

VIETNAM PARALYSED BECAUSE OF COMMUNISTS' FEAR OF FIVE DEADLY HATS

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Tran Xuan Bach is a name well known since March 27, 1990 to all those who are interested in Vietnam. March 27, 1990 is the date when Bach was expelled from the Politburo, Secretariate, and Central Committee of the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) at the end of the Party's Eighth Plenum. A very big fall for a very important communist indeed.

Bach's unforgivable sin was - in the eyes of the Party leadership - violation of Party discipline. More specifically, he had held strong views on the necessity of more radical and faster political reforms, and had continued to speak out in defence of those views although the Party had made it clear that they were contrary to the Party line. And the Party line since its Sixth Plenum in August 1989 was: no political pluralism, no abandonment of dictatorship of the proletariat (i.e. of the CPV), no tolerance of any opposition, and no deviation from "the purity of Marxism-Leninism".

A month earlier, Bach had written an article which generated big waves. The article appeared in Tap Chi Cong San (Communist Review), the Party's ideological review. In this article, Bach gave a very penetrating analysis of the causes of Vietnam's present paralysis. They dealt essentially with the psychology of the Vietnamese communists.

One of these causes is what Bach called "the xenophobic psychology" prevailing in the Party. This xenophobia, he said, was the result of the war years, when intense hatred was whipped up against the foreigners (French, Americans, and westerners in general -- who happened to be also from capitalist countries), but the Party has not forsaken this anti-western/capitalist psychology although the country is now at peace.

But the most essential part of Bach's analysis concerned what he called the "psychological fear of chup_mu". The term chup_mu is one of the most powerful in the Vietnamese language. Literally, it means "clamping a hat down a person's head". What it does not say explicitly is that the hat has a particular label on it, usually a politically very damaging one. The English terms closest to it would be "to brand", to "stick a label on", or to "accuse someone of being".

Chup_mu is a term used by Vietnamese to destroy a rival's political reputation and popular support. This is something Vietnamese dread like the plague because in the cruel, gullible, rumour-rife society of Vietnam it is extremely difficult to fight this kind of insidious attack. This was the kind of method used extensively with devastating effect by the communists against their nationalist and other enemies during the war. But now, they are using it against one another, and in defense against it, they are no better armed than the nationalists. In fact, they are much more vulnerable to it than their former enemies because they have always put a special premium on radicalism.

The five deadly hats identified by Bach are: 1) loss of vigilance; 2) deviation from socialism; 3) rightist deviation; 4)

worship of the West; and 5) shaky grasp of Marxism-Leninism. The fear of having these hats clamped down on one's head was "the powerful force that blocks renovation and creativeness", although no one would admit openly that this was the case; these five hats are like "an invisible force floating around our minds and haunting us", Bach said.

Bach said that personal security considerations dictated that "the best course is to protect oneself, to execute orders without question, to always nod agreement with what is said, to always go with the crowd in discussions, to lean on others when speaking, and to follow in the footsteps of others passively". The result is a stamping of one's feet without moving forward, and "progressing in circle".

As a result, said Bach, the Party has been clinging to "old model socialism" characterised by dogmatism in thinking and reliance on violence in action. Current historical developments are totally ignored. The scientific and democratic achievements of capitalism are totally disregarded although they are values of human civilisation and the product of the human mind. This has led to the doing of "stupid things" because of inadequate or inaccurate information. Among these stupidities are "mandarinal politics", the claim of "monopoly of truth", and "the politics of monopoly of management". But politics and economics are like our two legs. "We cannot walk with one short and one long leg, still less move forward by limping with just one leg".

Well informed people from Vietnam said that this article was one of the main causes of Bach's expulsion from the leading organs of the CPV. If that is so, the Party has expelled Bach for

having had the courage to draw the attention of the whole country, and not just the inner circles of the Party, to what he considered were the deepest causes of the present state of paralysis of Vietnam. Instead of congratulating and rewarding him for rendering a truly great service to the country - and also to the Party - by pinpointing the sources of the country's troubles, and especially by speaking out, the Party has punished him.

Naturally, the Party's harsh and spectacular decision was meant to intimidate and silence others. What the CPV leadership has overlooked, or did not care about, is that in adopting such a course, it has condemned the country, and indeed, itself to perpetuate what Bach had warned against, i.e., denying itself access to full and accurate information, and committing stupidities which push the country more and more deeply into poverty and despair, and sooner or later invite rebellion from outside, or from inside the Party, or both simultaneously.

What the Party has failed to do was to grasp the chance offered by Bach and take strong measures to destroy the five deadly hats and kill the fear of chup_mu among the members of the Party and among the people, so that the root causes of the country's present predicament can be exactly pinpointed and clearly understood, and appropriate measures taken to remove them and make it possible for the country to move forward.

For the time being, Bach's diagnosis concerning the deepest causes of the country's present appalling poverty and chaos - both in the material and moral sense - are ²correct. This situation has led to diplomatic isolation, to denial of access to much needed foreign capital and modern technology, and above all, to

horrifying waste of resources, especially of human capital, and still more particularly of **time** - and in this epoch of accelerated history, time is something Vietnam cannot afford to waste -.

Thus Vietnam has been caught in a vicious circles, just because the leadership of the CPV has been clinging fast to policies, and especially, to attitudes which may have been highly effective in the past, but which are now blatantly anachronistic, highly counter-productive and undisputably disastrous, especially in view of the great turning taken by the Soviet Union, the CPV's model for the last 60 years.

It is therefore natural that both outside and inside the CPV there have been persistent calls for change, and according to well informed sources, more and more people are working actively to bring about the desperately needed change - either of policy or of personnel, or of both - , and this, by any means - either peaceful or violent -.

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