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The Comintern in Southeast Asia, 1919-1939

Introduction

During the period of existence of the Comintern, all of Southeast Asia except Thailand was subject to European colonial rule. The British ruled Burma and Malaya. Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos made up 'French Indochina'. The United States ruled the Philippines. Portugal also ruled East Timor, and the Dutch ruled Indonesia, which is examined elsewhere in this book. Comintern activities in Southeast Asia were often initiated by European or US communists who viewed as natural allies the colonial subjects or victims of their enemy, the metropolitan government.

Another important common factor was the existence throughout Southeast Asia of minority communities of ethnic Chinese traders and workers; for instance, in the 1930's, Chinese made up half of Saigon's population and a fifth of Phnom Penh's.[1] Under British rule, Burma and Malaya also saw substantial migration of labourers and moneylenders from India. As we shall see, Chinese and Indian communists played an important part in the rise of communism in Southeast Asia.

Some Southeast Asian anti-colonial and nationalist groups were banned by the European and US rulers, others were legalised or tolerated at least for a time. But the Comintern and its constituent communist parties established in Southeast Asia were almost invariably outlawed and repressed in this period, even in uncolonised Thailand. Only rarely, such as in Indochina during the period of the French Popular Front government (1936-39), was communist activity tolerated.

The influence and organisation of the Comintern was determined in part by the colonial context: economic exploitation and development, cultural adaptation, and rising nationalism. Landless northern Vietnamese peasants, to take one example, were press-ganged to work as labourers in the new French rubber plantations in southern Vietnam and Cambodia. In 1927 a French official reported from Cambodia: 'Already 450 coolies have fled. Most of them have been recaptured and sent back to Memut, and have undergone punishment that should frighten the rest.' Within three years, Vietnamese rubber plantation workers in Cambodia had formed a communist cell, and in 1935 the communist organisation in Cambodia sent a representative to the Portuguese colony of Macao for the first Congress of the Indochina Communist Party.[2]

A major characteristic of Southeast Asia in this period was the numerical predominance of the peasantry and the overwhelming economic role of the rural sector, as in traditional times. However, colonial rule and population growth stimulated many peasants to move out of subsistence farming and into the farming of cash crops for commercial export markets fostered by the colonial empires.

For instance, in 1855 a million acres of riceland had been cultivated in Lower Burma; its population of about 1 million produced 162,000 tons of paddy for export. But by 1905, 6 million acres of riceland supported a population of 4 million people, producing 2 million tons for export.[3]

About 25% of the land was leased to cash tenant farmers, a figure which rose to 42% by 1928. By then, 10 million acres were cultivated with rice in Lower Burma, which now had a population of 8 million. Migrants from India (to which Burma was joined by Britain until 1935) made up 7% of the population. Some of them were prominent in moneylending, and when the Depression struck, 2 million acres of farmland in lower Burma were foreclosed upon, provoking anti-Indian riots, although many of the farmers who lost land were also Indian.

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[1] Ngo Vinh Long, *Before the Revolution: The Vietnamese Peasants Under the French* (Cambridge, MIT Press, 1973), p. 31; Ben Kiernan, *How Pol Pot Came to Power: A History of Communism in Kampuchea, 1930-1975* (London, Verso, 1985), p. 38, n. 142.

[2] Kiernan, *How Pol Pot Came to Power*, p. 8; W.J. Duiker, *The Rise of Nationalism in Vietnam, 1900-1941* (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1976), pp. 216, 238.

[3] Michael Adas, *The Burma Delta: Economic Development and Social Change on an Asian Rice Frontier* (1974), p. 58. Slightly higher figures for the 1855 acreage and population are given in David J. Steinberg (ed.), *In Search of Southeast Asia: A Modern History* (Honolulu, University of Hawaii Press, 1987), p. 231.

By 1935, landlords owned 58% of the riceland in Lower Burma.[4]

Roughly similar developments occurred in the Mekong Delta of southern Vietnam. French officials and entrepreneurs drained large areas and opened up new land. Rice acreage quadrupled to 5.5 million and the population tripled to 4.5 million by the 1930's.[5] Vietnamese rice exports grew from 57,000 tons in 1860 to 1.55 million in 1937. Even more than in Burma, a small number of absentee landlords, both French and Vietnamese, monopolised the new lands. In Cochinchina (the Mekong Delta and the area around Saigon) in 1938, the wealthiest 2.5% of the landholders each owned over 50 hectares, totalling 45% of all riceland there. The poorest 72% of peasants, on the other hand, with less than 5 ha. each, accounted for only 15% of Cochinchina's riceland.[6] Many were in fact landless tenants, sharecroppers or rural labourers, groups which made up 80% of the Delta population by the 1940's.[7]

In heavily populated northern Vietnam, the agrarian structure was more complex, but still polarised. In 1940 there were 1.5 million landless.[8] 62% of the farming families owned less than one acre, while 20% owned less than one-half an acre. The poorest 90% of the landowners owned only 37% of the farmland, while the richest 10% controlled 43% of it.[9] However, the latter tended to be villagers rather than absentee landlords.

In Cambodia, another virtual monoculture, the ricegrowing area increased from 500,000 ha. in 1910 to 1.1 million ha. in 1940, and rice production nearly doubled to 1 million tons.[10] In 1930, 80% of Cambodia's landowners owned less than 5 ha., accounting for 44% of the cultivated land. Few peasants were landless, but the richest 20%, usually not absentee landlords, owned more than half the land. The ratios remained the same until 1950. Although population growth meant that four-fifths of the population *now* subsisted on farms of less than 2 ha., Cambodia was much less densely populated or commercialised than Vietnam, and landlordism only became a significant problem in the late 1960's.[11]

In Thailand's populated central plain in 1930-31, 36% of the farmers were landless tenants;[12] by 1953 the figure was 49%,[13]
suggesting an increasing commercialisation despite the absence of colonial rule. Through trade with the West, Thailand, too, had become a major rice exporter. From 1909 to 1939 the area of riceland rose from 1.5 to 3.4

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[4] Steinberg (ed.), *In Search of Southeast Asia*, pp. 231-4. The figures cited for rates of tenancy refer to the thirteen main rice-producing districts of the Burma Delta.

[5] *Ibid.*, p. 235.

[6] Nancy Weigersma, *Vietnam: Peasant Land, Peasant Revolution: Patriarchy and Collectivity in the Rural Economy* (London, Macmillan, 1988), pp. 85, 77.

[7] Robert L. Sansom, *The Economics of Insurgency* (Cambridge, MIT Press, 1970), pp. 54-5.

[8] Alexander B. Woodside, *Community and Revolution in Modern Vietnam* (Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1976), p. 155.

[9] These figures are taken from works by the French geographer Pierre Gourou, as cited in D. Gareth Porter, *The Myth of the Bloodbath: North Vietnam's Land Reform Reconsidered* (Ithaca, New York, Cornell University, International Relations of East Project, Interim Report No. 2, 1972), pp. 9-10.

[10] Rémy Prud'homme, *L'Economie du Cambodge* (Paris, PUF, 1969), p. 254, tableau 11.

[11] See Ben Kiernan, "Socio-Economic Structure, 1930-1970", in Kiernan and Chanthou Boua (eds), *Peasants and Politics in Kampuchea, 1942-1981* (London, Zed Books, 1982), pp. 4ff.

[12] The figures for the south, north and northeast of Thailand were lower: 15%, 27% and 18% respectively. See David Elliott, "The Socio-Economic Formation of Modern Thailand", in Andrew Turton, Jonathan Fast, and Malcolm Caldwell (eds), *Thailand: Roots of Conflict* (Nottingham, Spokesman, 1978), p. 30, citing Carle C. Zimmerman, *Siam: Rural Economic Survey, 1930-31* (Bangkok, 1931).

[13] And by 1964, 56%. These figures are taken from Brewster Grace, "Recent Developments in Thai Rice Production", *American Universities Field Staff Reports*, Southeast Asia Series, vol. 23, no. 3, 1975, p. 8.

million ha., and rice exports rose from 890,000 to over 1.5 million tons, or 50% of total rice production.[14]

Unlike the other mainland Southeast Asian countries, the economy of Malaya was dominated not by rice production but by rubber and tin. By 1929, 3 million acres in Malaya were planted in rubber, and only 1 million in rice. Peasant smallholders in Malaya and Indonesia, already competing with the European-run rubber plantations there, exported nearly 40% of all world rubber in 1929.[15] The Philippines, too, was a major exporter not of rice but of processed agricultural commodities such as sugar, coconut products, and cigars.

The 1930's Depression delivered a severe shock to all the agricultural countries of Southeast Asia which had become dependent on income from primary exports. It is instructive that Malaya, Thailand, the Philippines, Vietnam, Cambodia and Burma all saw the establishment of communist parties or their branches in the year 1930. Not all took root at that time, however, and the nationalist issue of independence from colonial rule was also needed to fan the flames of communism in Southeast Asia. This required a good deal of 'cooperation' from the colonialists, and finesse from the Comintern.

1. Vietnam

In February 1922, two Southeast Asian representatives attended the First Congress of the Toilers of the Far East in Petrograd. One was a Vietnamese.[16]

In 1911, at the age of twenty-one, Ho Chi Minh took off to see the world. He briefly enrolled in a navigation course in Saigon, and then set sail, from the city that would one day carry his name. For two years Ho worked on a ship as a kitchen hand, travelling back and forth between France, Boston and New York. During most of World War I, he washed dishes in a London hotel. The 1916 Easter Rising against British rule in Ireland caught his attention, as an example of an anti-colonial movement for independence. In late 1917 he moved to Paris; within weeks news arrived of the world's first communist revolution, in Russia.

The First World War had seen 100,000 Vietnamese sent to fight for France, a needless sacrifice in Ho's view. He wrote bitterly in *The Trial of French Colonialism* (1923):
"They perished in the poetic desert of the Balkans, wondering whether the mother country (France) intended to install herself as a favourite in the Turk's harem; why else should they have been sent here to be hacked up?"

Ho was immediately attracted to the Russian Revolution. He became friendly with Jean Longuet, a grandson of Karl Marx, and joined the French Socialist Party, noting its "sympathy for the struggle of the oppressed peoples". At the Versailles Peace Conference in January 1919, Ho tried to present a request for equal rights and freedoms for French and Vietnamese. This immediately made him well-known in France. When the Socialist Party split and the French Communist Party was formed, in 1920, Ho became a founding member as a "Representative of Indochina". For six years he kept pricking the conscience of the French left by reminding them of the hardships France had imposed on the Vietnamese. But he also wrote about French colonialism in Algeria, and Madagascar. In 1924 elections, his newspaper *Le Paria* supported the Communist Party because it was "the only party to put up a coloured candidate in Paris".[17]

Another Vietnamese, with whom Ho had studied navigation in Saigon in 1911, was also greatly influenced by the Russian Revolution. After taking part in a brief workers' strike in 1912, Ton Duc Thang also left Saigon working as a mechanic for the French navy. He later worked in the Renault factory in France.[18]

In 1918, he found himself on a voyage to Russia, his ship taking supplies to the anti-communist foreign intervention forces. On the high seas the French sailors decided to refuse to carry out their mission. They mutinied, and Ton Duc Thang joined in. Two years later, back in Vietnam, Thang secretly organised the first trade union there. (When Ho Chi Minh died in 1969, Thang succeeded him as President of the Democratic Repu-

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[14] Takeshi Motooka, "Rice Exports and the Expansion of Cultivation", in Yoneo Ishii (ed.), *Thailand: A Rice-Growing Society* (Honolulu, University of Hawaii Press, 1978), pp. 283-5.

[15] Steinberg (ed.), *In Search of Southeast Asia*, p. 228-9.

[16] Anthony Short, *The Communist Insurrection in Malaya, 1948-1960* (London, Muller, 1975), p. 19.

[17] Jean Lacouture, *Ho Chi Minh* (London, Pelican, 1969), p.

[18] Woodside, *Community and Revolution in Modern Vietnam*, p. 204.

blic of Vietnam. Ton Duc Thang died in 1980.)

In 1923, the year the Comintern established its Far Eastern Bureau in Shanghai, the French Communist Party sent Ho Chi Minh to Moscow as its delegate to the Peasant International, and he was elected to its executive committee.[19] He spent the year 1924 in the Soviet Union, studying Marxism-Leninism at the University of the Toilers of the East in Tashkent, and met communists from all over the world, including India and China. At the Fifth Congress of the Communist International in June-July 1924, Ho warned: "We shall put forward facts that surpass the imagination and tempt one to believe that our party is deliberately snapping its fingers at everything connected to the colonies... The revolt of the colonial peasants is imminent."[20] He was later appointed "plenipotentiary of the Far Eastern Secretariat of the Comintern Executive",[21] and at the end of 1924 he moved to China.

For two years Ho worked in Canton as an interpreter to Mikhail Borodin, the Soviet adviser to the Chinese government in Canton.[22] He made China his base for the next twenty years, organising a Vietnamese communist movement, training its officers and sending other recruits for study in the USSR, travelling to places such as Siam and Malaya to coordinate its activities with those of other Asian communists and anti-colonialists, and coordinating all of their activities with the policies of the Soviet Union.

The "first truly Marxist organization in Indochina" was the *Thanh Nien*, or Vietnamese Revolutionary Youth League, which Ho founded with Vietnamese students in Canton in 1925.[23] As the late Huynh Kim Khanh described it, "Thanh Nien was a new type of anti-colonial organisation... It postulated a new Vietnamese society on the basis of a double revolution, both political ('national independence') and social ('land to the tiller'). From 1925, the cadres, policies and metamorphoses of Thanh Nien determined the course of the Vietnamese revolution."[24] From 1927 to 1931, Ho also served as the Comintern official with responsibility for the "South Seas" region.[25] A politics of proletarian internationalism, as Khanh put it, was "grafted" onto a culture of Vietnamese nationalism.[26]

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[19] Neil Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie: John Paul Vann and America in Vietnam* (New York, Random House, 1988), p. 157. Yevgeny Kobelev writes that Ho arrived in Petrograd on 30 June, 1923. *Ho Chi Minh* (Moscow, Progress Publishers, 1989), p. 59.

[20] Ho Chi Minh quoted in Lacouture, *Ho Chi Minh*, pp. 42-3. Lacouture cites the Comintern congress transcript published by the State Publishing House, (Moscow, 1925), pp. 653-7.

[21] Kobelev, *Ho Chi Minh*, p. 75.

[22] Lacouture, *Ho Chi Minh*, p. 44.

[23] Duiker, *The Rise of Nationalism in Vietnam*, p. 201.

[24] Huynh Kim Khanh, *Vietnamese Communism, 1925-1945* (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1982), p. 64.

[25] R.B. Smith, *An International History of the Vietnam War*, vol. 1, *Revolution Versus Containment, 1955-1961* (London, Macmillan, 1983), p. 80.

[26] Khanh, *Vietnamese Communism*, ch. 1. See also Pierre Rousset, *Communisme et nationalisme vietnamien* (Paris, Galilée, 1978). On p. 24 of his book, Khanh lists two Vietnamese works which he found "most helpful to understanding the early history of Vietnamese communism": Tran Huy Lieu, *Lich su tam muoi nam chong Phap*, [History of the eighty-year anti-French resistance], 3 vols. (Hanoi, 1957-61); and Tran Van Giau, *Giai cap cong nhan Viet-Nam: Tu dan cong san thanh lap den cach manh thanh cong* [The Vietnamese working class: From the formation of the Communist Party until the success of the revolution], 3 vols. (Hanoi, 1962-63). No study of pre-revolutionary Vietnam is complete without the works of David G. Marr, *Vietnamese Anti-Colonialism, 1885-1925* and *Vietnamese Tradition on Trial, 1920-1945* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1971 and 1981), and Ngo Vinh Long, *Before the Revolution*.

From 1919 to 1929, "the number of workers in Vietnam more than doubled", to about 220,000.[27] They were mainly employed at ports, on railroads, in rubber plantations and coal mines, or as paid agricultural labour in Cochinchina. Workers, and particularly those peasants who became seasonal workers, were to play a part in Vietnam's communist revolution. Saigon was a city of 250,000 by the 1930's, and throughout the country perhaps 150,000 Vietnamese were engaged in non-agricultural production. But urban dwellers accounted for little over 5% of the population of Vietnam, while rubber and coal accounted for less than 10% of export value.[28] The economy remained predominantly a rice-growing one, and under French rule it had become dependent on export markets. When the World Depression hit in 1929-30, Vietnam was affected as no other world crisis had affected it before. Rice prices in particular fell dramatically, and in the wake of crop failures, peasants quickly felt threatened. In northern Vietnam alone, a conservative newspaper reported in May 1930, "There are now one million persons who do not have enough clothes to wear or food to eat."[29] However the colonial government still attempted to collect taxes, even in advance in some cases. This provoked major peasant protest in the south, centre and north of the country.

From April 1930 to November 1931, there were over 500 peasant demonstrations. Land and rice stores were seized all over Vietnam. There were also over 100 workers' strikes, in many cases in support of the peasants.[30] Violence was used against landlords, Catholics and Frenchmen. The colonial government responded with brutal and overwhelming force. In one incident troops and aircraft killed nearly 200 peasants. Hundreds more were killed before the French regained control, taking 10,000 Vietnamese prisoners.

In the meantime Ho Chi Minh had succeeded in merging several different communist factions into the "Vietnamese Communist Party" in February 1930. Ho had sponsored the choice of name, saying that 'Indo-China' implied too broad a scope for Vietnamese communist activity. But the Comintern then interceded, instructing a name change to the "Indochina Communist Party" at the Central Committee's first plenum in October. Ho Chi Minh was not present then, but he did table his response, which was to support a proposal from the Party Committee in Central Vietnam that the name not be changed until similar committees had been formed in Laos and Cambodia. The plenum rejected this, however, and stressed that despite ethnic and social differences the three countries of Indochina were of necessity "closely related to one another politically and economically".[31] On 11 April 1931 the Executive Committee of the Communist International, at its Eleventh Plenum, recognised the Indochina Communist Party (ICP) as an independent section of the Comintern.[32] It had three regional committees for northern, central, and southern Vietnam.

By early 1931, according to a French police commissioner, six out of ten peasants in the central Vietnamese provinces of Nghe An and Ha Tinh had joined the ICP or its other organisations (such as Peasants' Associations).[33] In fact the movement there became known as the Nghe-Tinh "Soviets", inspired by the Russian Revolution. Huynh Kim Khanh has argued that it was Ho Chi Minh who had attempted to spark a revolution, without involving the ICP leadership.[34] Though communists never fully controlled the movement, their involvement at the side of the anti-French protestors over the full length of the country established the ICP as the leading party of Vietnamese anti-colonialism. Though almost the entire ICP Central Committee were arrested, the party recovered much better from French repression than other anti-colonial organisations did.

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[27] Duiker, *The Rise of Nationalism in Vietnam*, p. 191.

[28] Ngo Vinh Long, *Before the Revolution*, pp. 31, 102-3.

[29] Quoted in Ngo Vinh Long, "The Indochinese Communist Party and Peasant Rebellion in Central Vietnam, 1930-31", *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*, 10, 4, 1978, pp. 15-35, at p.17.

[30] *Ibid*, pp. 15-17.

[31] See Kiernan, *How Pol Pot Came to Power*, p. 10.

[32] Huynh Kim Khanh, *Vietnamese Communism*, p. 171.

[33] Ngo Vinh Long, "The Indochinese Communist Party and Peasant Rebellion in Central Vietnam", p. 27.

[34] *Ibid.*, pp. 163-171. Khanh concluded: "It is to be hoped that one day such questions will be resolved by scholars with access to the Comintern's and ICP's archives."

Until then the ICP had had two major competitors. The Vietnam Nationalist Party (or *Quoc Dan Dang*, Vietnamese for *Guomindang*, name of the ruling party in China), a non-communist group, attempted to win over Vietnamese troops in the French colonial army. The plans for a mutiny were discovered, however, and the revolt went off half-cocked in February 1930. Almost all the leaders were arrested by the French, and most executed. The Nationalist Party almost ceased to exist during the 1930's. It did not succeed in recruiting many rural members, and had few in the south and centre of Vietnam. One of the three founding leaders of the Nationalist Party, Pham Tuan Tai, encouraged his followers to join the ICP. The leading moderate nationalist, Nguyen An Ninh, also gravitated towards the communists.[35]

In the south was the Constitutionalist Party of Cochinchina, a moderate, relatively pro-French party based on the landed classes who had prospered under French rule there. But because Cochinchina was legally a colony, not a Protectorate like the north and centre, the inhabitants could demand greater rights from France. By the 1930's leading Vietnamese had near equality in the professions and bureaucracy, the right to offer advice to the French, and to form parties and stand for election for the Saigon City Council. However this was of little benefit to the peasantry (or to Vietnamese of the north and centre), and in 1930-31 Cochinchina saw the most widespread peasant "Soviets" of all. These were led by the ICP from start to finish, before they were crushed.[36]

Little is known about Ho Chi Minh's activities over the next ten years, and some writers have concluded that he was "in disgrace".[37] In 1933, Tran Van Giau, one of a number of Vietnamese graduates of the University of the Toilers of the East who had returned home to take part in the underground movement, rebuilt the ICP structure in Cochinchina. The influence of the Constitutionalist Party declined greatly in the 1930's, and that of the communists increased. In the 1933 elections for the Saigon Municipal Council, in which 12 seats were reserved for French citizens, a coalition of Trotskyists and ICP communists won two of the six seats set aside for Vietnamese. In 1935 this leftist coalition, cooperating in what was then a unique defiance of the Comintern, won four of the six Vietnamese seats, and again three in 1937.[38]

When the Popular Front government came to power in Paris in 1936, and legalised opposition colonial movements, Vietnamese Communists were well placed to expand their legal operations outside Saigon. In 1939 it was the Trotskyists, however, having broken with the ICP in mid-1937, who won the limited elections held in Saigon for a Colonial Council.[39]

In the meantime, in contrast to the Nationalist, Constitutionalist and Trotskyist parties, the ICP had set out to study carefully the problems of the Vietnamese peasantry. Two of its leaders published *Van De Dan Cay* (The Peasant Question), an analysis of life in the countryside. The two authors, Vo Nguyen Giap and Truong Chinh, would both become leaders of the modern Vietnamese communist government. In 1938 they proclaimed as follows:

"Peasants comprise a majority of the people, and suffer many layers of oppression and exploitation. Therefore the peasants have a hidden force, worthy of attention and worthy of respect. We must be aware of all the strengths and weaknesses of the peasants, but we absolutely must not underestimate them."[40]

Even though the French grip on the country seemed unshakeable to many Vietnamese, communist revolution was now on the agenda.

1939 saw the end of the Popular Front in France. In Indochina, Communists (and Trotskyists) were

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[35] *Ibid.*, p. 217, and Duiker, *The Rise of Nationalism in Vietnam*, p. 178, who notes that "the centrist, national reformist" Nguyen An Ninh "in his political views had moved closer to the rising Indochinese Communist Party" in the 1930's. See also Rousset, *Communisme et nationalisme vietnamien*, p. 157.

[36] Ngo Vinh Long, "The Indochinese Communist Party and Peasant Rebellion", p. 17.

[37] Khanh, *Vietnamese Communism*, pp. 186-7, 257.

[38] *Ibid.*, pp. 199, 203-4, and Rousset, *Communisme et nationalisme vietnamien*, pp. 156-7. The best study of the Trotskyist-Communist collaboration in Vietnam is Daniel Hémery, *Révolutionnaires vietnamiens et pouvoir colonial en Indochine* (Paris, Maspéro, 1975).

[39] Rousset, *Communisme et nationalisme vietnamien*, p. 160.

[40] Truong Chinh and Vo Nguyen Giap, *The Peasant Question (1937-38)*, translated by Christine White (Ithaca, Cornell University Southeast Asia Data Paper No. 94, 1974), p. 25.

outlawed in September, and 2,000 of them were arrested. In November, the sixth plenum of the ICP Central Committee resolved that Japanese fascism and French imperialism were equally inimical to the peoples of Indochina. In 1940, the Japanese army moved troops into French Indochina, whose rulers, coming to terms with Hitler's successful invasion of France, reluctantly opened the door. In the same year, Ho Chi Minh crossed the Chinese border and returned to Vietnam for the first time since 1911. He had spent four more years in the Soviet Union (where he had participated in the mid-1935 Seventh Comintern Congress, which approved the decision of the Executive Committee to admit the ICP to the Comintern), and the rest of the 1930's in places like Thailand, a British gaol in Hong Kong, and Mao Zedong's Chinese Communist base at Yenan. His return home was partly motivated by his view that a new opportunity was opening up for Vietnam to seize its independence. In 1941, as undisputed leader of the ICP, he and other communists set up a new organisation, the League for the Independence of Vietnam, known as the *Viet Minh*. Like the ICP, the *Viet Minh* was pledged to fight both the French and Japanese. But before it could achieve its goals, it would have to face British, Chinese and American armies as well.

2. Cambodia

The first Comintern report on Cambodia was drawn up by the former leader of the Communist Party of Indonesia, Semaun, who may have visited Cambodia as early as 1927 or 1928. Semaun's report (its date is uncertain) noted that communist organisation in Cambodia "remained weak in the development of revolutionary work": "Most of the enterprises ... are still in the hands of Chinese who, during strikes and disorders among the local Malay [*sic*] population, benefit from the protection of the French authorities and are able to replace their Malay workers with Chinese coolies." A French Sûreté official noted in 1929: "In fact the Cambodians, in spite of the proximity of the Vietnamese and Chinese, have not yet learnt to organize meetings to hatch conspiracies. They know how to gather together only on pagoda feast-days and for funeral ceremonies, which are not very suitable for intrigues."[41] The only French official killed on active duty in Cambodia before World War Two was assassinated when he attempted to collect taxes from Cambodian villagers during the Khmer New Year festival.[42]

As elsewhere, economic crisis struck Cambodia in the early 1930's, after a decade of expansion of the agricultural economy. Phnom Penh had fewer than 100,000 residents in a population of 3 million, and there was almost no industrial sector in Cambodia. Rice could not be sold at home or abroad, and its price fell dramatically.

The first communists active in Cambodia were Vietnamese, some of whom were members of Ho Chi Minh's *Thanh Nien*. They were rounded up by the French in a series of arrests in late 1929. By October 1930, the newly-formed Vietnamese Communist Party (VCP) had established a cell among the rubber plantation workers of eastern Cambodia. But in April 1930, with the help of the VCP, Cambodia's first Chinese Communist Party cell was established in a barber shop in Kampot province, the region of greatest concentration of the Chinese minority. The ringleader appears to have been a Phnom Penh portrait painter and teacher of Chinese characters named Nien. French sources appeared unsure whether Nien was Vietnamese or Chinese, but he appears to have escaped from China to Saigon after the *Guomindang's* repression of the Canton Commune in 1927. He worked in Phnom Penh with a Vietnamese communist activist and with a Vietnamese-born Chinese, supplying the Kampot cell with leaflets in both Vietnamese and Chinese (but not in Cambodian) which they distributed there on May Day and again on the night of 31 July 1930. Thirty-six people were quickly arrested and twelve gaoled. The *Sûreté* regarded their activity as "proof of the Sino-Vietnamese alliance" designed to engineer "co-penetration" of Cambodia by the two communist parties, but was unable to identify the agent responsible for liaison between them.

Whoever it was, had a wider net. On the same night, some of the same leaflets were distributed by the first Cambodians known to have become involved in communist activities. These were Ben Krahom ("Red Ben"), a 24 year-old coolie at the Phnom Penh electricity works, and Sau Mel and Prak Sim, two teenage Cambodians

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[41] Kiernan, *How Pol Pot Came to Power*, pp. 15, 13. See this reference for documentation of much of what follows.

[42] David P. Chandler, "The Assassination of Resident Bardez (1925): Premonition of Revolt in Colonial Cambodia", *Journal of the Siam Society*, 70, 1 & 2, July 1982, pp.35-49.

from the Saravann Monastery, as well as Krahom's Vietnamese wife and two Vietnamese *lycée* students. From trees in the streets of Phnom Penh, they hung three red banners "with Soviet emblems" and slogans in Vietnamese calling on the population to establish "a workers' government". The leaflets in Vietnamese urged on the proletariat against both imperialism and the Guomindang in China, and protested taxes on the local Chinese. All six were arrested, and five gaoled; their fate is unknown.

On the eve of 7 November 1930, the thirteenth anniversary of the Russian Revolution, Phnom Penh was lashed by a violent storm and suffered an electricity blackout. Soon after, Vietnamese leaflets were found at the port, in the post office letter-box, and in the town center. They appealed for a revolt and gave a brief history of the Russian Revolution. But by the end of May 1931, the French security forces claimed they had made a "clean sweep of all the revolutionary organizations" in Cambodia. The first ethnic Khmer to join a communist party was Thach Choeun, a native of Vietnam's Mekong Delta. He joined the ICP in 1932 while working as a fisherman in Cambodia, where the party assigned him an unknown political mission. The ICP program, elaborated in 1932, included not only the defeat of French colonialism, but also "the overthrow of the indigenous dynasties" in Cambodia, Vietnam and Laos, along "with all the mandarins and notables [and] confiscation of all their possessions". But anti-colonial or even reformist activity of any kind in Cambodia remained minimal, despite the ICP's call for a "fraternal alliance of all the peoples of Indo-China" and its promise of "the right of the Cambodians, Laotians, and all other peoples of Indo-China freely to manage their own affairs". The Sûreté reported: "We have not yet come across a single case of contamination of Cambodians." Only later did Choeun's activities come to light, but his name disappears from our story after he fled to Cochinchina in 1935. Another Sûreté report noted in 1934, "On January 14, the anniversary of the deaths of Liebknecht, Rosa Luxemburg and Lenin, there were no demonstrations or leaflets distributed in Cambodia." Nor would there be any other Marxist-Leninist activity for at least fifteen years. Cambodian communism would only be conceived by the combination of an indigenous declaration of independence from France and a French attempt to frustrate it and reassert colonial control.

Later in 1934, the ICP leaders outlined their policy in an important "letter to comrades in Cambodia". It stressed: "There is no question of a separate Cambodian revolution. There is only a single Indo-Chinese revolution. Indo-China being under the domination of a single imperialist government, all the revolutionary forces must be unified and grouped under the direction of a single party, the ICP. Cambodia does not have the right to a separate Cambodian communist party. The communists there must unite and create a regional committee which will be placed under the leadership of the ICP Central Committee. To create a Cambodian communist party would harm the revolution by dividing the forces of the proletariat, and by breaking the leadership of unity of the ICP, it would be to fall into the trap of the policy of racial division, set by imperialism."

In March 1935, the ICP's First Congress re-stated the Party's 1932 programme: "After the eviction of the French imperialists, these minorities [including Cambodians and Lao] will have the right to manage their own affairs up to and including the right to secede and form an independent state and to adopt the political regime of their choice. The worker peasant and soldier Soviet government of Indo-China undertakes not to interfere in their internal affairs." The eventual aim was a "Union of Soviet Republics of Indo-China"; each people would be free to join on "a basis of liberty and equality" and, while cooperating in foreign affairs and defence matters, would "enjoy complete autonomy within their territorial limits". The Union would form part of a "World Union of Soviets". This followed the lines of a Chinese Communist Party open letter to ICP members, which looked forward to the day when "Soviet Indochina and Soviet China will unite in the World Federation of Soviet Republics".[43]

On the Vietnamese side, all this militant internationalism was provoked by the French frustration of Vietnamese nationalism. But in practice the ICP remained as Ho Chi Minh had envisaged it, centered on Vietnam and largely unconcerned with either liberating or controlling Cambodia. Cambodia was a target if under colonial rule. As an ICP newspaper had put it in 1931: "If the Vietnamese revolution succeeds but French imperialism is lurking in Laos and Cambodia, the revolutionary power in Vietnam will be shaky."[44] Once the Viet Minh seized power in 1945, it established the "Democratic Republic of Vietnam", not of Indochina. Hanoi recognized the nationalist declarations of independence in Cambodia and Laos. But it was not until 1951 that

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[43] Khanh, *Vietnamese Communism*, p. 174.

[44] D.Gareth Porter, "Vietnamese Communist Policy Towards Kampuchea, 1930-1970", in David P. Chandler and Ben Kiernan (eds), *Revolution and Its Aftermath in Kampuchea: Eight Essays* (New Haven, Yale Southeast Asia Studies Monograph No. 24, 1983), p. 60.

the ICP was dissolved into national parties for Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos.

3. Thailand

As early as 1881, the king of Siam had hoped for deliverance from "the hands of those base classes, Socialist, Nihilist, Communists..." His successor in 1911 claimed somewhat contradictorily that there were no classes in Siam, since all but the king were equal in status.[45] The Russian revolution ended the formerly warm relations between the two monarchies. Diplomatic relations between the two countries were not re-established until after World War II, by which time Russia had become the USSR and Siam had changed its name to Thailand (in 1939, after a coup had ended the absolute monarchy in 1932). The break thus lasted the entire lifetime of the Comintern. Yet in the 1920's Comintern leaders like Ho Chi Minh and the Indonesian Tan Malaka, were active in Siam.[46]

A 1923 report even claimed that two Thai subjects had found their way to Moscow and held high positions in the Comintern. In 1927, there were two reports of a British communist (apparently named Slater)[47] travelling to Bangkok with Thai comrades educated in Europe, as well as accounts of "a Siamese of bad character", living in Marseilles, who was a "secret agent... well supplied with funds which his daughter brings at intervals from Germany through Switzerland". However, as with Cambodians, prewar communists had little success among ethnic Thai, and were limited to working among the Vietnamese and Chinese minorities. The main Comintern channel was the "South Seas Communist Party", apparently Ho Chi Minh's Hong Kong-based network.[48]

The Siamese monarchy had become noted from the mid-nineteenth century for its sophisticated dealings with the West. It also made a deft appraisal of the Comintern. In 1927, the Thai Minister of Foreign Affairs informed a US diplomat of "the present situation in so far as Moscow was concerned":
"Siam was a small and unimportant country in world affairs so that any real effort on the part of Moscow would scarcely justify itself. The object and aim of the Communists therefore was to use Siam as a sort of neutral base from which to carry on activities in southeastern Asia. Three western powers possessed important colonies in the vicinity of Siam... and... it was at these that the activities of Moscow were really aimed. Prince Traidos said that in the reports received from the Siamese Legation in Paris, it had been clearly indicated that the Soviet had felt it necessary to increase its activities in southeastern Asia, and to have a center from which to base its work. What more logical than that Siam should constitute that center..."[49]
In a celebrated case in 1930, thirty Vietnamese exiles, some of them communists, were arrested in central Thailand and deported to China.[50] Most communist documents seized in Thailand were written in Chinese, sometimes in Thai or English. But one produced on May Day 1930 was signed by the "Communist Workers Committee of Siam", and another of the same year was called "Draft Statement Analyzing the Government and Economy of Siam". These criticized the imperialist powers, discussed the condition of the working class in Siam, and called for the overthrow of the monarchy, "until the propertyless class are the leaders, holding absolute power". One of these documents the king found particularly impressive:
"This is very well written, and not the work of someone foolish. Also, *it was not written in China*, but in Siam. The author is a knowledgeable person well worth listening to, and I would like for all members of the cabinet to read it in order to see what communist propaganda in Siam is like. If the contents of this document were

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[45] Benjamin A. Batson, *The End of the Absolute Monarchy in Siam* (Melbourne, OUP/Asian Studies Association of Australia, 1984), pp. 165, 182 n. 22.

[46] For references, see *ibid.*, p. 181 n. 19.

[47] *Ibid.*, p. 168.

[48] *Ibid.*, p. 165-72, 180-4.

[49] *Ibid.*, p. 170.

[50] *Ibid.*, p. 175-6.

disseminated among the agricultural classes in Siam, *many might find it quite convincing.*"[51] A 1977 official history of the Thai Communist Party claims that "in 1930, the Communist Party of Siam was founded".[52]

By 1931 at least two Thai princes did seem worried. One warned the king's wife, Mai Tew: "We must prevent revolution before it is too late. There will be fighting in the streets!... Hide your gold! Hide your jewels, Mai Tew! The looters will take everything. They will kill us..."[53] There was indeed something to fear. In June 1932, a combined military-civilian coup ovethrew the absolute monarchy, and one of the first economic plans of the new regime envisaged substantial nationalisations,[54] although these were never implemented. A leaflet distributed in Bangkok, signed by the "Communist Party of Siam - Young Communist Party of Siam", attacked both regimes and called for a "Soviet government of Siam".[55] The radical coup leader, the Paris-educated liberal socialist and head of the People's Party, Pridi Phanomyong, was eventually shunted aside by the pro-Japanese military strongman and Thai chauvinist, Phibun Songkram.

Three representatives of the Communist Party of Siam attended the first Congress of the ICP in Macao in 1935.[56] However, the official Thai Communist Party history records that the Communist Party of Siam "was severely suppressed by the reactionary regime soon after its formation. Leading party organs were disrupted several times and numerous party members imprisoned. The dissemination of Marxism and party activities were kept within severe limits for a long period. Lacking experience, the Party could not exert much influence upon the society and its political role was limited." The Communist Party of Thailand, the history continues, was officially founded only in December 1942.

4. Burma

The Communist Party of Burma was founded in August 1939 by a group of radical nationalist students, who, Robert Taylor remarks, had "learned their Marx and Lenin, not through two decades of debate within the international Communist movement that followed the Russian Revolution, but rather through the popularized and reformist texts of British writers like John Strachey and the theoretician of the British Communist Party, R. Palme Dutt". Other such influential works were recommended by the Indian nationalist Pandit Nehru in his *Impressions of Soviet Russia*.[57] All these became accessible in Burma from about 1932, when royalties from a book written by anti-British rebel leader Hsaya San funded the establishment of a library of Marxist literature.

British documents describe Oo Kyaw as "the father of Burmese communism". Having been influenced in his youth by Indian revolutionary organisations such as the League Against Imperialism, Oo Kyaw had gone to London in 1927 to study law; "he travelled widely in Europe where he contacted several Communist groups". He sent Marxist literature home, and was influential in radicalising key student leaders in Burma. In 1937, the first Marxist works were published in the Burmese language; "From then onwards, socialist ideas influenced

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[51] *Ibid.*, p. 171.

[52] "A Brief Introduction to the History of the Communist Party of Thailand", in *Thailand: Roots of Conflict*, pp. 158-168.

[53] Quoted in Batson, *The End of the Absolute Monarchy in Siam*, p. 172.

[54] *Ibid.*, pp. 245, 271.

[55] Patrice de Beer, "History and Policy of the Communist Party of Thailand", in *Thailand: Roots of Conflict*, pp. 143-157, at p. 145.

[56] Khanh, *Vietnamese Communism*, p. 187.

[57] Robert H. Taylor, *Marxism and Resistance in Burma, 1942-1945* (Athens, Ohio University Press, 1984), p. 3.

nearly every political organisation in Burma."[58]

But relations with the British Communist Party were "tenuous", according to Robert Taylor. One Burmese had joined the Anti-Imperialist League in Britain in 1931, the British communist David Freeman visited Burma in November 1937, and in 1938 the Workers' Bookshop in London had at least one influential Burmese subscriber to its *World News and Views*, the editor of the All-Burma Student Union paper. "The first contact between a Burmese nationalist and a foreign Communist Party", however, occurred in 1936. While studying law in Lucknow, the Burmese journalist and novelist Thein Pe had joined a Bengali student organization and met Indian Communist Party leaders, including CPI co-founder Mustafa Ahmed. A Bengali Communist, B.N. Dass, returned to Burma with Thein Pe in 1938, and a Burma-born Bengali maintained the link. This came to fruition when the CPI obtained Comintern permission to sponsor a Communist Party in Burma. Indian and Burmese Marxist study groups in Rangoon were united at a meeting held on 19 August, 1939. Thakin Aung San was elected secretary-general of the new Party.[59]

The climate was certainly favourable for the formation of the Communist Party of Burma. A successful student protest against a British crackdown in 1936 had already been followed by a 1938 oilfield workers' strike. This led to a mass uprising in 1938-39. In February 1939 British troops massacred 17 demonstrators, including seven Buddhist monks.[60]

In 1929-30, the "South Seas Communist Party" had established a "Provisional Committee of the Special Division, Burma", among the small ethnic Chinese community in Rangoon. But it had little contact with ethnic Burman radicals. Bertil Lintner speculates that "Had the two groups established contact in the late 1930's, it is possible that communism might even have succeeded in Burma." In 1940, the Burmese communists sent one of their number, Aung San, to Shanghai to contact the Chinese Communist Party, but, forced to elude the British police, he ended up in Japanese-occupied territory. Separated from the communist movement, Aung San began a four-year collaboration with Tokyo (whose forces invaded Burma in 1942) before breaking away again on a new path, one that made him the unchallenged leader of Burmese independence. He was assassinated in 1947. His former Party comrades from 1940, however, had been the first Burmese to contact the Allies in the interest of common resistance to Japanese occupation,[61] and they subsequently built an organised communist movement, and led an insurgency which ended only in 1989.

5. Malaya

The South Seas Branch of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), headed by a Provisional Committee, was formed in Malaya in 1925. The next year a labour wing called the South Seas (Nanyang) General Labour Union, was set up under the guidance of the Profintern.[62] Within three years, however, British colonial repression had paralysed CCP activities in Malaya. In April 1930, a new Malayan Communist Party (MCP) was established, and it inherited the labour organisation, which, after British police had largely suppressed it in 1928-31, was renamed the Malayan General Labour Union in 1934.[63]

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[58] Bertil Lintner, *The Rise and Fall of the Communist Party of Burma (CPB)*, (Ithaca, Cornell University Southeast Asia Program, 1990), p. 4-5.

[59] Taylor, *Marxism and Resistance in Burma, 1942-1945*, pp. 5-6, 70-2.

[60] Lintner, *The Rise and Fall of the Communist Party of Burma*, p. 4.

[61] *Ibid.*, p. 5-7.

[62] Anthony Short, *The Communist Insurrection in Malaya*, p. 20, gives the date of the union's founding as May 1926; Lee Tong Foong, "The MPAJA and the Revolutionary Struggle, 1939-1945", in Mohammed Amin and Malcolm Caldwell (eds), *Malaya: The Making of a Neo-Colony* (Nottingham, Spokesman, 1977), pp. 95-119, gives the date as 1925.

[63] Lee Tong Foong, *ibid.*, p. 96, and Michael Morgan, "The Rise and Fall of Malayan Trade Unionism, 1945-1950", in Amin and Caldwell (eds), *Malaya*, p. 152. See also Cheah Boon Kheng, *The Masked Comrades: A Study of the Communist United Front in Malaya, 1945-1948* (Singapore, 1979).

The new MCP was sponsored by the Comintern's Far Eastern Bureau, through the Pan-Pacific Trade Union Secretariat, based in Shanghai. According to Anthony Short, "a member of the French Communist Party arrived in Singapore to help with organisation." However, he was arrested, and with the later arrest of Ho Chi Minh in Hong Kong, the Far Eastern Bureau was nearly eliminated. The Malayan Communist Party was left to sink roots in its own native soil.[64]

Malaya's population was more ethnically divided than that of the other Southeast Asian countries. By 1930, indigenous Malays had become a minority, with more than half the 4 million population made up of Chinese or Indians.[65] Malays were largely restricted to rice farming and rubber smallholding, and Indians made up 80% of the rubber plantation workforce, while Chinese dominated the tin-mining labour force and small business activity. The MCP succeeded only among ethnic Chinese, with the exception of one multi-racial labour insurrection. In the aftermath of the Depression, a wave of strikes among miners, Singapore bus workers, and other labourers, spread to rubber tappers in 1936. The next year the unrest spread further, and in the Batu Arang collieries in Selangor protesting workers briefly set up a local "soviet". According to Michael Morgan, "the workers took possession of the property, setting up an internal government complete with an elaborate defense system".[66]

Opposition to the Japanese invasion of China provided the MCP with its greatest appeal. Membership of the Party and of its ancillary bodies was never less than 90% Chinese.[67]

6. The Philippines

Like Malaya, the Philippines was more urbanized and its economy less dominated by rice cultivation than the other Southeast Asian countries. Manila, for instance, imported much of its rice from Vietnam's Mekong Delta. In 1929, sugar headed the nation's exports, followed by coconut products, abaca, cigars and embroideries. By the 1940's, the population of the capital alone had reached 1 million, over 6% of a total population of 16 million. The largest group of workers in Manila were the 12,000 cigar makers, who with printing workers probably exhibited the most proletarian consciousness.[68]

The first socialist labor movement in the Philippines had been established by Isabelo de los Reyes, who brought socialist and anarchist literature home from Europe in January 1901. A Philippine revolution against Spain had broken out in 1896. It had been very successful until 1898, when the United States replaced Spain as the colonizing power. Philippine armed resistance to the US continued until 1902, the year de los Reyes established the Democratic Labor Union. Three months and three strikes later he was arrested and jailed. The union struggled on under new leadership and a slightly different name. On May Day, 1913, one of its members, Crisanto Evangelista, organized the Philippine Workers' Congress, "the biggest and best organized labor

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[64] Short, *The Communist Insurrection in Malaya*, p. 20.

[65] Michael Stenson, *Class, Race and Colonialism in West Malaysia: The Indian Case* (St. Lucia, University of Queensland Press, 1980), p. 5. For detailed figures, see Kernial Singh Sandhu, *Indians in Malaya: Immigration and Settlement, 1786-1957* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1969), p. 175.

[66] Morgan adds that although the soviet did not last long, "The bargaining position and determination of labour was such that all employers were forced to grant substantial concessions." "The Rise and Fall of Malayan Trade Unionism", p. 153.

[67] Short, *The Communist Insurrection in Malaya*, p. 19.

[68] Daniel F. Doeppers, *Manila, 1900-1941: Social Change in a Late Colonial Metropolis* (New Haven, Yale University Southeast Asia Studies Monograph No. 27, 1984), pp. 39, and Doeppers, "The Impact of the Great Depression on Employment and Well-Being in Metropolitan Manila", paper read at the meeting of the Asian Studies Association of Australia, May 1986, pp. 2, 7.

federation in the country for nearly two decades".[69] As respected leader of the Philippine Printers' Union, Crisanto Evangelista was to be labor's representative in the first Philippine independence mission to the United States, in 1919. By then a Philippine Farmers Union had also been founded, with Jacinto Manahan as its general secretary. Its leaders included a former Philippine revolutionary general.

An unnamed Filipino was apparently the other Southeast Asian representative who, with a Vietnamese comrade, attended the first Congress of the Toilers of the Far East, at Petrograd in 1922.[70] In early 1924, an agent of the Communist Party of the USA (CPUSA) named William Janequette, alias Harrison George, arrived in Manila to attempt to set up a Philippine communist apparatus. Janequette met with a number of local labour leaders and is said to have been impressed with Evangelista and Manahan, who in 1930 would become co-founders of the Communist Party of the Philippines. In June 1924, five Filipino delegates, including two whom Janequette met in Manila, attended the First Congress of Oriental Transportation Workers in Canton. In the same year, Crisanto Evangelista and one of the returned delegates resigned from the Nationalist Party to form a new Workers' Party.

In July 1925, the Indonesian-born Comintern official Tan Malaka arrived in Manila, posing as a Filipino musician. He soon "cut a great swath among Manila's intellectual elite and the political salons". He became friendly with Senate President Manuel Quezon, later to become the first President of an independent Philippines, as well as with the last President during the revolution, Emilio Aguinaldo. In his undercover role, Tan Malaka met with Evangelista and other leftists, and arranged for three Filipinos to attend a Profintern conference in Canton, sponsored by the Pan-Pacific Trade Union Secretariat. He also spent time in Siam and Malaya, and was finally unmasked in Manila in August 1927. Dutch police pressed for his extradition, but after a ten-day public campaign in which Quezon declared that Tan Malaka was entitled to full protection under the US flag, he was deported instead to the Chinese port city of Amoy.

At the Shanghai Profintern conference in 1928, the Filipino delegates were Evangelista and his comrade Cirilio Bognot. They met future Chinese premier Zhou Enlai and the CPUSA leader Earl Browder, who arranged for the two Filipino labor leaders to go on to visit Moscow. Jacinto Manahan met them there, on a trip financed by the Krestintern. After returning home, Bognot established a short-lived Philippine section of the Anti-Imperialist League.

But in his own absence, Evangelista was outmanoeuvred by a conservative labor faction and lost control of the Philippine Workers' Congress, which he had established fifteen years earlier. He left it in 1929 to establish a new "Association of the Sons of Sweat", known by its Filipino initials, KAP. In August 1930, the decision was made to establish the Communist Party of the Philippines (*Partido Komunista ng Pilipinas*, PKP), which was officially proclaimed on 7 November, thirteenth anniversary of the Russian Revolution, before a crowd of 5,000. It named its newspaper, after Lenin's, *Titis* (Spark), and received financial aid from CPUSA figures William Janequette and Agnes Smedley.

The Central Committee included four farmers' representatives, but was heavily weighted towards urban workers. It included seven cigarmakers, five printers, four woodcutters, two mariners, two electricians, two slipper makers, a plumber, a railroad worker, and a clerk. Two Chinese were also nominated, including a Comrade "C", who served on the seven-person Politburo. Evangelista became Secretary-General of the PKP.

After speaking at a banned KAP demonstration on May Day 1931, Evangelista was arrested and charged with illegal association and sedition; he was fined and sentenced to 18 months in jail. Evangelista, Manahan, and many other PKP leaders were also "banished" to various provinces for eight years. The PKP was outlawed. Worse, Manahan quit the party, claiming it did not represent peasant interests. The Party continued to favour the urban proletariat. But it retained an organisational network, including a United Peasant Center, and one PKP

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[69] Eduardo Lachica, *Huk: Philippine Agrarian Society in Revolt* (Manila, Solidaridad Publishing House, 1971), pp. 92 and 93, quoting Alfredo Saulo, *Handbook on the Communist Party of the Philippines* (Armed Forces of the Philippines, 1961).

[70] Short, *The Communist Insurrection in Malaya*, p. 19. Studies of Philippine communism do not seem to mention this, however. My account of its birth is from Lachica, *Huk*, chs. 4 and 5, and from Benedict J. Kerkvliet, *The Huk Rebellion* (Quezon City, New Day Publishers, 1979), pp. 50-3. Readers are invited to consult A.S. Araneta, "The Communist Party of the Philippines and the Comintern, 1919-1930", Ph.D. dissertation, Lincoln College, Oxford, 1966, and other references noted by Kerkvliet, p. 50 n. 36.

leader headed a nationalist association with 40,000 members.[71]

Under President Roosevelt, the US moved cautiously towards granting Philippine autonomy, and the nationalist struggle hotted up. A new independence party, *Sakdal*, won three seats in the House of Representatives and a large number of minor elected posts; its membership was estimated at over 60,000. On May Day 1935, the Sakdalistas launched an armed rebellion, and were crushed.

A new populist group was the Socialist Party of the Philippines. Based in Pampanga province north of Manila, its leader was Pedro Abad Santos, an admirer of Léon Blum, Norman Thomas, and Mexican President Cardeñas. A former major in the Philippines revolutionary army, Santos had been pardoned after serving part of a 25-year sentence. In 1925-30, a peasant union was organised by the son of another 1890's revolutionary leader; he received communist literature from Russia and China, but preferred to join Santos and the Socialists. A second rural organisation, established by Luis Taruc in 1932, also joined forces with the Socialist Party in October 1935. Taruc became the Party's General Secretary.

The next year, the CPUSA sent James S. Allen, using the name Dr. Sol Auerbach, with a new directive for the PKP. The Seventh Comintern Congress in 1935 had called for united front tactics to oppose fascism. Allen also persuaded Quezon, now President of a new, autonomous Commonwealth of the Philippines, to release Crisanto Evangelista from jail. The PKP's leaders were freed in December 1936, and pardoned two years later. Meanwhile, Allen returned to the Philippines to encourage a Communist-Socialist merger. At its third congress in October 1938, the PKP approved the plan, and the Socialists agreed at a joint convention held on the twentieth anniversary of the Russian Revolution. Evangelista became chairman of the new party and Abad Santos vice-chairman. Luis Taruc was appointed to the PKP Central Committee.

Abad Santos remained a moderate advocate of reform,[72] and Socialist Party candidates won eight seats and a number of other positions in Pampanga in the 1940 elections.[73] Despite some tensions within the PKP, the merger was a remarkable attempt to unite peasant and labor movements in a Southeast Asian country. It lasted sixteen years.

In World War II, Crisanto Evangelista and Pedro Abad Santos lead the PKP-sponsored *Huk* resistance to the Japanese invasion, but both were captured by the Japanese. Evangelista was executed in 1942; Abad Santos died in Pampanga in 1945. Luis Taruc continued the fight as Huk military commander. After the war, six Huk candidates won seats in the 1946 elections to the Philippine Congress. Taruc won his seat in Pampanga with 80% of the vote. However, the conservative Philippine government barred the Huks from taking up their seats, provoking a major rebellion against the postwar Philippine government. Defeated, Luis Taruc left the Party in 1954.[74]

But a splinter group of Huks participated in the 1968 founding of the New People's Army, which continues today to direct perhaps the most serious insurgency in Southeast Asia.

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[71] Kerkvliet, *The Huk Rebellion*, p. 50, and Lachica, *Huk*, pp. 89, 70.

[72] In April 1940 Abad Santos said: "We have no intention of importing the Russian brand of communism into this situation. Russian conditions are utterly different... In fact I feel free to severely criticize the Soviets. Indeed, we would welcome... twentieth century capitalism in the Philippines. If our workers could approximate the living conditions, status, and rights that... American workers have obtained under modern capitalism, we would be satisfied." Quoted in Kerkvliet, *The Huk Rebellion*, p. 53.

[73] Lachica, *Huk*, p. 89.

[74] Lachica, *Huk*, pp. 104-5, 120-1, 134-6.