

# The Vietnamese revolution and the role of the party

Friday 12 August 2011, by [ROUSSET Pierre](#) (Date first published: 1 November 1973).

A long debate occurred during the 1960-1970s within the Fourth International on the nature of the Vietnamese revolution and on the role of the Vietnamese Communist Party (VCP). In the text below, Pierre Rousset answers George Johnson and Fred Feldman's criticisms of his 1973 book *Le Parti communiste vietnamien* (first edition). George Johnson and Fred Feldman were the US Socialist Workers Party (SWP) Indochina specialists.

As often at that time, polemics were loaded with quotes. Quotes can be quite useful to let the quoted authors express their view in their own words or to relay a situation as accurately as possible. But we also massively used "authority quotes" - referring to an "authority" (here for example Leon Trotsky) to give legitimacy to an argument - this said, it is true that, in the present case, the legacy of the Fourth International was a dimension of the debate, which explains in part the importance of the "authority quotes".

It would be interesting to look back at the way various concepts were then used (as the notions of worker's state or empiricism), and to place this particular polemics in a broader framework (other debates within the FI and in the Marxist movement) and in perspective (evolution of analysis, post-1975 developments...). My own understanding of parties like the VCP or the CCP was far from being completed in 1973, as I worked later on the notion of "national communisms".

We'll try to post online more documents of the time. For the evolution of analysis, see Pierre Rousset, [Marxisme\(s\), révolutions et tiers monde : réflexions sur les expériences d'Asie orientale – Un cheminement générationnel](#) (ESSF, article 2609).

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## Contents

- [I. Two theses on the role of](#)
- [II. Stalinism, petty bourgeois](#)
- [III. The revolution in stages](#)
- [IV. On the uniqueness of \(...\)](#)
- [V. The programmatic outlines of](#)
- [VI. The future of Vietnamese](#)

*Without the party, independently of the party, skipping over the party, through a substitute for the party, the proletarian revolution can never triumph. That is the principal lesson of the last decade .... We have paid too dearly for this conclusion as to the role and significance of the party for the*

*proletarian revolution to renounce it so lightly or even to have it weakened.*

**Leon Trotsky**, *The Lessons of October*

*The fact that the struggle [in Vietnam] has been carried on for three decades without being decisively defeated should not be permitted to influence our evaluation of the program of the [Vietnamese] leadership .... The fact that the struggle has sustained itself for thirty years is a tribute to the persistence and iron will of the Vietnamese people.*

**George Johnson and Fred Feldman**, "On the Nature of the Vietnamese Communist Party", *International Socialist Review*, July-August 1973 [1].

It is difficult to discuss a book that the readers of the *International Socialist Review* cannot read. Feldman and Johnson have reviewed the principal periods of development of the Vietnamese Communist Party (VCP) [2] in order to give their interpretation, which, in general, differs greatly from that advanced in the *Livre Rouge (Le Parti communiste vietnamien)*, by Pierre Rousset [Paris, Maspero, 1973]). The temptation is strong to reply to them by summarising the theses of the book in question, and by following its outline. But that would risk further dispersing the debate, rather than concentrating on what is essential. For the essential issue is not the analysis of this or that period under indictment, but in fact the whole conception of the role of the VCP in the Vietnamese revolution, of its nature, and of its future.

So on this occasion the problem is deliberately presented in a political, rather than a historical way, even though it means not being able to reply to each and every particular criticism. Feldman and Johnson lay claim throughout their article to Trotskyist orthodoxy, and especially to the theory of permanent revolution. They make a study of its principal ideas. But they "forget" to bring to light the central place that this theory assigns to the activity of the party itself in the success of a revolution. Their analysis of the role of the Vietnamese Communist Party in the history of the Vietnamese revolution quite simply makes an abstraction of this fundamental, clarifying concept. Therein, in our opinion, lies its essential weakness, which permits a particularly erroneous "reading" of the events in Indochina. If that is the main weakness of their article, unfortunately it is not the only one. We shall begin nevertheless with this problem, for it is this that enables us to understand the other disagreements.

## **I. Two theses on the role of the party in the revolution**

For Comrades Feldman and Johnson, the VCP is, and was, "*a petty-bourgeois party, linked by its program and its international allegiances to world Stalinism*" [xx], which up until the beginning of the Sino-Soviet dispute faithfully followed the twists and turns of the Kremlin's politics. On reading the article in the *ISR* it is clear that for them the VCP has never wanted seriously, or for any length of time, to establish a workers' state in Vietnam. On the contrary, it has generally sought conciliation with one imperialist power or another. Only by the extreme pressure of the masses has the revolution been allowed to progress. Not only has the VCP never wanted a revolution, but it was also quite incapable of knowing how to make one. Its program was, and is, fundamentally only a "left" version, in its form, of the Stalinist theory of the revolution in stages. Caught between the hammer of the intransigence of imperialism and the anvil of the tenacious courage of the masses, it has been forced into armed struggle without ever having the strategic objective of taking power. Moreover, it is because of this that, after having let slip some excellent opportunities to make a revolution, the VCP led the Vietnamese people merely to a partial victory in 1954.

### **A. The first fundamental problem**

So we have in Vietnam a socialist revolution which after having experienced its first forward leaps in

1930 and 1936-37, has gone through 30 years of almost ceaseless revolutionary armed struggle, resulting in the establishment of the first workers' state in Southeast Asia, and withstanding the most colossal counterrevolutionary onslaught in history. And all this in opposition to the organisation that is at its head, without seriously or visibly shaking it, without giving rise even to the embryo of an alternative revolutionary leadership.

The *ISR* comrades, as we shall see, appeal continually to orthodoxy; but there you have a conclusion implied directly by their article that does not seem to correspond very much to the traditional teachings of Marxism, Leninism, or Trotskyism - teachings drawn from a century of experience of the workers' movement.

*"Without the party ... the proletarian revolution can never triumph. That is the principal lesson of the last decade,"* wrote Trotsky (see the quotation at the beginning of this article), and in *The Permanent Revolution*:

*"No matter what the first episodic stages of the revolution may be in the individual countries, the realisation of the revolutionary alliance between the proletariat and the peasantry is **conceivable only** under the political leadership of the proletarian vanguard, organised in the Communist Party."* [3] (Our emphasis.)

The worker-peasant alliance itself is impossible without a revolutionary party! And we are told that in Vietnam not only has the alliance been realised (unless, comrades, the revolution was able to triumph without this alliance? Certain passages in the *ISR* article would lead us to believe so), but it has permitted the establishment of the DRV without such a party! The problem is a sizeable one and it would have been useful if Comrades Feldman and Johnson had tackled it more systematically. Unless of course, they think Vietnam can be characterised as an exceptional case.

## **B. Vietnam: A typical case**

On the contrary, Vietnam is a typical case. Let us examine some of the comparisons outlined by Feldman and Johnson. The case of Vietnam, first of all is in no way comparable with the East European or Korean people's democracies. The Vietnamese revolution was not the product of an advance by the Red Army and a diplomatic Yalta (with or without insurrectionary processes) - quite the contrary. The foreign armies were nationalist Chinese, French and British, and then American. Potsdam recognised Indochina as belonging to the Western "sphere of influence", an agreement the USSR attempted to respect. The Vietnamese people had to make - in the real sense of the word - their revolution. It was truly, in that sense, a "national" revolution.

Nor can the case of Vietnam be compared to the resistance to Nazism during the war in the USSR. In this latter instance it was a case, in effect, of a bureaucracy of a degenerated workers' state literally fighting for survival in the face of imperialist aggression. From 1940 to 1954, from 1960 to today in South Vietnam, it is a matter of something very different - making a revolution. The implications of the dual nature of the bureaucracy cannot be used as an argument here.

Finally, the comparison with Cuba allows us to show exactly how much the Vietnamese revolution has had to make its own way through considerable difficulties. Feldman and Johnson write curiously that in 1945 the relationship of forces was better than in Cuba. To that there are two replies. The first concerns the relationship of forces in 1945. If it is true that the bourgeois forces in Vietnam in August 1945 were particularly weakened, it is dangerous to draw the conclusions of the *ISR* authors from this fact. First, because the revolutionary forces had not had the time to consolidate their position in a country in turmoil; we shall return to this later. Second, because imperialist intervention - sanctioned by Yalta and Potsdam - was inevitable, with the army of the Kuomintang

(200,000 men) and the Anglo-French expeditionary force.

The second reply is that even if an opportunity had been missed, we also have to take into account the later course of the revolution in order to judge the theoretical and practical role of the party. However, the primary characteristic of the Vietnamese and Indochinese revolutions is the extent and duration of the imperialist intervention. From this point of view, Indochina represents a unique example. This imperialist intervention, then, by its importance, eliminates the particular or momentary characteristics that could have provoked a “surprise” victory for the revolution.

For these reasons – and others – we can say that all the considerations that justify, for Marxist theory, the necessity of a revolutionary party are especially present in the case of Vietnam. And the analysis shows besides, as we shall see, that the VCP led the revolutionary process in a way that was uncontested – at least after 1939-40.

If despite all that the VCP cannot be characterised as a revolutionary party, [\[4\]](#) then the whole Marxist theory of the party deserves to be re-examined from this point of view.

The Cuban revolution itself had need of an organised proletarian vanguard. However, it has not undergone “imperialist interventions” other than the ill-fated Bay of Pigs affair. Vietnam, a colonial country, has been attacked by the imperialists of France; France and Japan; Britain, France, and nationalist China; France; France and the USA; and finally the USA and its satellites. So? So, would not the fact that the Vietnamese and Indochinese revolutions have been able to withstand such developments without the embryo of an organised vanguard, against its leading party, without even strongly shaking up the latter, pose a theoretical problem?

It is too bad Feldman and Johnson don’t examine the question more seriously.

### **C. The existence of the VCP in the revolution**

Even a cursory examination of the Vietnamese revolution shows that the role of the VCP was active and decisive in assuring its successes. We don’t need to go back over the details here. Comrades Feldman and Johnson explain that “prolonged revolutionary war” was the worst of the roads for the revolution to follow. We shall return to this. Nevertheless it was by this road that the revolution won in the North, and then brought the United States to a standstill in Indochina. Now, the leading role of the party in this war – both military and political – as an indispensable element of the victory is obviously incontestable. And that is true not only of military offensives. The entire course of the war as a revolutionary war depended among other things on the attitude of the VCP. The consequences of the errors of the VCP are there to confirm this fact.

Up until 1953, the very moderate agrarian policy of the VCP prevented a really massive mobilisation of the peasantry. But the struggle for a radical agrarian reform could only become a politically decisive national objective after the Vietminh (and behind it the VCP) made it their program. The fact that the VCP changed its program under the pressure of events, and not out of political foresight, makes no difference; this is true, of course, only insofar as it is a matter of assessing the active role of the VCP, and not of defining its nature more exactly.

Nor is the exact tempo of the realisation of this radical agrarian reform the most important fact. What is decisive is the fact that the mass uprising of the Vietnamese peasantry for the division and takeover of the land was an indispensable lever in the victory of the military offensives of 1953-54 that led to Dienbienphu.

The second resistance confirms the lessons of the first as to the role of the VCP. From 1954 to 1959-60 the VCP refused to resume armed struggle, and therefore rapidly found itself irrelevant as

far as the peasant insurrection or “spontaneous” uprisings of national minorities were concerned. Given the position taken by the VCP, these movements were several years later still unable to provide the basis for an alternative revolutionary organisation. It was necessary for the VCP to change its line (1959) and decide to launch the NLF (1960 – for was it not the VCP that decided the NLF’s constitution?) in order for the armed struggle to regain a national scope. Then it was to take four years before the “special war” of US imperialism suffered severe blows and the VCP was on the verge of taking power. This shows how wrong it would be to take 1965 as the date of the “turn” of the CP; that is, when the bombing of the DRV began, and when arms and men from the North arrived in large numbers for the first time in the South. What was most important of all was the change of political orientation. And only engaging in “local war” allowed the puppet regime to be saved. Finally – a very telling fact – the core of the Vietnamese revolutionary cadres are today members of the VCP or of affiliated organisations; and this is after thirty years of mass revolutionary struggle, with the probable exception of some independent revolutionary cadres in the Saigon workers’ movement.

We will return later to the faults, mistakes, and weaknesses of the VCP. But what is immediately clear and obvious is that the VCP was able to play an active revolutionary role in the whole course of the revolution. To begin to define more precisely the nature of this party, let us return to the adjectives used by Comrades Feldman and Johnson in attacking the VCP.

## **II. Stalinism, petty bourgeoisie and revolution**

Throughout their article, the comrades of the ISR define the VCP sometimes as a “petty-bourgeois party”, sometimes as a “Stalinist party”, and sometimes both at the same time. This series of epithets cannot help but pose some problems. The VCP has certainly been characterised in various ways by the Trotskyist movement: a workers’ party in the case of the “Indochinese Communist Party” (*Quatrieme Internationale*, September-November 1945), a Stalinist workers’ party (1947 pamphlet), an “empirical-revolutionary” workers’ party ... but never before “petty bourgeois” and “Stalinist” at the same time. The class definition that Comrades Feldman and Johnson give the VCP is particularly unclear.

### **A. A petty-bourgeois Stalinist party?**

Take your choice: either Stalinism reflects basically an evolution in social interests, which is the classical Trotskyist understanding; or it is only an ideological deviation of an indeterminate class character. The views of Comrades Feldman and Johnson on this are not altogether clear. But in either case their definition does not apply.

A party is defined above all by the class interests that it represents more or less effectively. A petty-bourgeois party in Vietnam is then, above all, a party tied essentially to the peasantry. A Stalinist party, for us, is a party tied essentially to the existence of a bureaucracy of a degenerated workers’ state (the USSR) and, in the final analysis, defending its interests throughout the world, which of course does not prevent it from exhibiting secondary differences. Trotsky in 1928 dealt with the problem of so-called “bipartite” parties, on the occasion of the debate in the Communist International on “workers’ and peasants’ parties”, a costume that the Chinese bourgeois Kuomintang, notably, was dressed up in by the Stalinist leadership to fit the needs of their case. Trotsky was categorical: “We understand the impossibility of the existence of a bipartite party, that is, a party of two classes that simultaneously expresses two opposing lines.”

By defining the VCP, despite everything, as petty bourgeois and Stalinist, Comrades Feldman and Johnson are driven to revise Trotskyist theory on one of the two following points:



- By reducing the class nature of a party to a purely ideological reality, the VCP is Stalinist because its program contains a number of Stalinist conceptualisations. The VCP is petty bourgeois because it displays typically petty-bourgeois empiricism. Unfortunately, this approach mistakes the effect for the cause; and above all it avoids the basic problem: exactly what social interests does such a party defend? Lastly it blurs the differences, however fundamental they may be, between a Stalinist workers' party and a petty-bourgeois nationalist party, etc. Nationalism, a peasant base, conciliationism toward imperialism, and multiclassism may also be applied to the Palestinian Fateh, Nasserism, and the VCP. Are these not, however, all parties of a different class nature?

- By giving the same class definition to the Stalinist bureaucracy and to the Vietnamese small peasantry, both then become "petty bourgeoisie". But how can you do that without stripping of its content the concept of class nature? The Vietnamese peasantry – as the stratum of pre-capitalist petty producers – is petty bourgeois. But these aspirations drive them naturally to seek either a golden age of the past, or their rise to the status of capitalist peasants. The collectivisation of agriculture in Vietnam is precisely the sign of a proletarian revolution in its content. The Stalinist bureaucracy defends collectivised production, and cannot be confused with the petty bourgeoisie defined by Marxists as a social class. It could be said of the Soviet bureaucracy that it is permeated with bourgeois and petty-bourgeois ideology. But it remains nevertheless a workers' bureaucracy in the sense that its existence is tied to the workers' state as well as to that state's degeneration. This reasoning holds true also for a Stalinist party, with a largely petty-bourgeois ideology, but tied both to the Soviet bureaucracy and to the organic development of the workers' movement of its own country.

No, the VCP cannot be at the same time Stalinist and petty bourgeois. But then, is it Stalinist or petty bourgeois?

## **B. A petty-bourgeois party?**

The authors of the *ISR* article define the VCP in one passage as "a petty-bourgeois party, linked by its program and its international allegiances to world Stalinism".[p. 89] Note that in this definition, for us, the VCP would then be a petty-bourgeois nationalist party, but not a Stalinist party. It would merely be "linked" to Stalinism.

But this definition of the VCP poses a new theoretical problem: that of the historical role of petty-bourgeois parties. Here is what Trotsky wrote about these parties after the Russian experience, which he considered exemplary:

*"This truly classic experiment shows that petty bourgeois parties based on the peasantry are still able to retain a semblance of independent policy during the humdrum periods of history when secondary questions are on the agenda; but when the revolutionary crisis of society puts the fundamental questions of property on the order of the day, the petty-bourgeois 'peasant' party automatically becomes a tool in the hands of the bourgeoisie against the proletariat."* [5]

Was the situation in Vietnam stable or humdrum for the last 50 years? And could a revolution led by a party that was an instrument of the bourgeoisie have followed the development of the Vietnamese revolution? If the VCP really a petty-bourgeois party, then there you have new theoretical ground to be broken.

## **C. A Stalinist party?**

Let us agree on our terms. A Stalinist party, in the final analysis, defends the international interests of a bureaucracy of a degenerated workers' state (which obviously does not prevent manifestations

of relative independence). Let us define the scope of the problem, lay aside the question of the nature of the bureaucratisation in China and the DRV, and take a look at the VCP before 1954 (the date of the creation of the DRV in the North). In this case, the VCP would be a party tied fundamentally to the Stalinist bureaucracy of the Soviet Union.

Comrades Feldman and Johnson furthermore explain that up until the opening of the Sino-Soviet dispute, the VCP faithfully followed the orders and the turns of the Kremlin. This statement is factually, to say nothing of historically, inaccurate. Unless, once again, it was despite the efforts of the VCP that the revolution did not follow the course ordered by Moscow. Potsdam gave Vietnam to the West, with the effective consent of the USSR. The Vietminh constituted the DRV in August 1945. The USSR only recognised the latter under pressure and force two months after China, in 1950. We could give many examples. But if this statement had been based on the facts, then it too would pose new (to say the least) problems for Trotskyist theory.

One of the two main factors contributing to the crisis of the Stalinist system has been the international extension of the revolution. The formation of the countries of Eastern Europe, the “buffer states”, remains in its form an internal modification of the relationship of forces in the context of the international status quo in which the Soviet bureaucracy lives. By contrast, the Vietnamese and Chinese revolutions began to bypass this status quo. The difference is qualitative. Furthermore, in the introduction to their article, the *ISR* authors underline the consequences the Vietnamese revolution has had for the world. This then would suppose that the Soviet bureaucracy was sufficiently shortsighted not to see the mortal danger that an uprising on the Asian continent would represent for it. All its policies prove the contrary, and it is therefore rightly denounced by the comrades of the *ISR*.

And if the Vietnamese and Chinese CPs really were Stalinist it would be necessary to acknowledge that since the Second World War the Stalinist movement has been the main revolutionary subjective factor! There is yet another thing to think about. We come now to the assertion that the program of the VCP is equivalent to the theory of the revolution in stages. But now the problem can be posed in these terms - the characterisations that Comrades Feldman and Johnson make of the VCP lead them to face a simple choice:

- To revise Marxist theory on certain very important points in relation to the class nature of a party, and the role of the petty bourgeoisie or Stalinism. This could be necessary, but you would have to say so, and to justify it.
- To return to the previous problem and explain that when all is said and done the nature of the party that is “leading” a revolution is a completely secondary factor.

### **III. The revolution in stages and the uninterrupted revolution**

Politics, Trotsky insists strongly in *The Third International After Lenin*, is the art of knowing how to make distinctions. [6] It is a shame that Comrades Feldman and Johnson have forgotten this recommendation. For them, the VCP, as a Stalinist CP, has the same nature and works around the same program as the Chinese CP in 1927, the French CP in 1936, the Spanish CP in the Spanish Civil War. “Uninterrupted revolution”, formulated by the VCP or the Chinese CP after 1930, is only a “left formulation” of the “theory” of the revolution in stages.

*“It was not only the immediate tactics of the Comintern that the VCP endorsed. It also embraced the Stalinist ‘theory’ of the revolution by stages, which was later given a radical face by Truong Chinh and Mao Tsetung under the name ‘uninterrupted revolution’.” [ISR p. 64].*

Basing themselves upon the declaration of Pham Van Dong published on May 7, 1973, the comrades conclude that “this is a crystal-clear example of the practice of the Vietnamese Stalinists to this very day, flowing from the theory of two-stage revolution”. [ISR, p. 84.]

The differences, which are pointed out in the *Livre Rouge*, between the frontist policies of the VCP and those of the Chinese CP in 1927, the French CP in 1936 or 1945, seem to them insignificant in comparison to three similarities:

1. The program of class collaboration seeks to perpetuate bourgeois rule.
2. The collaborationist front deprives the working class and other oppressed layers of their independence.
3. Once in power, such a front forms a government bloc with bourgeois parties.

The fact that the Vietnamese revolution has experienced a radically different fate from that of the revolution and movements in China in 1927, in Spain and France in 1936 and 1945, Greece in 1945, etc., does not bother comrades Feldman and Johnson (see the quotation at beginning of this article). To compare their programs however, it is necessary also to compare their practice, notably on the very revealing question of the “coalition government”. For a political line cannot be judged by words alone.

### **A. The practice of the Stalinist CPs**

In China in 1926-27 the CCP, on the express recommendation of the Communist International, recognised the Kuomintang - both the right and left wing - as the leading party of the national front. In reality they gave up their political and organisational independence. They opened up the zones under their control to the Kuomintang, and subordinated their armed forces to them, right up until the Canton massacres. The French CP in 1936 and 1945 loyally supported the governments dominated by bourgeois parties (Radical and Gaullist) with or without participation in those governments. It refused to increase the number of its action committees (1936) or disarmed and demobilised existing proletarian organisations (1945). Concretely it relied on bourgeois legality, even helping to reconstruct bourgeois organs of power from 1945 up to the time the latter turned against them. Perhaps the most interesting comparative example is that of Spain. For in Spain all the elements of a revolutionary civil war were present. The bourgeois state apparatus was at first actually crumbling in the republican zones; despite that, the political line of the Spanish CP succeeded in giving it new life. In fact, it relied upon certain imperialist (“democratic”) countries. And the domestic bourgeois forces quickly regained their strength once the bourgeois state had been restored by the workers’ parties. And to accomplish that, the Spanish CP had to help dismantle or strip of their content the organs of workers’ power that had risen up in the initial revolutionary phase.

The immediate question: why has Vietnam not suffered the fate of Spain? It would hardly be serious to talk of the international relationship of forces. Trotsky never said that the Spanish revolution was doomed inevitably; on the contrary, he placed responsibility for the defeat on the activity of the subjective factor. And so?

And so, like a theme running through the *ISR* article we find the “courage”, “tenacity”, and “perseverance” of the Vietnamese people. But didn’t the Spanish people show just the same qualities? But do such qualities find expression apart from engagement in political action (see, for example, how the Spanish resistance weakened with the abandonment of revolutionary perspectives)? Are these qualities sufficient? How many painful examples have shown that tenacity,



courage, and perseverance cannot replace political orientation and revolutionary organisation?

And so? So, the practice of the VCP has not been that of the Chinese CP in 1926-27, or the French CP, or the Spanish CP. And this difference is decisive.

## **B. The practice of the VCP**

There are many examples of the VCP's participation in governments. During World War II, the Vietminh agreed to participate in a "government in exile" in China, numerically dominated by bourgeois formations (often close to the Kuomintang). But it made use of its participation to divert most of the material aid for its own benefit and to eliminate more than ever the influence of competitive formations, even in Vietnam itself. They were so successful at the latter that the government in exile rapidly fell into oblivion.

In 1945-46 the Vietminh participated again in a coalition government. In Vietnam, as in Spain, CP militants assassinated Trotskyist militants. But in Vietnam, unlike Spain, the CP also eliminated at the rank-and-file level - by liquidation if necessary - nationalist militants of pro-Chinese or pro-Japanese persuasion. It favored the exclusive development of its own rank-and-file and mass organisations. The competition was fierce, and when the war broke out over the whole of the territory in 1946 after the Hanoi insurrection, they were the ones who controlled the entire resistance.

In 1954 the Vietminh as a front corresponded exactly to a formal definition that Feldman and Johnson give to it. It gave birth to a renewed coalition government. Even today "bourgeois parties" participate - on paper - in the government of the DRV. In 1954, however, a workers' state was formed in North Vietnam, and without delay.

The NLF-PRG now proposes a tripartite coalition government in South Vietnam. They even had the principle written into the Paris accords - against the objections of Thieu. This government would certainly be different from that of 1954. Thieu and his administration have certain resources. But if the objective of the NLF-PRG (and thus of the VCP) really were that defined by the comrades of the ISR - the pursuit of bourgeois rule - it becomes difficult to understand the present bitterness between the antagonists. If the stakes were only a choice between two forms of bourgeois rule, if Nixon, with all his means, and the PRG, with all its prestige, were in agreement on the essentials, would the "tenacity" of the Vietnamese people by itself succeed in blocking any concrete process of rapprochement? If Thieu were the only obstacle to a bourgeois solution, wouldn't he have been liquidated long ago? Where Feldman and Johnson are concerned, the concrete facts of history become strange and astounding. A coalition government may soon be formed in South Vietnam. It can even be foreseen that before the reunification takes place under such a coalition government, the state will be called a "national democracy" or something similar. This notion does not exist in the history of the creation of the DRV; yet the PRG seems ready to resurrect it.

And so, it will certainly be necessary to analyse the concrete relationship of forces that exists behind this coalition government. But everything leads us to believe that such a case would be similar to the situation in which the People's Republic of China emerged in 1949. For three years after the seizure of power China was called a "national democratic state." Everybody defined it as a workers' state. Question: when did the proletarian revolution take place? In 1949? Then a state can call itself "national democratic" and be a workers' state. In 1952? Then the revolution was peaceful and in continuity with the bourgeois state. This may be the opinion of Feldman and Johnson; it is certainly not ours. It would mean giving new life to a theory of revolution in stages.

In a general way the Vietnamese conception of fronts does not involve a dispersion of power or a

sharing of it with bourgeois forces, but rather a maximum concentration of real power in the hands of the VCP. This is the reason why it was so important that CP fractions exist at all levels and why so much emphasis was put on the rank-and-file organs that the party controlled. Even in 1945, the dissolution of the VCP was a “diplomatic” act - which does not of course justify it in any way. As Comrades Feldman and Johnson note, the Vietminh rapidly concentrated the entire leadership of the resistance in its hands. And who controlled all positions of power in the Vietminh? The VCP. To such an extent, moreover, that VCP members were even brought in to head the “bourgeois parties” in the front!

### **C. The CP was not predestined to lead the resistance**

To measure properly the difference that exists between the politics of the VCP and those of the real Stalinist parties, it is important to understand that in Vietnam as elsewhere the nature of the leadership of the liberation movement was not predetermined.

It is true that in Indochina no bourgeois party of the strength of the Kuomintang existed, and that the Vietnamese bourgeoisie was particularly shaky. But a weakness of the VCP would have opened the door once again to other political leaderships - bourgeois or petty-bourgeois nationalist. The bourgeois and petty-bourgeois nationalist movements dominated the political scene until 1930. At the time of the “soviets of Nghe Tinh”, the VCP more or less posed its concrete candidacy for the leadership of the liberation movement and of the mass movement. Subjected to harsh repression, it reconstituted itself in 1931-33 and then found itself confronted with the role the “Constitutionalist Party” (a bourgeois party) was able to play all over again. In fact, during the period that was opening up, the “Constitutionalists”, after applauding the repression, tended to force concessions from the colonial rulers by once again showing their “nationalist” opposition. La Lutte - a united front of the CP and the Trotskyists - actually represented a dual effort: implantation in the urban working class and confrontation with the bourgeois nationalist party through a policy of tactical alliance and outflanking manoeuvres; it served as an affirmation of the Communist movement in opposition to the nationalist movement. It was mainly this action that prevented the Constitutionalist Party from misleading the popular movements under its influence.

During World War II and at the time of the liberation, the petty-bourgeois nationalist organisations resurfaced, with new resources - the Kuomintang and Japan were backing them. Similarly, the French supported the religious sects, which had at times represented important forces. Here again the subordinate position of these groups in the national liberation movement cannot be understood without reference to the VCP’s political line.

If it had wished, the VCP could have sold out the revolution and the regime to them, perhaps even more easily than in Spain! This profound practical difference between the politics of the VCP and those of the real Stalinist parties is also reflected in theory, even if in an imperfect way.

### **D. The programmatic formulations of the Vietnamese**

The programmatic formulations of the Vietnamese vary according to the period, the function of the document, or the editor [author?]; but certain constants do exist. Again, we really need to give a history of the Vietnamese theory of the process of its revolution. Unfortunately, fundamental documents are lacking from many periods. The only basic documents on this question that I have had access to date from the period 1930-35 and the post-1954 period. However, the development of the VCP between these two periods was not simply linear, not to mention the 1925-30 period. Studying the concrete political line and the documents of a more tactical nature is obviously much easier. We shall have occasion to return to the 1930-35 period; let us now look at the present theoretical contributions produced by the VCP.

"The strongest evidence," write Feldman and Johnson, "for Rousset's view that the VCP has abandoned the theory of stages comes from the recent writings of Le Duan." [p. 81] No, no, no! The strongest evidence of this certainly does not come from someone's writings, but from real history of the revolution. Having said this, an examination of the fundamental programmatic documents shows that in actuality the practical break of the VCP from the theory of stages is reflected, imperfectly, the realm of theory.

The *ISR* authors take a quotation from Le Duan that is cited in the *Livre Rouge*, a quotation that could remind the "unwary reader" of the Trotskyist theory of permanent revolution. They lengthen this quote bring in the following phrase: "To escape this dangerous situation [the danger of neocolonial domination] and safeguard their national independence ... [the formerly colonial or semicolonial countries] should side with socialist camp and rely on its assistance with a view advancing along the path of non-capitalist development. [p. 82] From this they deduce that "evidently" (*sic*) this passage proves clearly that behind a left vocabulary the VCP is pushing for a period of development that is reality non-socialist, and thus capitalist, after the seizure of power.

It is a shame that Feldman and Johnson, wary readers that they are, have not found more convincing texts. All the more so, since in this same quotation we find just previously: "Opening up before these nations only two paths: either that of capitalist development or the march towards socialism, bypassing the stage of capitalist development." The English translation of this passage formulates it as follows: "... either follow the path of capitalist development or bypass it, to proceed directly towards socialism." [p. 82]

Trotskyist militants are rightly hostile to and suspicion of phrases like "the path of non-capitalist development". But it is hard to maintain that this passage repression a "pure" expression of the theory of the revolution in stages.

So, then, the present analyses of the VCP aim at providing a theoretical framework for the history of the Vietnamese revolution without making a fundamental break with the core of thought inherited from Stalinism. We shall see why. It is this dual process that is reflected in such passages as the above. But if necessary, it is easy to corroborate our "reading".

First, there is a fact. The history the VCP is theorising about has not witnessed a period of capitalist development after the seizure of power. The DRV declared itself socialist shortly after the seizure of power. And the DRV is a workers' state. It is difficult to maintain at one and the same time, as it seems Feldman and Johnson would like to, that the accords of 1954 resulted in a compromise because the USSR and China hoped to establish a policy of peaceful coexistence (which is true), and that if a workers' state emerged nevertheless it is because at that time the USSR and China wanted to show their teeth and were thus ready to forget their programmatic objectives - the perpetuation of capitalist exploitation a regime "friendly" to the socialist camp.

Furthermore, the meaning of the VCP's formula "bypassing the stage of capitalist development" is very clear, at least as far as their own history is concerned. In a recent policy declaration the Political Bureau of the VCP (Vietnamese Workers Party) underlined the objective causes of the present difficulties of the DRV: "Our cadres have been formed and have grown in the framework of a society of agricultural workers, passing from petty production to a socialist regime, bypassing the stage of capitalist development. The administration of the cadres also presents numerous weaknesses and is not equal to the tasks."

And here is how Le Duan posed the problem of the transformation of the revolution and of "nationalist countries" in 1963 (that is, even before the "local war"). After analysing the works of Marx on the "uninterrupted revolution" Le Duan passed on to Lenin's contribution: "Lenin created

the great principle of the strict connection between the bourgeois-democratic revolution and the socialist revolution in the epoch of imperialism [Le Duan's emphasis] ... The proletariat must not let the bourgeoisie take control over the leadership of the peasantry ... but seize it themselves in order to make the bourgeois revolution, with the whole of the peasantry, overthrowing the feudal order; then, not stopping in midstream, waiting for the peaceful development of capitalism and raising a Great Wall between the bourgeois democratic revolution and the socialist revolution, they must instead provide an impetus for the revolutionary movement so as to push it forward without interruption and to make the socialist revolution with the poor peasants" [7]

On the question of "nationalist countries" [8] he says:

*"Nearly [all the nationalist countries] find themselves in a common situation, namely, that the imperialists still preserve varying degrees of colonial rights ... moreover they are striving to conquer new ones, either by old colonialist methods or under cover of neocolonialist forms. ... The nationalist countries today constitute a field of battle between the old colonialism and the new. ... The urgent task of completely eradicating imperialist slavery is posed before the people. To complete this task, these countries must choose between two paths: the non-capitalist path or the capitalist path of development.*

"That is precisely why in the nationalist countries the working class - along with the great masses of the peasantry and other layers of working people, and also the intermediate layers aspiring to independence and real democracy - do not want [the capitalist road]. On the contrary, they want to choose the non-capitalist road, the road of total accomplishment of the tasks of the democratic national revolution, creating the conditions for the passage to socialism." (pp. 112-114)

These two passages clarify each other. (Even though in this same pamphlet we learn that Stalin faithfully applied Leninism and that Trotsky wanted to break up the worker-peasant alliance.) But, once again, can the Vietnamese writings seriously be defined as, "from all evidence", a reproduction of the theory of the revolution in stages in the Stalinist manner?

In the realm of theoretical expression one problem cannot be avoided: the existence of references and formulations belonging to two different worlds; that of the revolution in stages (numerous formulations of tactical alliances, international overtures to Chile) and that of the permanent revolution (the future of the revolutionary process, the hegemony of the party in the front).

We have seen what the party was not. To understand this duality in the theory of the VCP, it remains for us to study what it is.

#### **IV. On the uniqueness of the VCP's development**

In the name of the strictest orthodoxy, the *ISR* comrades end up, as we have seen, seriously questioning certain key elements of Marxist theory (on the role of the party, the place of the petty bourgeoisie or of Stalinism), but without admitting it. For our part, we admit the necessity of following a specific analysis of parties such as the VCP precisely in the light of the theory of the permanent revolution. This analysis is based on four distinct elements: the world historical situation; the cultural situation; the socio-economic situation; and a certain type of revolutionary development, that of a protracted war.

##### **A. The world historical situation**

The Indochinese revolution developed for the most part in the postwar period - a period that saw the

fractionalisation of the world revolution and its shift from the developed capitalist countries to the colonial and semicolonial world. This period was dominated by the emergence and the sharpening of the crisis of Stalinism, without at the same time immediately giving rise to a credible international revolutionary Marxist pole of attraction. A political interval was thus created, an interval that favored the blossoming of empirical or centrist revolutionary formations.

## **B. The cultural situation**

The cultural world of the colonial revolution is very different from that of the developed capitalist countries, resulting from the lack of development of an industrial revolution. The absence of an implanted, revolutionary international has further prevented, here as elsewhere, the complete overcoming of the unevenness of the objective situations. Empiricism is a common characteristic of most of these formations. The links they establish between practice and theory are different from ours. Theory is seen as having a more directly utilitarian function; to "adapt" it to immediate tactical needs does not distress them. On the contrary, it is often the rule.

In the case of the VCP this deep-going characteristic is particularly important, although unlike other examples (Cuba), they have constantly made references to Marxism. Vietnamese culture is Confucian; and Confucianism, while it is a sociological code, is also pragmatic. Some cadres of the future VCP received their education in the early days of the French CP. But the French CP at that time was hardly Bolshevik. The militants who "returned from France" came back steeped in Social Democratic humanism. As for the cadres educated in the Stalinist school of thought, they were fed on the shortsighted empiricism of the bureaucracy. The historical roots of the VCP's empiricism are thus numerous and profound. And this empiricism has been consolidated today by the very fact of the existence of significant bureaucratic deformations in the DRV.

This is not a matter of minimising the importance of theoretical firmness. To be convinced of the contrary, it is sufficient to recall the extent to which the ambiguities of the theory of the uninterrupted revolution facilitated the Chinese CP's application of an international policy that was often counter-revolutionary (allowing the Chinese CP to cover up its policy with regard to Pakistan, Sukarno's Indonesia up to 1965, etc). What it does involve is coming to an understanding of the links a party such as the VCP maintains with theory, in order to understand the function of its documents.

This link is different from ours, or from that of the leaders of the Bolshevik party. From this point of view it is irksome to see Comrades Feldman and Johnson declare learnedly:

*"Can we simply assume, in the face of this evidence [sic!] to the contrary, that the VCP leaders would refuse to participate in administering a bourgeois state as members of a coalition government in South Vietnam, without dismantling the armed forces of either side? To assume this is to believe that the VCP leaders do not mean what they say."* [p. 85]

What magnificent "naiveté"! Feldman and Johnson "believe" whatever they want. They "believe" Pham Van Dong when he says he does not want to impose socialism immediately upon South Vietnam. They stop "believing" him when he says he seeks reunification with the socialist North. However, concrete evidence exists - the DRV. Not even the ISR authors dare say that the government of North Vietnam is a coalition government. Bourgeois parties do, however, officially exist in the "patriotic front".

They voted for socialisation!

To understand the (relative) empiricism of a formation like the VCP not only permits an intelligent reading of their documents, it is also necessary to grasp the processes by which its program is

worked out.

The serious-minded militant of such a party is sure to start off from a certain minimum Marxist framework. But for the answers to new problems of his revolution (or what appear to him as such) he will not look to the historical debates of the workers' movement. The VCP has in practice been able to lead a victorious revolution without, however, going back and trying to rethink its understanding of the historic confrontation between Stalinism and Trotskyism. This empiricism has permitted them in practice to break politically out of the programmatic framework of Stalinism in order to reply (however belatedly) to the needs of their revolution, without making a full and open break with it in the domain of ideology.

### **C. The socioeconomic situation**

Vietnam is not (and was not) just any underdeveloped country. It was a small country with an enormously predominant peasantry (95 per cent rural), a colony of an imperialist metropolis, a rural society emerging from an era of development of the Asiatic mode of production. This was to have a dual implication.

First, the process of permanent revolution tended to be particularly progressive. In their *ISR* article, Feldman and Johnson characterise the permanent revolution as only a process combining democratic and socialist demands in the same stage of development [p. 82]. Under the circumstances this concise definition is dangerous. It would be better to describe the dual aspect of the permanent revolution, that is, its characteristic as a revolution that combines from the beginning national and social demands and that experiences a growing over of the bourgeois democratic revolution into a socialist revolution. Obviously, the form of this transformation will depend very much on the country and on the period under consideration. In Argentina, which is today formally independent and has a developed urban economy, there will be a high degree of interpenetration of the two stages of the permanent revolution. But the case of Vietnam will be very different.

In *The Third International After Lenin*, for example, Trotsky ponders the immediate question of China in 1928:

*"This goal [socialism] could be achieved only if the revolution did not halt merely at the solution of the bourgeois-democratic tasks but continued to unfold, passing from one stage to the next, ie continued to develop uninterruptedly (or permanently) and thus lead China toward a socialist development"* [9]

Further on, he studies the slogans in which "the democratic stage of development of the Chinese revolution shows itself. ... This democratic stage of the revolution imposes historic tasks. But the democratic character of these tasks in no way determines, by itself, the classes that will resolve these problems."

The tasks of the bourgeois democratic revolution and of the socialist revolution are indissolubly linked, insofar as the overall process is concerned, by the social and political forces that promote this process in a decisive manner. But the composition of both slogans and class alliances (both with and within the peasantry) undergoes a qualitative evolution, especially in a country like Vietnam.

It is astonishing, however, that we have to remind the *ISR* comrades of that they have on the whole a tendency to bend the stick in the other direction. Weren't they content, in the course of the development of the Palestinian resistance, with taking up the slogan of a "democratic Palestine"? And this at a time when our first task there was really to make the entire process clear to the Arab revolutionary militants, and to clarify the fact that the "barrier" that the Palestinian resistance had



to remove at all costs to avoid the serious crisis that was breaking out, was the obstacles that blocked its ties to the rest of the Arab revolution and to the revolutionary opposition in Israel. In such a situation it is surely the strategic slogan of a "socialist federation of the Middle East" that was appropriate.

We shall return to that which separates the Vietnamese formulations from our own. What must now be emphasised is the extent to which this socioeconomic reality facilitated the maintenance of erroneous and ambiguous "theoretical" formulations adapted to the "uninterrupted revolution" on the Vietnamese model. To the extent, of course, that the CP sought to avoid an open break with its past and with the Third International.

One final socioeconomic factor has had an influence in the same direction, and in a manner that cannot be overlooked; that is, the weakness of the Vietnamese national bourgeoisie. Once the nationalist movements of 1930 to 1946 were eliminated, the VCP benefited from a broad field of manoeuvre where no enemy force found itself prepared to profit from a tactical overture by the VCP. Moreover, the specific nature of Vietnam as a formerly Asiatic society required that a party that wanted to take the head of the liberation movement had to know how to integrate itself into a very particular and very important national reality, given the place that the peasantry was to occupy in the revolution. The mainspring of the traditional society was actually to be found at the village level. It was important to know how to take hold of two decisive links in the chain of the Vietnamese revolution: the historic role of the proletariat as leaders in the revolution; and this village mainspring, for which the peasantry had to provide the determining mass force. This the VCP knew how to do, and therein lay its strength. Again, it is difficult to know what the Vietnamese Trotskyists did in this regard. We could note that the 1947 pamphlet (written in France) defined precolonial Vietnam in a polemical and vigorous way as a strictly feudal state. This is false and cannot help but pose a problem. For the rise of the peasantry was not only a social question (agrarian reform), but also a cultural question, especially in a country like Vietnam, where the tradition of peasant resistance goes back 1000 years or more.

It is this problem that I wanted to raise in the *Livre Rouge* when I wrote - improperly - of "possible underestimation" of the national question on the part of the Vietnamese Trotskyists. I say "improperly" because this formulation appeared incongruous in 1945, when the Trotskyist movement was not only more radical than the VCP in the social domain, but also in its anti-imperialist and pro-independence slogans. The passage lends itself to misinterpretation; it needs to be reworded.

But the problem remains; it demands thorough study. It is the problem of the link between tradition and revolution in Vietnam, and more generally in the colonial world. But there again this capacity of the VCP to insert itself into the Vietnamese national reality has, at one and the same time, accounted for its strength and tended to determine its limits. It permitted the VCP to capture the considerable energy of the whole liberation movement. At the same time, it is one of the factors that prevented the party from passing beyond the point of view of Vietnamese communism with the aim of validating it in the international arena.

#### **D. Prolonged revolutionary war and its effects**

The Sino-Vietnamese "people's war" is, for Feldman and Johnson, "a peasant war, under a bourgeois-reformist program, that bypasses the working class". [p. 79] How did such a war permit the immediate emergence of a workers' state after the seizure of power in 1954? A mystery. Did this new workers' state not already exist embryonically in the liberated zones, as in the South today? And then, where and when was the revolution made? Decidedly, history of the type put forward by the *ISR* authors contains many unexpected reversals!

To this policy of “prolonged revolutionary war” they seem to counterpose urban insurrection, basing themselves on a marvellously simple argument: the Vietnam war has shown the capacity of the peasantry for struggle, but the proletariat is the most revolutionary class; therefore its capacity for struggle is greatly superior; therefore a struggle centred on the urban proletariat would have been infinitely quicker, less costly and more politically beneficial. And there you have it!

However, many problems should have prompted Comrades Feldman and Johnson to be more prudent.

The rich experience of the colonial revolution has shown the importance of urban insurrection. But it has also shown how difficult the victory of the revolution was without such a prolonged struggle in a country with a predominant peasantry, and where imperialism has been able to intervene with enormous forces. China, Viet nam, Cuba, the Portuguese colonies, Algeria, the Philippines, etc, have undergone such processes of “prolonged revolutionary war”. And on this list can be found all the victorious revolutions since the Second World War!

To say that “prolonged revolutionary war” on the Vietnamese model is not exportable is one thing. To say that it does not deserve any political attention is another thing entirely.

Trotskyist tradition shows the weakness of the categorical statements of the *ISR* comrades. In an article on Indochina in the *Quatrieme Internationale* of October-November 1945 the Vietnamese comrades noted that “the particular conditions in Indochina are such that revolutionary waves come from the countryside into the urban centres, contrary to what generally takes place in the West.” The world congress of reunification of the Fourth International [held in July 1963 - *ISR*] adopted a resolution affirming:

*“Along the road of a revolution beginning with simple democratic demands and ending in the rupture of capitalist property relations, guerrilla warfare conducted by landless peasants and semi-proletarian forces, under a leadership that becomes committed to carrying the revolution through to a conclusion, can play a decisive role in undermining and precipitating the downfall of a colonial or semicolonial power. This is one of the main lessons to be drawn from experience since the second world war. It must be consciously incorporated into the strategy of building revolutionary Marxist parties in colonial countries.”* [10]

This resolution is nothing less than the “theoretical and political basis for reunification” that was written and adopted by the American Socialist Workers Party before being adopted by the Fourth International. It is too bad Comrades Feldman and Johnson forgot to refer to it.

Finally, the Vietnamese leaders have given much attention to the problem of the dialectic between urban struggle and peasant struggle. And on precisely this point, the VCP has not in either theory or practice mechanically reproduced the Chinese theory of encirclement of cities by the countryside. The urban work of the VCP has never been abandoned, and has always played a very important political and military role (holding back the forces of repression). Here again, it is too bad that Comrades Feldman and Johnson act as if this policy and these documents did not exist. In this context it is difficult to say that today the VCP has no program for urban struggles, since it has advanced a whole series of slogans, ranging from the freeing of political prisoners to the struggle against taxes and inflation, and democratic rights. You could hold the opinion that these slogans are not the best ones (even though in the present situation they seem to be those most capable of breaking down the last door of the puppet regime). But their existence cannot be denied.

To be sure, the book by Truong Chinh (*The Resistance Will Win*, 1947) does not offer a complete program for the future Vietnamese revolution. It bears the stamp of the VCP’s general orientation to

the period. But this book still has the merit of showing how the population of an underdeveloped colony could defeat a military intervention by the metropolitan country or any other imperialist force. *People's War, People's Army* by Giap is one of the most important writings if only because he offers the most critical analysis of the VCP's politics, notably in the matter of agrarian reform. Finally, if Comrades Feldman and Johnson are looking for a systematic exposition of the Vietnamese theses on "prolonged revolutionary war" they would do well to read Giap's recent work, *The War of National Liberation in Vietnam* (1970), where the roots and class nature of the war, the army, and the revolutionary party are underscored.

In any case the analysis of "prolonged revolutionary war" merits something more than the heavy sarcasm of Feldman and Johnson, which is most unwelcome. I have no intention here of developing its lessons. I merely propose to show how the theory influences in a very general way the overall development of the VCP.

The analysis provides first of all the framework for the empirical experience of the VCP. Since the revolutionary crisis is chronic in a colony like Vietnam, and since Vietnam is an underdeveloped country with a predominant peasantry, dual power will take on a particular aspect - it will have liberated zones, which will pose the whole problem of the organisation of the revolutionary state even before the revolutionary seizure of power on a national scale; because the revolutionary war, in order to win, must mobilise the energy of the population, and because it is in this sense a "people's war", it must be defined as a "class war". Because in any case it cannot hope for the rapid defeat of an enemy whose international backing is already assured and because the crisis of the society is total, despite important errors at the outset, and despite the absence of previous domination of the national-struggle/class-struggle dialectic, the VCP will be able to gradually draw lessons from the needs of the war. The nature of the revolutionary crisis in a country like Vietnam and the prolonged revolutionary war have furnished an opportunity for gradual correction of its political course, something that Western centrist parties have generally not been able to benefit from.

Lastly, "prolonged revolutionary war" is at one and the same time a prolonged revolutionary experience, and a prolonged experience of war. And the VCP will carry the marks of this twofold aspect, as will Vietnam. The organisation and commitment of the population necessary for victory will favor the politicisation of this population and horizontal democracy at its base. On the other hand, strict military discipline and the extent of the destruction caused by the American war favor and reinforce the development of centralism, of paternalism in the party, of bureaucratic deformations. This fact is notable because it helps us understand the apparent paradox of revolutionary Vietnam: the most politicised population in the world at least in the liberated zones, and the absence of the birth of soviet forms of workers' power - at least in their "classical" form (with several currents of the workers' movement confronting each other within them, and with a democratic structure extending from the base to the summits of state power). But the Vietnamese revolution has witnessed the rise of numerous "people's committees", "self-management committees", etc.

Revolutionary war, then, is important not only because, notably in its Chinese and Vietnamese expression, it is rich in lessons for every militant, but also because it is one of the essential coordinates of the VCP's development.

This set of characteristics lets us begin to trace the outlines of the VCP. It gives content to the definition of an "empirical revolutionary party" in the colonial revolution. It also explains why, beyond the characteristics it has in common with other formations that emerged from this revolution, the VCP requires specific analysis. It also indicates even now that the relative validity of its orientation is historically and geographically limited.

## **V. The programmatic outlines of the VCP: two examples**

A systematic analysis of the VCP's orientation remains to be made. The problem obviously does not occur to Feldman and Johnson. The orientation of the VCP is in their eyes only the Vietnamese translation of the politics of Moscow. It is there, then, that we must turn to find the key. The problem becomes a bit more complex only with the opening of the Sino-Soviet dispute, which permitted the "Vietnamese bureaucracy" to manoeuvre – in a secondary way – for its own interests.

For us the problem is obviously more complex. We have tried to sift out some of the main circumstances that have shaped this orientation and stamped it with this "duality" of the formulas and references. It is the nature of this "duality" that we must try to illustrate from two examples: the question of internationalism and that of the permanent revolution.

### **A. Internationalism and "left polycentrism"**

For 30 years, Indochina has been one of the focal points of world politics. The coordinates of the Vietnamese revolution have not been solely national – less so, in fact, than in any other country. World revolution and counterrevolution and international political forces have confronted each other there for a long time, and that is still the case today. This is one of the factors that explains the extreme attention that Vietnamese communism has commanded in the world situation. The other is obviously the education received by the Vietnamese communists, which was illustrated notably during the *La Lutte* period. In this period, Trotskyists and members of the VCP were profoundly convinced of one thing: the liberation of Vietnam would take place alongside the French revolution.

This explains why, despite its tightly compressed national character, the VCP has never had a "narrow national point of view". On the contrary, outside of the parties of the Trotskyist movement, the VCP has displayed the greatest ability to analyse the international situation and the keenest comprehension of the role of internationalist support in assuring the possibility of victory.

But other factors are strongly at work in an opposite direction. In the absence of a theoretical understanding of Stalinism, the Vietnamese leadership found itself confronted at one and the same time with the counter-revolutionary cowardice of the official international Communist movement and the absolute necessity of obtaining their help. Coming in contact with the "new" revolutionary vanguard – above all our movement – they were able to use it as a "lever" to force official Communism into motion without, however, expecting it to overcome its weakness. The vanguard of the world revolution, the Vietnamese revolution has sparked new movements, but after Cuba none were successful; none came near to success. Sensitive to the value of internationalist support, the Vietnamese leadership had a rather negative experience with its own international. The Russian Revolution had to bypass the Second International to be successful; and in the eyes of the Vietnamese – given their lack of understanding of Stalinism – it is probable that the Chinese revolution appears to have been victorious in spite of the Third International. The international orientation of the VCP reflects this situation, a crossroads of contradictions. Once again; this is a mark of its empirical understanding, to which must be added today the specific weight of bureaucratic deformations. The VCP is conscious of the role it plays in the emergence of "new" vanguards. It offers aid to numerous movements of national liberation so long as they do not interfere with its immediate interests. It does not seek the birth of a new international; it must consider such an attempt as utopian, and perhaps more dangerous than useful. It has not even sought to play the role that China once played. It cannot pretend to this status of a great power.

The result of all this is an orientation that is both internationalist (comprehension of the objective dialectic and the role of international solidarity) and an unusual form of "left polycentrism".

## B. The permanent revolution

We have seen that for Feldman and Johnson the point of divergence between the Trotskyist and Stalinist movements lies in the entire perspective of the colonial revolution; permanent revolution versus revolution by stages; workers' government versus bourgeois-dominated coalition government.

Let's try to find where the differences lie; for there are indeed differences. But they are not where the *ISR* comrades think. If the differences do not concern the existence or nonexistence of the transformation of the revolution, do they involve the principle of tactical alliance with the national bourgeoisie? Certainly not. There is nothing wrong in principle with such alliances.

How did Trotsky, for example, analyse the problem in relation to China in 1928?

*"It goes without saying that we cannot renounce in advance such rigidly delimited and rigidly practical agreements as serve each time a quite definite aim. The sole 'condition' for every agreement with the bourgeoisie, for each separate, practical, and expedient agreement adapted to each given case, consists in not allowing either the organisations or the banners to become mixed directly or indirectly for a single day or a single hour ... and in not believing for an instant in the capacity or readiness of the bourgeoisie either to lead a genuine struggle against imperialism or not to obstruct the workers and peasants."* [11]

It is also interesting to note that in 1937 the split between the Trotskyists and the VCP was not prompted by the latter's agreements with the national bourgeoisie, nor even with the French leftists in Saigon, but by the relations with the French Popular Front. At least, that is what emerges from a thesis Daniel Hemery has just finished, on *La Lutte* from 1933 to 1937. It seems also that debates on this question developed among the Vietnamese Trotskyists and between the Vietnamese and French Trotskyists.

In 1930 Ta Thu Thau (a principal leader of the Vietnamese Trotskyists) criticised the sectarian attitude of the Indochina CP toward the Constitutionalist Party, a bourgeois party, in the following terms:

*"The [Constitutionalist] bloc is composed of a social stratum and a stratum that is, let us say, 'ideological', belonging to the propertyless masses. It is up to us Marxists" confident of our ideas, to penetrate without fear and without left sectarianism into the latter milieu, to win acceptance for our revolutionary concepts and methods of work."*

Once the united front of the Trotskyists and the VCP was constituted in *La Lutte*, their elected representatives on the municipal council maintained constant relations with the liberal wing of the bourgeois party. In the perspective of an anti-imperialist united front – following the Popular Front victory – Ta Thu Thau advocated making political agreements with the Vietnamese big bourgeoisie without – obviously – slowing down the class struggle because of it.

After the victory of the Popular Front, in June 1936, *La Lutte* campaigned for the calling of an Indochinese conference. An organising committee was set up, and soon it had a majority of members from bourgeois formations. Ta Thu Thau became a very active member of this committee. When attacked by C. Metter in the Trotskyist organ *Agir* for being "allied with the Vietnamese bourgeoisie", he replied:

*"The progressive elements of the bourgeoisie, like the working class, call for democratic freedoms. The organising committee provided for the admission of the French left on an equal basis with the other national minorities, and invited them to participate in the group's action committees."*

At the end of 1936, on the occasion of the debate on the “Chinese popular front” that broke out between the Trotskyist Ho Huu Tuong and a member of the VCP, Ta Thu Thau confessed some differences that he had with Ho Huu Tuong. He explained that the alliance of the Chinese communists with various groups of the Kuomintang (in 1936, not 1926-27) did not mean they had abandoned the class struggle. The step they should not take, he said, was to join the government party. With the French Popular Front, he said, that was exactly the dilemma that now existed in Vietnam. [12]

So, if the question at issue is not the principle of alliance with the national bourgeoisie, but what kind of alliance, again you are faced with a dilemma; the VCP’s Stalinist theoretical references to the bloc of four classes advocate an alliance for a whole period of the revolution and promote the idea that the national bourgeoisie can really be anti-imperialist. By contrast, the practice of the VCP has not foundered upon this illusion.

This apparent paradox allows us to pinpoint the divergence more closely. Strictly speaking, what is important is not the concept of the transformation of the revolution, but the concept of theory, and tactics that is employed by the VCP.

Thus we can say that the VCP has taken up in practice the major strategic options of the permanent revolution. So we finally have found the real differences that separate us from the VCP.

The first consequence of its empiricism and its Stalinist training is that the VCP has greatly retarded the development of the Vietnamese revolution, and indeed has held it back in several instances (see the history of the agrarian reform), blunting the true scope of the class struggle of the colonial revolution in many instances.

The a posteriori theoretical explanation of its experience, which seeks to avoid breaking out of the frame of reference inherited from Stalinism, leads them to recognise, in the beginning of the revolutionary struggle, the combined character of national (anti-imperialist) and social (antifeudal) demands, and to hold that, in the case of conflict, the former are predominant. We would tend to say the opposite.

By so doing, the VCP weakened and confused the process of assimilation by the vanguard - both international and Vietnamese - of its own revolution. It also permitted the perpetuation of an error that could cost Vietnam itself dearly in the event of more developed bureaucratisation and in the action of movements that might try to reproduce its experience mechanically in other parts of the world (see the Chinese example).

Finally, it has made political clarification more difficult in the solidarity movement, as well as hampering the work of the revolutionary Marxists in providing leadership for this movement.

These criticisms are not unimportant. Nevertheless, they do not imply that Vietnamese communism has gone over to the side of the bourgeois order. The real problem lies elsewhere.

Vietnamese communism is not Stalinism, which makes a revolution without wanting to, and without knowing it. The Jourdaines do not exist in the world of politics. Nor is it a “near-Trotskyism” that only needs to mature a little more before it joins the Fourth International. Empiricism, the hallmark of the VCP, does not imply eclecticism and inconsistency, either.

The orientation of the VCP has its consistency, but it is a consistency firmly linked to a definite historical period, to a certain state of international political forces, and a particular geographic sector of the world. Vietnamese communism, apart from its shortcomings in relation to the Vietnamese revolution itself, cannot claim to have a solution to the crisis of the international



leadership of the revolution. The question that is raised now is how well it can respond to the future problems of the Vietnamese and Indochinese revolutions. [13]

## **VI. The future of Vietnamese communism and the role of Trotskyism**

It would seem, from reading the ISR article, that there are only the “leadership” (responsible for all the problems) and the “masses” (responsible for all the victories). However, there also exists a party, with tens of thousands of cadres, hundreds of thousands of revolutionary militants, and a population largely organised and educated by 30 years of revolution.

There probably exist, notably in the Saigon region, a certain number of revolutionary cadres who are not members of the VCP. But the vast majority of them are members. To seek to determine the role that Trotskyism must play in the Vietnamese revolution depends to a large extent on what can happen to this party, and to its relationship with the masses.

First of all, the VCP will certainly suffer grave crises in the future. Already every turn in the revolution has provoked important debates inside the party. Tomorrow the international coordinates of the VCP’s orientation will be gradually modified. Once the victory has been won, there will be new tasks confronting them. Today, in the DRV, the period of “peacetime reconstruction” poses again the question of the bureaucratisation of the cadres, and the necessity for spectacular intervention by the Political Bureau of the Vietnamese Workers Party. This will be even more true tomorrow. The Indochinese revolution is on the eve of the most profound turning point in its history - namely, the period after the seizure power. It goes without saying that a setback - however improbable - of the revolution in South Vietnam would provoke a shock at least as powerful. So it is not be a prophet of doom to predict important crises under these circumstances. The same would be the case any party. The Russian and Chinese experiences confirm that. But the VCP’s capacity to surmount these crises will depend on specific factors.

### **A. The inadequacy of the VCP’s orientation**

First it is important to examine how well or poorly the VCP’s orientation prepares it to face this potential crisis; for in its general features, the orientation existed before the DRV did and before problem of bureaucratisation arose. There has been qualitative change in the program of the VCP since the taking of power in the North. So it is the relative weight of this factor that we must first outline.

One of the outstanding traits of Vietnamese communists is a profound lack of understanding of the nature and roots of Stalinism. Without having access to the basic documents on this question, we can nevertheless deduce this conclusion from its politics. For the VCP, the official international Communist movement remains essentially a (the) worldwide revolutionary movement. Sino-Soviet dispute is, in the final analysis, contrary to this nature. The leaderships of this Communist movement are, to be sure, profoundly and dangerously opportunistic. But this can be repaired.

This analysis of the official Communist movement is the only one besides our own that takes into account its reality in relation to the Vietnamese revolution, even if in a very superficial way. The Soviet and Chinese leaderships (for various reasons) have not given - in the case of the Chinese, not always given - the necessary aid to Vietnam. But nonetheless some important aid has been won by the Vietnamese revolution. Aid did not come as a matter of course because of the leadership’s opportunism. It can be gained because of the fact there is a common nature that, in the final analysis, ties the VCP to the rest of the Communist movement. This is probably the VCP leadership’s interpretation of the situation.

This analysis is rooted in an error. And from there we can clarify the nature of three of the principal errors of the VCP's orientation.

1. This analysis of the Communist movement, combined with other factors (like intervention in the nation movement), will bring the VCP to make an adjustment. This will tend to realign this movement on an international scale, rather than destroy it; on the national level, it will tend to maximise national sufficiency. The analysis of the future dynamics of world revolution will probably become greatly deformed.
2. There is no democratic centralist functioning in VCP, in the sense in which we understand it. The party describes itself as a combination of vanguard party (the role it plays in the struggle) and a mass party (by the "paternalism" that it shows). It seems that the lower echelons are less involved in working out the policies than in discussing how to apply them. This way of functioning prolongs the Stalinist imprint as well as the Vietnamese tradition.
3. The VCP has never had a strictly "soviet" concept of a workers' state. Even in 1930 the "soviets of Nghe Tinh" didn't have a soviet structure or manner of functioning. The VCP was born when the Russian soviets were long dead, and, as we have seen, were replaced by a combination of horizontal democracy at the base and vertical centralism on the state level. The construction of the DRV and the American air war only served to accentuate this feature.

## **B. What bureaucratisation?**

These basically negative characteristics of the VCP's orientation have clearly found a new framework for expression in the birth and development of a bureaucratically deformed workers' state. Again, we must emphasise that the bureaucratic deformations of the DRV are primarily the result of objective conditions: underdevelopment, isolation, and a war of destruction and genocide. Not even a revolutionary Marxist leadership could have prevented their development up to a certain point. The USSR from 1920 to 1923 (when Lenin's poor health left him incapable of action) saw its soviets drained of their active components, democratic centralism in the party "suspended" (Tenth Congress), the party completely merged with the state, bureaucratic privileges fostered, and the apparatus constructed as an instrument of war for the new bureaucratic caste that was forming.

Is this to say, in summary, that the DRV and its party are analogous to the USSR of that period and the Bolshevik party? No. First of all, because the DRV was born bureaucratically deformed (by the combined action of the VCP's orientation and the prolonged war). Second, because these deformations became, to a certain extent, institutionalised and endorsed. To be sure, frequent campaigns against bureaucracy have been launched, and again most recently by the Political Bureau of the Vietnamese Workers Party. But these campaigns seek to solve the problem on the level of the training given to cadres (the struggle against egoism, etc) and not on the decisive level, the structure of the state. Thus, they make it a question of personal behaviour, rather than a problem of a social layer. Not having drawn the lessons from the Russian Revolution, the militants are even less armed to face the danger of bureaucracy, and privilege of rank finds even more favorable ground to develop.

Well then, reply Feldman and Johnson, if the DRV is not the USSR of 1921, then it is the Stalinist USSR of 1930! No, it isn't that either. And to define the Vietnamese bureaucracy as a Stalinist bureaucracy is to make a significant change in the Trotskyist theory of Stalinism. This theory is in fact above all a theory of the origin of the bureaucracy and its crystallisation as a caste under given circumstances. The DRV has never known terror of the Stalinist kind, its population has never suffered a defeat comparable to the crushing of the Soviet proletariat and the peasantry. The VCP has not experienced qualitative shifts in its orientation and purges like the Soviet CP. This means

that the present leadership of the DRV (and of the PRG) is the same one that made and is still making the revolution. The world situation has changed deeply, and is dominated especially by the outbreak of the crisis of the international Stalinist system, just as Trotskyist theory always predicted. To believe under these conditions that the Vietnamese bureaucracy is Stalinist is to tend to make Stalinism a universal phenomenon, no longer dependent upon a balance of given internal and international factors. It is true that the tendency toward bureaucratisation is universal; it will even be evident in the USA, the most economically developed country in the world, but not in its specific form of Stalinism. The difference is important because the Vietnamese party and state apparatuses do not have the same relationship with the masses as do those of the USSR.

The precise analysis of the nature of the DRV's bureaucracy has yet to be made, in my opinion. "Neither the USSR in 1921 nor the USSR in 1930" indicates only the rough outline of the problem. We lack, too much in the way of factual knowledge to make a more specific analysis. Nevertheless, this outline allows us to trace the main threads.

The DRV was born bureaucratically deformed, under the combined effect of the VCP's orientation, the war, the international situation, the Asiatic tradition of state centralism, and underdevelopment. But the bureaucratic deformations did not give birth to a hardened caste, basing its power on the crushing of the proletarian and peasant masses. On the contrary, the state and the party had to maintain strong links with the mobilised masses, to judge from the efforts of the revolutionary war. And this implies that the future contradictions that emerge from the reconstruction will immediately be reflected within the party, and not initially by the formation of an opposition outside the party.

The two examples given in the *Livre Rouge* (of the role of the CP in the South in 1959, and in the effects of the Nghe An movements in 1956) illustrate this.

The slogan of political revolution thrown out by Comrades Feldman and Johnson as if it were self-evident is extremely serious. This is a remarkable innovation in the Trotskyist movement. It is in fact the first time that American comrades have advanced this slogan; it is too bad they had to do it in this way.

But what does such a slogan imply? That the Trotskyist militants in the DRV - or in the liberated zones of the PRG - had to (since when? 1954?) and still have to work simultaneously for the anti-imperialist struggle and for the insurrectional overthrow of the government of the DRV and the PRG, and the crushing of the VCP? If such is the conclusion of comrades Feldman and Johnson, it deserves more than a few paragraphs of "justification"!

In our opinion, the call for political revolution is wrong - and extremely dangerous in its implications precisely because the VCP has not gone over to the side of the bourgeoisie.

### **What evolution?**

In this context, three outcomes of the situation seem highly unlikely:

1. A linear "Stalinisation" of the DRV, the zones of the PRG, and of all of Indochina, continuously, without a major crisis, without significant resistance from the masses, in both the party and the state. For this would run up against a population and militants whose combativity has never been broken, and whose politicisation is certain.
2. A linear, large-scale "political transformation" of the VCP toward revolutionary Marxism. The confrontation with future problems of the Indochinese revolution implies in fact a triple dISruption: in the theoretical consistency of the VCP, in its internal functioning, and in the bureaucracy that exists today in the state.

3. The birth, especially outside of the VCP, of a credible, alternative revolutionary-Marxist leadership. Unless we wait for a whole generation, any important revolutionary leadership, if only in order to be recognised as such, will have to be based on the cadres who made the revolution. Once again, the eventual presence of a certain number of revolutionary cadres outside of the VCP does not resolve the problem, even if the political diversity of a region like Saigon could play a role in the future evolution of Indochina.

It is not a matter of "putting confidence" in the "Hanoi leadership," as the *ISR* authors put it. It is simply a matter of recognising that the VCP exists as a party, that it organises the masses, and that it is no stranger to the revolution. Nor is it a matter of denying the possible role of Trotskyist militants. Their role, in relation to their strength in the world, can be important, provided they penetrate and win to revolutionary Marxist ideas some of those who led the Vietnamese revolution. They number in the tens of thousands.

Feldman and Johnson, with an indulgent and paternalistic attitude, wonder if the analyses of the *Livre Rouge* were not the result of pressure: the pressure that forces one to admire the Vietnamese people. It is true that this admiration exists, and that it extends from the Vietnamese to the communist militants who provided the necessary framework for the revolutionary struggle. It is true that this admiration is great; for they accomplished a very difficult feat! But it is not a moral and apolitical pressure that lies behind this admiration, but a real political problem: the position occupied by this party and these militants in the revolution that will take place in the future.

#### **D. The weight of the future international situation**

The rate at which splits will appear and the lines along which they will develop are still impossible to determine today. The evolution of the international situation will play, most certainly; a very important role there. The evolution of the situation in China, of the crisis of Stalinism, of the blocking of the revolutionary process in Latin America or the Middle East, the possibilities for development of the revolution in Southeast Asia and in India, the tempo of the resurgence of the class struggle in Western Europe, and the degree to which a credible, international revolutionary Marxist vanguard can be reconstructed will all have a definite impact.

And their impact will not stem solely from their influence on the world relationship of forces, and thus necessarily the objective framework of the development of the Indo chinese revolution. The problem is also a subjective one. For every new rise of the world revolution will not be content to break out of the chains that imperialism continues to impose on Indochina; it will pose - or will be able to pose - in concrete terms, the need for and the possibility of an alternative orientation to that developed by the VCP in matters of internationalism, soviet democracy, economic development, etc. And because the alternative orientations will be there in practice for all to see, they will have all the more impact on the Vietnamese communist militant. Along with the internal contradictions that the Vietnam ese revolution will confront, it is the course and the tempo of the world revolution that will determine the form and the lines of the future differentiation.

#### **E. Our role**

In this context the role of revolutionary Marxist militants can be posed. In Vietnam, their role would be to work so that the victory of the Indochinese revolution favors the maximum emergence of independent organs of the working class and the peasantry. How? It is impossible to discuss this without a much more concrete understanding of the situation than we have.

On the international arena, this role consists above all of struggling to make the final victory of the Indochinese people as rapid as possible and take place in the best possible world relationship of

forces. In doing this, Trotskyist militants have not only objectively aided the Indochinese revolution, but have also shown in practice what their concept of internationalism is. The American and European Trotskyist militants have carried out this task.

But the form that was given to this support is also important. Comrades Feldman and Johnson would clearly have you believe that we have been able to weaken Trotskyist theory by shifting from unconditional support to uncritical support. To this we can say two things in reply:

- First, we have clearly indicated what was at issue in our support: the victory of the Indochinese revolution. We were not content to choose as our target the “dirty American war” and to denounce the Soviet and Chinese betrayals. We knew how to link up massive and united support with the only thing that could lead to the victory of the Indochinese revolution today: the seizure of power by the organisations of the resistance of the three peoples of Indochina. Do the *ISR* comrades disagree with that? But by acting in that way we have avoided any reduction – insofar as the understanding of the militants who responded to our appeal is concerned – of the Vietnamese revolution to a simple national liberation struggle. We have written into our activity our revolutionary objective, the victory of a revolution, and a framework of analysis, that of the permanent revolution; all this without ever falling into sectarianism, isolation, or impotence. We have taken on major responsibilities for many of the most important mobilisations that have taken place in Europe.

- Second, for several years we have published material studying the Indochinese revolution in detail. Its insufficiency may be regrettable, and we do regret it. We could discuss its theses, or the balance between explanation and criticism. But ever since the beginning, analytical and critical material has been published, raising in particular the problem of the permanent revolution in relation to the Vietnamese experience. For us, that was one of the guarantees of a solidarity that was radical, committed, and unconditional, but not uncritical. I need only point out that to my knowledge the article by Feldman and Johnson is the first published by the North American Trotskyists on the nature of the VCP. This article appeared in July 1973. The solidarity movement really got under way in 1965.

You can challenge the validity of our analyses, and in many respects they remain tentative and exploratory. But you can hardly reduce them to being the result of pressure, due to the prestige of the Vietnamese leadership, on the militants engaged in support work.

### **To continue the debate**

Feldman and Johnson underline in a number of cases the insufficiencies of the *Livre Rouge* on the subject of the VCP; and often correctly. Certain periods were skimmed over too rapidly to be really clearly understood. Numerous additional points of clarification deserved to be brought up, in order to understand the evolution of the VCP. The *ISR* authors essentially stress one of them: the history of the Vietnamese Trotskyist movement, its influence on the VCP, and the analyses by Trotskyist militants of the Vietnamese revolution between the two wars and following the Second World War. The criticism is justified.

Let us note immediately only that the rediscovery of our history in relation to Vietnam is not as easy as Feldman and Johnson seem to think.

Unfortunately, the shortcomings of the *Livre Rouge* are more numerous than those the *ISR* comrades have pointed out. We should have to add: the analysis of the political and economic theory of the DRV (too brief in the *Livre Rouge*); the analysis of the intervention of the VCP in the international political field (too quickly sketched); the analysis of the social programs and the evolution of the judicial structure in the DRV (scarcely outlined); the analysis of the interaction of

the Vietnamese revolution with the Indochinese and the Southeast Asian revolutions (just indicated); the analysis of the links between tradition and revolution, which would necessitate a detailed examination of precolonial Asiatic society (absent). . . .

The *Livre Rouge* does not pretend to give definitive answers. It aims to open a debate, to offer a bit of material – however insufficient – of necessary information for the discussion, and to present an initial interpretation of the evolution of the Vietnamese revolution and the VCP. It obviously suffers from the fact that relatively few documents are available in any one place, and from our movement's cumulative delay in analysing this revolution. It is unfortunate, for example, that Comrades Feldman and Johnson – or others – thought they had to wait until they felt the need to reply to the *Livre Rouge* before writing an initial study of the VCP. Collective effort and a long discussion are clearly necessary today.

If the *Livre Rouge* were to be rewritten today, certain changes would already have to be made in it. [14] Nevertheless its logical structure – and the thesis contained in it – would remain unchanged. Continuing the debate opened up by the *ISR* article is thus clearly necessary. But it is necessary in this perspective to find a common way of dealing with the information.

The treatment of the information obviously depends on the political and theoretical approach of each of the participants. We have seen how important it is to understand the empirical nature of a formation such as the VCP in order to know how to “read” their programmatic and tactical documents. A large part of the interpretation of texts, of their relative importance, and of their meaning is thus made clear.

Then we must not “overlook” texts and documents that threaten to weaken our thesis. Unfortunately, one gets the impression that this is often the case in Feldman and Johnson's article. Here are three examples:

1. It is difficult to say that during the period 1930-35 the VCP advocated the “bloc of four classes”(ISR pp 8-9) without quoting the program of 1930 and especially that of 1932, which is very precise on this question and develops the exact opposite idea (advocating the “revolutionary bloc . . . workers, peasants, the labouring and poor populations of the cities” against the “counterrevolutionary bloc of feudal imperialists, landlords, the wealthy, and the notables, and against the unworthy, reformist national bourgeoisie that betrays us”).
2. It is difficult to study the relations between the Vietminh and its allies during the Second World War without referring to documents such as the circular of August 6, 1944 (provided by Deviller in his *History of Vietnam*), which shows how the August revolution was prepared politically.
3. It is also very difficult, in studying the politics of the VCP in 1945-46, to quote the speech of Ho Chi Minh on March 7, 1946, in Hanoi to explain the accords with the French, without even mentioning that of Giap, given in the same place, at the same meeting. Giap's speech contradicts Ho Chi Minh's version of this policy of the VCP. Obviously, we would have to discuss their relative importance; but first we must recognise that the latter exists.

These passages are in the *Livre Rouge*. But the latter is not yet available to the readers of the *ISR*. It would have been a good idea to mention them at least.

The same caution ought to be used in defining certain situations. It is in fact very probable that the “soviets of Nghe Tinh” were initiated in an ultraleft perspective. But to what extent? What were the possibilities of alternative policies? We do not have the documents that would allow us to answer these questions. And a reference to a Trotskyist article from 1931-32 is not sufficient to resolve all



the problems. We have seen that Comrades Feldman and Johnson use such an article to characterise the VCP of the period as having turned toward the conquest of an essentially peasant base, in the hope of bypassing the working class. It is difficult, in hindsight, to be satisfied with such an analysis, when you know what the policy of the VCP was in 1932-33 (and that was at a time when the USSR was not making any new turns in policy!): the VCP turned steadfastly toward the cities and made implantation in the urban proletariat a priority. This implantation was even one of the bases of the formation of La Lutte. Moreover, from 1927 to 1930 it had “established” a number of its militants in factories. And the period 1931-32 had been dedicated to rebuilding the apparatus dismantled by the repression.

Likewise, is it really irrelevant whether the assassination of Trotskyist militants was the result of a central, regional, or local decision? Feldman and Johnson say that the evidence indicates (that familiar refrain) this was the action of “Stalinists:” But in this period the Nambo (South Vietnam) committee enjoyed a real autonomy. It is very possible that such a decision was made outside of the Political Bureau. That is at least the hypothesis that appears most probable, given the present state of our knowledge. The assassination in any case deserves to be roundly denounced. But the political conclusions to be drawn from it are not identical. Besides, Tran Van Giau, the commander in Nambo at that time, has not played a decisive political role for a long time.

Finally, Comrades Feldman and Johnson ought to be more cautious in their appeals to orthodoxy since, as we have seen, Trotskyist militants have never (to my knowledge) characterised the VCP as a “petty-bourgeois Stalinist party,” and since some of the most important documents of the Trotskyist movement contain a very different assessment of the nature of “revolutionary war”.

Nonetheless, the collective work of our movement on this subject is in general still very insufficient. The discussion opening up today can allow us to engage in this effort – provided, however, that greater clarification is brought to bear on the theoretical frame of reference on which we base our work.

November 1973

**Pierre Rousset**

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**P.S.**

\* Translated from the French. Published in *International Socialist Review*, February 1974:  
<http://members.optushome.com.au/spainter/Rousset.html>

\* Biographical note (1974). Pierre Rousset is a prominent French Trotskyist and a leader of the antiwar movement in France. He was a leader of the Ligue Communiste, the French section of the Fourth International, until the Ligue was banned by the Pompidou government in June 1973. Pierre Rousset was arrested at the time of the banning and held for two months, until a massive protest campaign secured his release.

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## Footnotes

[1] Reproduced here:

[2] The Vietnamese Communist Party has been known by several names in the course of its history. Founded in 1930 as the VCP, it was later called the Indochinese Communist Party and today uses the name Vietnam Workers Party in the North and People's Revolutionary Party in the South. To avoid confusion the three authors contributing to this issue of the ISR use Vietnamese Communist Party or VCP throughout.

[3] Leon Trotsky, *The Permanent Revolution and Results and Prospects* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1969), p. 277.

[4] Here, of course, I mean by "revolutionary party" a party capable of playing a determining subjective role in the victory of the national revolutionary process. I do not necessarily imply that it must be able to pose and answer the problems of the world revolution as a whole — that is, that it be a "revolutionary Marxist" or Trotskyist party.

[5] *The Permanent Revolution*, p. 196. See Thesis No. 6 as well.

[6] The facility with which the comrades of the ISR fall into false analogy is also glaringly illustrated in the case of the CP-Trotskyist united-front organ, *La Lutte*. Nothing astonishing in such a united front, they exclaim; hasn't the American SWP imposed unity of action in the antiwar movement with the CPUSA? Can two things so different from one another really be compared? *La Lutte* was a united front that encompassed first the whole and then the major part of the legal work of the CP and the Trotskyist groups; and this for three to four years. All the major political campaigns in the Saigon region and in Nambo (South Vietnam) were organised in common from 1932 to 1937. This was right up to the year after the election of the Popular Front in France. And it is hardly correct to explain this united front by the strength of the Trotskyist movement as shown in the figures from the 1939 elections! In 1932-33 Trotskyism had a precious element, some intellectual militants of great value (which the CP needed in order to carry out its legal work), but an audience infinitely smaller than that of the VCP, including in Nambo.

[7] Le Duan, *Sur quelques problemes internationaux actuels*, Hanoi, 1964, p 143.

[8] I leave to Le Duan the responsibility for the conception of "nationalist countries".

[9] Leon Trotsky, *The Third International After Lenin* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1970), p. 188.

[10] "For Early Reunification of the World Trotskyist Movement," *Intercontinental Press*, May 11, 1970, p. 444.

[11] *Third International After Lenin*, pp. 168-9.

[12] I am introducing this into the debate with a word of caution: we have not yet seen the documents from which Hemery worked.

Despite the differences that separated the Trotskyist militants and the members of the VCP, the experience of *La Lutte* shows that some important programmatic similarities and objectives existed during that period.

[13] I shall leave aside a comparative study of the VCP and the CCP. Chinese and Vietnamese communism are cousins, because of their history. But their own personalities were established from the beginning. And especially since 1949 (the victory of the Chinese revolution), their paths

have diverged on some fundamental questions.

[[14](#)] A second edition was actually published in 1975, very much enlarged and reworked.