



Joseph Alsop

Wash Post
11-6-72

An Upheaval in Hanoi?

THERE IS a good chance that the great change of policy in Hanoi was preceded by a great political upheaval, including the severe downgrading of North Vietnam's crucially important First Party Secretary, Le Duan. This is not certain as yet, but the wisest American analysts consider that it is highly probable.

As usual in such cases, the evidence will appear trifling to anyone who is not a close student of North Vietnamese affairs. Perhaps the most impressive item is a recent photograph showing the party leadership at a public reception.

Prime Minister Pham Van Dong, General Vo Nguyen Giap, Le Duan's bitter enemy and rival, Truong Chinh — these and all other leaders of consequence were conspicuously present, while Le Duan alone was conspicuously absent. The First Party Secretary's absence was significant, of course, precisely because the lineup of personages on public occasions is always a message telling who is who.

The photograph, in turn, underlined the further fact that Le Duan, usually most active, has not been publicly seen or heard from since September 3. This is not surprising, either, since the North Vietnamese policy change undoubtedly dates from mid-September. And when a great mistake is acknowledged by a great change of policy, the principal author of the mistake is usually made to suffer for it.

IN THE CASE of North Vietnam, it is inordinately difficult, of course, to know for sure which leader was on what side in any given decision. It is widely supposed, for example, that General Giap was a strong backer of the policy of huge North Vietnamese investments in the war in South Vietnam. Yet most of the inner group of experts instead believe that Giap was really an advocate of the doctrine of classical guerrilla war — which he wrote himself after the French defeat.

In the case of Le Duan, in contrast, there is no room for doubt about his role. The documents have consistently shown the First Party

Secretary as the leading advocate of using North Vietnam's manpower and resources with an unsparing hand, in order to aid the Vietcong in the South.

With equal consistency, the evidence has shown Truong Chinh on the opposite side of the argument, in favor of putting the home front first, in fact. In addition, Le Duan is one of the two Hanoi politburo members who comes from South Vietnam, whereas Truong Chinh is a Northerner, and is Chinese Communist-trained, to boot. His name, a pseudonym, even means "Long March."

IF TRUONG CHINH is up and Le Duan is down (or even out), it certainly does not mean that the angels of light have triumphed over the powers of darkness. Yet, if this is really the way of it, the fact has immense meaning, nonetheless.

Suppose a great political upheaval has, in fact, preceded what looks like a great change of policy, to begin with. It is then much, much safer to assume that the policy change is real.

This has direct bearing on the most vital question raised by Dr. Henry A. Kissinger's negotiations. That question, of course, is whether the North Vietnamese mean to cheat again this time, as they cheated so flagrantly and promptly after their Laos agreement with Governor Averell Harriman in 1962.

Truong Chinh being up and Le Duan down further fits neatly with the course of the Kissinger negotiations, since the North Vietnamese began to get down to business in late September. On the one hand, Le Duan bears the heaviest responsibility for the sacrifice in war of at least a million of North Vietnam's young men — the equivalent of 11 million Americans. Yet if Hanoi does not cheat, this dire sacrifice will be in vain.

ON THE OTHER HAND, as above-noted, Truong Chinh has always been an advocate of priority for the home front. And as soon as they got down to business in the talks, the theme of American aid to help reconstruct the home front be-

came very important indeed.

There is another potential meaning, too, in the appearance of a political upheaval in Hanoi. If the appearance is not misleading, in fact, it is clinching evidence that we could not possibly have got a deal of the sort the Nixon administration has now got, either four years ago, or even four months ago.

But the claim that we could have got such a deal much earlier, is also shown to be self-serving hogwash by a mountain of other evidence. And while the probability is clear that Truong Chinh is up and Le Duan is down, we must still wait for certainty.

© 1972, Los Angeles Times

See Washington Post
29 Oct, 26 Nov 72,
filed Indochina/
Comment.