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## **Ideological rebellion growing in Vietnamese CP**

### **HO NO LONGER UNTOUCHABLE As present party leadership uses him as shield in fight against abandoning Leninism**

By Ton That Thien

In the present state of the world Marxism-Leninism and socialism should be abandoned because they have become obviously utopian and anti-scientific, regressive, and inapplicable; for Vietnam, Marxism-Leninism is a luxury; the word "socialist" in Socialist Republic of Vietnam should be scrapped; all the road signs pointing in the direction of socialism should be reversed; Ho Chi Minh made a disastrous error in choosing the Leninist road as the road for Vietnam's salvation.

The views cited above have been expressed in recent years, not by embittered Vietnamese unconditional anti-communists living in exile in the United States, but by Vietnamese communists with impeccable credentials.

These mavericks had been members of the VCP for over 30 or 40 years, had distinguished war records, observed party discipline scrupulously and kept silent for years. But now, they explain, reason as well as conscience have compelled them to speak out.

Those views constitute the common main thrust of the numerous criticisms levelled openly by rebel party members at the party leaders and the regime. A full list of the grievances aired by such members, whose number has been growing, would be long. They are directed primarily at the party leaders for their ignorance, arrogance and conservatism, and at socialism for the glaring economic, social and moral ills it has brought upon the country and on the party itself. Inevitably, they will be directed at Ho Chi Minh also, for he is the recognised founder, educated, leader, chief strategist and tactician of the party.

The party members who braved the thunder from the present party leadership say that they feel a terrible sense of shame to be members of a party which was once highly respected and admired, but is thoroughly discredited and despised today. They say they rebelled after their pleas for reforms and change done out of goodwill, in a constructive spirit, and according to normal party rules – through the proper channels, quietly, and with due respect – were rejected unceremoniously by the party leadership, their views totally suppressed, and harsh punitive measures taken against them – immediate dismissal from their jobs, expulsion from the party, economic blockade and harassments, and also jail and torture --.

The ranks of the rebels have become larger, and their voices have also become louder as at one meeting after another of the Central Committee, the party leaders continued to adopt the orthodox Leninist hard line, and contrary to expectations, chose to harden, instead of softening, their position following the collapse of communism in Europe. In contrast, that collapse shook the faith of a large number of party members and cadres, and encouraged the rebels to speak out, in the belief that their position is strongly supported by facts and by history – always a very important consideration for communists -- , and also by the knowledge that many other members share their views and their feelings. The VCP has ceased to be monolithic, certainly ideology wise.

The arguments of the rebels are difficult to refute since they are backed by hard facts. This led the party leadership to resort to tactics which serve it well, but which does great harm to Ho Chi Minh, for it drags him into a debate in which he is bound to get smeared.

The debate is about the basic issue: should Vietnam continue to adopt “building socialism”, Leninist model, as its national aim?

To this question, the conservatives, who hold actual power at the moment, resolutely answer yes. But considering the undisputedly dismal performance of socialism since 1975 and the uncertainties beclouding its future, it is difficult for them to defend such a position against the attacks of their detractors. So, fully aware of the power of the Ho Chi Minh mystique, they use Ho Chi Minh as a shield.

In Vietnam, and still more so, in the party, Ho Chi Minh is accepted unquestionably as a great political and military genius, an infallible master and leader, a perfect man to be revered. He is untouchable. Expressing doubt about his wisdom, and especially criticising him, would be breaking the greatest of all taboos, wilfully committing a crime of lese majesty. By claiming that pursuing the socialist road is the correct way to implement “Ho Chi Minh’s thoughts” and prove one’s true loyalty to “Uncle” the VCP leaders therefore make any challenge to their position difficult, if not suicidal, certainly so politically, as such a challenge would mean an assault on Ho himself.

The VCP leaders’ position seems well grounded, as it is a historical fact that it is Ho who has introduced Leninism to Vietnam and that he has repeatedly enjoined party members always to fully trust and follow Lenin, just as he himself had done since he discovered this “beacon” in 1920.

According to former Premier Pham Van Dong, a very close disciple of Ho, Leninism constitutes the basis of “Ho Chi Minh’s thoughts”. But the bolshevik features of this doctrine disturb a number of party members, especially after the dramatic rejection of that brand of socialism by the East European communists. But these members are reluctant to renege on Ho and on the party. So, they advance a fanciful interpretation to rationalise their attitude.

They argue that if Uncle Ho were still alive in 1975 he would not have adopted the course followed by the present party leadership, for he was first and foremost a patriot; he would use Marxism-Leninism only as a means; he would advocate a policy of true national

reconciliation, favour a multiparty democratic system after the French and American models, practice neutrality in foreign policy, and favour a market economy. This is sheer speculation, and wild wishful thinking, but it is a view held by those who are sentimentally attached to Ho inside the party, and because of it, have abstained from active opposition to the regime. It also represents the true aspirations of the overwhelming majority of the Vietnamese people at present.

A number of other members also hide behind Ho, but for a different reason. Convinced that the course being pursued by the present leaders is wrong and hurts the country's interests as well as the party's popularity, they advocate radical changes: full recognition of property rights, full acceptance of capitalism as "the road along which all mankind has to travel", a democratic multiparty system, the rule of law, to name but a few. These are all anathemas to these leaders.

To avoid being branded as "weakhearted", "deviationist", "antiparty", they hide behind Ho's name, arguing that what should be preserved above all is "Uncle Ho's ideals" – national independence, the freedom and welfare of the people --, and Ho was a patriot who cared only about the aims and was pragmatic about the means. In Ho Chi Minh's thoughts, these members argue, Marxism-Leninism would be just a means. Uncle would not hesitate to discard them if he found them harmful. This is twisting history and doing violence to Ho's deep convictions. But the reference to Ho gives good protection to the authors of such unorthodox proposals.

A last group of party members advocates dumping Leninism, lock, stock, and barrel. They view Leninism as an unqualified calamity for the country because it is utopian, capable of producing only political and cultural slavery, not freedom and economic development. They decide to look closely at Ho Chi Minh himself because the conservatives, who defend Leninism steadfastly, invoke "loyalty to Uncle Ho" as their motivation.

The most prominent member of this group, the first Vietnamese communist ever to have dared commit such an unthinkable and unpardonable act, is Lu Phuong, a former vice-minister in the South Vietnam Liberation Government. He points out that Ho himself has admitted that when he decided to put his absolute faith in Lenin and the Comintern he did not know anything about socialism, that all he knew and cared about was that Lenin and his followers supported anti-colonialism.

Ho has bound the Vietnamese people tightly to the international communist organisation for so long that today the Vietnamese people are paralysed while the world is going through momentous change, says Phuong. Can we accept the