

TRUTHS AND UNTRUTHS ABOUT HO CHI MINH

Ho's journey to Russia as a stowaway in 1923
and
his disgrace in the Comintern in 1933-1939

TON THAT THIEN

Ho Chi Minh is a name well-known all over the world. Much less well-known are the full facts about his life. A great deal about them has been presented as fact when it was sheer fiction. Bernard B. Fall, who has spent over twenty years studying Ho, and who claimed to be one of the three persons to have done solid first hand research on Ho's life, noted in Last Reflections on a War¹, written in 1967, one year before his death and two years before Ho's death, that there were large areas, gaps of four to five years, in Ho's life. The book repeated numerous errors or fantasies (22 in 12 pages) contained in an earlier book, The Two Vietnams², which was published in 1963 on the basis of a visit to Vietnam during which he was received by Ho personally and was given written documents on Ho's life.

The second author who has spent over two decades researching and writing about Ho is Jean Lacouture. In his book, Ho Chi Minh, generally considered the best biography of Ho, he said that

¹. Bernard B. Fall, Last Reflections on a War, New York, Doubleday, 1967, p.62.

². Bernard B. Fall, The Two Vietnams, A Political and Military Analysis, New York, Praeger, 1963. See chapter 6.

everything related to Ho's life until 1941 was "fragmentary, approximative, controversial". Witnesses of his career abound, his friends tell a hundred stories about him, "but too many shady areas intrude and make it difficult to see the true course".³

Ho's closest companions, who were supposed to know him well enough to speak or write with authority about him, have on the contrary misled the public, Vietnamese and foreign, by giving erroneous and contradictory facts about his life. But they themselves have been misled by Ho.

The confusion was heightened by the writings of Communists and Communist Vietnam's supporters and sympathisers of all kinds, who sought to put Ho in the best light possible, in particular by presenting him as a Vietnamese revolutionary nationalist who put the interest of Vietnam above everything else and suffered for it.

The various "official" biographies of Ho written by Truong Chinh, Pham Van Dong, and the historians of the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV)⁴ were based essentially on a number of Ho's writings or revelations to journalists about his life. Ho wrote two brochures under pseudonyms. The first, under the pseudonym Tran Dan Tien, Nhung mau chuyen ve doi hoat dong cua Ho Chu Tich⁵, was published in Vietnamese in 1948, and appeared in

³. Ho Chi Minh, Paris, Seuil, 1969, p.8

⁴. Notre President Ho Chi Minh, Hanoi, Editions en langues etrangeres, 1970.

⁵. Tran Dan Tien, Nhung mau chuyen ve doi hoat dong cua Ho Chu Tich, Hanoi, Nha Xuat Ban Su That, 1948.

translations as Glimpses of the Life of Ho Chi Minh⁶ and Souvenirs sur Ho Chi Minh⁷. This was later incorporated under the title of "Nguyen Ai Quoc" in With Uncle Ho (Avec l'Oncle Ho)⁸. The second, under the pseudonym T.Lan, was Vua di duong vua ke chuyen (Telling Stories along the Road)⁹. (To my knowledge, there is no translation of this brochure). In addition, Ho has given a long interview to the French Communist Charles Fourniau of L'Humanite in 1969. This interview appeared on July 15 of that year, and was reproduced in Vietnamese translation in Ho Chi Minh Tuyen Tap (Selected Works of Ho Chi Minh), volume II¹⁰.

Like the brochures mentioned, the interview with Fourniau contained many deliberate untruths. These untruths were evident from the inherent contradiction of the facts, and since 1975, from the revelations of Ho's companions in their memoirs, and especially from a book written in 1980 by Hong Ha, a prominent member of the CPV. The book, entitled Bac Ho tren dat nuoc Lenin (Uncle Ho in the land of Lenin)¹¹, covers the period 1923-1938, from the moment of Ho's arrival in the Soviet Union to the moment of his departure from that country. Hong Ha had obviously access to the archives of the Comintern. His book is thus undoubtedly

⁶. Hanoi, Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1958.

⁷. Hanoi, Editions en langues etrangeres, 1962.

⁸. Hanoi, Editions en langues etrangeres, 1972.

⁹. T.Lan, Vua di duong vua ke chuyen (Stories along the road), Hanoi, Nha Xuat Ban Su That, 1976 (1963).

¹⁰. Ho Chi Minh Tuyen Tap (Selected Works of Ho Chi Minh), Vol. II, pp. 518 ff, Hanoi, Nha Xuat Ban Su That, 1980.

¹¹. Hong Ha, Bac Ho tren dat nuoc Le-nin (Uncle Ho in the land of Lenin), Hanoi, Nha Xuat Ban Thanh Nien, 1980.

the most authoritative work on this period.

For the period from Ho's birth to his departure from Saigon for France, we now have the brochure put out by the Nghe-Tinh section of the Commission for the Study of the Party's History, Nhung mau chuyen ve doi nien thieu cua Bac Ho (Stories about Uncle Ho's Youth), published also in 1980¹². This brochure should be considered also very authoritative.

For the period from Ho's arrival in France in 1911 to his departure for the Soviet Union in 1923, we have two excellent publications: Lacouture's already mentioned book, and the testimony of Michele Zecchini, a socialist worker assigned to help Ho in 1917-1918¹³.

For the period 1939-1945, the memoirs of Archimedes Patti¹⁴, OSS agent in South China, and of Jean Sainteny¹⁵, chief of the French Mission in South China and later in North Vietnam and negotiator with Ho Chi Minh in 1945-1946, and the study by K.C. Chen¹⁶, who has interviewed the main Chinese officials involved in Vietnamese affairs in 1940-1946, contain most of the details of Ho's life and activities during those years.

¹². Ban Nghien Cuu Lich Su Dang, Tinh Uy Nghe Tinh, Nhung mau chuyen ve thoi nien thieu cua Bac Ho (Stories about Uncle Ho's Youth), Hanoi, Nha Xuat Ban Su That, 1980.

¹³. Zecchini's testimony is in Planete Action, special issue on Ho Chi Minh, March 1970.

¹⁴. Archimedes Patti, Why Vietnam? America's Albatros, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1980.

¹⁵. Jean Sainteny, Histoire d'une paix manquee, Indochine 1945-1947, Paris, Amiot Dumont, 1973, and Au Vietnam face a Ho Chi Minh, Paris, Seghers, 1980.

¹⁶. K.C. Chen, Vietnam and China 1938-1954, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1969.

The rest of Ho's life from 1945 onward, when he fully surfaced from clandestinity and could be observed and studied openly, is generally well known.

Thanks to the revelations mentioned, it is now possible to fill in certain gaps and reconstruct with accuracy certain important periods of Ho's life which had been kept in the shade, in particular those pertaining to his relations with the Comintern. Two of these periods deserve special attention because they have been subjected to a great deal of obscurity, and have served as foundations for a number of myths about Ho. One relates to the circumstances of his departure from Paris and his arrival in Moscow in 1923 and his integration into the Comintern apparatus; and the other to his so-called "disgrace" and "preventive detention in Moscow" in the mid-1930s.

Ho's journey to Moscow

For many years, it was known that Ho moved to Moscow from Paris in the early 1920s. But the precise circumstances of Ho's journey remained obscure, and this was so because Ho himself chose to deliberately mislead not only the general public and the ranks and files of the CPV, but also his closest associates and members of brother parties. In Uncle Ho Tran Dan Tien (alias Ho Chi Minh) said he obtained the details from "a French comrade". This is an odd reference, as the author explained that he had collected his material in 1945-1947. This was a time when it was not possible for Vietnamese to communicate from the jungles of North Vietnam, or even from Hanoi, with the members of the French Communist Party (CPF), especially with its leaders in Paris, the

only ones, very few, who really knew Ho intimately.

In any case, Tran Dan Tien began the story with the arrival of Nguyen Ai Quoc, Ho's name then, in Leningrad (then Petrograd). He said it was on "a day when it was snowing heavily and the ground was all white". The captain of the ship on which Quoc had travelled handed him a fur coat and told him to keep it until he would no longer need it. He was led by two young sailors to the immigration officer. Ho told the latter that he had travelled as a stowaway and had absolutely no paper whatsoever on him, and the purpose of his visit was to see Lenin. Thereupon the officer told him that Lenin had died two days earlier. This puts Quoc's arrival in Petrograd on January 23, 1923.

Since Quoc had no papers, he was asked to give the names of references in the Soviet Union. He cited (Marcel) Cachin and (Paul) Vaillant Couturier. He was asked to write to them, which he did. Two days later, Vaillant Couturier arrived, and they left for Moscow the same evening. This means that the postal service of the Soviet Union was really fast in spite of war and the chaos prevailing in the country at the time, and it took a letter mailed at the immigration office of Leningrad harbour only one day to get into the hands of its addressee in Moscow. Still, this was not impossible.

Tran Dan Tien said nothing about Ho's activities in the Soviet Union in 1923 and 1924. That is understable. In 1945-1947 the Chinese Communists' victory was still in doubt; Ho was not yet the unchallenged leader of the Vietnamese nationalist movement in Vietnam; and the French were pressing very hard on Ho's fresh army. Ho thus did not want his name to be associated

with the Communist International because his still shaky national united front risked floundering as a result of the defection of the scared Vietnamese anti-communist or non-communist nationalist elements.

In 1950, however, the situation had radically changed. With massive Chinese Communist aid and a safe rear represented by China, the prospects of victory over the French were much brighter. In fact, Ho was then going to the Sino-Vietnamese border to watch the greatest defeat of the French forces since 1946. Thus, Ho could tell a little more. So he did in Telling Stories along the Road, which was written in 1950. He said he wanted to go to Russia. A railway worker in Paris, comrade "X", promised to smuggle him on his train to Berlin and ask German railway workers to help him from there to the Soviet Union. But Ho still had a number of problems connected with the Paria to settle.

He grappled with the problems for several months, and was still doing so when, one day, the Central Committee of the CPF called him in to inform him that he was to go to the Fifth Congress of the Comintern as "representative from the colonies". He then had no more need to worry about his problems.

To shake off the secret agents assigned to watch him, he devised an ingenious plan. For several days, to lull the vigilance of the agents, he observed an absolutely regular daily schedule. Then, one day, he went to a meeting in the suburbs, but half an hour later slipped back into Paris and went to the station, where a comrade was waiting for him with a first class ticket and a small suitcase. And so, he left Paris as a rich

Asian tourist, without attracting attention. He had been given 1000 French Francs for travelling expenses by the CPF. It was a big sum for the time (enough to keep a student going for five months); it became still bigger in Germany where inflation was roaring.

Concerning his arrival in Leningrad, Ho gave almost no details. He said he arrived in Russia "in the midst of winter"; everything was covered with snow, and there were days when the temperature dipped to 40 degrees centigrade below zero. Then there was a reference to the Fifth Comintern Congress being postponed because Lenin was ill; next a reference to Lenin's death on January 21, 1924. And that was all. He gave no date and no other detail of his arrival in the Soviet Union, or of the purpose of his trip.

More precise details concerning Ho's departure from Paris and his arrival in Moscow were "revealed" to Charles Fourniau in an interview published by L'Humanite on July 15, 1969, six weeks before Ho's death. The details concerning Ho's departure from Paris were partially true; those concerning his arrival in Moscow were completely untrue.

The interview was reproduced in Vietnamese in Tuyen Tap (Selected Works) volume II¹⁷. The essentials of it were given in 1970 by Fourniau in Ho Chi Minh, notre camarade, edited by Leo Figueres.¹⁸ It tells of Ho's contact with French railway workers

¹⁷. Ho Chi Minh, Tuyen Tap (Selected Works), Vol.II, Hanoi, Nha Xuat Ban Su That, 1980, pp.518 ff.

¹⁸. Leo Figueres, Ho Chi Minh, notre camarade, Paris, Editions sociales, 1970, pp.31 ff.

willing to help him to Berlin clandestinely, and, from there, with the help of German railway workers, to proceed to Moscow. But in the midst of his planning, luck came his way. He did not have to trouble himself any more. Arrangements were made for him, as he was designated to attend the Fifth Comintern Congress.

Fourniau said he was given a "relative precise date" by Ho Chi Minh himself, and that was "the middle of 1923". After an uneventful trip to Berlin, Ho proceeded to Russia, embarking at the German harbour Rostock. But he told Fourniau that, once arrived in Leningrad, he had to wait for "several months" until his identity had been checked out. It was "at the end of 1923" that Ho arrived in Moscow, said Fourniau. It did not occur to him at all that according to the story he was told, it took Ho six months to go from Paris to Moscow! And further, considering that it was known that Ho had attended the Kresintern Congress in October 1923, and even made a very remarked speech there, these two events being reported in most biographies of Ho before 1969, it did not strike Fourniau at all that there was something rather odd there. Still more, Ho had sent a letter to the Central Committee of the CPF dated "Moscow, July 1923", and Fourniau must have heard about it.

In the text of the interview Ho said that one evening he went to the movies, then slipped through the backdoor to go to the station where a comrade was waiting for him with a ticket and a small suitcase, and that he journeyed to Berlin in first class, smoking a cigar, like a rich tourist. This means that he must have had time to buy rich clothes, an expensive suitcase, not to say anything about cigars, and also the time, and a prearranged

place, to change into a rich tourist's clothes, not to say anything about collecting the 1000 French Francs. In other words, the detailed arrangements for Ho's trip must have been prepared very thoroughly by someone.

It is astounding how Ho had been able to hide the exact details of his departure from Paris and his arrival in Moscow so well. The two men who have spent more time than anyone perhaps in tracing Ho's life knew little about the events described until they were revealed by Fourniau in 1969. Bernard Fall said in The Two Vietnams that Ho left France "at the end of 1923". With much fantasy he added that "wearing a borrowed fur coat, he [Ho] reached Leningrad aboard an ice-covered Soviet vessel on January 23, 1924 and immediately proceeded to Moscow"¹⁹.

Lacouture was more circumspect. He simply noted in 1969 that the exact date of Ho's departure from Paris and his arrival in Moscow were "still enigmas"²⁰, and that "the best source" on this was Ruth Fischer, the prominent German Communist. In Von Lenin zum Mao, Fischer said that Nguyen Ai Quoc (Ho Chi Minh then) had attended the Fourth Congress of the Comintern, that is in 1922. Lacouture mentioned an official brochure published by Hanoi giving "June 1923" as date of departure of Nguyen Ai Quoc from Paris. But he also cited a biography of Ho by Truong Chinh in which it was said that Ho arrived in Moscow in January 1924 "a few days after the death of Lenin". It should be noted in this connection that, strangely enough, Nguyen Khac Huyen, who has

¹⁹. Fall, The Two Vietnams, p.92.

²⁰. Lacouture, Ho Chi Minh, p.35.

written an otherwise rather searching biography of Ho, published in 1971, also said that Ho attended the Fourth Comintern Congress in November-December 1922, during which time he met Lenin and Stalin, then left Russia, to return to Moscow again in June 1923, and arrived there "shortly after" Lenin's death"²¹.

All the contradictory unofficial or official "precisions" mentioned have generated a great deal of confusion. This confusion has now been cleared up by Hong Ha in the book Uncle Ho in the land of Lenin referred to earlier. The abundant details supplied by Hong Ha were not only more plausible than those advanced by the others because they matched the revelations by former agents of the Comintern and serious students of this organisation, in particular regarding Dimitri Manuilsky, as well as the context of the debates of the congresses of the Comintern. But more than anything, they were drawn from the archives of the Comintern and were accompanied by photographic reproduction of key documents from those archives and were therefore irrefutable. Let us see what Hong Ha has revealed.

On Ho's journey from Paris to Berlin, Hong Ha's version was similar to those of others. The details were obviously drawn from the Fourniau interview. It is from Berlin onward that Hong Ha's version differed fundamentally from all others²². "As agreed", it said, upon arriving in Berlin, Nguyen Ai Quoc went immediately to the office of the Soviet Mission in Berlin, located at number 7 Unter den Linden, one of the most famous streets of the German

²¹. Nguyen Khac Huyen, Mission Accomplished, the Enigma of Ho Chi Minh, New York, MacMillan, 1971, pp.22-23.

²². Hong Ha, Uncle Ho in the land of Lenin, pp.19-24.

capital. Agreed with whom? Hong Ha did not say explicitly, but the rest of his story made it quite clear that it was with Moscow, via the CPF naturally, as the arrangements in Paris suggest. The comrades at the Mission, "forewarned by Moscow", received Quoc warmly. The chief of the Mission, Stephan Bradman Bradopsky, inquired about Quoc's health and his trip, and "discussed with him the arrangements concerning his mission to the Soviet Union". Bradopsky had "received instructions to ensure perfect safety" for Quoc's journey. Accordingly he had made arrangements for a Soviet ship returning to Petrograd from Holland to make a detour to pick up Ho at Hamburg (Rostock, according to Fourniau, which is more logical).

While waiting for the ship to arrive, the Soviet Mission took the necessary steps to secure from the German police the authorisation for Quoc to stay in Berlin (beyond the transit time permitted) first until June 23, then until June 27. The visa, signed by the chief of police named Schneider, bore the date June 18, 1923. Bradopsky also delivered to Quoc a laissez-passer for travelling to Moscow, bearing the date June 16. Thus Ho must have left Paris on June 15. The visa was delivered to Chen Vang, born on February 15, 1895. This was probably Ho's real birthday. A visa of entry to the Soviet Union was also issued to Quoc. It was dated 25 June 1923.

Ho embarked on the 27 of June. The ship carrying him was the Karl Liebknecht, captain Antonov. The captain received Quoc in the main salon of the ship, according him special guest treatment. As the Baltic sea was cold, even in the summer, he lent Quoc a warm coat.

The ship arrived at Petrograd on 30 June 1923, and docked at pier number 7. The immigration control visa stamped on Ho's passport bore the date 30 June 1923. Hong Ha provided a special detail: it was a mild sunny summer day, with a temperature of 18 degrees centigrade. It was a rather unusual day for a city reputed for fog and rain in the summer. We were far from the midst of winter with snow everywhere! Ho stayed at the hotel Astoria on Issalipsky street. On 1 July, day of festivity in Petrograd, which celebrated the arrival of summer and the end of Allied intervention, Ho took the train for Moscow. There was no mention of Vaillant Couturier. Ho surely knew some Russian and could get by alone. This explains his joke about using Russian with Vaillant Couturier in the Tran Dan Tien version.

The date of Ho's arrival in the Soviet Union has been confirmed by the Marxist-Leninist Institutes of Vietnam and of the Soviet Union. In a joint study, they said: "On 30 June 1923, at the invitation of the Executive Committee of the Communist International (ECCI), comrade Ho Chi Minh arrived at Petrograd, Soviet Union, to participate in the Fifth Congress of the Comintern". They also said that "this was the first time that he came to the home of the October Revolution and of the great Lenin"²³. This was also confirmed by the official chronology of Ho's life in Ho Chi Minh Toan Tap (Ho Chi Minh's Complete Works)²⁴. However, although it said that Ho stayed in Berlin from June

²³. Vien Mac-Le-nin, Su hop tac quoc te giua Dang Cong San Lien-xo va Dang cong san Viet Nam, (Marx-Lenin Institute of the Communist Party of Vietnam, International Cooperation between the CPSU and the CPV). Hanoi, Nha Xuat ban Su That, 1987, p.79.

²⁴. Vol.3, 1980, p.548.

18 to June 27, it did not say when Ho had left Paris.

It was mentioned earlier that Hong Ha said that upon his arrival in Berlin, "as agreed", Ho went immediately to the Soviet Mission. He did not say agreed with whom or how. The statement of the Marxist-Leninist Institutes just cited provided the answer. It was agreed with ECCI, the Executive Committee of the Communist International. The man responsible for this invitation was surely Manuisky, a member of ECCI, in close touch with the Political Secretariat, and still more particularly, with the all-powerful restricted committee of this secretariat, the "little committee" -- the mlaia_comisia --.

To understand how powerful Manuisky was, it should be pointed out that in the view of Lenin and of his closest associates at the time -- Zinoviev, Radek, Trotsky etc... -- the Communist International was to be the general staff of the world revolutionary army whose function was to direct civil war on a world scale. It had therefore to be run like an army with the strictest discipline, and had to be closely patterned on the Bolshevik party, with extremely centralised direction. The power in the organisation was therefore centered in a general staff, the Executive Committee (ECCI). In this committee, power was centralised in the hands of its Political Secretariat, which had eleven members. And in this secretariat, power was centered in the hands of a restricted committee -- the mlaia_comissia -- composed of five members. Manuisky worked closely with these five members, then became and remained a senior member of this

committee under Lenin as well as Stalin.²⁵ We shall have more to say on him later on.

For the time being, it is sufficient to note that Manuisky was the emissary of the Comintern to the CPF in the early 1920s. His knowledge of French, which he had mastered when he was a student at the Sorbonne before World War I, and his total loyalty to Bolshevism and Lenin (and later Stalin), made this choice natural. He was Comintern delegate to the CPF Second Congress in Paris in 1922, and spotted Ho Chi Minh, then Nguyen Ai Quoc and still a new militant. Quoc's speech on the colonial questions impressed Manuisky enormously, and as a result, he told Quoc to prepare himself to attend the Fifth Comintern Congress.

It should be noted that Lenin had given prominence to the national and colonial questions at the Second Comintern Congress in 1920, and these questions were debated in subsequent congresses. But not much had been accomplished, as the Communists at the time were essentially west-oriented, and had little interest in the East, and still less in the colonies. This is natural as, in strict marxist orthodoxy, the emancipation of the colonies could come only after the liberation of the working class in the advanced industrial countries²⁶. Besides, they had little or no direct experience of the East.

In the debates Lenin had considerable trouble with the

²⁵. On this see Branko Lazitch and Milorad Drackhovitch, Lenin and Comintern, Vol. I, Stanford, Hoover Institution Press, 1972; and The Comintern: Historical Highlights, New York, F. Praeger, 1966; Charles McLane, Soviet Strategies in Southeast Asia, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1966.

²⁶. On this see Charles B. McLane, Soviet Strategies in Southeast Asia.

Indian M.N.Roy, who vigorously contested his theses. Naturally Roy had more direct experience of the Eastern and colonial questions than Lenin, and the latter could make his views prevail only because he was Lenin.

After Lenin practically ceased to direct the Comintern personally due to illness, it befell Zinoviev and Manuisky to present and defend the Comintern leadership's views. Zinoviev had no interest or experience in the Eastern question. Manuisky, who was responsible directly for presenting the reports on the national and colonial questions, had an experience limited only to the Ukraine, his home country, and to Central Europe and the Balkans. He would have considerable difficulty in jousting with Roy, as although he had no experience of the East and did not have the authority of Lenin, he would have to present irrefutable arguments based on hard facts and extensive experience.

To a troubled Manuisky Nguyen Ai Quoc seemed to be the man who could provide what he needed to bolster his position in facing formidable adversaries like Roy and Serrati. In addition, Quoc would surely make a valuable contribution in his own right, especially in needling the member parties to more concrete action. Manuisky knew this, as he had seen how Quoc had spoken authoritatively about colonial matters and harshly criticised the CPF's inaction at the CPF Second Congress in Paris in 1922.

Quoc's presence in Moscow as an expert for Manuisky and a participant in the Congress was very important at this juncture because of the challenge from the orthodox marxists, whether Europeancentrist like Serrati, or Asiancentrist like Roy, who fought hard against Lenin's view that the national component

should be given at least as much weight as the social component in the assessment of the revolutionary potential of the colonies, and therefore Communist support and collaboration should be given to the nationalist revolutions led by the bourgeois elements. From the purely cold practical tactical point of view, Lenin was right. And Ho shared his views. Unlike Roy, Ho was always more interested in practical strategy and tactics than in theory, and in addition, he was an unconditional believer in Lenin's wisdom. In fact, in his account of his arrival in the Soviet Union, as early as 1923, he already attached great attention to the idea of united front. Indeed, he this point by underlining it in the T.Lan brochure. Quoc's presence in Moscow and at the Fifth Comintern Congress would therefore considerably strengthen to the position of the Comintern leadership, and in particular the personal position of Manuilsky.

Nguyen Ai Quoc, the future Ho Chi Minh, was thus invited, or rather selected, to participate in the Fifth Comintern Congress in 1924. And, in view of what has been said above, the choice was made by Manuilsky and communicated to the CPF. Ho was to be sent to the Fifth Comintern Congress as a delegate of the CPF to speak especially on colonial questions. Arrangements for his trip to Moscow had to be made, and in Comintern practice, they were made thoroughly and secretly, as we have seen. This explains the "as agreed" mentioned by Hong Ha, as well as the sybilline references to "no more need to bother with my problems" by Ho.

It is a matter of record that Ho (then Nguyen Ai Quoc) took part in the Kresintern Congress in October 1923. He made a resounding speech there on the 13th. The speech established his

reputation as a solid and unquestioning Leninist, and an undisputable expert on the peasant question. It made him an instant celebrity in Comintern circles. He was elected to the presidium of the Kresintern. That was a big leap forward in his career as a Communist. His standing rose still further, and considerably, following an interview by Ossip Mandelstam of the Soviet magazine Ogonyok. Mandelstam sought him out following his speech at the Kresintern Congress, interviewed him, and gave him full front page treatment with his photo as well. That was on 23 December 1923, less than six months after Ho's arrival in the Soviet capital. That was quite an accomplishment.

Mandelstam called Ho (then Nguyen Ai Quoc) "an international fighter for communism", and titled his article "Guest of a Cominternchik". Reinhold Neuman-Hoditz, who printed a photographic reproduction of the front page of the Ogonyok article in Portrait of Ho Chi Minh, commented that "Cominternchik was an honorary designation for a member of the Comintern -- a man who devotes his whole life to the service of the Communist International.... Nguyen Ai Quoc was such a man". From now on, Ho was no longer a rank and file militant, but a cadre of the Comintern apparat.

Soon thereafter, Ho was assigned to work at the ECCI as well. Citing Ruth Fischer, Neuman-Hoditz said that Ho had gained so much experience in the difficult area of Asian revolution that he became "a privileged adviser of the Comintern leaders"²⁷. As mentioned earlier, Ho was also a privileged adviser to Manuisky.

²⁷. Reinhold Neuman-Holditz, Portrait of Ho Chi Minh, Frankfurt/Main, Herder and Herder, 1969, p.102.

It is also a matter of record that Nguyen Ai Quoc made another resounding speech at the Fifth Comintern Congress. The speech established his reputation as a great Leninist, who had thoroughly grasped the thought of the master and was a true believer; in addition, he was recognised as an undisputable expert on the colonial question. His status of Cominternchik was still more solidly established. As Fourniau has pointed out, in 1924, at the Fifth Congress, "Nguyen Ai Quoc was no longer a militant operative, he had already become a militant of international class"; he was "a militant of the International". He had completed his period of training as a militant. "He had reached such a high level that the International could entrust him with important tasks".²⁸

The tasks performed by Ho for the Comintern were many. But we are not here concerned with them. So we shall pass on to the second part of this essay: discussion of the thesis of Ho Chi Minh's "disgrace" between 1931 and 1941.

Before doing so, however, we should ask why did Ho Chi Minh keep telling untruths about his journey to the Soviet Union, even in 1969 (to Charles Fourniau who was a French "brother") when there was obviously no more need for it? The only logical answer to this question is that, as a result of long years of training in Leninism and of practice of it, telling untruths, although done for tactical reasons at the beginning, had become something natural in Ho Chi Minh in the end.

We shall now turn to the second part of this essay.

²⁸. In Leo Figuer, Ho Chi Minh, notre camarade, pp.31-32.

The Ho in disgrace thesis

We may recall that after being accepted as a Cominternchik, Ho worked at the Eastern Department of the Comintern until the autumn of 1924, then was sent to Canton, under the cover of the Borodin Mission, to help organise the peasant-worker movement in South China and to militate among the Vietnamese emigre nationalist revolutionaries there to implant communism into Indochina. He was also a delegate of the Kresintern with authority to build up the peasant movement in all the countries of Asia he could reach from Canton (China, Burma, Indonesia, Indochina, Taiwan). His work was interrupted by Chiang Kai-shek's break with Moscow in April 1927. He had to flee Canton to Wu-han, then to Hongkong and find his way back to the Soviet Union.

In 1928 Ho was sent back to the East again by the Comintern, this time to Southeast Asia, to strengthen the communist movement there. By then Roy had been expelled from the Comintern because of his Trotskyites leanings, and Tan Malaka, the Indonesian, was also falling out with Moscow for maintaining that Islam had revolutionary potential for Indonesia. Ho thus became the Comintern's top man in Southeast Asia. Following his arrival in Siam in the fall of 1928 Ho founded the Communist Party of Indochina and helped found the Communist party of Siam and the Communist Party of Malaya. Ho was arrested by the Hongkong police in June 1931, and imprisoned. Saved by the British lawyer Frank Loseby, he escaped, went into hiding in Macao then in Shanghai, and finally found his way back to Moscow in the spring of 1934. We are not concerned with those events here. We shall now examine the "disgrace" thesis.

This thesis was put forward by Huynh Kim Khanh in Vietnamese Communism 1924-1945²⁹ to account for Nguyen Ai Quoc's apparent eclipse between 1931 and 1941. But since Lacouture and Bernard Fall also have offered differing interpretations of Ho's intriguing disappearance from the public view and from police records in those years we shall consider the accounts of these important biographers of Ho first.

Officially, Nguyen Ai Quoc had died in jail in Hongkong. The exact date of his death was even given: 26 June 1932. Notices of his death were published in Communist papers, including L'Humanite in Paris and the Soviet press. Memorial services were held by Communists. The Vietnamese Communists studying in Moscow held a special service at which a representative from the Comintern pronounced a funeral oration.³⁰ Above all, the French surete considered the Nguyen Ai Quoc file closed.

Lacouture said that little was known about Ho during the period 1934-1938, during which Ho spent "the most studious years of his life, away from the quarrels and the purges which tore asunder the USSR and the International".³¹ But Ho never lost contact with the Party, and from Moscow he regularly sent articles to the Party paper Tin Tuc (News) in Saigon under the pseudonym of Lin. Lacouture noted, however, that in 1935 Ho was "in open conflict" with the leadership of the CPI (Communist Party of Indochina), which had called a meeting at Macao in March,

²⁹. Huynh Kim Khanh, Vietnamese Communism, 1924-1945, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1982.

³⁰. Lacouture, Ho Chi Minh, p.53.

³¹. - ibid. -, p.57.

in his absence and without waiting for the return from Moscow of Le Hong Phong, secretary general of the Party.

Bernard Fall, for his part, noted in 1963 that it was "possible" that Ho was "in temporary disgrace". He spent the years 1934-1935 attending Party schools in Moscow. Significantly, he was spared the purges of the ever suspicious Stalin because "perhaps, as a practitioner rather than a theoretician of revolution, Ho was not considered dangerous by Stalin - or perhaps he was considered absolutely loyal".³² Four years later, Fall was more affirmative. He said Ho was spared by Stalin because Ho was "unconditionally loyal to Stalin, and Stalin knew it".³³

Now, let us examine the facts and interpretations advanced by Huynh Kim Khanh, who has given more attention to this question than any other author and consecrated a full chapter to it (chapter 3) in an obviously searching study.

According to Khanh, the CPI was then divided between the "proletarian internationalists" who took their cues from Moscow and the "revolutionary patriots" who favoured a liberal interpretation of Marxism-Leninism and the adaptation of Comintern directives selectively to the conditions of Vietnam. Khanh did not say so explicitly here, but obviously he put Ho in the latter category.

In 1933-1934 the repatriation of the KUTV trainees resulted in the ascendancy of the proletarian internationalists over the

³². The Two Vietnams, p.97.

³³. Last Reflections on a War, p.79.

revolutionary patriots. In any case, following the Sixth Congress of the Comintern in 1928 Moscow imposed a radical line and demanded strict subservience of the member parties.

The result of the above developments was the "sharp decline" of Nguyen Ai Quoc's influence within Communist circles. For almost ten years, from June 1931 to May 1941, his whereabouts were known only to a handful of people, and from 1932 to 1939 the name of Nguyen Ai Quoc was "not mentioned once" in connection with the revolutionary movement in Indochina except for those few instances in 1934 when he was singled out for criticism. Khanh said it was "possible" that Ho was being "confined to Moscow for self-criticism" as a "penalty for his errors". It is "obvious" that Nguyen Ai Quoc "had fallen out" with the current Comintern leadership, and that his services to the CPI at this time were "not required". Throughout the 1930s Nguyen Ai Quoc held no official position in either the Comintern or the CPI, and he attended the Seventh Congress of the Comintern not as a delegate but as "a consultant" to the CPI delegation, which was led by Le Hong Phong.

According to Khanh, the "decline in Ho's authority" was the direct consequence of the ultra-left policies adopted at the Sixth Congress. After this congress, the Comintern demanded total obedience and subservience from the professional revolutionaries and from the national sections, and "there was no lack of Vietnamese communists much younger and less experienced than Nguyen Ai Quoc who were willing to accept Comintern guidance and instructions unquestionably". The implication is that Ho's stature was diminished because, unlike the others, he refused to

submit to the will of Moscow as he was not a "proletarian internationalist" but a "revolutionary patriot".

Khanh said Ho's "eclipse" began "as early as 1929", and the decline of his authority became apparent as the rift between him and the CPI Central Committee developed "with the Comintern apparently supporting its younger apparatchikis". Two KUTV-trained members, Tran Phu and Ngo Duc Tri, were instructed by the Comintern to rectify most of the "erroneous resolutions" of the unification conference (the founding conference of the CPV).

During the next few years Ho was the object of a systematic vilification campaign. "Ho's devotion to the cause of national independence" was cited as evidence of his "petty-bourgeois hangover". His Duong Kach Menh was attacked as "a document which reeks of nationalist stench". Criticism of Ho reached a peak in 1934, and "apparently had the approval of the Comintern".

Thus, for approximately ten years after the Nghe Tinh defeat the Moscow-trained apparatchiki dominated the CPI, and "Nguyen Ai Quoc played no role in the development of Vietnamese communism". He was not present at the Macao Congress (March 1935), which was convened "at the explicit instruction of the Comintern and concerned itself with international questions". Ho was then "in disgrace"; he was "under some form of preventive detention" in Moscow. The glory of "the Moscow-oriented Communists" was to end only in 1939-1940, and the following five years were to witness "the re-ascendency of Ho" and his former Thanh Nien comrades in the CPI.

The natural conclusion from the facts cited and the arguments advanced by Khanh is that Ho's stature in the eyes of

the Comintern leadership was diminished, and he was punished by the organisation and vilified and rejected by the CPI because of his "devotion to the cause of national independence", of his unwillingness to place Soviet interests above Vietnamese interests, and his questioning of the wisdom and rejection of the authority of the Comintern leadership, including that of Stalin, the real master of the organisation.

The true facts tell a totally different story.

As we have seen earlier, after Ho's discovery of Leninism and his option for the Third International in 1920, and especially after his arrival in Moscow in 1923, he became a thorough and unwavering believer in Leninism and Bolshevism; his competence and loyalty were recognised; he was accepted as a Cominternchik and integrated into the Comintern apparatus, and entrusted with important missions in Asia whereas Roy, who was surely more brilliant than him, had strong views, and could, and would, argue on high policy matters on an equal footing with Lenin and other ranking leaders of the Comintern, was to get into deep trouble. The same applied to Tan Malaka of Indonesia because he had strong views about the role of Islam in the national revolution and dared defend them. By 1929 both Roy and Tan Malaka had been anathemised by the Comintern whereas Ho still invoked the authority of this organisation to convene the unification conference of the CPI in Hongkong and, according to all accounts, presided over it "in the name of the Third International". Now let us take up the facts and arguments invoked by Huynh Kim Khanh one by one.

First, with regard to Tran Phu. Ho never lost the respect or

obedience of the CPI because the CPI was his creation. Tran Phu, alias Li Kwei, was one of Ho's first recruits and Thanh Nien students in 1925. He was also a protege of Ho's. It was Ho who sent him to Moscow for training at the KUTV, and it was on Ho's intercession that he was admitted all the same although he was one year late for the opening of the course.³⁴ It was Tran Phu who on behalf of the other Vietnamese students warmly greeted Ho in Moscow when Ho visited them after his return from China in 1927. Phu was the first student to return to Vietnam in 1930. On the way home, he stopped in Hongkong "to meet Nguyen Ai Quoc and receive instructions" as well as "advice on operational methods" from him. Ho gave him a letter of introduction to the CPI Central Committee "in the name of the Communist International".³⁵ On the other hand, the Party's History stated clearly that "The Political Thesis of 1930 was written by Tran Phu....and adopted by the Central Committee in October".³⁶ Ho was then occupied elsewhere. Hong Ha did not elaborate on "elsewhere", but said that Ho "had made many suggestions to Tran Phu".³⁷

Concerning the Unification Conference, the Party's biography of Ho said that "the resolutions of the Conference had met in time the requirements of the revolutionary movement; this was thanks to the correct leadership of President Ho Chi Minh, to the

³⁴. Hong Ha, Bac Ho..., p.197.

³⁵. - ibid. -, p.251.

³⁶. 50 Years of Activities of the Communist Party of Vietnam, Hanoi, Foreign Language Publishing House, p.31.

³⁷. Hong Ha, Bac Ho, p.253.

instructions and aid of the Communist International."³⁸

Further, it said that from 1930 to the middle of 1931, from China Ho "watched closely the movement in the country, saw to it that the line of the Party was applied correctly".³⁹

With regard to the disastrous Nghe-Tinh insurrections, Ho was obviously not responsible. He had watched developments in Indochina with anxiety and had reminded the Central Committee of the CPI that "this is not the moment yet to attempt a seizure of power";⁴⁰ he wrote to ECCI on 29 September about the situation and asked for help and "instructions on what to do".⁴¹ After the wave of arrests, which practically broke up the Party in 1931, Ho sent two very harsh letters to the CPI Central Committee: one, on 20 April 1931, to criticise the non-observation of the Comintern operational rules; and one, on 24 April 1931, to remind the Party that his tasks had been assigned by the Eastern Department and, accordingly, this department would keep him informed of developments, and if he had suggestions, these "have been approved by the Eastern Department", and the Party "must notify" him about its decisions or desiderata.⁴²

That Ho was by no means held responsible and was not blamed for the Nghe-Tinh disaster was made clear by a letter to him from Hilaire Noulens, the chief of the Far Eastern Bureau (Dalburo) in

³⁸. Notre President Ho Chi Minh, p.98.

³⁹. - ibid. - ,p.10.

⁴⁰. Hong Ha, Bac Ho, p.251.

⁴¹. - ibid. -, p.253.

⁴². - ibid. -, p.258.

Shanghai. In the letter, dated 12 May 1931, Noulens put the blame not on Ho, but on the Politburo of the CPI. He suggested that Ho write to the latter to warn it against the risks of violent action.⁴³ Finally, from June 1931 to July 1934, Ho was in jail, in court, in hiding, or in search for a way to make contact with the Chinese Communist Party (CPC) to get help to return to the Soviet Union, and could therefore not be held responsible for anything.

It should be mentioned here that in November 1933, Ho, who had been hiding in Shanghai, succeeded in making contact with the CPC and get help from it through Vaillant Couturier, who happened to be passing through that city. The Comintern sent a ship to pick him up off Shanghai, and by July he was back in Moscow. The Comintern sent a car to fetch him from the station, and he was received very warmly by Manuilsky when the two met. Furthermore, at Vladivostok, when asked about his references in the Soviet Union, Ho gave the names of V. Vassilieva and Pavel Mif. The first was an important member of the Institute of Oriental Studies in charge of the Vietnamese students in Moscow, and the second was no lesser a person than the man who had replaced Petrov as head of the Eastern Department and who was the special adviser to Stalin on Eastern questions. All that was surely not treatment reserved to someone in disgrace!

Now, with regard to the period 1934-1939. After his return, Ho was assigned to the Comintern again. He made a visit to the CPI delegation to the Seventh Congress. He was warmly greeted in

⁴³. - ibid. -, p.259.

the name of the delegation by Le Hong Phong, head of the delegation, and secretary general of the CPI. Phong introduced Ho as "comrade Lin who has come to visit us on behalf of the Third International".⁴⁴ Ho, who had been put in charge of the delegation, told its members to change their names during the congress. He did likewise with the Malay and Indonesian delegates, a proof that he was in charge of Southeast Asian affairs at the Eastern Department.

In addition to the delegation to the Seventh Congress of the Comintern, there were two groups of Vietnamese studying at the INKP (Institute for National and Colonial Questions). When Ho visited these two groups Vassilieva introduced him as "a cadre of the Comintern", and announced at the same time that by decision of the Political Secretariat of ECCI, in addition to work at the Eastern Department, Ho was assigned to lead the two groups of Vietnamese students at INKP.⁴⁵ The facts mentioned were surely not manifestations of the Comintern's displeasure and its way of punishing Ho, or of Ho's loss of authority over the CPI.

Now, let us turn to Ho's status at the Seventh Congress of the Comintern in July 1935. The Party's biography of Ho said that Ho attended the Congress as "a deputy delegate", but it added that "fully conscious of his responsibility to the delegation, he did his utmost to help it fulfill its task at the Congress".⁴⁶ The official history of the Party said that "comrade Nguyen Ai

⁴⁴. Hong Ha, Bac Ho, p.290.

⁴⁵. - ibid. -, p.285.

⁴⁶. Notre President Ho Chi Minh, p.107.

Quoc, who was then following study courses at the Lenin University in Moscow, was also invited to the Congress".⁴⁷ The official chronology of his life said that he attended the Congress in the capacity of "delegate of the Eastern Department".⁴⁸ Ho himself (alias T.Lan) said that at the Congress, Le Hong Phong, Nguyen Thi Minh Khai were official delegates while he attended as a "dai bieu tu van", for which the editor provided a footnote, giving the translation of the term in a document of the Soviet Marx-Lenin Institute in French.⁴⁹ The French term used meant "as a consultant". It did not specify whether it was to the CPI delegation or to the Comintern.

Here, again, Hong Ha provided the answer to the riddle. He provided a photographic reproduction of Ho's admission card to the Congress. It bore number 154, the name of Lin (official name of Ho at the Comintern) and indicated under country of origin: Indochina. But Hong Ha added that Ho "helped the delegation from inside the country draft the speeches to be delivered at the Congress".⁵⁰

Ho was then still a Cominternchik working at the Comintern, and considered a senior member by the CPI. This is but natural. Like Tran Phu, Le Hong Phong was one of Ho's first Thanh Nien students. He was sent by Ho to the Soviet air academy Boris Glepskaia. When Ho returned from China in 1927 he decided that

⁴⁷. 50 Years' Activities..., p.49.

⁴⁸. Ho Chi Minh, Toan Tap, vol.3, p.460.

⁴⁹. Vua di duong..., p.53.

⁵⁰. Hong Ha, Bac Ho..., p.298.

after the aviation academy Phong would go to KUTV. How Le Hong Phong greeted Ho has been noted. In 1934 Le Hong Phong was designated chief of the External Bureau of the CPI. But this bureau was placed under the authority of the delegate of the Comintern, who was Ho Chi Minh. And from 1938 onward, when the members of the CPI heard about Ho's presence in China, and later in Vietnam proper, they always understood that he was a "cao cap", a high official, of the Comintern, and deserved the respect due to such a personage. And in May 1941, when Ho presided over the crucial eighth plenum, he did so "in the capacity of representative of the Comintern" and not of a member of the CPI Politburo or Central Committee. He had been, and remained, above the CPI. As Fourniau has stressed, he was a "militant of the International".

It is thus natural that Ho was by no means "in disgrace" in regard to the Comintern leadership, including Stalin. We have already cited many proofs earlier. But the subject deserves further exploration. That Ho had the full confidence of Moscow is certain. This has been confirmed by a Soviet specialist of Eastern affairs, A.Reznikov. In The Comintern and the East, this author said that the Comintern operated "in close contact" with "the great patriot and internationalist" Ho Chi Minh; that the Comintern aid to Indochina was rendered "through the good offices of Ho Chi Minh"; and, what is much more significant, that the decisions of the Comintern regarding Vietnam were drafted "with his participation and sent to him first of all".⁵¹

⁵¹. A.Reznikov, The Comintern and the East, Strategy and Tactics, Moscow, Progress Publishers, 1978, pp.162-163.

It is a remarkable, and remarked, fact that Ho Chi Minh (Nguyen Ai Quoc) survived the Stalinist wave of liquidation of foreign agents of the Comintern of the mid-1930s, whereas most of the well-known figures of the organisation were murdered, sent into exile in Siberia, jailed, or saved themselves by deserting this organisation and somehow leave the Soviet Union alive. Many of Ho's early protectors or co-workers - Voya Vayouvitch, Willi Munzenberg, Georges Pioch, Petrov, Pianitsky, Borodin, etc...-, and of course the very big names -Trotsky, Zinoviev, Radek, Bukharin, ...- who had been faithful followers of Lenin were removed from the Comintern. Only Manuisky managed to survive unscathed until the end of World War II and beyond. Since Ho's destiny was closely associated with this man, it is interesting to dwell at some length on Ho's relationship with him, for Ho survived mainly because he moved in his shadow, and through him, was well acquainted with the current thoughts and wishes of Stalin, a basic condition of survival at the time.

It has been noted above that Ho's standing with the CPI was high. The same applies to his standing with the Comintern. In fact, it can be said that here it was even higher. Two anecdotes confirm this. One is provided by Albert Vassar, who was representative of the CPF to the Comintern from April 1934 to April 1935. Vassar resided at the Lux hotel, which served as residence for Comintern leaders and foreign Communist leaders on business in Moscow. Vassar has given the following account related by Dominique Desanti in L'Internationale Communiste.

"At the restaurant of the Lux hotel, a curtain divided the dining room of the Cominternian rabble from that of the "leaders" who had to be kept in good shape. An Indochinese, former photograph in the XIII precinct of Paris, sat each

day at a different place in order to be able to wipe his mouth and goatee with a piece of clean napkin from the table cloth; **his real name was Ho Chi Minh**. His rotation lasted thirty days, for the table cloth was changed only once because of lack of soap".⁵²

Another proof, which is irrefutable, of Ho's importance in Comintern circles at the time has been provided by Margarete Buber-Neuman, wife of Heinz Neuman, an important Cominternchik who at one time was highly rated by Stalin, but later was liquidated like many others. In her memoirs, she told the following story:

"At the XIII plenum of the ECCI in December 1933 it was decided to convene the Seventh Congress of the Comintern for the first half of 1934, but then the meeting had to be postponed. The delegates of Latin America, who could not be warned in time about the change, arrived on time for the originally planned opening of the Congress. Once they had arrived in Moscow, the ECCI did not want them to leave totally empty-handed. A conference was therefore organised in which participated the delegates from Latin America, as well as **the members of the leadership of the Comintern**: Manuilsky, Dimitrov, Gottwald, Kuusinen, Pieck, Kolarov, Togliatti, **Ho Chi Minh**, Thorez, Guyot and Wan Ming. It was thus a very brilliant company which discussed a question which had already been settled, but which was to be put on the agenda only at the Seventh Congress: the tactics of popular front".⁵³

The above story proves irrefutably that instead of having fallen out with the Comintern, being in disgrace, being in preventive detention, or being shoved aside, not only was Ho a member of the cream of the Comintern and moved in the innermost circles of the ECCI, but was also privy to discussions of high strategy at the highest level. It should be stressed that the

⁵² Dominique Desanti, L'Internationale Communiste, Paris, Payot, 1970, p.198.

⁵³ Margarete Buber-Neuman, La révolution mondiale, l'histoire du Comintern (1919-1943) racontée par l'un de ses principaux témoins, Paris, Casterman, 1971, p.349.

above event took place in the first half of 1934, at a time when Ho was said to have been in serious trouble.

Since the Comintern leadership, especially its innermost circle, must have the blessing of Stalin to continue to exist, it is logical to infer that Ho had won the good grace of the Soviet dictator also. Ho succeeded in this because he was a model Leninist-Bolshevik, scrupulously observed democratic centralism, and never challenged the decisions or the views of the leaders. Above all, if Ho had his own views on China and the East as well as on the colonies, he never voiced them unless they happened to be the same as those of the chief. If Ho voiced his views vigorously and displayed a high profile, that was on one particular issue: anti-Trotskyism. This happened to be Stalin's main battle-cry during those years. Ho took very great care that on this particular issue, which he knew was of paramount importance to Stalin, the CPI did not stray from the right path.

Ho left no stone unturned to ensure that his disciples strictly adhere to the Stalinist anti-Trotskyite line. The resolutions of the CPI from the day of its foundation were full of reminders to Party members to pay special attention to bolshevisation, and especially to eradicate all Trotskyite tendencies, to avoid absolutely any cooperation with the Trotskyites. After the close of the Seventh Congress, before the delegates of the CPI returned home, Ho held several discussions with the members, each time insisting that they must take "every measure" to annihilate the Trotskyites politically. Even at the railway station, before the delegates got on the train, Ho's last recommendation was that they must pass on to Le Hong Phong the

order that "under no circumstance" must there be collaboration with the Trotskyites. On the other hand, the resolutions of the Party contained frequent praises of the wisdom of Stalin.

Ho's efforts must have been known to Stalin, and the channel through which Stalin was informed was Manuisky. Here it is interesting to compare the role played by Manuisky in Ho's scheme regarding Stalin to that played three decades later by Sainteny in Ho's scheme regarding de Gaulle. Manuisky was the channel through which Ho obtained first hand and accurate information about Stalin's plans, and especially about Stalin's mood. Manuisky was the man behind whom Ho moved and thus never made a false step. Manuisky was also the man who provided Ho with the best support and protection. And this was all the more important as Manuisky was a very powerful figure in the Comintern.

As has been noted, Manuisky was chosen to represent the Comintern at the Second Congress of the CPF in Paris in 1922. In 1926, after the fall of Zinoviev he moved up in the Politburo, and from then on remained a most powerful figure there. The direction of the Comintern was entrusted to Molotov, but behind the scene, "Manu" wielded considerable power.⁵⁴ It was said that the strength of Manuisky lay in the fact that he could make Stalin laugh, but he did this only on good days and only on non-prohibited subjects. He never defended lost causes or lost people. He was not mistrusted and was spared by Stalin because he was always content to be a brilliant second and always

⁵⁴. Dominique Desanti, L'Internationale Communiste, Paris, Payot, 1970, p.147.

espoused the views of the master.⁵⁵ Eugenio Reale, well known for his knowledge of Comintern affairs, said that the most notable Soviet leader who had worked in the Comintern apparatus since its "heroic" days under Lenin and Zinoviev was Manuilsky, and during the final ten years "he held more actual power than Dimitrov, the titular secretary general".⁵⁶ The early part of this period was precisely, according to Huynh Kim Khanh, the one during which Ho was in disgrace and in preventive detention because of his "devotion to the cause of national independence".

The close relationship between Ho and Manuilsky naturally worked both ways. If through Manuilsky Ho was always well informed about Stalin's plans and mood, and was privy to the Comintern and Soviet government's analyses of the world situation, which was to enable him to make his own moves unerringly, in return, through Ho Manuilsky obtained first hand information and insight into the problems of the East and the colonies, which enabled him to avoid disastrous mistakes in analysis as well as policy, and thus enhance his own position within the Comintern and the Soviet leadership.

If Ho maintained such a low profile during those years, it was surely with Moscow's approval, or even on Moscow's orders, for it should be noted that Moscow did not issue a denial of the news of Ho's death after Ho had turned up in Moscow safe and sound, and was taken back into the fold of the Comintern. The big

⁵⁵. - ibid. -, p.197.

⁵⁶. Eugenio Reale, "Founding of Cominform" in B.Lazitch and M.Drackhovitch, The Comintern: Historical Highlights, New York, Praeger, 1966.

question, then, is: why did Moscow force the observance of such a low profile on Ho? Again, Desanti provided the most logical answer. Citing B.Lazitch, he said that following the Soviet-French agreement of May 1935, it was better not to have on the Executive Committee of the Cominform the name of an Indochinese revolutionary leader several times condemned to death for subversion by the French tribunals.⁵⁷

It should be recalled in this connection that in the early 1930s, Stalin was alarmed by the rise of fascism, especially after the coming to power of Hitler in Germany. In 1932 he signed a non-aggression pact with France, and in 1935 he followed up with a mutual assistance treaty. In 1935 the Bolshevik and class against class hard line was officially abandoned and replaced by that of united front. This was certainly not the moment to rouse French suspicion about good Soviet intention by throwing the name of Nguyen Ai Quoc at them. This, according to Desanti, explains why Moscow did not put out a rectification concerning the latter's death, why it put Cha-Yen (alias Le Hong Phong) instead of Nguyen Ai Quoc on the Presidium of the Comintern. And so Ho was told to cool his heels and to spend his time studying and to await the next opportunity.

The opportunity came in 1938, when Moscow was certain that war was inevitable, and on a world scale. In these conditions, Communist parties all over the world would have to be prepared in order to support the Soviet Union against its enemies, Japan being one of them. It was clear also that tactical guidance from

⁵⁷. - ibid. -, p.234.

Moscow would not be available as daily communication with it would be impossible. The Communist parties must be therefore be prepared to be on their own, and in this this they had the blessing of the Comintern. This was what Manuilsky told Ho before sending him home via China in the autumn of 1938.⁵⁸

Ho Chi Minh, as a true Cominternchik, should, in all circumstances, know what to do, with or without guidance from ECCI. This, he certainly had learned from his years of close association with ECCI, especially with Manuilsky. Vassar has told the following anecdote concerning Manuilsky treatment of Fried, a Comintern agent assigned to work with the CPF. But it certainly applies to all other Comintern agents, including Ho Chi Minh.

"Fried arrived and Manuilsky rudely insulted him. Fried tried to defend himself: "My task is staggering. I have not been able to isolate Doriot. What is the main thing required of me?"

"Do you think that a Communist delegate should ask such a question? You will not return to Paris"

Vassar took up Fried's defense.

Manuilsky asked him to be quiet. "You are not qualified to talk about it," said Manuilsky. "We know our own personel better than you do"

"Personel? He is the Executive delegate!".⁵⁹

The above anecdote shows that a Cominternchik must always know what he had to do in the service of the cause. Strategic decision was not permitted, but tactical skill was expected of him. Vassar pointed out that "the real content" of the policies of ECCI was "always" settled by the "restricted general staff", i.e., the milaiia_comissiiia, and the decisions of this group were sovrein; however, if the policy of this "summit" was "never to

⁵⁸. Hong Ha, Bac_Ho...., p.318-319.

⁵⁹. Lazitch and Drackhovitch, The Comintern: Historical Highlights, p.248.

be brought into question", discussions were possible on the methods of decision.⁶⁰

What has been pointed out above explains the tactics adopted by Ho Chi Minh from 1939, and especially from 1941, onward: waving high the flag of national independence, postponement of the social revolution, carefully concealing the Communist aims of the Party, broad national united front, etc....But none of these was outside the bounds permitted by the Comintern. On the contrary, that was precisely what the Comintern and pure Leninism expected of Ho Chi Minh: never waver on principle, i.e. the strategic aim, but always apply the utmost flexibility in choosing the most effective tactics in given circumstances. The main thing was to achieve the ends set by Lenin: achieve Communism and World Revolution, or accelerate the process leading to the achievement of these aims.

Admirers and apologists of Ho Chi Minh have tried to present him as a man who has fought and suffered because of his "devotion to the cause of national independence", because he was "nationalist first and communist second". And they had to bend and distort history to that end. There is no need for it. To those who make revolution the transcendental aim of their existence, Ho Chi Minh will be, and should be, admired as a great revolutionary, in fact the greatest revolutionary of our epoch, unequalled by any other revolutionary, except perhaps Lenin. But he has certainly not sought Vietnam's independence for its own sake, but only as the first phase in the bringing of Vietnam into

⁶⁰. - ibid. -, p.63.

the Communist camp as a service to the cause of World Communist Revolution. That is a historical fact.

To recognise this fact by no means reduces the admiration we have for the revolutionary spirit of the man. But we must question his wisdom and honesty for having chosen the Leninist/Bolshevik road and taken the Vietnamese people along with him without telling them this explicitly and clearly at the beginning. The terrible plights befalling the Vietnamese people since the Communist "victory" in 1975 certainly warrant, or even compel, such a conclusion.

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