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WITH THE SHIFT in North Vietnam's position on negotiated settlement, some analysts are suggesting that a struggle between contending factions of the party leadership has ended in a victory for those who favor a strategic retreat from the war in the South. This is only the latest version of the old claims of disunity in the North Vietnamese politburo, which has been argued by Victor Zorza and P. J. Honey for many years.

Since the Paris talks began nearly five years ago, and especially since the death of Ho Chi Minh in September, 1969, Zorza has consistently maintained that Hanoi's leaders are divided between "hawk" and "dove" factions on the war in South Vietnam. His latest analysis, in the Oct. 15 Outlook, claims to see the final defeat of those who have for so long advocated a heavy military commitment in the South.

The argument that the politburo has been divided by opposing factions has also been pushed for at least a decade by the University of London's P. J. Honey. And Prof. Nguyen Tien Hung of Howard University supports this interpretation in his Oct. 29 Outlook article.

The idea of a power struggle behind the scenes in Hanoi has so enchanted Western observers over the years that it has lured them away from the path of careful scholarship. The methods of Kremlinology used successfully to pinpoint the issues in the Sino-Soviet dispute as well as those dividing Soviet and Chinese leadership groups—interpreting the political significance of differing formulations of ideological principles, changes of emphasis and even omitted phrases—have not been the basis for this interpretation of North Vietnamese politics. On the basis of a misunderstanding of North Vietnam's agrarian policy, some analysts had decided by the early 1960s that there was a split in the politburo between a faction led by Truong Chinh, the party secretary-general until 1956 and now chairman of the Standing Committee of the National Assembly, and one led by Le Duan, who became secretary-general in 1960.

What Split in North Vietnam?

By D. Gareth Porter

The writer, who two months ago challenged the Nixon administration assertion that the North Vietnamese massacred half a million people while imposing land reform in the 1950s, is a research associate at Cornell University's project on the International Relations of East Asia.

False Dichotomies

FOR MANY YEARS, it was accepted as fact that Truong Chinh was "pro-Chinese" because of a land reform program which supposedly imitated the Chinese model and used Chinese advisers. Because of their alleged opposition to the land reform, Le Duan and Vo Nguyen Giap were categorized as "pro-Soviet." On the basis of this supposed cleavage in the politburo, P. J. Honey even claimed in his book, "Communism in North Vietnam," that Truong Chinh's pro-Chinese group had taken over while Ho Chi Minh was in Moscow for the 40th anniversary of the October Revolution in October and November of 1957. The Hanoi press and radio, he said, refused to mention Ho's activities in Moscow, and politburo member Nguyen Duy Trinh insulted his Russian guests by quoting extensively from Mao Tse-tung at a meeting marking the Russian Revolution.

A more careful examination of the documents relating to the land reform program and the 1957 observance of the October Revolution in Hanoi, however, would have dispelled the popular notion of a power struggle between pro-Chinese and pro-Soviet factions of the politburo. The land reform was not an imitation of the Chinese model but was specifically tailored to the Vietnamese political and economic conditions. Nor is there any evidence that it was pushed through over the objections of a "pro-Soviet" faction. Truong Chinh had to step down as secretary-general because of a failure to exercise strict enough supervision over the implementation of land reform and party reorganization, not because he had been responsible for a "pro-Chinese" policy.

As for the 1957 takeover by the Truong Chinh faction, it appears to have been a figment of Prof. Honey's imagination. In fact, the Hanoi press carried full reports of Ho Chi Minh's activities in Moscow almost every day, and Nguyen Duy Trinh's "Maoist" speech on the 40th anniversary of the October Revolution, the full text of which appeared in Nhan Dan a few days later, did not quote Mao at all.

The foundation of the factional interpretation is thus a series of misconceptions about the North Vietnamese leadership. On the assumption that Truong Chinh and Le Duan are fundamentally at odds with each other, Zorza, Honey and others have attributed to each of them policy views which are not supported by an objective reading of their speeches and writings. These analysts have constructed a series of false dichotomies of strategy where none exist.

One of the alleged dichotomies is between a "big war" or "quick victory" strategy, which the analysts have associated with Le Duan and Defense Minister Giap, and a "guerrilla warfare" or "protracted war" strategy associated with Truong Chinh. The same dichotomy is portrayed by both Prof. Honey and Prof. Hung in terms of Truong Chinh's emphasis on "political struggle" as opposed to the emphasis by Le Duan and Gen. Giap on "military struggle."

Zorza has written that Truong Chinh's August, 1968, report in which he exhorted cadres to "grasp the motto of the 'long drawn-out fight and relying mainly on one's self,'" was an implicit rebuff to Le Duan and Defense Minister Giap, whom Zorza holds responsible for the Tet offensive. But the same report formulated the tasks of the revolution in the South in such a way as to rule out a defensive strategy: "Strive to wipe out as much of the enemy's strength as possible; powerfully develop our people's armed forces and political forces; cause the disintegration of the puppet army."

In fact, neither Truong Chinh nor anyone else in the politburo has ever asserted that "protracted war" means the repudiation of a general offensive with big-unit warfare. North Vietnamese military theory has never regarded the concept of the "offensive strategy," under which main force units have been committed to battle in the South, as incompatible with the principle of "protracted war."

The complementary relationship between the two principles was discussed in a letter said to have been written by Le Duan in 1966 and captured by U.S. troops in 1967. The author declared that the command was "firmly adhering to the principle of a protracted war, at present and in the future." At the same time, however, he explained that the party's central committee had endorsed the concept of achieving "ultimate victory in a relatively short period of time." The two concepts, he concluded, "are not in the least contradictory with each other," because "at present, we are on the offensive and not on the defensive."

The conflict has remained "protracted," according to Vietnamese military doctrine, not because the balance of forces in the South has been favorable to the South but because the Americans have refused to recognize the fundamental weakness of their strategic position. Although the Tet offensive failed to cause the disintegration of the Saigon army or to hold urban objectives, Hanoi military theorists never admitted going back to the strategic defensive; instead the concept of the "offensive strategy" has become more complex.

Gradual Steps and Leaps

NOTHING SHOWS MORE clearly the error of viewing the North Vietnamese politburo as divided between advocates of "protracted war" and "quick victory" than the analysis written by Le Duan for the 40th anniversary of the founding of the Lao Dong Party in 1970. The essay reaffirms the "offensive posture" of the revolutionary forces in the South, analyzing the strategy as one of "ever fiercer as-

A Reply From Victor Zorza:

DR. PORTER deplors the lack of scholarship of those with whom he disagrees but at the same time reveals his own inability to comprehend the analytical method which he criticizes. He argues that the continuity of Hanoi's political line, and the unity of its leadership, is shown by the fact that party documents have repeated since 1960 "the substance, if not the words," of the party resolution of that year.

But it is in fact the difference in emphasis between the various renderings of this resolution, as quoted by different speakers and writers, that makes it possible to trace some of the disagreements in the Hanoi leadership. The differences are usually minute, and it is only the detailed comparison of a large accu-

mulation of departures from pattern that makes it possible to draw any conclusions. Thus, the quotations which Dr. Porter cites cannot really settle the argument, which will be resolved only when the Hanoi leadership publicly reveals the debates it has long pursued in private.

These debates always are revealed in the end. Many eminent Western scholars disputed, with arguments similar to Dr. Porter's, the evidence which pointed to conflicts in both the Soviet and Chinese leadership, and between Moscow and Peking, but in the end they were persuaded by events. Some of the present events surely confirm those parts of my analysis which related to the imminence of a Vietnam settlement, and the rest must be left to the future.

saults which assume higher and higher forms, alternating gradual steps with leaps." At times, it concedes, the military struggle "may take on a defensive character, but this is only a temporary tactical move aimed at clearing the way for continuation of the offensive."

The strategy did not emphasize either guerrilla operations or main-force units over the other. On the one hand, the author embraced the motto, "to fight a protracted war, gaining strength as one fights"; on the other hand, he called for the combining of military attack and political struggle to "make very important leaps apt to change the relation of forces and the face of the war."

What is most interesting about this analysis is that it represented, according to the party newspaper, *Nhan Dan*, the "collective ideas" of the politburo, which discussed and gave full approval to Le Duan's draft before it was presented to the public. The consensus of the North Vietnamese leadership has thus supported a strategy which combines the two principles alleged by Western observers to be polar positions.

It is equally misleading for Prof. Hung to cite Truong Chinh's 1972 essay, "On Current Front Efforts," as evidence that he was opposed to a new military offensive and supported primary reliance on political struggle instead. For, although he called for urban political struggle, Truong Chinh also formulated the military task in a way that is hardly compatible with a retreat to low-level guerrilla fare. The liberation forces, he wrote, "must annihilate as much of the U.S. puppets' potential as possible, especially their mobile strategic forces." It was Saigon's mobile strategic forces, of course, which were among the major objectives of the country-wide military offensive that began two months later.

The "Great Rear"

THE SECOND QUESTION on which Le Duan and Truong Chinh are said to have been at odds is the relative priority to be given to socialist construction in the North and to the prosecution of the war in the South. Prof. Honey characterizes Truong Chinh as fearing that the socialist system of North Vietnam is endangered by the "subordination of everything to the prosecution of the war," while Le Duan "maintains that priority No. 1 must be winning the war in South Vietnam." This description of the alleged argument is also supported by Prof. Hung, who suggests that Le Duan wants to use the country's "entire resources" to reunify the country by force. Similarly, Zorza cites documents which he says show Truong Chinh has long led a faction that puts primary emphasis on "socialist construction" in the North as against those who favor major military campaigns in the South.

Ever since the country was divided into two zones, the relationship between the socialist revolution in the North and the liberation of the South has been a central theme, reflected in North Vietnamese theoretical documents for more than a decade. These documents have invariably repeated the substance, if not the words, of the resolution of the Third Party Congress of September, 1960.

That resolution stated that each zone had its own distinct task: The North was to "carry out the socialist revolution," while the South was to carry out the "national democratic revolution," liberating itself from American control. The two tasks were conceived as being "closely related" and having a positive influence on each other. Socialist construction would make the North "more and more powerful in every field," thus aiding the revolution in the South, which would in turn help defend the North from possible American attack.

The resolution also established the principle that the "most decisive task" for the revolution as a whole was the socialist revolution in the North, insuring that progress toward the building of socialism would not be reversed in the course of the struggle to liberate the South. This remained the guiding principle even after the American intervention in South Vietnam and the

massive bombing of the North created what the party called "the new situation."

Party leaders began to refer to North Vietnam as the "great rear" giving "active support" to the "great frontline" in the South. But it was Gen. Giap, the man alleged to have favored military involvement in the South over socialism in the North, who reminded his compatriots of the primacy of the socialist revolution in 1965. In the October, 1965, issue of *Tuyen Huan*, Giap wrote that it was necessary to "clearly realize that the responsibility to build socialism in North Vietnam is the most decisive to the overall revolution in our country."

A United Leadership

SO WHEN TRUONG CHINH or any other party spokesman or publication emphasizes the primacy of "socialist construction" for the North, he is not taking one side in a fierce struggle for control of policy but merely restating a generally accepted principle. Contrary to Zorza's claim, Truong Chinh's August, 1968, essay did not declare a shift in emphasis to socialist construction; on the contrary, his discussion of socialist construction emphasized that it had to take place in the setting of continued war. He re-

ferred to the people of North Vietnam as "continuing the socialist transformation and socialist construction," but he made it clear that the "central task" of the socialist economy was to "meet the growing requirements of the resistance of all the people."

Nor did his speech announce a new policy on negotiations with the Americans. It merely referred to the Hanoi statement of April 3, 1968, some five months earlier. Truong Chinh did not indicate any hope for substantial results from the Paris talks, nor did he "juxtapose" them with a "socialist construction." There was, in short, nothing in this speech to suggest that he advocated any lessening of the military pressure in the South for the sake of economic and political stability in the North.

Moreover, Truong Chinh's 1972 essay, already cited, gives no support to the notion that he regards socialist construction and the military campaign in the South as mutually exclusive. "If we do not fight and defeat the Americans," he wrote, "they will not let us peacefully and successfully build socialism." It may well be, of course, that major statements by Truong Chinh, like those of Le Duan, actually represent the consensus of the politburo rather than his individual views. But

that would merely underline the mistake of trying to find deep cleavages in the Hanoi leadership on its basic strategic problems.

The negotiated settlement which the North Vietnamese are now prepared to accept would indeed represent a major retreat from the struggle in the South if it were the result of a victory within the politburo of a group which had always opposed the heavy commitment of North Vietnamese regular units in the South. The evidence points, however, to the opposite conclusion: The North Vietnamese concessions are the result of the careful weighing of all factors — military, political and diplomatic — by a leadership which remains united in its objectives.

Hanoi may well believe that the 1972 general offensive, which regained large areas of central Vietnam and threw even more territory into contested status, puts the revolutionary forces in a stronger position to defeat the Thieu regime under a cease-fire arrangement than at any time since the American military buildup reached its peak in 1968. But that does not mean that Hanoi's leaders will shrink from more heavy fighting if and when they believe it is necessary.



Showing socialist solidarity in Hanoi during the 1960s: from left, Truong Chinh, Gen. Vo Nguyen

Giap, Le Duan, Ho Chi Minh, Ton Duc Thang (now president) and Premier Pham Van Dong.

By Sven Oste