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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE GROUP
INTELLIGENCE REPORT

95856

COUNTRY French Indo Chin.

DATE: 25X1A

SUBJECT Political Information: The Viet Nam Government

INFO. [REDACTED]

DIST. July 1947

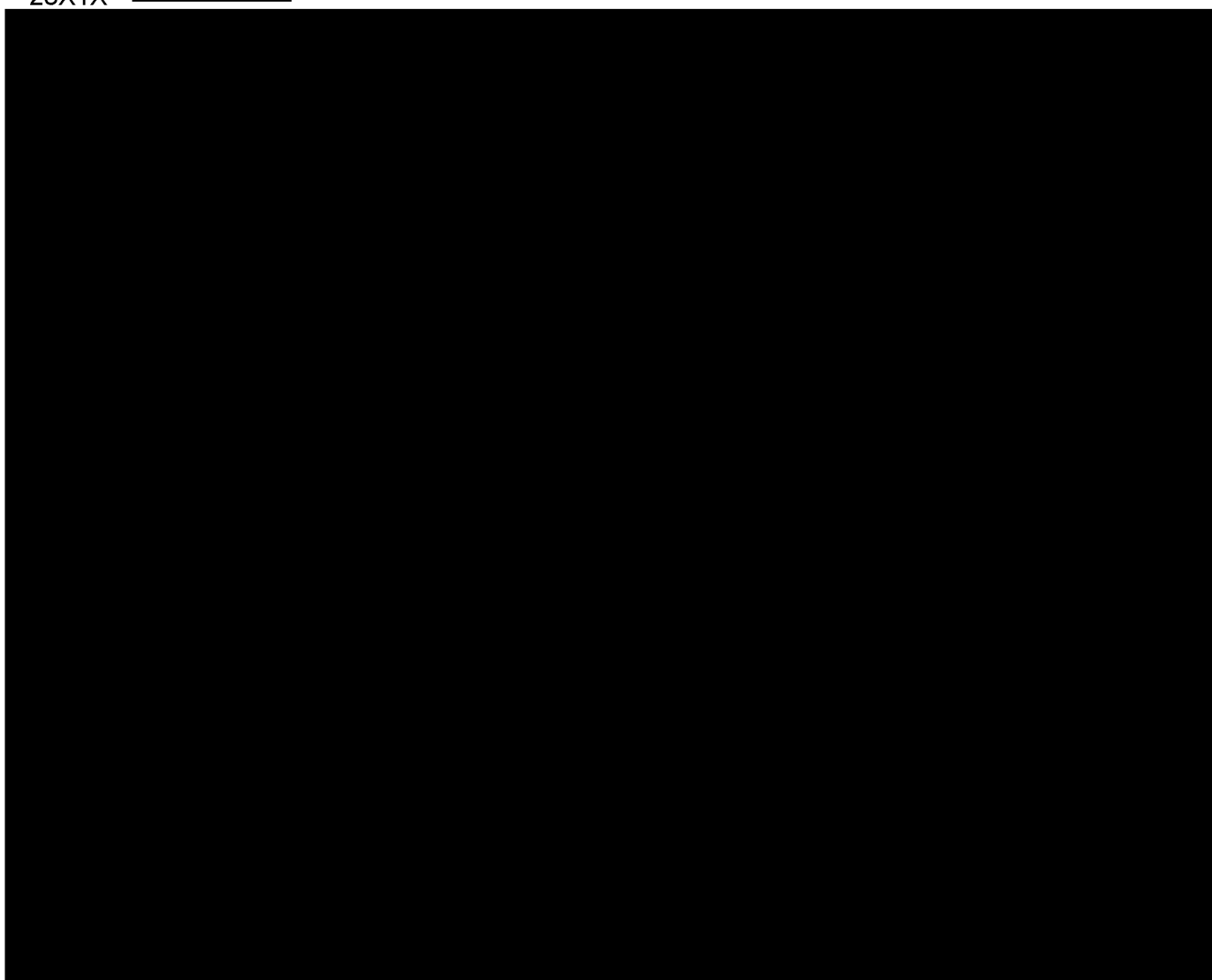
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SUPPLEMENT

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The People's Committees

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1. The People's Committees are roughly designed in the classic Marxist model of People's Soviets, although there are some important differences. In the election of Marxist Soviets the vote is weighted heavily in favor of the city proletariat as against the other classes. The People's Committees in Vietnam, however, are

222/81

elected by universal suffrage--all men and women over 18 years of age. Attendance at elections is not compulsory, but Government pressure usually succeeds in reducing abstentions to less than 25%. The elections are controlled by skillful Government propaganda.

2. The People's Committees are in theory the source of administrative power. According to the present Vietnam Constitution (adopted 9 November 1946), Vietnam is divided, from the administrative point of view, into 3 Bo: North, Central and South. These Bo are the geographical equivalent of the 3 Ky: Tonkin, Annam, Cochinchina; but it must be noted that the Bo are supposed to be purely administrative subdivisions, not separate states like the old Ky. Each Bo is divided into a number of provinces; each province into a number of Huyen (Annamese equivalent to the Chinese Hsien) each Huyen into a number of Xa (communes or villages). Each of these divisions elects its own People's Committee as follows:
 - a. Xa: population of each Xa elects People's Committee for that Xa by direct popular vote.
 - b. Huyen: population of each Huyen elects People's Committee for that Huyen by direct popular vote.
 - c. Province and Bo: same as Xa and Huyen. There is no indirect election of People's Committees. In addition to the People's Committees which exist on the four different levels enumerated above, there is the National Assembly which is the equivalent of a People's Committee for the whole country; also elected by direct popular vote.
3. Article 59 of the Constitution states: "The People's Committee (on each level) makes decisions on local problems. These decisions must not be in opposition to the directives of the Committees on the higher levels." It is this inconspicuous provision in the Constitution which permits a complete negation in practice of this theory of power stemming upward from the people through the Committees to the Government; and in fact reverses the flow of power, changing it into one from a central dictatorship down to the level of the individual.

The People's Committees and the Executive Committees

4. The implementation of this reversal of the flow of power is through the use of Executive Committees on each level. Article 59 of the Constitution continues: "The Executive Committee is charged with these duties: (1) to execute the orders of the Committee on the next higher level; (2) to execute the decisions of the People's Committee on its own level, after these decisions have been approved by the Committee on the higher level; and (3) to direct the administration of the locality." Article 60 states: "The Executive Committee is responsible both to the Committee on the next higher level and to the local People's Committee." Article 61 states: "The details of the organization of People's Committees and of Executive Committees will be fixed by Government decree." 25X1A
An example of such a decree (based, of course, not on the present constitution but on a similar provision in the previous one) appears in the Official Journal of 23 July 1946 and provides for the creation of a "Special Region of Hongay" (107-05, 20-57), in which the Executive Committee of the People's Committee reports directly to the People's Committee of Bac Bo (Tonkin) rather than to that of the Province of Quang Yen. Hongay is an important coal mining center).
5. In practice almost the sole function of the People's Committee is to elect the Executive Committee on its own level. This election, like the others, is guided by skillful propaganda from above. After having elected the Executive Committee, the People's Committee tends to disappear from sight. It is supposed to meet every six months to approve or disapprove the actions of the Executive Committee. As a rule these ratifications are perfunctory. Special meetings of the People's Committee are sometimes held in order that they may be required to assume outward responsibility for an action which is sufficiently unpopular to cause the Executive Committee to hesitate--a scapegoat function.

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The Executive Committee

6. The Executive Committee on each level consists of a President, one or more Vice-Presidents, and a Secretary. Often the President and Vice-Presidents are figureheads, with the real power (such as it is) being exercised by the Secretary. All administrative power is exercised by the Executive Committee in accordance with rather rigid directives from above.
7. In like manner, on the National level, the Cabinet is the equivalent of the Executive Committee just as the National Assembly is the equivalent of the People's Committee. The Cabinet is controlled by the Vietminh. The National Assembly is as much the puppet of the Vietminh as the People's Committees are puppets of the Executive Committees. Because of the true reversal of the flow of power (described in paragraphs 3 and 4) local Government and police duties tend to become coordinate functions under the Executive Committee and the Department of the Interior with the latter becoming the deciding factor.

Restrictions on Local Officials

8. The authority of local officials is closely circumscribed. Local officials in Vietminh-controlled areas were unable to discuss with source A any specialized field of government, such as education, law enforcement, population changes, taxation, which would nominally be considered to be under the overall direction or study of the administrative officials of a city or province. Few local officials had much knowledge of the social, economic, or commercial aspects of their communities; or if they had such knowledge, they indicated that they were not authorized to discuss such matters.
9. Another means by which the local officials are kept in line is the Secret Police, who observe their activities closely. Central Government officials are similarly watched. The Secret Police encourage informers to report exactly what they see and hear without comment. Source B was told by several different persons on whom he had recently called that they had been visited by Secret Police immediately after source's departure to verify their connections with him, their conversations and their actions.
10. [redacted] states that some local officials are arrogant blockheads but the majority are mere machines. [redacted] It has been previously reported that HO chi Minh admits the limitations of his administrative officials, for which he blames the lack of adequate education and administrative experience during the French regime. Other reports indicate that many small functionaries are beginning to imitate the mannerisms and attitudes of former French functionaries). According to source A, local officials in general are young men who have only an elementary education but pleasing personalities. In some of the hamlets the officials are the village elders. A great many of the local officials are former revolutionists who had suffered prison sentences under the French; many had performed guerrilla and underground activities during the Japanese occupation. Because of the narrowness of the directives which govern their powers as administrative officials, they have little initiative or opportunity for individual judgment. When in doubt they do nothing until receiving instructions from higher authorities. This tends to result in apparent obstructionism.
11. This inability to make decisions on the spot results in clumsy and sluggish administration with a maximum of red tape. Persons can move from one area to another only with all the rigmarole of obtaining special permission from the new authority for each succeeding step. It is impossible to visit an official without making a previous appointment. A representative of the Information Department of the Ministry of the Interior was assigned to source A during part of a trip in Vietminh-controlled areas for the purpose of making all necessary arrangements for source; but apparently even this representative had to go through all the usual red tape. Whenever he succeeded in arranging a meeting, he seemed extremely excited as though it were quite a triumph. (See par. 29) Difficulties of administration are increased by the slowness of communications. Many officials commented on the difficulties of coordinating interrelated government activities

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because of officials being scattered and communications being poor.

National Welfare Associations

12. The National Welfare Associations are not elected. In every case, their membership in each district comprises nearly the whole class of persons to whom the Association is applicable; for example, the "Women's Association for National Welfare" includes practically all the women in the district. Membership is theoretically voluntary, but propaganda and pressure make it nearly compulsory. Just as the People's Committees exist on various levels, so do the National Welfare Associations. The activities of the Associations are directed by Executive Committees of the Associations, who are chosen by meetings of the members of the Association under suitable "guidance" from above. Unlike the People's Committees, which tend to disappear in practice, the Associations are very active; but are naturally under rigid control by the Executive Committees of the Associations. Just as in theory the Executive Committee of the People's Committee is jointly responsible to the People's Committee itself and to the Executive Committee of the People's Committee on the next higher level, so in theory the Executive Committee of the Association is jointly responsible to the members of the Association itself and to the Executive Committee of the Association on the next higher level. In practice, the Executive Committee of the Association is solely responsible to the Executive Committee of the Association on the next higher level; and the general activities of the Associations are governed by the Executive Committee of the Association in question on a national level. On this high level, the Executive Committee of the Association is in close touch with the various Ministries, which suggest or request (they do not order) the Association to conduct given activities in connection with the responsibilities of those Ministries. These might include, for example, a public health program undertaken under the joint auspices of the Ministry of Public Health and the Department of Information, Public Works programs, etc. When the program has been agreed upon, the Executive Committee of the Association on the National level gives implementing directives to the Executive Committees of the Associations on the level of Bo, Province, Huyen, and Xa. On each level, the relationship between the Executive Committees of the People's Committees and the Executive Committees of the Associations is merely one of liaison, not one of authority in either direction.

There are three main types of Public Welfare Associations: (a) By categories (age, sex, or religion); (b) By profession, business, or trade; (c) Cultural and allied associations.

Associations by Categories.

13. Examples of Associations by categories are: Public Welfare Associations of Children, Youth, Young Men, Women, Old People, Catholics, Protestants, Buddhists. These Associations differ among one another in organization and function.
14. The members of the Boys' and Girls' Associations are known as "Bamboo Shoots" - who will one day grow up straight and strong as bamboo trees. They are divided into two groups, those under 11, and those over 11. The children are encouraged to sing popular revolutionary songs as well as the old songs of the country. They are encouraged to write and perform skits and plays; catching bandits and killing traitors are the themes of their games. They have bonfire parties in the moonlight; and go on picnics to the country where emphasis is on discipline and knowing the country in order to be good guides. They are taught semaphore signaling and how to send up fire-balloon signals. These children's groups are enthusiastic and

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serious. Many of the children have been guerrillas for several years. They learn about arms and about security measures and they are encouraged to be daring. They also serve as volunteers for the Red Cross, morale-builders for the Army (a sort of "Special Service"), cooks for army messes, and makers of clothes for the needy.

15. In some localities the specific functions of some of these Associations are rather vague. In the great majority of cases, one of the most important and conspicuous functions of the Associations is to furnish "volunteers" for various sorts of public work, principally demolitions in connection with the Scorched Earth Policy. (See previous report on Vietminh-controlled areas: Economic Information -The Scorched Earth Policy). But, in sober fact though not theory, the really most important reason for the existence of these Associations is to tighten the Vietminh grip on individual members; an important phase of this is to force these individuals to play a more or less conspicuous part in Vietminh activities, which will so compromise them that later, even if they should wish to desert the Vietminh for the French or Nationalist Front, they would not be able to do so for fear of French reprisal and punishment against them in connection with these past activities under the Vietminh.
16. The National Welfare Associations of Catholics, Buddhists, etc., are instruments of similar purpose to the above. In addition to attempting to use the existing religious organizations to keep the people in line politically, a secondary purpose is to neutralize the activities and propaganda of rival organizations of the same religions (for example, Christian League, Hoa Hao, etc) which have aligned themselves with the Nationalist Front. For example, it is the responsibility of the leadership of the National Welfare Associations of Catholics to persuade the faithful that French Catholic priests who denounce the Vietminh as Communists and anti-religious are just plain liars. (See previous reports on Role of the Church in Indochina, and the religious groups in both the Vietminh and the Nationalist Front).

Associations by Business, Profession, or Trade.

17. Examples of Association by Profession: Doctors, Lawyers, Schoolteachers. Examples of Association by Business: Bankers, shopkeepers. Examples by Trade: Railway workers, Printers, Miners. Thus it will be seen that some of them are in the nature of guilds or business associations; others a kind of emasculated trade union or peasants' organization. Their function is clearly different from that of their apparent parallel in democratic countries. As strikes are prohibited by law and would be repressed by ruthless measures, the "trade-union" associations have little power. Each of these associations may be component part of more generalized associations; for example, Railway workers, Printers, Miners Associations are gathered together in a general "workers Association". Similarly, Associations of Peasants, of Tenant Farmers, of Landowners, may be gathered together in National Welfare Associations for Agriculture. In general, the purpose of these Associations is to keep the various professional, business, trade and agricultural groups strictly in line with Vietminh policy. In addition, they undoubtedly serve a useful purpose in advising and coordinating commercial policy and influence (indirectly) the educational program, and the dissemination of propaganda.
18. It will be noted that any given individual can hardly escape from belonging to at least one National Welfare Association. Even if he has no religion, no profession or business, and no cultural attainments, he has at least a given age. In practice, individuals will usually belong to two or more such associations. A business woman for instance might belong simultaneously to the local Women's Association, the Buddhists' Association, and the Merchants' Association. Thus the political grip of the Vietminh on individuals is tightened in a multiplicity of ways.

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Cultural Associations.

19. One of the mightiest political weapons wielded by the Vietminh is the National Welfare Association for Culture. The outward purpose of these associations is to spread and popularize culture in general. The real purpose is to spread culture of a definitely tendentious (pro-Vietminh) nature. For this purpose a number of vehicles are used, including lectures, expositions, publications, orchestras, theatres, and travelling theatrical troupes. The means of promoting tendentious works of art, at the expense of non-tendentious ones, is subtle and effective rather than blatant. Naturally, all works of art whose tendency is in any way hostile to Vietminh policy (mention of Nationalist Front, mention of Trotskyists, harsh criticism of Britain or America) is prohibited from circulating. On the other hand, purely neutral items (paintings of landscapes or flowers, for instance) are not prohibited from circulating; they are merely given less favorable opportunities. In a land of scarcity of means this is quite effective.
20. The Cultural Association on the National level, which formerly enjoyed a striking and even brilliant career at Hanoi, is now established at Tuyen Quang (105-14, 21-48.) The chief of this Association is NGUYEN dinh Thi, a (Stalinist) Communist. This Association and its subsidiaries include the great majority of the nationally-known writers, artists, and musicians now in Tonkin, as well as a number of lesser-known ones. Many of these are persons of outstanding ability. Every Huyen has its Cultural Associations. In the towns, the chief activities of the Cultural Associations are the management of expositions, concerts, lectures, theatres, and receptions for VIP's; in the villages: lectures, discussion groups, travelling theatrical troupes, and group singing.

DISSATISFACTION AGAINST THE VIETMINH REGIME

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Note: Previous reports have indicated that such dissatisfaction exists; the diverse elements--the French and their satellites, the Nationalist Front, the Trotskyists, and possibly the Conservatives of the Vietminh--have already made use, or will shortly make use, of this dissatisfaction for their own ends; the hardships attendant upon the Scorched Earth Policy (see previous report on this policy) and the wholesale displacement of populations constitute an ever present threat to the Vietminh hold on the people).

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21. Without exception every business man and every business woman met by source in Vietminh-controlled areas was unhappy about the present situation. Their antagonism toward the Government varies. Merchants in Cao Bang were frank in their criticism. As to the immediate future, it is normal that business men take a poor view of the business stagnation which results from lack of imports and exports, imposition of restrictions on transport, and other limitations. For the longer term point of view, it seems unlikely that business interests will necessarily become a group opposed to the Vietminh, unless the Government makes definite assurances to them in lieu of present frustrations. So far the Government has laid down no clear policy concerning private business. 25X1A
The Constitution provides that "private property shall be respected." Under present conditions this clause is of little value. No clear limitations of the Government's proposed competition with private business nor of a possible policy of nationalization have been promulgated. Some business men therefore suspect the worst.
22. Despite the general feeling of fear and unwillingness to criticize the Government openly, one well-educated Government official spoke to source with surprising frankness. He said that Government officials generally were a disgrace to the country--poorly informed, incompetent, and powerless /to act on behalf of the welfare of the people/. (See paragraphs 8-11). He stated that the present government is Communist and many people fear the extension of Communism in

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the country even though the present pattern of government has not yet many similarities with that of the USSR. He said that everyone was watched; and in particular if two or more people gather together their activities are under rigid surveillance; every one lives in fear of the Secret Police.

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23. Source met a number of persons who find trouble hating the French and who asked if source believed the Vietminh stories about French atrocities. Many of these people had pleasant associations with the French in the past and inevitably look to France for guidance in cultural and economic matters. A small group even considers the French, as individuals, to be wonderful people. 25X1A

25X1X Note: [redacted] ridicules the last two sentences but also states that as terrible as life was under the French, many people feel that the present is far worse and look back wistfully upon the orderliness of the French regime, however unjust it was. Source D states that logic suggests that there is a growing number of persons in Tonkin for whom the French seem the lesser of two evils and that these persons include those of wealth, culture and influence).

VIETNAM: TERRORISM

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24. The most striking feature of life under the Vietnam Government is the pervading sense of fear. Source found it a relief to return from this fear-ridden country to the comparative freedom of Kuomintang-controlled China. In Tonkin no one dares to raise any question or to express himself freely. Officials are even more cautious than private citizens. Because the secret police are everywhere, informers do a thriving business. People are at all times subject to arbitrary arrest and interrogation. The sense of fear is greater than in the Communist-controlled areas of China. Although many people tend to excuse this Vietminh terrorism on the basis of war-time necessity, they resent it more strongly than the terroristic methods formerly employed by the French and later by the Japanese because Vietminh terrorism is more efficient and is done by their own people rather than the foreign conqueror. This sense of fear among the population is regretted by the Vietminh; it is not itself a fixed policy but is the inevitable result of the terroristic methods used for the purpose of keeping the population under control.

25X1A Note: Last sentence also reported by [redacted] 25X1X

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25. Terrorism under the French was bad enough but it was not very systematic or clever. It was chiefly designed to suppress sedition and keep workers in line. Execution, imprisonment, torture, and forced labor were the principal methods used. Poulo Condor, although the most famous of the prisons, was by no means the most horrible. The most usual torture was beatings; the most refined was passing an electric current through the body. Terrorism under the French was only in part a matter of fixed policy; it was greatly aggravated by the brutality and sadism of minor officials, overseers, and prison guards. Note: 25X1A The ruthlessness and brutality of the French during the old regime is well documented by the Vietminh; see for example the publication Temoignages, published by the Vietminh in 1945. [redacted] reports that the construction of the Tonkin-Laos Highway before the war cost many more lives than that of the Bangkok-Koumei "Railway of Death" under conditions even more horrible; there are also evidences of the French continuing at present to make use of brutal policies in some areas under their control. Precise details are not available and it may be that such incidents could in part be excused on the ground of military necessity.

25X1X [redacted] states that terrorism is a necessary instrument in class conflict and exploitation. No real evidence is available as to whether the French are continuing terrorism as a matter, at least in part, of fixed policy).

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26. Japanese terrorism was more violent and more efficient. It roused the whole people to a general anti-imperialistic feeling. Before that the people had been merely anti-French; but they came to realize that the danger of any imperialism--French, Japanese, Russian--left little to choose between one another. The principal Japanese innovation was large-scale use of the water torture. Vietnam terrorism is far worse than either French or Japanese. It is more efficient and ruthless. It was more blatant during the period of the occupation by Chinese troops, when the Vietnam was attempting to stamp out the QDD and the Nationalist Front elements, Trotskyists, and French sympathizers. Its principal instruments were assassination by burying alive or by tying in sacks and throwing in the lake (because of the scarcity of cartridges), imprisonment, and torture. Its most terrible refinement, reserved as a frightening example for important political prisoners, was to dig an inclined hole in which the prisoner was buried all except his head; he would then be given just enough rice every day and his body would very slowly rot; however, such cases were fairly rare. Since the departure of the Chinese troops the technique of Vietnam terrorism has developed along more precise lines. There is absolutely no freedom of speech. Strikes are forbidden. The lot of the worker is considerably worse than even under the French regime. Although the workers tend to blame the war, there is a strong undercurrent of dissatisfaction among labor and soldiers; it is here that the Trotskyists will find fertile fields. Current Vietnam terrorism is purely fascist in technique (See previous report on the Vietnam Government--Fascistic Aspects) but there is one important difference between it and the examples of Germany and Russia. In Vietnam, imprisonment, torture and execution are attended with a minimum of publicity. This is in line with the Vietnam effort to appear outwardly "civilized" and "democratic." Because of this secrecy it is impossible to arrive at an estimate of the number of persons who have suffered from this policy. "Mysterious disappearances" are extremely frequent and it is usually unknown whether the persons disappearing are imprisoned or assassinated. Beatings and other minor tortures of criminals and suspected criminals are innumerable. These are applied for the most part to petty offenders, thieves, bandits, black marketeers, and violators of unimportant regulations. To some extent the rich are terrorized in order to take possession of their wealth for the state. As to important political offenders, some disappear mysteriously; but a more frequent technique is to leave them at large and watch them closely. Note: Regarding the future, comments that it would seem impossible to govern Indochina without terrorism as long as there is exploitation, which seems inevitable under any regime which is now possible; this fact will help to build up the growing power of the Trotskyists whose propaganda is always aimed at the class struggle.)

COURTS AND JAILS IN VIETMINH-CONTROLLED AREAS

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27. Courts are under the control of the Central Government rather than the local government. All personnel of the courts are appointed. In general source found the personnel of the courts to be of good training and intelligence. The law is primarily French law, with some Chinese law particularly in respect to land. The jails source saw at Cao Bang and Thai Nguyen were reasonably clean and airy. Even the food looked decent. At Cao Bang prisoners were permitted to work outside of the jails in gangs on public projects. At Thai Nguyen the only job for the prisoners was maintaining the compound of the jail itself. Prisoners who have been sentenced and those awaiting trial share the same quarters. Men, women, and children also live together. Infants, too young to be separated from mothers, are taken to jail with their mothers. Most prisoners are housed in open rooms rather than private cells. Source saw some people in solitary cells

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which were dark and ill-smelling. Source was told that these people were confined because of contagious diseases, but source does not believe this is true. The individual cells at the Thai Nguyen jail were in a separate room and on the doors were huge rings; source was told that these were for holding extra bars across the doors but source does not believe this. Source saw no prisoners of foreign nationality.

28. One interesting feature of the court system is the requirement that cases must be tried within 45 days or the prisoner is released. When a prisoner has been confined for 45 days awaiting trial, he is automatically discharged; this provision forces the court to try him with reasonable speed. In serious crimes against the state the maximum period is 4 months. Source asked several prisoners pending trial how long they had been held and in no case was their answer more than a month and a half. Court procedure was simple, dignified and nonabusive. Courtrooms were airy and attractive. Judges told source that there were fewer cases now and seemed to expect some sort of compliment from source because of this fact. Source felt that there is no total loss of respect for the orderliness of law in Vietnam.

TRAVEL CONTROL IN VIETMINH-CONTROLLED AREAS.

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-2 29. Sources were accompanied by a representative of the Interior Department of the Central Government. At each city the representative was given a local pass which was typewritten and gave all details of who, when, why, etc. These passes were not available for source's inspection. Without the cooperation of the Interior Department sources would not have been able to visit Vietminh-controlled area. The representative had to arrange all interviews and this was done with considerable difficulty. Baggage and passports were examined and stamped. Only pictures taken with the approval of the government official were permitted. Police officers, including many in civilian clothes, frequently stopped and inspected the visitors' papers.

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-1 30. The following are the flag and insignia of the Vietminh.

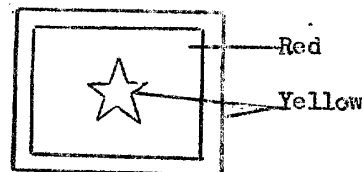
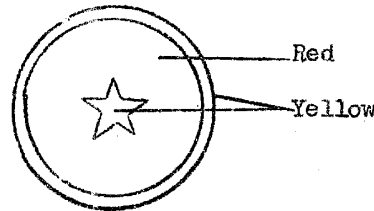
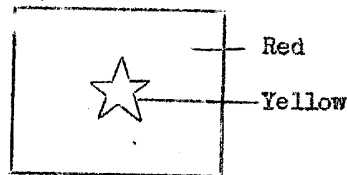
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a. National flag of the Vietnam Republic

Note: It has been previously reported that the red field of this flag is of Soviet inspiration and the leaders of the Nationalist Front claim that they will insist on a change from this flag).

b. Shoulder patch worn by members of the Vietnam National Army.

c. Shoulder patch worn by the "Tu Ve" (Self Defense Corps), sometimes described as "Volontaires de la Mort."



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