

# WHERE IS HO CHI MINH?

The Voice of the Vietminh's "Stalin" has been silent of late



HANOI, VIETNAM

**I**N THAT ever-changing galaxy of stars that directs the international Stalinist movement a new name is in the ascendant: Darg Xuan Khu.

For it is Khu, Vietnamese nationalists and French intelligence now believe, who directs the activities of the Vietminh revolutionary movement in Indo-China against the French-sponsored government of former Emperor Bao Dai.

From behind Vietminh lines in the zone that the Communist-dominated rebel regime controls (perhaps 80 per cent of Vietnam's land surface) have come persistent reports during the past month that Khu has replaced Ho Chi Minh as the leader of the "Democratic Republic of Vietnam."

Ho, leader of the revolutionary group which established a provisional government here in Hanoi in 1945 and with whom the French negotiated unsuccessfully until war broke out in 1947, is legendary throughout Southeast Asia. His popularity with the Vietnamese people—encouraged and shrewdly propagandized by the Vietminh between 1941 and 1945—is undisputed, and it is rare when an anti-Vietminh nationalist attacks him directly in public.

There are three general theories as to why Khu has replaced Ho (in fact, if not officially in Vietminh radio and printed propaganda):



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It is deemed quite possible here that Ho, who during his lifetime of revolutionary activity served in China, France, Thailand, Russia and Indo-China, is dead. He was known to have been tubercular in 1945, and his 70-odd years probably weigh heavily if he still lives. His voice, which once was used as often as possible by the clandestine Vietminh radio, has not been heard in years.

An alternate explanation is that, sensing his time is short, Ho has chosen his successor and now limits himself to giving occasional counsel.

The third and most interesting explanation is that the old sickness of totalitarianism has arisen to plague the Vietminh, and that Ho has been ousted in a purge. While there is no concrete evidence to prove that Ho Chi Minh has ever been anything but a stalwart follower of the Moscow line, there persists among Marxist circles in France and in America, as well as among the general political groups here, a belief that Ho has "Titoist" tendencies.

These politicians believe that Ho is today a "prisoner" of the Vietminh *Tong Bo* (Politburo) and that he is no longer able to take the nationalist movement which follows the Vietminh along anything but a Moscow-directed path.

Whatever the truth of these speculations, there is general agreement that it is Khu—as director of the *Tong Bo* and the Communist party, which has been openly reconstituted after having been "dissolved" into a "Marxist Study Group" in 1945—who now directs the Vietminh.

It is curious that Khu, a slightly cross-eyed little man of 40 years,



General de Lattre and Bao Dai—Can they repel the threat of Dang Xuan Khu?



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should now take the limelight, as he is perhaps the least known of all the leaders of Indo-Chinese Communism. Unlike several members of the *Tong Bo*, Khu has never been in Moscow, and his only residence outside the country was for a period during the Japanese occupation of Indo-China.

He was born in 1910 in the little village of Hanh Thien, not far from Nam Dinh in the southern part of North Vietnam (Tonkin). His parents, Buddhists in an area where Catholics hold most of the political power, were "petit bourgeois," his father being a village schoolteacher.

His first connection with the nationalist movement was at the public school of Nam Dinh, where he signed a student protest against jailing of the old Vietnamese revolutionary of the 1920s, Phan Chau Trinh, and where he participated in a students strike.

In 1931, Dang Xuan Khu—a student at Hanoi's Commercial Studies School—met Nguyen Thu Duc, the founder of the Indo-Chinese Communist party, who had just returned from indoctrination at Moscow. (Nguyen Ai Quoc, alias Ho Chi Minh, was still abroad at this time, in Hong Kong, where he worked under the Russian agent Michael Borodin, and in France, where he was one of the organizers of the "League against Colonialism.")

Taken into the party by Duc, Khu rapidly rose to a position of authority in the organization, becoming its chief pamphleteer. Duc and Khu were arrested in 1933 by the French for revolutionary activity against the colonial government. Duc was released shortly afterward, but Khu was sent into exile at Son La, a small village in the Thai country.

With the introduction of a more liberal colonial policy by the Popular Front government of Leon Blum in France in 1936, Khu was released from imprisonment. Given semi-legality, the Communist party began intensive activities in North Vietnam under the direction of Khu, Duc and a young ex-professor of history, Vo Nguyen Giap—now commander of



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the Vietminh's armies and minister of defense in the rebel government.

The end of the Popular Front, the death of Nguyen Thu Duc of tuberculosis in 1938 and an unsuccessful revolt by the Communist party in South Vietnam (Cochin China) in 1940 ended what had been perhaps the most prosperous period for the Stalinists in Indo-China.

### MOVED ACROSS BORDER

With the outbreak of World War II and the occupation of Indo-China by the Japanese, the Communist party chieftains in Vietnam moved over the border into South China. There the party reorganized at the time the Vietminh organized.

Dang Xuan Khu changed his name to Truong Chinh, and from 1941 to 1945 worked almost exclusively as the theoretician of the Indo-Chinese party, writing books in Vietnamese on Marxist subjects and biographies of Vietnamese Communists. He was responsible for all Vietminh propaganda diffused in Indo-China from 1941 until the Japanese surrender in 1945.

When the Vietminh entered Hanoi in late August 1945, Dang Xuan Khu was among the leadership, and while he took no official part in the government, he remained one of the most powerful members of the Central Committee of the Communist party still operating behind the scenes. Through the difficult sixteen months of Vietminh rule in Hanoi, Khu and Vo Nguyen Giap—who by this time had control of the Vietminh guerrilla army and the police—formed the most powerful clique within the party. Allied with them were Nguyen Khanh Toan, Russian-educated Vietminh leader, who was Vietnam's delegate to the last congress of the Oriental Communist parties in Peking in 1949.

In the months before the failure of French-Vietminh negotiations and afterwards, this clique was able to override a more conservative group in the Communist party headed by Pham Van Dong, chief of the Vietminh-Vietnam delegation which went to Fontainebleau in 1946 to negotiate with the French, and a more nation-



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alist group led by Tran Huy Lieu, former Minister of Propaganda of the Vietminh (believed to have been purged recently). Vietnamese nationalists believe that Khu has gained Moscow's favor through complete obedience.

### NEW BOSS

He is now listed in official Vietminh propaganda as head of the Vietminh's Politburo, and it is believed here that he is also the chairman of the Central Committee of the Communist party, as well as the Prime Minister of the Vietminh-Vietnam government. Khu's friend, Vo Nguyen Giap—while he remains as the army's commander—is believed to have taken a back seat.

In the months to come, electric little Dang Xuan Khu may be seen at international meetings speaking in his soap-box-pitched, letter-perfect, if accented, French. His picture has already begun to appear at Vietminh meetings beside those of Stalin, Mao Tse-tung and Ho Chi Minh. But there is every reason to believe his position within the Communist party (always threatened in this country by personal rivalry) and within the Vietminh (which remains, even today, probably 90 per cent non-Communist) is tenuous.