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COMMUNISM IN BURMA, INDOCHINA,  
THAILAND AND INDONESIA

A. BURMA

1. Background

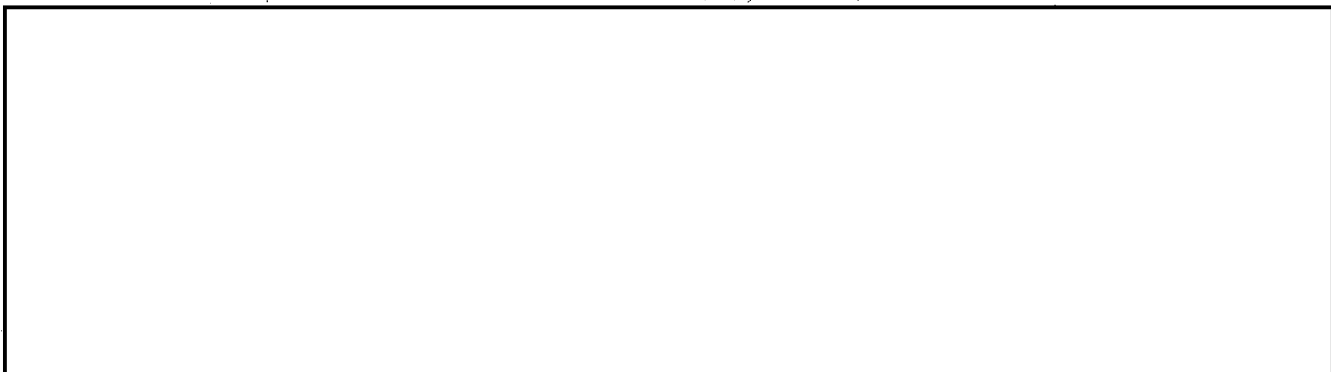
The Burma Communist Party (BCP), the chief instrument of International Communism in Burma, played an important role in the nationalist movement which won Burmese independence after World War II. It was frustrated, however, in its efforts to gain control of Burma by (a) the Socialists and other deviationist elements, and (b) a split within its own ranks which resulted in the formation of the Communist Party (Burma) -- a more nationalistic group.

The BCP took up arms against the Socialist Government of Burma in March 1948, less than two months after Burma became independent. The ostensible disagreement which caused the revolt was whether or not expropriated land and industry should be paid for by the government. However, it is believed the break derived from a more basic conflict. Although the Socialists, who controlled the new government, were zealous Marxists, they were at the same time extreme nationalists and refused to take sides in the "cold war." The BCP, although not strictly orthodox in much of its thinking, was sympathetic with the principles of International Communism and desired closer ties with it.

Never capable of overthrowing the government by its own efforts, BCP capabilities have steadily declined in the face of government pressure and the necessity of fighting various other insurgent groups. However, by establishing its principal area of activity in central Burma across the main lines of communication between northern and southern Burma, it has seriously disrupted the country's economy and practically eliminated the government's control over large areas north of the delta.

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2. Recent Developments



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Internally, BCP policy has changed from one of dogged adherence to a program of unilateral struggle to gain power over all opposition to one of advocating a united front of all insurgents, at least in tactical matters, with the chief objective being to overthrow their mutual enemy--the Burmese Government. BCP propaganda is now boasting of victory "within two years."

### 3. Conclusion

The pattern of Communist activity in Burma is becoming apparent. Until recent months, the Communist movement appeared to be drifting more or less aimlessly and was badly in need of coordination. Now, attempts are evidently being made to draw together the various extreme leftist splinter groups, indications point to a definite strategy for the ultimate overthrow of the Burmese Government, and it is clear that Communism in Burma will receive aid, and possibly leadership, from China.

## B. INDOCHINA

### 1. Background

Indochina is inhabited by several different racial groups including the Laotians and Cambodians but, with negligible exceptions, all Communists are Vietnamese. These Vietnamese Communists control the rebel government headed by Ho Chi Minh, the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV). In general usage, the DRV has been lumped together with the DRV Government, its army and

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its adherents under the term "Viet Minh." This somewhat inaccurate term derives from the fact that the High Command of the Viet Minh League, which was established during World War II by Ho Chi Minh as an anti-Japanese resistance movement, played the leading role in the establishment of the DRV in August 1945 and has continued ever since to direct the DRV. Official spokesmen of the DRV described the Viet Minh League, up to the time of its dissolution in February 1951, as one of several "patriotic organizations" which supported the DRV.

Although it savagely attacked the several pro-Kuomintang parties in Indochina, the DRV proclaimed a policy of "coalition government." The DRV was indeed a coalition government in the sense that the majority of delegates to the DRV National Assembly (elected in January 1946) were non-Viet Minh and non-Communist, and included prominent independents and Catholics. But the claim was misleading in that the Assembly had little power and was dominated by the close-knit Viet Minh League bloc of delegates. Communist representation in the Assembly was confined to a small "Marxist Group."

From its inception until December 1946, when open warfare between DRV forces and French occupation troops in Tonkin developed over control of Haiphong customs, the DRV followed a policy of peaceful negotiation with the French Government. As the conflict in Tonkin expanded throughout Vietnam, however, and was prolonged over a period of years, DRV spokesmen began to differentiate between the French "colonialist warmongers" and those leftist groups in France who opposed the war in Indochina and advocated a settlement with Ho Chi Minh.

In mid-1949 the DRV began to emerge as a full-fledged People's Democracy. During the latter half of 1949, the major emphasis of DRV propaganda continued to be on the theme of nationalism, but began to coincide with the Soviet line on specific themes, notably those of praising "democratic" China and making more or less veiled attacks on the US. During 1950 and 1951, the DRV abandoned its earlier policy of avoiding propaganda themes not pertinent to the struggle against the French and gradually adopted the Soviet line on a wide variety of subjects which had no relation to Vietnamese nationalism, e.g., the Lysenko theory and rebellion in Spain. The statement by the DRV radio on 6 March 1950 that the "Vietnam working class has constantly been led by the Indochinese Communist Party" appears to have been the first such reference since 1945. Concurrently with the ascendancy of the Communists in China during 1949 and the consequent increase in Communist prestige throughout the Far East, the emergence of old-line Indochinese Communists to positions of prominence was noticed.

## 2. Recent Developments

Until Communist control of China was established, DRV military opposition to the French was limited entirely to guerrilla tactics. In mid-1950,

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however, when material and advisory aid from Communist China apparently developed a new confidence in DRV military leaders, the French began to be subjected to frontal attacks in Tonkin. The DRV strategy of more orthodox warfare continued until early April when, after a series of costly, unsuccessful attacks, the DRV radio announced it would return to attrition fighting.

The most recent manifestation of Communist tactics was the creation of the Vietnam Workers' Party in mid-February 1951. This was followed in early March by the absorption of the Viet Minh into another, and purportedly even broader, front organization known as the Lien Viet. The Workers' Party-Lien Viet formula was apparently designed to bring the Communist apparatus of Vietnam into closer conformity with the pattern prescribed for the Eastern European countries. The decision to use the Lien Viet rather than the Viet Minh label for the broad popular organization may be related to the fact that the full name of the Viet Minh ("League for the Independence of Vietnam") smacked too much of "narrow nationalism" and to the fact that certain intellectuals who did not consider themselves Viet Minh members had been willing to lend their names to the Lien Viet. Another aspect of the DRV's departure from "narrow nationalism" has been its effort to establish closer control over rebel movements in Laos and Cambodia. The DRV has for some time past been engaged in infiltrating these organizations. On 11 March 1951 the DRV radio hailed the establishment of an "alliance" among the three rebel groups.

The current policy of the DRV, as announced in recent weeks by Workers' Party spokesmen, is (a) the expulsion of the French aggressors and American imperialists, (b) adherence to the world peace camp headed by the Soviet Union, and (c) a careful but steady advancement on the path to socialism. The long-run view taken by the Vietnamese Communists on the question of socialism is not unnatural in view of the largely pre-industrial nature of the Vietnamese economy and the fact that the wage-earning proletariat (most of which is in the French-held areas) makes up about 1 percent of the population. A significant by-product of the creation of the Workers' Party is the increased attention given to the formation of labor associations in "enemy-occupied areas."

The DRV has attempted up to the present time to preserve the fiction of "coalition government." A number of moderate intellectuals, mandarins and religious leaders are still credited with ministries and other high offices in the DRV regime. Propaganda appeals continue to be made to the 1,500,000 Vietnamese Catholics, but the difference between "reactionary" and "progressive" Catholics is now more sharply drawn than in the past and there are signs that the groundwork for "national Catholicism" is being laid.

### 3. Conclusion

In its present form, the Vietnamese Communist movement controls a People's Democracy--the Democratic Republic of Vietnam--which has declared its loyalty to the Soviet Union and to the ultimate goal of "socialism" for Vietnam. The DRV enjoys the moral support of the USSR. It enjoys both the

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moral and material support of the People's Republic of China, which has provided sanctuary for DRV armed forces, as well as training and arms for DRV troops. The DRV further aspires to control all of Indochina and to become a "bastion of democracy" in Southeast Asia. The adoption of the title "Workers' Party of Vietnam" rather than Indochinese Communist Party probably results from a desire to retain non-Communist support for the time being and to avoid giving offense to rebel movements in Laos and Cambodia.

### C. THAILAND

#### 1. Background

The Communist movement in Thailand is numerically small and composed almost entirely of Overseas Chinese. In these respects it is markedly different from the indigenous Communist movements in adjacent Indochina and Burma.

Legislation outlawing Communism in Thailand was repealed shortly after World War II in order to forestall a Soviet veto of Thailand's application for membership in the UN. The subsequent establishment of a Soviet Legation in Bangkok did not prevent a decrease of overt Communist activity in Thailand. The Communist victory in China, however, gave new impetus to the Communist movement in Thailand, since most of the large Chinese community at least passively and opportunistically supported the Mao government. On the other hand, Communist activities in Thailand have been severely circumscribed by the increasingly hostile attitude of the Thai Government towards Communism.

#### 2. Recent Developments

Growing external Communist pressure on Thailand has become clearly discernible in the past six months. Propaganda attacks from Moscow, Peiping and the Viet Minh have become increasingly menacing. One Viet Minh blast went so far as to forecast civil war in Thailand in the near future. These Communist blasts denounce the Thai Government as "fascist" and condemn its pro-Western, especially pro-US, foreign policy and its wholehearted support of the UN action in Korea. Prime Minister Phibun is accused of turning his country into a haven for Kuomintang "remnants" and developing it into a US military base aimed at Vietnam and "new" China. Another frequent topic of this Communist propaganda is Thai discrimination against the local Chinese and Vietnamese populations.

Another recent development of significance is the increasing tendency of the official Chinese Communist newspaper in Bangkok to be the self-appointed spokesman for the Chinese in Thailand. At the same time its editorial staff has been acting as though it were the "official" representative of the Peiping regime in Bangkok.

There is also some evidence of intensified covert Communist activities in Thailand. Chief among these are the procurement and/or smuggling of

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materials in short supply for Communist China and the recruitment of both Thai and Thailand-born Chinese for political and military training in China. Occasionally, imports of arms and ammunition to Chinese residents have been uncovered.

### 3. Conclusion

There are at least two possible reasons why Thailand has been spared the Communist violence which is so widespread in neighboring countries: (a) Chinese domination of Communism in Thailand is so well known that, until greater Thai participation can be secured, a Communist uprising might serve as an excuse for the Thais to direct swift and ruthless retribution against all Chinese in Thailand; (b) the Communists expect that, if they can gain control of neighboring Burma and Indochina, they can extend their control over Thailand without resorting to violence.

It is believed that the Communists in Thailand have sufficient arms and numbers (only 4-5,000 Communist insurgents in Malaya are occupying over 100,000 security forces) to create a serious security problem for the Thai armed forces at any time. They are not capable, however, of overthrowing the Thai Government.

The Thai Communist Party, organizationally, is a replica of the Chinese Communist Party and undeviatingly parrots the latter's propaganda line.

## D. INDONESIA

### 1. Background

During World War II, Communists in Indonesia as elsewhere in the world joined the underground against the Japanese. Following the war--in November 1945--Tan Malaka, a Communist exile, returned to Indonesia and organized a People's Front, which in 1946 attempted unsuccessfully to overthrow the Indonesian Republic (then engaged in a struggle with the Netherlands to maintain its independence). In 1947 Aliman, a Moscow-trained Communist, returned to Indonesia, discounted Tan Malaka's activity as Trotskyism and, apparently for tactical reasons, supported the Republican Government as an expression of the people's will. In 1948 a third exile returned--Moscow-trained Muso--and began reorganizing Aliman's activity, which had probably not been considered strictly orthodox by the USSR. Muso pushed a five-point program that demanded, among other things, the severance of negotiations with the Netherlands, a "national front" government with Communists holding prominent posts, and military action against the Dutch. As a result of Muso's activity, a Communist regime was established at Madiun in central Java, which on 19 September 1948 declared war upon the Indonesian Republic. Within eleven days Republican troops had captured Madiun; Muso fled but was overtaken and shot.

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Meanwhile, Tan Malaka and his followers were released from prison to offset the revolt launched by Muso's Indonesian Communist Party (PKI). Tan Malaka immediately organized the Partai Murba (Proletarian Party), which has continued to function as a "national Communist" party and has refused all overtures of merger with the PKI. Although Partai Murba has never formally broken with Moscow, the USSR recognizes only the PKI (which was never outlawed) as its vehicle. Tan Malaka himself was captured by the Army and reportedly was executed for terrorist activities in April 1949.

Since the Madiun revolt, Aliman has reassumed leadership of the PKI and has organized it into a small, well-trained group operating chiefly through front organizations. It is opposed to the government of President Sukarno, which achieved sovereignty in December 1949 as an equal partner with the Netherlands within the Netherlands-Indonesian Union. In this matter, it follows Moscow's lead and consistently proclaims that the Indonesian people have not given up the fight for independence.

Since the Madiun revolt in September 1948, PKI policy has closely followed International Communist directives. Politically and militarily, the party was severely weakened by the Madiun affair and therefore now exercises its strength chiefly through the Stalinist-dominated SOBSI (Central Organization of All Workers of Indonesia), the largest labor federation in Indonesia.

## 2. Recent Developments

Politically, the PKI controls 40 seats out of 229 in Indonesia's Parliament. With insufficient strength to direct policy itself, the PKI has increasingly supported the Indonesian National Party (PNI)--the second largest party in Indonesia, which in 1950 and 1951 has become increasingly socialistic and has demanded nullification of the Netherlands-Indonesian Union and revision of agreements reached between the two countries in 1949. However, the new coalition cabinet that was formed on 26 April 1951 did not include any PKI representatives, even though its selection was strongly influenced by the PNI.

Unlike certain other Communist parties in Southeast Asia, the PKI has no armed forces fighting for "national liberation." However, numerous Communist-led armed bands, chiefly in Java, terrorize large areas and seriously obstruct economic rehabilitation. Moreover, it is estimated that five percent of the Indonesian Army is Communist. This percentage, however, does not include any higher echelon personnel.

Probably the most important Communist development in 1950 was the mutual recognition and diplomatic exchange between Communist China and the Republic of Indonesia. Indonesia maintains a Charge d'Affaires in Peiping, but China has an Ambassador (arrived October 1950 in Djakarta) and four Consulates (opened 1 April 1951), one in each of the four largest islands of Indonesia--Java, Sumatra, Borneo and Celebes. The Chinese Ambassador

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is very active in local Communist activities, particularly those of the large Chinese community. The USSR also recognized Indonesia in January 1950, but to date there has been no diplomatic exchange.

3. Conclusion

As in Burma, Communism in Indonesia has been suffering since World War II from a lack of continuous central direction and coordination. It has been weakened by doctrinal divergencies and by the racial antipathies between the Indonesians and the Overseas Chinese. Its reputation was adversely affected by the Madiun revolt, which also raised deep-seated suspicions of Communist motives in the minds of patriotic Indonesians. At the present time, however, the Communists are maintaining a "correct" attitude, are working legitimately through labor unions to recoup their strength and are apparently making some headway in coordinating splinter leftist groups.

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