

## HO CHI MINH: A VERY EFFICIENT AGENT OF THE COMINTERN

TON THAT THIEN

In the several past decades, the communists inside and outside Vietnam, together with the international communist fellow travellers belonging to "the Hanoi international symphony orchestra", especially in France and in the United States, have repeatedly proclaimed that Ho Chi Minh was "the greatest patriot among the Vietnamese people" (thus Vietnamese communist propaganda has asserted, placing Ho above even Phan Boi Chau); or that he was "the symbol of Vietnamese nationalism" (a myth spread by people like Jean Lacouture and Paul Mus); or that Ho Chi Minh was "nationalist first, communist second" (as the O.S.S. chief in Northern Indochina, A. Patti, has said in the past and continues to say today); or that in all of his life, Ho was interested "in nothing else" but the independence of Vietnam (as well known author Bernard Fall has unabashedly written); or that Ho was punished by Moscow because he was not a proletarian internationalist but a "revolutionary patriot" who placed his patriotism above the requirements of the Communist International (as Huynh Kim Khanh has tried hard to prove).

However, at the same time, the same authors and specialists who had spent much time studying Ho's life and activities complained unanimously that everything connected with Ho's life prior to 1941 was clouded in uncertainty, especially the details

of his life and activities between 1923 and 1941. This was the period during which Ho left France for the Soviet Union, and became a very efficient and ardent agent of the Communist International.

The details of Ho's life have been "revealed" in two brochures considered basic in the study of his biography: Nhung mau chuyen ve doi hoat dong cua Ho Chu Tich by Tran Dan Tien, and Vua di duong vua ke chuyen by T.Lan. According to these two publications, Ho left Paris in the middle of June 1923, travelled as a stowaway on a Soviet ship, and arrived in Petrograd (Leningrad) "in the midst of winter, when everything was covered by snow", a few days after Lenin's death, and carrying no paper whatsoever on him. x

All biographies of Ho, official and semi-official, were based on the details contained in the two brochures just cited. These brochures were written by Ho himself under the pseudonyms Tran Dan Tien and T.Lan. Even Ho's closest disciples like Pham Van Dong, Vo Nguyen Giap, Truong Chinh and Le Duan were kept completely in the dark by Ho regarding his trip to Russia in 1923. His closest foreign "brothers" like Wilfred Burchett, the well known Australian communist journalist, or Charles Fourniau, a French journalist and an important figure in the French Communist Party, or biographers like Bernad Fall, an American considered to be an "expert" on Vietnam, did not know the truth either, although all three men had been received by Ho personally and heard him make confidences concerning certain details of his

life. But Ho lied to them concerning the real details.

The truth about Ho's trip to Moscow in 1923 has been unearthed recently by various authors. One of them has produced undisputable material. He is Hong Ha, a member of the Vietnamese Communist Party (VCP), who had been given access to the archives of the Comintern by the Soviet authorities. Other authors have delved into the archives of the French Overseas Ministry, or were former agents of the Comintern themselves who knew the organisation from the inside and had met Ho (then Nguyen Ai Quoc) when Ho was working in that organisation in Moscow. From the revelations of these people, the facts about Ho's trip in 1923 can now be told with accuracy.

Ho was admitted to the French Socialist Party in 1918. In 1920, he sided with the Marcel Cachin faction and voted for admission to the Communist International (Comintern). He thus became a founding member of the French Communist Party (FCP) and the first Vietnamese to become an international communist. In October 1922, at the Second Congress of the FCP in Paris, Ho attracted the attention of D. Manuilsky, who was delegate of the Executive Committee of the Communist International (ECCI) and a man trusted by Stalin.

Through the channels of the Communist International, Ho was told to come to Moscow to participate in the Fifth Congress of the Comintern because of his apparent mastery of the colonial question and of his obvious passion when speaking about it. Ho was to be sent to Moscow for the Congress in 1923, but when he

arrived the Congress was postponed to 1924 because of Lenin's illness.

Ho's trip was prepared very thoroughly. He arrived in Berlin on June 16, 1923, and as instructed, went immediately to the Soviet Mission. There, he was received very warmly. The Mission, on instructions from Moscow, provided him with all the official papers and visas required for his travel on to Moscow, and a Soviet ship returning from Holland to Petrograd was ordered to call at Rostock for the unique purpose of picking him up. On board the Soviet ship Ho was treated like a special guest. Ho left Rostock on June 27 and arrived at Petrograd on June 30 on an exceptionally beautiful summer day when the temperature was 18 degrees centigrade. He was lodged at the international hotel Astoria, and took the train for Moscow the next day. The real facts are contrary to his confidential "disclosures" to his dear Vietnamese comrades and foreign "brothers".

Ho Chi Minh, then Nguyen Ai Quoc, was immediately recognised by the leaders of the Comintern and the Soviet Union as "a cadre having a thorough understanding of Leninism" and deserving the honour of being named a "Cominternchik", i.e. "a communist cadre who devotes all his life to the service of the Comintern". This was a special honour. No other communist received that distinction, even the very important Indian M.N.Roy, who was a prominent figure of the Comintern hierarchy at the time. X

Ho was awarded the above distinction in an interview by

Ossip Mandelstam, a reporter of the prominent Soviet magazine <sup>review</sup> Ogonyok. Mandelstam sought out Ho for interview after listening to him speak at the Kresintern Congress and after Ho had been elected to the Presidium of that organisation. The interview occupied the full front page of the <sup>review</sup> magazine and bore the title: "Guest of a Cominternchik". The date was December 1923, less than six months after Ho's landing at Petrograd. This was a recognition of the importance of Ho and of the trust he had generated among Soviet and international communist circles within a very short time. x

In addition to being elected to a top position in the Kresintern, Ho was assigned to work with the Eastern Department of the ECCI. A year later, he was selected to accompany Michael Borodin to Canton when the latter was appointed head of the Soviet Advisory Mission to Sun Yat-sen. In China, Ho shared a house with the Borodin family. His mission was: 1) to help organise the peasant movement in South China, and 2) to prepare the ground for the introduction of communism to Vietnam.

Ho zealously carried out his assignments. He took an active part in the peasant movement in South China. At the same time, he sought out the revolutionary youths in the Canton area and enticed them away from Phan Boi Chau by promising them "a new road". It was during this period that Phan Boi Chau was arrested by the French police in Shanghai when he was going to a secret meeting with Ho Chi Minh. As a result, there was no other prominent Vietnamese revolutionary figure capable of blocking

the expansion of communist movement from then on.

During the time that Ho was in Canton, from November 1924 to April 1927, he founded the Association of Vietnamese Revolutionary Youth (AVRY) and set up the first Vietnamese communist cell, comprising nine members, of whom 5 were full members. This group operated secretly under the cover of the AVRY. This was the typical method used by Ho and taught by him to his disciples.

In April 1927, the communists were haunted hard by Chiang Kai-shek, who had broken with Moscow. Ho had to flee Canton to Wuhan with the Borodin Mission, then from there to Hong Kong and back to the Soviet Union. But a year later, he was sent back again to the East, to Southeast Asia this time, as chief of the Southern Bureau of the Comintern. His mission was to help organise the communist movement in the area. From 1928 to 1931, Ho founded the Communist Party of Indochina (CPI), co-founded (with the Chinese communists) the Communist Party of Siam (Thailand), and the Communist Party of Malaya, with supervision authority over the Communist Party of Indonesia. His authority was really extensive. This reflected the great confidence that Moscow had in him because he had proved that he was an absolutely trustworthy "Cominternchik".

In June 1931, as a result of the negligence of a agent of the Comintern, Ho was arrested by the British police in Hong Kong. He was saved by a pro-communist British lawyer Frank Loseby and by the loose British legislation, and escaped from Hong Kong,

first to Macao then to Shanghai. There he got into touch with the Chinese communists and got help from them to return to Moscow. That was in 1933.

From 1933 to 1941, Ho disappeared from public view. According to Huynh Kim Khanh, Ho was "in disgrace" and was "punished" by the Comintern because of his "devotion to the nationalist cause" to the detriment of international communism. In fact, however, according to the disclosures of former agents of the Comintern like Albert Vassart (representative of the FCP to ECCI), and Margaret Buber Neuman (wife of Hans Neuman, a German communist very trusted by Stalin for a time) Ho played a very important role in the ECCI.

During this time, Ho was ordered to lie low because Stalin was seeking a rapprochement with France to counter the threat of Hitler and Japan, and did not want the French to suspect that he was using Indochinese revolutionaries to stir up trouble in the French colonies. For this reason, Nguyen Ai Quoc was not heard of, and the French police thought that he had died in a British jail in Hong Kong as the news said (but in fact, this news was floated by Loseby and the Comintern to deceive the public).

In 1936 Ho volunteered for fighting in the ranks of the communists in Spain, but he was told to wait for a more important assignment. In 1938 Ho was ordered to go back to Vietnam, with full powers, to prepare for the fight against Japan because Stalin was convinced that a world war was inevitable, and that in such a war, the Soviet Union and Japan would be on opposite

sides. The Comintern made arrangements with the Chinese Communist Party to help Ho to travel safely from Yen-An to South China to make contact with communist cadres from Vietnam. In 1940, Ho met Le Quang Ba, Hoang Van Hoan, Vo Nguyen Giap, Pham Van Dong, and a number of other Vietnamese communist cadres, and in February 1941, he crossed the Sino-Vietnamese border and set foot again on Vietnamese soil after 30 years of absence. His mission was: to organise resistance to Japan in support of the Soviet Union. Vietnam's independence was a secondary concern.

Ho's mission was to organise the movement against fascism, which was the principal enemy of the Soviet Union. Japan was considered a fascist enemy. And because the French authorities in Indochina sided with Marshall Petain and cooperated with Japan, Ho could make the fighting against both the Japanese and the French his objective without infringing Moscow's policy. If the French authorities had sided with de Gaulle, Ho would have been in a bind like the Malayan communists because communists all over the world were ordered by Moscow to collaborate with the Allied governments, whether capitalist or imperialist, provided they fought against the principal enemy of the Soviet Union.

For the same reason, in 1945-1946 Ho was ordered by Moscow to cooperate with France and avoid extremism, and to seek technical assistance from the United States for its development. The Soviet Union had a secret representative in Hanoi at the time, and in December 1945 it secretly sent a mission to Hanoi. Immediately after the departure of this mission, Ho's government



announced to the population that it would negotiate with the French. In September 1947, Moscow changed policy from cooperation with the Western powers to confrontation, thus starting the cold war. Through the Conference of World Youth at Calcutta (February 1948) it ordered the communists in Southeast Asia to start armed rebellions against the Western powers. By then Ho was already deeply involved in fighting against the French.

We have referred above to some of the unknown aspects of the "nationalism" of Ho Chi Minh and of the Vietnamese communists. They match the statements of the high cadres of the CPV. For example, Pham Van Dong: "Ho Chi Minh was a model fighter of the international communist movement"; and Le Duan: Ho Chi Minh was "a loyal student of Marx and Lenin....an outstanding fighter in the international communist movement...".

It is the highest cadres of Ho Chi Minh who have stressed that Ho was a model fighter of the international communist movement. For this reason, when communist propaganda and "the Hanoi international symphony orchestra" sing that Ho was the greatest patriot among the Vietnamese people, what should we understand by it? The problem revolved round the word "quoc" (fatherland). What "quoc" (fatherland) did Ho love? To answer this question, we must have clearly in mind the statements of Pham Van Dong and Le Duan before, and especially after, 1975: "A Vietnamese patriot must adopt socialism", and "Socialism and patriotism are one and the same thing". But the fatherland of socialism is the Soviet Union. This statement was repeated again

and again in the resolutions of the CPV since its foundation in 1930. Thus, the fatherland of Ho Chi Minh and of the leaders of the CPV has been the Soviet Union, not Vietnam. Ho Chi Minh was a great patriot. We agree. But we agree only if it is specified that that the real fatherland of Ho Chi Minh was the Soviet Union, and not Vietnam.

In Ho's appeal to the Vietnamese people on the foundation of the CPV in February 1930 Ho said: "On order from the Communist International to solve the question of revolution in our country, I have completed my mission....". In October 1936, a resolution of the CPV said: "We are internationalists, not nationalists...the form of our struggle is nationalist, but its contents is internationalist....". And a resolution a year later said: "Our party must always correctly follow Marxism-Leninism, always correctly follow the principles laid down by the Third International, become a bolshevik party....."

In May 1941, the CPV met at Pac Bo to make plans for the seizure of power. The official history of the CPV recorded the event as follows: "The Central Committee met under the chairmanship and at the convocation of comrade Ho Chi Minh, in his capacity as representative of the Communist International...". Lastly, in Duong Kach Menh, the first text-book written by Ho Chi Minh for use in his training of the first communist recruits in 1926-1927, Ho stressed: "The Third International is a world party. The national parties are only sections. They must follow a common plan and common principles. In everything, if

there is no order from the Third International yet, then the parties must refrain from taking action".

As Pham Van Dong and Le Duan have stressed, Ho Chi Minh was "a model fighter of the international communist movement". He constantly reminded his disciples to maintain "the purity" of Marxism-Leninism. And the basic condition for maintaining "the purity" of Marxism-Leninism was always to follow the orders of the Third International. Although this organisation was disbanded by Stalin in 1943, in 1947, explaining the significance of the creation of the Cominform, G.Dimitrov, the last secretary general of the Comintern, stressed that in the international communist movement there is only one leader, and that is the Soviet Union. So, to say that Ho Chi Minh was a nationalist, then what nation did he love and serve? If Ho and the leaders of the CPV really loved their country, then why have they led the Vietnamese people into the present tragic situation?

Why did Ho hide the facts relating to his connection with the Communist International? For a very simple reason: he wanted to wear the colours of an ardent nationalist who fights with all his forces for national independence, and thus deserving to be considered a symbol of Vietnamese nationalism and to be accepted as the undisputable leader of this movement by all those who love freedom and oppose colonialism. If Ho wore communist colours, then he would lose the support of the majority of the Vietnamese as well as of the people in the world. Only in 1950, when Ho was sure of having secured hegemony (control) over the nationalist

movement did he throw down his mask and proclaim that the Democratic Republic of Vietnam was a member of the socialist camp. It was then that those who did not want communism opened their eyes, but it was too late: nothing could be done at that late stage to eject Ho from the leadership of the Vietnamese nationalist movement.

Lastly, Ho was in any case a communist who accepted Lenin and Leninism unconditionally, as he often proclaimed. So, he could not be a nationalist because Lenin, in his first work on communism, What is to be done?, written in 1903, set as preliminary condition for those who want to become communist, that they must forsake all nationalist sentiments and must place world revolution above everything else, including their national interests. In these conditions, Ho could not be a nationalist. The fatherland he loved could only be the Soviet Union, the fatherland of socialism.

At the time when the Vietnamese communists and "the Hanoi symphony orchestra" make a great deal of noise about "Uncle Ho" on the occasion of the centenary of "Uncle", the historical facts should be recalled to shed light on the question.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For more details concerning Ho's association with the Comintern, read: Ton That Thien, The Foreign Politics of the Communist Party of Vietnam, A Study of Communist Tactics, New York and London, Taylor and Francis, 1989; and Was Ho Chi Minh a Nationalist? Ho Chi Minh and the Comintern, Singapore, Information and Resource Center, 1990.