

Report of Pham No Mach [Pham Ngoc Thach] to the Soviet Envoy in Switzerland, A. G. Kulazhenkov

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Description:

Report of a meeting with an emissary of the Viet Minh government who requested Soviet support for Vietnamese forces in their independence war against the French. Pham Ngoc Thach stresses the communist nature of the Republic of Vietnam's government, explaining that the Communist Party was only dissolved in 1945 "to avoid provoking a negative American reaction." Pham also discusses his meetings with the French Communist Party in Paris, and the situation in other Southeast Asian countries, including Malay, Indonesia and Thailand.

Report of Pham No Mach [Pham Ngoc Thach] [1] to the Soviet Envoy in Switzerland, A. G. Kulazhenkov

I received Pham No Mach at his request and at the recommendation of the Workers Party Chairman Nicole [Nicol'?). Pham No Mach declared that he is a member of the Vietnamese government and has been given the assignment by the Communist Party (CP) politburo to travel to Europe, chiefly to meet the leadership of the French Communist Party (FCP). He travelled on a Chinese passport in the name of businessman Lin-Tay. He presented his credentials to [Maurice] Thorez and [Jacques] Duclos, with whom he met in Paris. Pham No Mach arrived in Switzerland on the pretext of treating his tuberculosis, and from here he crossed the French-Swiss border illegally. He decided to drop in on the Soviet mission in Bern in order to inform us about the situation in Vietnam.

The Republic of Vietnam has been carrying on a war against the French since 1945. In 1945 they signed an agreement with the French in Simao, according to which the French would recognize Vietnam as an independent state. However, in 1946 the French occupied the southern area of Vietnam, Cochinchina, the richest region of the country. On 20 November 1946 French regiments landed in North Vietnam and occupied several port cities, taking a cruel revenge against the local population. The French issued a demand that the government of Vietnam disarm and destroy its fortifications, etc., which the Vietnamese government could not accept. On 19 December 1946 the war began. [A summary of French strength follows, with an estimation of territory under French control as "not more than 5-6 % of the entire country."]

[...] In Vietnam the government is, in reality, communist. Of 18 members of the government, twelve are communists, although only three of these have officially made known their party membership. In the Republic there is officially no CP [Communist Party]; it exists illegally, in spite of the fact that it is the strongest party in the country. It was officially dissolved in 1945. This was done in order to avoid giving the Republic of Vietnam a clearly expressed communist character, and to avoid provoking a negative American reaction. The CP, in the words of my interlocutor, has no fewer than one hundred thousand members and provides leadership for a variety of social organizations, including a children's organization that comprises ten million people. On the CP's initiative, other parties have been created, which are in fact led by the communists, as all of the parties are in the Vietnam Independence League (Viet Minh).

The RV is an agrarian country. The peasants have carried out a redistribution of land. Thus, for all practical purposes an agrarian reform has been implemented, which has huge significance for the country.[2] The fundamental task of the government is now to organize resistance against the French army. But Vietnam does not possess the necessary weapons, and the government has no foreign currency with which to acquire these weapons. The army also lacks leading cadres. The Chinese CP has decided to aid Vietnam and is sending a military work group [military instructors]. My interlocutor drew my attention to the fact that the Americans are taking a "waiting position" in relation to Vietnam, yet in meetings with Vietnamese representatives, they invariably approve the struggle that Vietnam is waging against the French.

On the other hand, the Americans are carrying out a policy of openness, not just towards Vietnam, evidently calculating that they can strengthen their influence in Southeast Asia this way. In Siam, for example, American influence is very strong; the US has taken over the more important sectors of the country's economy.

Pham No Mach emphasized that in Southeast Asia, within the struggle for independence, communist parties have grown up in a number of countries, but that Vietnam has a special position as the center of the spread of communist influence. On his way to Europe Pham No Mach had a series of meetings with the leaders of different communist parties. He was in the Malay States. A strong CP has been created there, which grew during the Anti-Japanese struggle. It includes only ten million members, but its influence is immeasurably important; it possesses secret weapons stores that it took from the Japanese. The basic weakness of the party is the fact that it has been unable to organize the population for a national liberation struggle [...]

Pham No Mach was not able to visit Indonesia. Someone who knows Indonesia well informed him that within the Indonesian CP there exist

substantial disagreements, which have been caused by Trotskyists who have penetrated the party. The only communist within the Indonesian government is the Minister of Defense, however the government is composed of progressive elements who are ready to do battle against the Dutch aggressors. [Some remarks on Burma...]

The Vietnamese CP had intended in 1947 to call a conference of communist parties in all Southeast Asia, in order to set up contacts and work out a common line towards the Anglo-American and French imperialists. However, they could not carry out this plan, due to the war between Vietnam and France.

Returning again to the war, Pham No Mach said that the government of Vietnam had turned to [Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal] Nehru with a request to place the Vietnamese question before the Security Council, and in this way to attract world opinion and also to influence France. However, Nehru has so far not given any answer. The Republic of Vietnam would like the question raised in the Security Council; it would also like to be admitted to the United Nations' Economic and Social Council. My interlocutor mentioned the position of the French CP. In his words, the French party pays little attention to Vietnam and has not worked out a defined line. As he earlier said, he saw Thorez and Duclos. Duclos told him that Vietnam should continue to apply all its strength to its struggle for liberation and should make no concessions to French imperialism. But the French party has not studied the Vietnamese question in depth and has done nothing meaningful to prevent the French imperialist war against the Republic of Vietnam. In Europe there is a false opinion that the Vietnamese CP [and the French CP] are a single organization. This is not true and these parties are not linked. [...]

[Pham No Mach gives his opinion on the attitudes of Southeast Asians towards the English and Americans, saying that the Asians hate them...]

PNM personally held a conversation with the American military attaché in Siam, who expressed his sympathy with the people of Vietnam, but who stated that the Americans could not become involved in the war and were not preparing to bring any sort of pressure to bear on the French. The US speaks in this tone with the representatives of other countries.

Pham No Mach explained that in Siam people are waiting impatiently for the opening of the Soviet mission. He is amazed that the Americans, who are running things in Siam, have not raised any major obstacles to the opening of diplomatic relations between Siam and the Soviet Union.

In conclusion he said that Duclos and Thorez promised to inform Moscow via the Soviet Embassy in Paris of his desire to visit the USSR and personally report on the situation in Southeast Asia. He said that if he does get permission to visit Moscow, he still does not want to have a Soviet visa stamped in his passport, as that could arouse suspicion among English authorities on his return to Viet Nam.

I didn't give him any promises and limited myself to thanking him for his information on the situation in Southeast Asia.

A. Kulazhenkov

[Appended to this document is the following report, marked 'translated from French', and with the penciled date 15-XII-47 followed by a question mark.]

Situation Within the Party

On 11 November 1945 the Party was dissolved, to our great regret. The reasons for the dissolution:

1. During the years of the World War, the Party's role for national liberation had been so dominant that this had provoked suspicion and distrust on the international level.
2. The Party was completely isolated, and was not able to maintain any systematic relations with any fraternal party in other countries.
3. The French move into South Vietnam (Cochinchina), the occupation by the Chinese forces in the north, the blackmail of our Party by the French, in order to deceive the Americans and Chinese – these were decisive factors.
4. The concession made to the Chinese reactionaries, who directly or indirectly demanded this.
5. On the internal level, in order to bring about authentic national unity.
6. Inasmuch as our Party has unceasingly struggled in underground conditions, even when its existence was recognized internationally, its dissolution could in no way have a negative influence on its revolutionary position or its position as a party of the avant-garde.

7. The position of the Viet Minh is so secure within Vietnam, while its policies are fully controlled, from top to bottom, by the Party, that the Party's political line can in no way be compromised by its dissolution.
8. The creation of a Marxist Study Group after the Party's dissolution, and the publication of a cultural weekly, Truth [Su That], the existence of a daily paper National Salvation [Cuu Quoc], as well as the leadership of the Viet Minh, permits the spread of Marxism-Leninism among the activists and the masses, in spite of the fact that officially the Party no longer exists.
9. The dissolution of the Party is purely formal, and has only been registered officially, while all sections and cells have been given precise instructions to continue Party activities.

Footnotes

[1] The Russians recorded his name as "Pham No Mach," but confusion between a Russian M and T could at least partially explain that.

[2] By "agrarian reform" the envoy must have been referring to the redistribution of vacant land or land held by absentee landlords in Viet Minh controlled areas. He may also have been talking about rent reductions for tenant farmers, the early phase of agrarian reform in the DRV.