The Origins and Role of the Self-Criticism and Criticism Campaign in the Lead Up to the Sixth Congress of the Communist Party of Vietnam in 1986

by

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I certify that this thesis is the product of my own original work.

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16 May 1991
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Abstract

In 1986, the Communist Party of Vietnam conducted a wide-ranging self-criticism and criticism campaign. The stated objectives of the campaign were to improve the performance of the Party generally, and of its members in particular. This thesis explores the factors which led the Party to launch the campaign and examines the possible role of the campaign in the context of the upcoming Sixth Party Congress.

A key hypothesis of the thesis is that the campaign was a product of, and a response to, a legitimacy crisis. After reviewing the economic situation in Vietnam, the internal challenges facing the Party organisation, and international developments, the author concludes that the Party was, indeed, in crisis. The core of its difficulties lay in its failure to adjust successfully to the economic reconstruction and development tasks of the postwar period. The outcome of this failure was a loss of confidence amongst rank and file Party members and the public in the Party's ability to govern the nation effectively.

The thesis shows that the self-criticism and criticism campaign was a vehicle for organisational change and an attempt to restore public confidence. Specifically, research evidence supports the proposition that the campaign was used to bring about significant leadership changes in the Party. It also supports the contention that public involvement in the campaign was encouraged, in part, to channel public hostility against individual cadres and to divert attention from the failings of the regime as a whole.

Another key proposition of this thesis is that the campaign mediated an internal party debate about the direction of economic reform, and that it was a forum for achieving a compromise on the issue. Much of the debate on this particular question took place after the release of the Party Central Committee's draft reports to the national congress. The reports were debated at cadre conferences and at Party congresses at the grassroots, district and province levels. Although this part of the campaign was conducted largely behind closed doors, evidence was still found to support the hypothesis.

Finally, the self-criticism and criticism campaign is assessed in the light of legitimation theories which hold that a regime experiencing a legitimacy crisis will sometimes respond by changing the way it legitimates itself to its staff and the public. The author finds evidence of such legitimation shifts in Vietnam in the period under study.
## Abbreviations

<table>
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<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AFP</td>
<td>Agence France Presse</td>
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<tr>
<td>BBC SWB FE</td>
<td>British Broadcasting Corporation Summary of World Broadcasts, Far East</td>
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<tr>
<td>BBC SWB SU</td>
<td>British Broadcasting Corporation Summary of World Broadcasts, Soviet Union</td>
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<tr>
<td>CPSU</td>
<td>Communist Party of the Soviet Union</td>
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<td>CPV</td>
<td>Communist Party of Vietnam</td>
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<tr>
<td>FBIS</td>
<td>Foreign Broadcast Information Service</td>
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<td>FEER</td>
<td>Far Eastern Economic Review</td>
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<tr>
<td>IMF</td>
<td>International Monetary Fund</td>
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<tr>
<td>JPRS-SEA</td>
<td>Joint Publications Research Service, South East Asia Report</td>
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<tr>
<td>SRV</td>
<td>Socialist Republic Of Vietnam</td>
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<td>VNA</td>
<td>Vietnam News Agency</td>
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Introduction

In 1986, the Communist Party of Vietnam initiated a wide-ranging review of its performance, in particular the performance of its cadres and members. It called the review a self-criticism and criticism campaign. Beginning in March, the campaign dominated the political landscape for most of the year and generated considerable media attention. The public was actively encouraged to participate in the campaign. Why was this so? Why did the Party decide to hold the campaign in the first place and what did it hope to achieve? Was there any connection between the campaign and the Sixth National Congress of the Party, due to be held in December that year? Finally, what can the campaign tell us about the major challenges facing the Vietnamese political system? This thesis will seek answers to these questions. Specifically, the thesis will investigate the factors which precipitated the campaign and the role of the campaign in the context of the Sixth Party Congress.

One need only look at the outcome of the Congress to realise the possible significance of the campaign. Coming a decade after the reunification of North and South Vietnam, the Congress presided over significant leadership changes and launched "doi moi" (translated as "renovation"), intended as a far-reaching restructuring of the Vietnamese economy and society. The leadership changes and "doi moi" did not occur in a vacuum. Events earlier in the year must have helped to lay the foundations. It is reasonable to suggest that the self-criticism and criticism campaign had some role to play in these events, and that a study of the campaign can help us understand the dynamics behind the changes.

There is another reason for studying the campaign. In a communist system, political processes are often screened from public view. An event such as the self-criticism and criticism campaign, with its heavy media coverage, may provide a rare opportunity to peek inside the system and gain a better insight into how that system works. The fact that the campaign occurred during preparations for a national Party congress, one of the most important avenues for political participation by Party members, makes the study of the phenomenon even more instructive. There are few other occasions in the Communist Party calendar which have as great an impact on its future direction.

The author first developed an interest in the self-criticism and criticism campaign during her four-month posting to Hanoi in late 1986 as an immigration officer with the Australian Embassy. At that time, there was vigorous debate within Party circles and in the public domain about the Party's performance, and the Party seemed willing to accept public criticism. In the context of Gorbachev's promotion of "glasnost" in the Soviet
Union, the author wondered whether Vietnam was also moving towards greater openness in political life, perhaps even democratisation, and whether the campaign was an indication of this movement. At that stage, however, she was not aware of the extent to which the process of criticism was controlled by the Party.

The self-criticism and criticism campaign was launched on 11 March 1986 with two stated objectives. The first was to improve Party performance by enhancing leadership capability, promoting unity in the Party, strengthening the relationship between the Party and the public, and other measures. The second was to evaluate cadres and develop a personnel policy to help in the selection of new Central Committee members at the Sixth Congress and in the election of delegates for congresses at all levels of the Party. Why was the Party so preoccupied with its performance and why would it want to develop a new personnel policy at that particular point in time?

To understand these issues, it is important to examine the political and economic environment in which the self-criticism and criticism campaign took place. Chapter Three will show that the Vietnamese economy was in crisis due to the cumulative effects of the Government's inappropriate development strategy and economic mismanagement, typified by the disastrous currency change of September 1985. By 1986, most Vietnamese were finding life a daily struggle for survival. People on fixed incomes found that their wages met only a fraction of their requirements. Peasants were subjected to high taxes and low procurement prices for their grain. In short, the livelihood of those constituting the Party's power base was under threat and the victims were both disillusioned and angry with the Party's failure to meet their needs. Added to this pressure from below, the Party was also receiving strong messages of displeasure from the Soviet Union about Vietnam's misuse of Soviet aid funds.

The Party organisation was facing many challenges at this time, as outlined in Chapter Four. After the war ended in 1975 and Vietnam was reunified, political structures and activities had to adjust to a peacetime economic and social environment. It is true that the occupation of Kampuchea and the border conflicts with China led to the continuing prominence of defence matters in government deliberations. Nevertheless, the prime emphasis was now on rebuilding an economy and society shattered by thirty years of war. The Party and state apparatus which had developed in response to wartime requirements now had to evolve in a very different direction to meet the demands of peacetime. Yet, the cadres who had so effectively prosecuted the war against the French and then the Americans were ill-equipped for their new tasks. Similarly, the structures that had proved useful to the Party before, such as autonomous regional Party units that responded creatively to local circumstances, were now undermining the authority of the
central Party organisation, and there was an ongoing tussle for power between them. The overlap of functions and personnel between the Party and state bureaucracies was hampering the implementation of new policies, especially economic reforms. Most importantly, the leaders who had guided the Party for decades were now in their twilight years, highlighting the issue of leadership succession.

As we shall see in Chapter Five, Vietnam was not alone in confronting these challenges. Other communist states, including the Soviet Union and China, were experiencing a similar range of problems, and it is not surprising that the Vietnamese looked to those countries for ideas on possible solutions. New Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev's promotion of greater openness about Communist Party shortcomings and his crackdown on corruption generated demands in Vietnam for similar action. While Chinese influence had declined since the souring of Sino-Vietnamese relations in the 1970s, economic reforms in that country did affect Vietnamese thinking on economic strategy.

The picture painted by this overview of developments in Vietnam in the 1980s is of a Communist Party struggling to cope with the demands of postwar reconstruction and development. It had failed to deliver the improved standard of living promised to the Vietnamese people after reunification. Indeed, a major objective of this thesis will be to show that the Party faced a legitimacy crisis in 1986, and that its efforts to improve its performance through such means as the self-criticism and criticism campaign were aimed at regaining authority and prestige.

For the purposes of this thesis, legitimacy will be defined as "the foundation of such governmental power as is exercised both with a consciousness on the government's part that it has a right to govern and with some recognition by the governed of that right." The only adjustment required in the Vietnamese case is to substitute the words "communist party" for "government" to more closely reflect the dominant role of the Vietnamese Communist Party in Vietnam's political system. A crisis can be defined as "a critical juncture or watershed, a point at which a system and/or regime is uncertain about its future direction and/or is seriously threatened, either by external forces or through its own internal contradictions or — as frequently happens — an interaction of these." The crisis confronting the Vietnamese Communist Party in 1986 can be described as a legitimacy crisis because it involved a loss of confidence among both Party members and

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the Vietnamese people generally in the Party leadership's ability to govern the country effectively.

What does a ruling elite do when it faces such a crisis? Besides engaging in some soul-searching to determine where it had gone wrong, a regime in this situation might try to find scapegoats for its problems, individuals against whom it can direct the anger and frustration of disaffected elements in society. Alternatively, the ruling elite might choose to confess its mistakes openly in the hope that this might restore confidence. An embattled ruling elite might also try to silence its critics, either by suppressing them or by giving them concessions. A constructive approach would be to develop policies to address the causes of the crisis. This might, however, lead to tension and disunity in the leadership if leaders cannot agree on an appropriate policy response. Were there signs of the Vietnamese Communist Party adopting any of these methods in 1986 to deal with the legitimacy crisis and what role, if any, did the self-criticism and criticism campaign play in the overall mix of responses?

A brief survey of the political science literature reveals some useful theoretical frameworks for analysing the possible responses of communist states to a legitimacy crisis. In a forthcoming book, Professor Leslie Holmes suggests that a regime which has lost legitimacy in the eyes of both its staff and the public will give priority to restoring public confidence, and will even be prepared to direct public hostility against its own staff to achieve this. In other words, it will seek scapegoats to take the blame for the deficiencies of the regime. The Vietnamese Communist Party did exactly this during the 1986 self-criticism and criticism campaign. It actively encouraged public criticism of corrupt and inefficient cadres and provided a convenient forum for the public to express their frustrations against clear targets, thereby deflecting criticism away from the regime. Chapter Six of the thesis, which provides a detailed examination of the campaign, will demonstrate this.

Communist regimes may also seek to change their staff in order to regain legitimacy. Holmes suggests that such changes can benefit a regime in at least three ways. First, the removal of corrupt officials can create vacancies to which other cadres can be promoted, hence reducing the frustration of more junior cadres in the organisation. Secondly, the dismissal of corrupt officials demonstrates to the public that the Party is serious about reforming itself, and finally, personnel changes can help to overcome the conservatism in a bureaucracy. The Vietnamese Communist Party appears to have been contemplating major staff changes in 1986. One of the stated aims of the self-criticism and criticism campaign was to help develop a new personnel policy to assist in the election of Party

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3 Ibid., pp. 45-46.
4 Ibid., pp. 224-225.
leaders and delegates at Party congresses. Chapter Six, and Chapter Seven (which examines, among other things, the outcomes of the Sixth Party Congress) investigate whether such personnel changes actually occurred and, if so, how extensive they were.

Communist states in crisis may also respond by changing the way in which they legitimate their rule to the public and their staff. Building on earlier theories by Max Weber, Harry Rigby and others, Holmes posits the existence of a continuum of seven legitimation modes along which a regime can move as it matures:

1. "Old" traditional - this mode of legitimation arises from a populace's belief in the sanctity of long-held traditions and in the legitimacy of those who exercise authority under these traditions. Examples include the perceived divine rule of monarchs;

2. Charismatic - this form of legitimacy is based on the charisma of a leader, by virtue of certain qualities of personality which set that leader apart from other people;

3. Goal-rational/teleological - the orientation of a regime under this mode of legitimation is towards goal-achievement, for example, movement towards the goal of communism;

4. Eudaemonic - this is a performance-related mode of legitimation geared towards satisfying the growing material aspirations of the public. Effectiveness in running a country's economy is an important focus in this mode of legitimation;

5. "New" traditional - through this mode, leaders seek to legitimate their rule by suggesting a link between their approach and that of a former publicly revered leader;

6. Official nationalism - here, legitimacy is sought through identification with national heroes, and by adopting a xenophobic line vis-a-vis other nations;

7. Legal-rational - this legitimation mode is based on the development and application by a regime of "objective", impersonal rules that govern the life of the society, a legal order that gives those in power the right to rule.

According to Holmes, regimes may use two or more of these modes of legitimation at the same time and when there is a shift along the continuum, there is often a blurring of modes during the transitional phase. If we evaluate the situation in Vietnam over the last thirty years it is easy to see several legitimation modes at work. During the Second Indochina War, the main modes of legitimation were the teleological and official nationalist modes. Both were generated by the struggle for national reunification and the desire to counter foreign domination. While Ho Chi Minh lived, there was also a strong element of charismatic legitimation.

5 Ibid., pp. 14-18.
After the Second Indochina War ended and reunification was achieved, the Vietnamese Communist Party had to re-assess its mode of legitimation to take account of changing circumstances and popular expectations. It chose to pursue another goal — socialist transformation — and hence clung to the teleological mode of legitimation. Only when this strategy plunged the country into dire economic straits in the late 1970s did the Party pause to consider an alternative approach. That approach was to improve its economic performance and seek to satisfy the people's material aspirations, in other words, eudaemonic legitimation.

Henry Krisch has made similar predictions about the development of communist regimes in post-revolutionary situations, pointing out that "the drift of Communist politics is toward a consensual legitimacy based on policies congruent with the situation of the regime and the expectations of the population." According to Krisch, to achieve consensus a regime would need to focus on such issues as employment and the economic welfare of the population, including access to consumer goods. As this thesis will show, the Vietnamese Communist Party did put forward policies on these matters in 1979 and subsequently, but implementation of the policies was stymied by ongoing disagreement within the leadership about economic development strategy and resistance in some parts of the bureaucracy to the reforms. The disagreement boiled down to a conflict between two policy positions. One held that the Party should improve its performance by renewing the Party organisation, including through personnel changes, and by maintaining centralised control over the economy. The other held that an improvement in economic performance could come only with greater decentralisation of decision making and the use of material incentives. Both policy positions took as their starting point the need to improve Party performance to restore legitimacy, but they disagreed on the best means of achieving it. A key proposition of this thesis is that the self-criticism and criticism campaign was partly a product of this debate and that the contending groups used it to consolidate their positions. In view of the economic crisis in 1986, the thesis will also explore whether the campaign signalled the beginning of another shift in legitimation mode, this time from the performance-based to the legal-rational mode.

The legitimacy crisis and the ongoing debate on economic strategy coincided with the coming of the Party's national congress, its supreme decision making body. The Congress would bring together Party delegates from all over the country to review Party performance and to decide on future policies and directions. Since 1975, there had been two other national congresses, one in 1976 and another in 1982. This frequency contrasted with the situation during the First and Second Indochina Wars when the logistical obstacles and dangers involved in bringing together a large number of delegates

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6 Krisch, "Political Legitimation", p. 113.
had led to congresses being held only rarely. As Party Congresses came to be convened more regularly, they provided a focus for greater debate amongst Party members about Party policies. The Party statutes, or rules, facilitated this debate by requiring that all Party organisations be supplied with prior drafts of the reports which the leadership proposed to present to the national congress.

Thus, it is not surprising that debate about the Party's performance occurred at all levels of the Party in the lead up to the national congress. The effect of the legitimacy crisis and economic policy debate was to inject much more vigour into this exchange of views. The congress was responsible for reviewing the Party's performance and setting future policy directions. So there was pressure to reach agreement, or at least compromise, on a framework for future policies in time for the congress. It will become clear in Chapter Six that the second phase of the self-criticism and criticism campaign played a key role in thrashing out this compromise.

An important function of Party congresses is to elect new leaders. As the congresses became more frequent, they created the conditions for a more regularised process of leadership change. This was an important issue for the Vietnamese Communist Party in the 1980s because of the ageing of its leadership. Le Duan had been Secretary-General of the Party for twenty six years. By early 1986 he was seriously ill and he died in July. It was patently clear that other veteran leaders in the Politburo and Central Committee, and ageing cadres in leadership positions at lower levels, would be unable to continue in their positions much longer. The question of leadership succession pressed ever more urgently.

Myron Rush asserts that the four main agencies involved in determining a leadership succession in a communist state are the Politburo; subelites in the society such as provincial leaders and government administrators; national sentiment including the views of workers, peasants, young people and intellectuals; and the Soviet Union.7 Was there any evidence during the self-criticism and criticism campaign of participation by these agencies in the Vietnamese Communist Party's leadership succession in 1986?

Rush also contends that the issues which mediate and influence the leadership succession include the role of the Party apparatus in economic management, the appropriate balance between central direction and local initiative, and the measures which should be used to win public support.8 These issues had all gained prominence in Vietnam in 1986 due to the legitimacy crisis and the ongoing debate about economic

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8 Ibid., p. 25
development strategy. In other words, the legitimacy crisis, the economic policy debate and the leadership succession were all inextricably linked, and the self-criticism and criticism campaign had a role to play in each.

The remaining question is: why was a self-criticism and criticism campaign picked to mediate these complex and interwoven dynamics? The answer lies in the history of communist parties generally and the Vietnamese Communist Party in particular. Campaigns of this kind had been used in the past to enhance Party legitimacy, to deal with internal Party conflict and to consolidate the position of one group or another within the Party. Such campaigns are a feature of well-established revolutionary parties, and especially of governing communist parties, and represent a mobilisational approach to the achievement of Party objectives. The Chinese communists were extraordinarily adept at using them. The practice of self-criticism and criticism has deeper cultural and ideological roots. According to a dictionary of Marxist terms, self-criticism denotes a critical evaluation of one's attitude or action, and admissions of errors inconsistent with communist party policy and practice.\(^9\) There are two major forms of self-criticism and criticism. The first occurs in a group setting and focuses on individuals' shortcomings. The second can be found in the mass media, especially the press, and addresses institutional malfunctioning, although individuals can be criticised in the context of their administrative or occupational role.\(^{10}\) For clandestine communist parties, self-criticism and criticism as a small-group device helped ensure that Party members remained disciplined and united behind Party objectives and ever adaptive to changing circumstances, thereby avoiding possibly fatal errors. It was a survival mechanism. As these communist parties moved into their next phase of development, where they became mass parties and then governing parties, they continued to use the device. It was still employed in small groups but often within the wider context of mass campaigns. The purpose had changed as well. Instead of being a survival mechanism it became a means for maintaining power and for bringing about organisational change. The Vietnamese Communist Party regards self-criticism and criticism as its "law of development" and so it is possible that the campaign was aimed at such organisational change.

In summary, the thesis is organised as follows. Chapter One provides a brief profile of the Communist Party of Vietnam. Chapter Two examines the historical origins of self-criticism and criticism, particularly within the context of mass campaigns. Chapters Three, Four and Five explore the context within which the 1986 self-criticism and criticism campaign took place, by focussing on the state of the economy, internal Party

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development and the international situation respectively. A detailed account of the self-criticism and criticism campaign follows in Chapter Six. Chapter Seven summarises the outcomes of the Sixth Party Congress and relevant subsequent developments.

In researching the campaign, the author relied mainly on primary sources in translation, in particular translations by the British Broadcasting Corporation's Summaries of World Broadcasts\textsuperscript{11}, the United States' Foreign Broadcast Information Service\textsuperscript{12} and the Joint Publications Research Service\textsuperscript{13}. The BBC and FBIS either summarise or translate in their entirety news items from Vietnam's domestic radio service or from daily newspapers such as the Vietnamese Communist Party daily \textit{Nhan Dan} (The People). The emphasis of these information services is on news items emanating from Hanoi. The JPRS provides translations of articles from a wider range of press sources, including southern newspapers such as \textit{Saigon Giai Phong}, (Liberated Saigon) and the Communist Party's monthly theoretical journal \textit{Tap Chi Cong San} (Communist Review). It should be noted, however, that these information services do not provide translations of news materials from the Vietnamese provincial press, as these materials are not available generally outside Vietnam. Hence, there is an unavoidable bias in the sources used in this thesis. Other primary sources in translation used in the research were collections of works by Vietnamese Communist Party leaders such as Ho Chi Minh and Le Duan, and by other communist leaders such as Mao Tse-tung, Nikita Krushchev and Mikhail Gorbachev.

The collection of accurate statistics on the Vietnamese economy presented the author with some difficulties. Statistical collections in Vietnam have been notoriously unreliable in the past\textsuperscript{14} and the more accurate ones have often been kept secret. The author is aware that some statistics on the period under study have been made publicly available in recent times, namely in Vietnam's Statistical Yearbook (\textit{Nien Giam Thong Ke}), but it proved impossible to incorporate those statistics in the thesis in the available time.

A range of secondary sources was accessed for this thesis. Of great value were articles in current affairs journals such as the \textit{Far Eastern Economic Review}. The author also found relevant articles in specialist journals such as \textit{Asian Survey}, \textit{Problems of Communism} and the \textit{International Yearbook on Communist Affairs}. In addition, the author consulted several studies on communist ideologies and institutions, and more

\textsuperscript{11} Hereafter cited as BBC SWB.
\textsuperscript{12} Hereafter cited as FBIS.
\textsuperscript{13} Hereafter cited as JPRS.
\textsuperscript{14} Even the Party admitted that the accuracy of the statistics it received from enterprises and other production units was open to question. See Vo Nhan Tri, \textit{Vietnam's Economic Policy Since 1975} (Singapore: Institute of South East Asian Studies, 1990), p. X.
specific analyses of political and economic developments in Vietnam, the Soviet Union and China.
1 The Communist Party of Vietnam — A Brief Profile

The self-criticism and criticism campaign was initiated by the Communist Party of Vietnam. Hence, it is important to know a little about the structure and functions of the Party. This chapter will provide such a profile, but it will not describe the history of the Party or recent developments within it, as these are covered in other chapters where relevant to the subject under study. The Party's statutes are the main source of the following information. It should be noted, however, that in reality the Party does not always function exactly as the statutes prescribe.

Organisational Structure

The Communist Party of Vietnam has a very hierarchical structure. At the top is the Politburo. Beneath it are, respectively, the Central Committee, province or municipal level Party committees, district committees, ward committees, basic Party organisations, Party chapters and at the bottom, the Party cells.

Politburo

The Politburo is elected by the Central Committee and leads Party activities between the six monthly plenary meetings of the Committee. Headed by the Party's Secretary-General, it plays a key role in initiating legislation and directing the work of the legislature and ministries. It can issue directives independent of the Government and these have the force of law. The Politburo presently consists of 13 full members, and 1 probationary member called an alternate who has no voting rights.

Secretariat

The Secretariat is also elected by the Central Committee. It carries out daily administrative functions for the Party, directs and co-ordinates the work of Party organisations in support of Central Committee and Politburo resolutions, and is responsible for monitoring the implementation of Party directives at all levels of the Party. The Secretariat currently comprises 13 members.

Myron Rush has pointed out that Central Committee Secretariats in communist states exercise tremendous power through their statutory responsibility for checking on the implementation of Party decisions. He argues that this responsibility gives them authority over the entire Party apparatus and provides them with grounds to intervene in the work of other institutions as well.1 Secretariats help to define political debate and policy

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1 Rush, How Communist States Change Their Leaders, p. 289.
options at the highest Party levels, as they prepare the agendas and necessary background briefs and reports for meetings of both the Politburo and the Central Committee.

**Central Committee**

The Central Committee is elected by the Party's national congress every five years, and assembles, on average, every six months at plenary meetings. The Committee runs Party activities between national congresses, implements decisions of the preceding national congress, has the power to set up and manage Party units in the state apparatus and in mass organisations and has control over the assignment of Party cadres.²

**Province, municipal, district and ward level committees**

These committees are responsible for implementing Party policies in their locality or region, ensuring that the targets of state plans are met, and carrying out activities to strengthen the Party organisation. They are required to inform lower level Party organisations of their activities and major tasks every three months and submit regular reports to the Central Committee or other high level Party committees. The Party committees elect standing committees to manage Party work in between their meetings.

**Basic Party Organisation**

The Basic Party Organisation represents the grassroots level of the Party. It takes in Party members at their place of work or residence, for example, factories or enterprises, mines, state farms, government agencies, army units. A basic organisation is set up if there are at least three regular Party members. When it comprises thirty members or less, it is called a Party chapter (*chi bo*) and it can contain several much smaller units called Party cells.³

**Control Committees**

Control Committees are set up by Party Committees at each level of the Party. They investigate cases of violation by Party members of the Party statutes, Party discipline, and state laws. They also deal with letters of complaint by Party members, including denunciations of other Party members, and supervise the enforcement of discipline by Party organisations at lower levels. The Committees report to Party committees at their level of the Party hierarchy.⁴

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³ Ibid., p. 261.
⁴ Ibid., p. 266.
Party Congresses

The *National Congress* is the leading decision making mechanism for the Communist Party as a whole. According to the Party statutes, a national Party congress should be held every five years. During the war, congresses were held only rarely, but since the end of hostilities, a more regular pattern has emerged, with congresses organised in 1976, 1982 and 1986, and one is planned for 1991.

The function of the national congress is to examine and approve the Central Committee's report(s), determine the Party's policies for the period up to the next congress, elect a new Central Committee and amend the Party platform and statutes if necessary. Before a national congress is held, the Central Committee is required to publicise the topics to be discussed at the congress to enable all levels of the Party to consider them.

Congresses are held at the province, district and ward levels of the Party every two years. They examine and approve reports of the Party committees, discuss and decide on Party tasks and policies for the locality, and consider any problems raised by the Central Committee. In addition, they elect new Party committees and choose delegates to higher level congresses.

Significantly, the Statutes require that the election of provincial Party secretaries be endorsed by the Central Committee. Secretaries of Party committees at other levels have to be approved by higher Party committees as well.

Party Membership

By December 1986, the Communist Party of Vietnam had a membership of 1.7 million, of whom 20 per cent were women, the average age was in the mid-40s, and the vast majority were ethnically Vietnamese. In terms of socioeconomic background, 40 per cent were labelled poor peasants, 25 per cent peasants or farm labourers, 15 per cent "proletariat" and 20 per cent other.

North/South Differences

There are significant disparities in the size of the Party membership in north and south Vietnam. In the 1960s, about 40 per cent of Party members were southerners but by 1976 the proportion had dropped to about 15 per cent. The decline was largely due to the disastrous Tet offensive in 1968 and to the American Phoenix program, an assassination

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5 Ibid., p. 257.
6 Ibid., p. 259.
program which reportedly led to the deaths of 100,000 people, many of them experienced Party cadres.\textsuperscript{8} Since reunification, recruitment efforts have sought to redress this imbalance but currently, southern provinces still account for only 24 per cent of all Party members. Membership figures go from a high of 5.3 per cent of the population in the northern province of Nghe Tinh to a low of 0.4 per cent in the southern province of An Giang. With the exception of the Vung Tau-Con Dao Special Zone, all southern provinces rank below the national average of 3 per cent. Indeed, Party membership falls below 1 per cent in 8 of the 18 southern provinces.\textsuperscript{9}

\textbf{Recruitment of Party Members}

To become a Party member, a candidate must submit a curriculum vitae to the local Party chapter which then, together with lower Party cells, investigates the candidate's background to make sure he or she meets the criteria for admission.\textsuperscript{10} Decisions on membership are made by the Party chapter but have to be approved by the next higher level Party committee and by the basic level Party committee. Upon acceptance, the candidate becomes an alternate member and remains on probation for 12 to 18 months.

\textbf{Disciplinary measures}

Party members found guilty of violating Party rules can be subjected to reprimands, warnings, dismissal from Party positions, "education and observation" for one year or, at worst, expulsion from the Party. Decisions on disciplinary measures are made by Party chapter conferences, but if the measure to be applied is "education and observation", it must be referred to the next higher Party committee for approval. If the disciplinary measure is expulsion, approval must be sought from at least two thirds of regular Party members of the Party chapter and confirmed by a Party committee empowered to admit members. Control committees can confirm, modify or nullify disciplinary measures except for dismissal, "education" or expulsion which must have the approval of a Party committee.\textsuperscript{11}

There are very specific procedures for the disciplining of high-ranking Party cadres. Regular and alternate members of Party committees, including the Central Committee, can be disciplined with reprimands and warnings by plenary conferences of those committees. More serious disciplinary measures must be decided at Party congresses. The only alternative is to convene a plenary conference of the relevant Party committee and obtain approval of the proposed disciplinary measure by at least two thirds of the regular

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{8} Alexander Casella, "Dateline Vietnam: Managing the Peace," \textit{Foreign Policy}, No. 30 (Spring 1978), p. 172.
  \item \textsuperscript{10} "Statutes of the Vietnam Communist Party", p. 248.
  \item \textsuperscript{11} Ibid., p. 270.
\end{itemize}
members, and the subsequent approval of the next higher Party Committee. In this case, the decision would still have to be reported to the next congress.\textsuperscript{12}

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid.
2 The Origins of Self-Criticism and Criticism Campaigns

The 1986 self-criticism and criticism campaign fell within a tradition of mass campaigns used not only by the Vietnamese communists, but also by the Chinese and to a lesser extent the Soviets. These campaigns had a variety of objectives, depending on the circumstances the communist party was facing at that point in time. Often the campaigns were restricted to the party organisation and the objectives were to deal with internal party conflict, to consolidate the position of one group or another, or to bring about some kind of organisational change. When the campaigns involved public participation, it usually meant that the Party was seeking to enhance its popular legitimacy, although there were instances of public involvement being used to gather further ammunition against particular sections of the Party. While most of these campaigns were not called self-criticism and criticism campaigns, they often used the device of self-criticism and criticism to help modify the behaviour of individuals who were the targets of the campaigns. This chapter will explore the origins of self-criticism and criticism, from the philosophical and ideological roots of the practice, to its role in clandestine revolutionary parties as a survival mechanism, and then its transformation into a device used in mass campaigns to maintain the power of governing communist parties.

Before reviewing the Soviet, Chinese and Vietnamese communist experience of self-criticism and criticism, it is useful to step back and try to understand some of the philosophical assumptions underlying the practice of self-criticism and criticism. A major assumption is that individuals who make mistakes can "clean the slate" and start afresh through their confession of shortcomings. People are considered inherently good and expressions of inappropriate behaviour are believed to be the outcome of bad learning which can be corrected.

There are some similarities between self-criticism/criticism and the belief system of gnosticism which developed at the dawn of Christianity. Gnostics believed that people could achieve salvation through a process of "gnosis" or knowledge. The knowledge was gained through a process of introspective reasoning, as against faith which was an integral aspect of Christianity. The gnostics believed that this knowledge would awaken the soul, make it aware of its true situation, and enable it to choose between good and evil. Manicheism, a specific type of gnosticism, held that confession played an important role in furthering self-knowledge:
To sin means fundamentally to commit an act of forgetfulness, of unlearning. It means being unwilling or unable to combat evil by appealing to the intellectual resources laid at the disposal of the enlightened soul. To confess is to re-learn, to revise. In such a confession, the concern is less with sin than with error, less with repentance than with self-criticism.¹

There are clear parallels between this philosophy and the communist belief that individuals can reform themselves through self-criticism. Both gnosticism and communist ideology emphasise the importance of creating the "new man", whose salvation comes through a capacity for knowledge, including self-knowledge. ²

The role of confession in the Catholic religion bears some similarities to the communist practice of self-criticism, but the underlying Catholic belief in "original sin" is somewhat incompatible with the communist conviction that human beings are basically good or at least that they start life with a blank slate. There is greater compatibility between self-criticism and criticism and Confucianism, which prevailed in both China and Vietnam at the time of the first communist revolutionaries. Both Confucianism and Marxist practices like self-criticism and criticism were based on the conviction that human nature is malleable and can be improved through corrective action, on a belief in the good of the community having precedence over the interests of the individual, and on the need for continuous study and self-improvement and the importance of exemplary moral behaviour.³ An old Confucian saying recited by six year olds in Vietnam from their first day of school reflected these beliefs:

> From birth, man is good by nature
> Unpolished jade is worthless
> Without study, man cannot know
> the principle of things. . .⁴

At the same time, self-criticism and criticism flew in the face of other Confucianist traditions, including the emphasis on maintaining harmony and avoiding conflict in interpersonal relationships.⁵

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² Ibid., pp. 13-14.
⁴ Nguyen Khac Vien, p. 30.
Hollander has noted the affinity of self-criticism and criticism with "shaming", a time-honoured device of social control in Tsarist Russia, in particular amongst peasants. Shaming entailed the public exposure of a wrongdoer, preferably among a peer group, and required the culprit to make a confession of guilt to eradicate the sin. The Russians even had a folk-saying which stressed the importance of this process: "He who confesses has repented and he who has repented has wiped out his sin." The Russian intelligentsia in the second half of the nineteenth century employed their own version of self-criticism in their quest for self-knowledge. To intellectuals like Chernyshevski, sinning meant refusing to learn, or understanding badly or forgetting. It was not really a question of repenting such sin but of being self-critical, of going through a kind of exam to see whether one could relearn if one was given the chance. Self-criticism and criticism were also practised in secret circles (krujok) in Tsarist Russia from the 1860s. In these secret circles, the baring of the soul towards a director of conscience was obligatory and mutual confession was seen as the path to moral progress.

In contemporary western society, parallels may be drawn between self-criticism/criticism and some aspects of encounter group activities. Encounter groups encourage participants to disclose their innermost thoughts and conflicts in the context of a supportive group. Once again, there is an assumption that through self-disclosure individuals can gain self-knowledge, resolve the problems in their lives and achieve personal progress. Having taken part in such groups during a university psychology course, the author is aware of the potential for peer pressure to be directed at participants who do not choose to disclose their thoughts to the group. Thus, a process intended to have therapeutic results for the individual can develop into a device for social control. There are strategies which individuals can adopt to protect themselves from victimisation in these situations. For example, they can make token disclosures to divert attention from themselves while keeping their real thoughts and views to themselves. In this case, self-disclosure to the group becomes little more than ritual. It is likely that individuals engaging in the communist practice of self-criticism and criticism developed similar protective strategies.

This overview suggests that self-criticism and criticism could play one of two primary functions. They could enable individuals to gain self-knowledge and hence experience a moral rebirth and other personal progress, or they could be used to exert social control and modify the behaviour of individuals. Both of these functions had some utility for clandestine revolutionary parties and it is not surprising that these parties incorporated self-criticism and criticism into daily party life. On the one hand, revolutionaries had to

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8 Ibid., p. 129. Also see: Hollander, op. cit., p. 257.
find great reserves of mental energy and toughness to sustain them in their dangerous, often life-threatening activities. They, individually, and the party as a whole, had to ensure that they were performing at their peak and that they were not going to make mistakes which might prove fatal to party goals. They had to keep one step ahead of the government's security forces and this meant constant reassessment of strategies to take account of changing circumstances. By engaging in small group sessions of self-criticism and criticism they could constantly review party and individual performance and decide on future directions. In this sense, self-criticism and criticism had a party-building role. Karl Marx recognised the need for this self-critical facility in revolutionary movements. In *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* he declared that proletarian revolutions were ever self-critical, that they always stopped short in their progress, retraced their steps to make a fresh start, and were "pitilessly scornful of the half-measures, the weaknesses, the futility of their preliminary essays".9

The social control function of self-criticism and criticism was also critical for a clandestine party. Party members had to be disciplined and united in their support of party objectives. Lack of discipline and unity could lead to fragmentation of the party membership and could threaten the party's survival. Hence, individual deviations from party objectives were not tolerated and party members who did stray from the norm were subjected to peer pressure through self-criticism and criticism.

As the communist parties developed into mass organisations and then into governing parties, the practice of self-criticism and criticism was retained, but now it was used for different purposes. The priority shifted from party survival to consolidation and maintenance of power. Accordingly, the balance between the party-building function and the social control function changed, often in the direction of a greater focus on social control. This was particularly the case for the Soviet Union under Stalin and China under Mao. While the Vietnamese communists also experienced this shift, they seemed more inclined to maintain the party-building role of self-criticism and criticism.

What seemed to be common to the communist parties was a fear that once in power, the party organisation would become sclerotic and bureaucratised, that it would be less able to adapt effectively to changing circumstances and that its cadres would lose the revolutionary virtues and commitment which had carried the parties into power. To address these problems, the parties conducted regular rectification and other campaigns within their organisations. Self-criticism and criticism still occurred in the small group setting but in the context of campaigns with very specific objectives. Increasingly, communist parties involved the public in these campaigns in an effort to police party

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members and cadres from below. They encouraged the public to criticise cadres and members who had engaged in corruption or other undesirable activities. Another reason for involving the public was to enhance party legitimacy by showing that it was prepared to act on public complaints against its staff. On the other hand, ruling elites sometimes involved the public in these campaigns as a cover for attacks on their political opponents in the party.

The rest of this chapter will explore the past use of self-criticism and criticism in the Soviet, Chinese and Vietnamese Communist Parties, both as small group devices and in the context of campaigns.

The Soviet Experience

Given the familiarity of intellectuals and secret circles in Tsarist Russia with the practice of self-criticism and criticism, and the cultural tradition of shaming, it is not surprising that the Bolsheviks incorporated the device into the daily lives of Party members. Operating as a clandestine organisation before the Revolution, the Bolsheviks used self-criticism and criticism to maintain Party discipline and help prevent or correct costly mistakes. Lenin himself stressed the need for the Party to be self-critical:

Frankly acknowledging a mistake, ascertaining the reasons for it, analysing the conditions that have led up to it, and thrashing out the means of its rectification - that is the hallmark of a serious party; that is how it should perform its duties, and how it should educate and train its class, and then the masses.  

When they came to power, the Bolsheviks were concerned to ensure that the strains and temptations of being a governing party did not bring about a decline in the cohesion, discipline and performance of the Party. To stop this decline from occurring, Lenin was prepared to involve the populace in a process of public criticism of Party cadres and members. Significantly, in view of Gorbachev's later use of the term, Lenin referred to this concept of leadership-initiated and leadership-regulated criticism as "glasnost". Lenin clearly understood the value of public criticism in building the Party's legitimacy. By attacking bureaucratic malpractice and stimulating public participation in the political process, or the appearance of it, the regime could build public support. There were set limits, however, to the kind of criticism which was permitted during this process. For example, there was no commitment to a free press and the Bolsheviks closed down newspapers owned by non-Bolshevik political parties.

Stalin also placed emphasis on public criticism and once said that the "valve of self-criticism" should be kept open to prevent cadres from putting on airs and graces and to prevent public alienation from the Party. Yet he made this particular comment on the eve of a campaign against "enemies of the state", which suggests that he was using public criticism as a front for purging his political opponents. By manipulating public criticism, he could fabricate allegations of corruption or other malpractices which would provide the justification for action against these individuals. Within the Party, Stalin transformed self-criticism and criticism into a vertical communication process, where the focus was on strict obedience. He denounced the "fetishism" of study circles and shifted the emphasis of self-criticism and criticism from group study and discussion to individual study of a Party history written under his supervision. Self-criticism and criticism became a vehicle for consolidating his personal power.

The group study circles were not revived again until Krushchev came to power in the 1950s. He made fresh efforts to rejuvenate group criticism and self-criticism along less hierarchical lines and sought public involvement in the process. An official Soviet dictionary published during this period confirmed the role of self-criticism and criticism in both the Party and public domains:

The strength of the socialist state consists of the fact that it is the state of the working people themselves who actively participate in its work. Therefore, only under the condition that the masses actively and vigilantly uncover shortcomings in the work of the apparatus, that is, under the condition of criticism from below, can the state apparatus fully and successfully carry out its functions. With the help of criticism and self-criticism bureaucratic methods of leadership are overcome. The criticism and self-criticism strengthens the socialist state and the socialist order and is a hallmark of its strength and vitality... 

The rules of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union emphasise that the development of self-criticism and criticism from below, the bringing to light and overcoming of shortcomings, the struggle against the pretence that all is well, and the celebration of successes in work is a responsibility of members of the Party.

It is likely that Krushchev used self-criticism and criticism to extend his control over the Party organisation, and to act against those Stalinist forces in the Party who might

12 Ibid., pp. 70-71.
14 Ibid., p. 27.
15 Politicheski Slovar (Moscow: Moscow State Publishing House of Political Literature, 1958), pp. 297-298. Translation kindly provided by Professor T. H. Rigby, Political Science Department, Research School of Social Sciences, Australian National University.
have been a threat to him. He also enhanced his authority by criticising his predecessor. In his famous Secret Speech to the Twentieth Party Congress in 1956, he launched an all-encompassing attack on Stalin's excesses. He criticised Stalin for his grave abuse of power, mass repressions and deportations, and his cultivation of a personality cult. By so doing, Krushchev was able to distance himself from his predecessor's actions and cast himself in a more favourable light. This had the effect of enhancing his own legitimacy, despite the fact that he had served Stalin in the period he was now condemning.

**Chinese Experience**

Chinese leader Mao Tse Tung asserted, based on Marxist theory, that contradictions were inevitable in society and that a society progressed by resolving them. He made an important distinction between the way in which "antagonistic" contradictions between the Party and "enemies of the people", and "non-antagonistic" contradictions between the Party and the "people" should be treated. There was to be no compromise with so-called reactionaries, the bourgeoisie and other Party enemies. They would be dealt with harshly, using coercion if necessary. A more persuasive approach, employing such means as self-criticism and criticism, was called for in dealing with the majority of people who Mao believed could be won over by the Party.

Mao's assumption was that people would naturally support the Party once they had undergone an educative process and realised that it represented their interests. His assumption was not altogether surprising in the context of the traditional Confucian belief that the human mind could be moulded and reformed through diligent study. The use of persuasion rather than force was also a principle of Confucianism, which considered coercion a sign of moral weakness. Mao operated on a similar assumption in his dealings with Party cadres and members. His concept of "unity-criticism-unity" held that cadres naturally aspired to Party unity and to serve the people. However, their shortcomings prevented them from achieving this goal. By pointing out the error of their ways through criticism, and through the cadres' own practice of self-criticism, the Party could help the cadres ascend to a higher plane of unity.

This educative and persuasive process occurred in small group study sessions in which participants studied Maoist and other communist texts and engaged in self-criticism and criticism. These groups were effective devices for behaviour change and social

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19 Frederick Teiwes has suggested that the Chinese Communist Party took these methods from Soviet experience. Ibid., p. 58.
control. It was impossible for individuals to remain uninvolved as they were all required to express an opinion. Participants had to relate the Party's policies to the group's and their own individual performance. Where there was a divergence between the two, the participants had to determine the reasons and conduct self-criticism and criticism of their shortcomings.20 Once again, there was an assumption that they, rather than the policies, were at fault.

Mao had used the device of self-criticism and criticism since the building of the armed forces and base areas in southern China in 1927, not only within the Party but also to mediate relations between the Party and the population at large.21 He further developed and applied the practice in the bases established in North West China after the Long March of 1934. There was a clear Soviet influence at this early stage. Party leaders read Soviet materials on self-criticism and criticism and adapted the ideas expressed in those works to the Chinese context. One Chinese booklet on self-criticism and criticism contained five Soviet articles out of a total of seven — two were written by Stalin and one by Lenin.22

Later, self-criticism and criticism came to be practised by small study groups in the context of campaigns. These campaigns occurred when the Party wanted to bring about internal organisational changes, or when it sought to introduce significant political, economic or social changes to Chinese society as a whole. In these situations, the campaigns functioned to mobilise the Party membership, and where appropriate the public, in support of the changes. Campaigns were also used to correct any unintended consequences of these upheavals,23 especially where those consequences threatened the Party's legitimacy. The campaigns were often opened to public participation when the ruling elite needed scapegoats for Party actions which had undermined public confidence, or when it was trying to find ammunition to diminish the influence of a particular faction within the Party itself. The ruling elite hoped to benefit from these campaigns by regaining a degree of public legitimacy, while the public could vent grievances against specific targets and hence enjoy an emotional catharsis. Mao also saw the use of public criticism during campaigns as an effective means of policing cadres from below and ensuring that they did not become bureaucratic, corrupt and arrogant. He had a longstanding distrust of bureaucratic structures and was suspicious that tendencies towards bureaucratisation in the Party could lead eventually to the creation of a new elite class of

20 Ibid., p. 33.
21 Mao Tse Tung, "Correct Handling of Contradictions", p. 172.
23 Teiwes, Politics and Purges, p. 6.
cadres. The Cultural Revolution demonstrated the lengths to which he was prepared to go to prevent this from occurring.

During the Second World War, the Party launched its first major rectification campaign. Called the Cheng Feng movement, it began in 1942 and did not end until 1944. Party members, cadres, students, and intellectuals spent several months on intensive group study of documents assigned by the Party. They engaged in self-criticism and criticism of their past attitudes and activities, and stated their renewed dedication to official policies and styles of leadership. At this time, the Party was facing great challenges. It was locked in a guerilla war against the Japanese and was involved in a civil war with the Nationalists. It needed to weld its members into a united fighting force, a daunting task in view of the very disparate backgrounds of the members and the huge number involved. In the space of only two years, from 1937 to 1939, the membership had climbed from 40,000 to 800,000. Most of the new recruits were illiterate peasants who had little knowledge, if any, of Marxism-Leninism. Another stream of recruits consisted of students and intellectuals who had fled from the urban areas occupied by the Japanese in northern China.

Mao also used the campaign to build his authority as Party leader. By ensuring that the campaign emphasised the study of his own writings, he was able to translate his role from that of an interpreter of Marxism-Leninism theory to a source of that theory. He established himself as a charismatic leader, and at the same time adapted Marxist-Leninist doctrine to the Chinese situation. The campaign provided him with a convenient opportunity to undermine the remaining influence of the "returned student group", the last likely source of a challenge to his leadership.

The next major rectification campaign occurred in the context of the land reform program in the late 1940s and involved significant public participation, unlike the Cheng Feng campaign which had been conducted mainly inside the Party. The land reform presented considerable difficulties for the Party. In some areas, local cadres were believed to have been too sympathetic to landlords and to have abrogated their responsibility to redistribute land to the peasants. There were suspicions that these cadres may have come from "bad" class backgrounds. On the other hand, in some areas the cadres and the peasants had gone beyond Party directives in their haste to confiscate land

25 Whyte, Small Groups, p. 32.
29 Teiwes, op. cit., p. 69.
from middle peasants as well as from rich peasants and landlords. They had beaten, killed, or caused the suicide of landlords and other so-called enemies of the Party. Many cadres had set themselves up as a new elite and this generated public discontent.

In response, the Party organised a rectification campaign to expel cadres and Party members with undesirable class backgrounds and to subject all cadres, including those who had overstepped the mark in the land reform, to mass criticism. The rectification campaign led to as many excesses as the land reform itself. Many cadres were classified by mistake as "enemies of the people". Ordinary peasants were able to participate actively in the rectification process, not only by criticising cadres but also by having a say in the disciplinary measures to be applied. In one village, rectification took the form of a "gate", a forum in which individual members of the village Party committee had to face representatives of the villagers. Only when the village representatives were satisfied that the cadres had owned up to their shortcomings were they allowed to "pass the gate" and resume their normal duties. This process had the potential in many cases to completely demoralise village cadres and to weaken Party leadership at the village level.30 In its efforts to restore public confidence by directing public anger at Party cadres, the Party leadership damaged its own credibility amongst its staff. The Vietnamese Communist Party would make the same mistake a decade later.

Following the excesses of the land reform and the associated rectification campaign, the Party steered clear of involving the public in this way in Party campaigns, that is, until the Hundred Flowers campaign. It appears that the campaign may have been an effort to reduce tensions between the Party and certain sectors of Chinese society, in particular intellectuals, who were regarded as an important source of expertise and skills in China's drive for economic development. Thus, at a time when the Party had consolidated its authority, the campaign may have been an attempt to resolve contradictions "amongst the people". The campaign began with the Central Committee's announcement on 30 April 1957 of a "movement for the rectification of style of work". Mao's speech of 27 February 1957 on the correct handling of contradictions among the people was the prescribed text for the movement,31 and the stated aim was to eliminate the three evils of "bureaucratism, subjectivism and sectarianism" in the Party and state bureaucracy.32 The campaign took place within a context of unrest in the universities. Many graduates were having problems finding jobs that matched their qualifications and there was a certain degree of disillusionment amongst students who felt that the Party had not lived up to their expectations.

30 Ibid., p. 88.
31 Mao, "Correct Handling of Contradictions".
During the Hundred Flowers Campaign a flood of public criticism was directed at the Party. By the end of May, Mao acted to define the limits of acceptable criticism. On 25 May he told delegates to a Youth League Congress that all words and actions that deviated from socialism were completely mistaken. Three weeks later, a modified version of his speech on the resolution of contradictions was released. It now contained six criteria for assessing correct criticism, the most important being support for Communist Party leadership and socialism. 33 This was followed by retaliation against those who had criticised the Party and Government. Two Deputy Chairmen of the Democratic League (a united front of non-communist parties) were denounced and lost ministerial posts in the National People's Congress. Senior positions in universities were given to Party officials and a regulation was passed to ensure that graduates could not obtain jobs unless they were politically reliable.34

The Soviet leader at this time, Nikita Krushchev, had another interpretation of Mao's reason for conducting the Hundred Flowers campaign. He claimed that Mao's motive was "to goad people into expressing their innermost thoughts, both in speech and in print, so that he could destroy those whose thinking he considered harmful."35

Bao Ruo Wang (Jean Pasqualini), a French national unwittingly caught up in the clampdown which followed the Hundred Flowers campaign, was subjected to self-criticism and criticism activities during his seven year imprisonment. He indicated that the principles of self-criticism and criticism boiled down to four rules:

1. Ideally, confession should be spontaneous and willed, and should occur automatically as soon as a citizen committed an error.

2. If this did not happen, others should be quick to give the offender "patient assistance" to help him recognize his mistake.

3. If this was without result, then "criticism delivered with goodwill by well-intentioned people" would be used. This criticism would be unaffected by personal grudges and would follow the principle that, "It is the mistake we are after and not the man".

4. As a last resort, the offender would be subjected to struggle sessions, solitary confinement and the like. 36

The use of self-criticism and criticism usually implied that one's shortcomings were considered within the bounds of contradictions among the people and that through

33 Ibid., p. 262.
34 Ibid., pp. 263-264.
confession and a process of re-learning, one could return to one's rightful place in Chinese society.

More coercive measures were used against those who were considered enemies of the people. Besides criminal sanctions, they could be subjected to severe struggle sessions in which they were exposed to both physical and psychological abuse. Bao witnessed several Struggle sessions in prison:

Like all the other non-physical interrogation techniques, the purpose is to bring the victim to accept anything that may be judged for him. Thus a Struggle is rarely resolved quickly; that would be too easy. At the beginning, even if the victim tells the truth or grovellingly admits to any accusation hurled at him, his every word will be greeted with insults and shrieks of contradiction. He is ringed by jeering, hating faces, screaming in his ear, spitting; fists swipe menacingly close to him and everything he says is branded a lie. . .

After three or four days the victim begins inventing sins he has never committed, hoping that an admission monstrous enough might win him a reprieve. After a week of Struggling he is prepared to go to any lengths.37

The Vietnamese Experience

There was a certain continuity between Marxism and the cultural traditions of Vietnam, especially Confucianism. Vietnamese revolutionaries in the Thanh Nien movement recognised and accepted this. On the anniversary of Confucius' birthday in 1927 they published an article which stated:

As far as we Vietnamese are concerned, let us perfect ourselves intellectually by reading the works of Confucius and revolutionarily by reading the works of Lenin.38

The Communist Party cadre assigned the task of political education was likened to the traditional learned man who was considered the vessel of ideas and moral principles required to regulate social life.39 Ho Chi Minh personified the Confucian "superior man" (chun tzu or in Vietnamese quan tu) by projecting the qualities of rectitude, probity, sincerity, modesty, courage and self-sacrifice.40

The use of self-criticism and criticism by the Vietnamese communists to identify corruption and inefficiency within the bureaucracy was similar to the role of the Censorate

40 Duiker, Communist Road to Power, p. 27.
in Vietnam during the Nguyen dynasty. Modelled on a Chinese institution, the Censorate was a watchdog body comprising a number of censors who travelled throughout the provinces scrutinizing the activities of officials and reporting direct to the emperor. Censors who had the power to impeach fellow officials for corruption or other abuses of power were called "investigating censors" (giam sat ngu su). 41

Self-criticism and criticism were used within the Vietnamese Communist Party from the early days of revolutionary struggle. Ho Chi Minh himself attributed the ever-growing strength of the Party in those years to the effective use of self-criticism and criticism.42 While the Vietnamese communists probably gained most of their knowledge of the practice from the Chinese, as noted earlier, the Chinese themselves learned from Soviet methods of self-criticism and criticism. Ho admitted that "the influence of the Russian October Revolution and the Marxist-Leninist theory came to Vietnam mostly through China".43

Ho regarded self-criticism and criticism as the fundamental law of development of the Party.44 While it is certain that he recognised the value of the practice as a means of social control, he also regarded it as a way of promoting self-improvement and a high standard of conduct and morality among Party members. He set an example by his ascetic lifestyle, and expected other Party members to show a similar selfless devotion to the communist cause. He viewed self-criticism and criticism as a means of maintaining a certain dynamism and change in the Party, and of helping to prevent it becoming a rigid, bureaucratic organisation out of touch with the public.

After World War Two, the importance of self-criticism and criticism in Party life was continually emphasised. There is some suggestion that the southern Party leaders Tran Van Giau and Tran Ngoc Ranh were required to undergo self-criticism in 1946 and were later removed from their leadership positions due to excesses (such as the killing of Trotskyists and nationalists) committed under their command in the period following the August Revolution of 1945. Their subjection to self-criticism and retirement from decision-making positions tended to be the Vietnamese Communist Party's method of "purifying" Party ranks. This contrasted with the more violent character of Soviet and Chinese purges.45

43 Ibid., p. 263.
44 Ibid., p. 127.
45 Huynh Kim Khanh, Vietnamese Communism, pp. 255-256. Tran Van Giau subsequently became a prominent historian and teacher.
In a speech in January 1949, Ho said that Party members had to remould and cleanse themselves, and stressed the role of self-criticism and criticism in achieving ideological unity and inner cohesion. At the Second National Congress of the Party in February 1951, he emphasised the need to use self-criticism and criticism to correct the mistakes made by the Party. He criticised the insufficient attention given to ideological training and inner party democracy and bemoaned the fact that self-criticism and criticism had not yet become regular habits. Ho pointed out that during its many years of underground activity, the Party had grown ever stronger due to the effective use of self-criticism and criticism, and suggested the expansion of their use to the public domain, but always under Party control:

The Party must widen the movement for criticism and self-criticism within the Party, the State organs, the mass organizations, in the press and among the people. Criticism and self-criticism must be conducted regularly, in a practical and democratic way, from top to bottom and from the bottom upwards. Lastly, there must be close control by the Party.

During the long years of the resistance against the French, the Party had relied for its existence on the continued support of the populace, especially peasants in rural areas. The Party made special efforts to protect the relationship by ensuring that Party cadres and members were responsive to the people's needs and by minimising Party action that might threaten this public support. One possible threat to the relationship was the arrogance and bureaucratism of some Party officials. Another was the tendency of certain cadres to use coercion instead of persuasion in dealing with matters affecting the public. To prevent these problems from damaging its credibility, the Party encouraged public criticism of the offending cadres. For example, in 1951 the Party directed basic level cadres to submit themselves to mass criticism and allowed the public to observe the cadres undergoing self-criticism.

The manifesto of the Vietnam Workers' Party, issued in February 1951, enshrined self-criticism and criticism as the Party's law of development. The Party's statutes confirmed this and ascribed an important role to public criticism, as we can see from the following excerpt:

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46 Ho Chi Minh, *Selected Writings*, p. 89.
47 Ibid., p. 119.
48 Ibid., p. 204.
49 Ibid., p. 119.
50 William Turley, "Political Participation and the Vietnamese Communist Party", in *Vietnamese Communism in Comparative Perspective*, p. 182.
The Vietnam Workers' Party makes criticism and self-criticism the law of its development. The Party continually develops criticism and self-criticism and encourages its members to practise it, especially criticism of high echelons by low echelons. The Party also bans all actions aimed at thwarting criticism. The Party struggles without compromise against all rightist and "leftist" tendencies and all bourgeois, petty bourgeois, feudal and other non-proletarian thoughts. The Party requires that all its members adopt the Communist philosophy of life, stick fast to the working class standpoint and combat all manifestations of individualism. The Party encourages the masses to criticize its activities, its cadres, and its members and welcomes this criticism. The Party sincerely accepts the correct criticisms of the masses.51

From this same passage, it is also clear that the public criticism would be circumscribed by what the Party deemed to be acceptable.

The Party turned again to a campaign involving self-criticism and criticism after the Seventh Plenum of the Central Committee in March 1956. That Plenum had taken a major policy decision to shift the Party's focus from the fight for national reunification to the consolidation of the North. The decision meant that the Party would now commence the process of socialist transformation. This issue had generated great debate and disagreement within the Central Committee and the subsequent self-criticism and criticism drive can be interpreted as an attempt by the top leadership to build commitment to the new policy and to neutralise potential opposition.

The documents circulated for study during the campaign were Secretary-General Truong Chinh's report to the Seventh Plenum and the Plenum Resolution. These documents criticised many of the ideas and policies which had prevailed after the Geneva Agreement was signed, even describing them as "rightist".52 Yet, the policies which they criticised, including the national front policy and its emphasis on reaching an accommodation with sympathetic landlords, had been long-standing Party positions. The campaign was aimed at ensuring that cadres and members at all levels of the Party accepted the policy reversal and implemented the associated changes. As it turned out, in calling for action against "rightists" within the Party, the campaign contributed to the turmoil and excesses of the last major phase of the land reform.

Perhaps some of the ruthlessness of the land reform can be attributed to the fact that Chinese advisers helped the Party plan and implement the reform. The Chinese Communist Party was not known for its velvet glove approach to this issue. Indeed, one

would have thought that a careful examination of the Chinese experience would have caused the Vietnamese to tread carefully, or at least try to avoid making the same mistakes.

Just as in China, special work teams were sent to villages to carry out the land reform. They were able to overrule and bypass the local Party committee and in many cases they set out to undermine the cadres by accusing them of having the wrong class background. This was a humiliating process for veteran cadres who had sacrificed years of their lives fighting the French and who considered themselves loyal Party members. Often, such cadres were removed from their positions and replaced by poor peasants who had no other qualifications for the job than their class rank.

The primary target of the land reform was, of course, the landlord class. Those landlords accused of minor crimes had to undertake self-criticism before their Province Administrative Committee before confessing their mistakes to the village Congress of Peasants' representatives.\(^53\) Landlords accused of the most serious crimes were brought before public denunciation sessions modelled on the Chinese "struggle" sessions.\(^54\) There were accounts of landlords being badly beaten and even killed, and of property confiscation going to the extreme of leaving families with no means of support. Subsequently, there were claims in the United States and South Vietnam that the land reform had led to a "bloodbath" and there was controversy over the number of people who had lost their lives. Some commentators speculated that between 50,000 and 500,000 people had died during the land reform while others estimated that the number actually executed was between 800 and 2500.\(^55\) More recently, a prominent Communist Party editor and writer has indicated that as many as 10,000 individuals may have been executed by "people's courts,"\(^56\) while a former senior Vietnamese Government economist has referred to a top secret report to the Central Committee in 1956 which estimated the loss of life at 15,000 people.\(^57\)

Despite the disastrous direction of the land reform, the Party leadership did not appear to become aware of the excesses until much later in 1956. When it finally recognised the magnitude of the crisis, it brought a halt to the process and initiated a rectification campaign. Essentially, the campaign required that the class classification of those accused of being landlords or other enemies of the people be reviewed and changed if they were


\(^{54}\) Boudarel, *Influences and Idiosyncracies,* pp. 162-163.

\(^{55}\) Porter, op. cit., p. 55.

\(^{56}\) Bui Tin, former deputy editor of *Quan Doi Nhan Dan* and *Nhan Dan* was interviewed in Paris and the results broadcast on BBC, 1 December 1990.

not correct. People who had been jailed unjustly were released.\textsuperscript{58} Several members of the Central Committee were held personally responsible for shortcomings in leadership during the land reform. Truong Chinh, the Secretary General of the Party for fifteen years, stepped down in favour of Ho Chi Minh. Ho Viet Thang and Le Van Luong, in charge of land reform and organisation reform respectively, were both demoted.\textsuperscript{59} General Vo Nguyen Giap conducted a serious self-criticism on behalf of the leadership. He admitted that:

\begin{quote}
While carrying out attacks on the enemy, we overemphasised attacking decisively, did not attach importance to taking precautions against deviations, and did not emphasise the necessity for caution and for avoiding unjust punishment of innocent people...therefore we expanded the area of attack, attacked too broadly, and made widespread use of excessive repressive measures.\textsuperscript{60}
\end{quote}

Edwin Moise has suggested that the Party leadership's frankness in accepting responsibility for land reform errors was a truly extraordinary feat of self-criticism which went far beyond anything the Soviet or Chinese Communist Parties would have been prepared to acknowledge.\textsuperscript{61} On the other hand, the disillusionment within the Party was so great as a result of action against cadres during the land reform that the leadership was compelled to take some action to restore morale.

A further campaign involving public criticism of Party cadres occurred at the beginning of the Second Indochina War in the 1960s when the Party again needed to rally public support behind the war effort. However, it carefully defined the public's freedom to criticise. Villagers were only permitted to criticise unranked village Party members. Workers could only target unranked enterprise Party members. The criticism itself was confined to work related matters. The only people who could criticise Party cadres were village level leaders. The purpose of the campaign was to improve the interpersonal skills of those cadres who had to deal with the public, to enhance the legitimacy of the local Party organisations and to maximise public support for Party objectives during the war.\textsuperscript{62} Indeed, improving the Party's legitimacy was an essential goal of such campaigns throughout the Party's history. By allowing criticism of individual cadres, the Party could bolster the legitimacy of the regime as a whole.

\textsuperscript{59} White, \textit{Agrarian Reform and National Liberation}, p. 432.
\textsuperscript{60} Ibid., p. 248.
\textsuperscript{62} Turley, "Political Participation", p. 187.
Party leaders have continued to stress the important role of self-criticism and criticism in the Party. Le Duan, General Secretary from 1960 to 1986, regarded its party-building function of prime importance. He said that self-criticism and criticism were an essential part of a cadre's education, and a way of making cadres think independently, more analytically, so that they could better apply the Party's policies to changed circumstances. Le Duan also saw a role for the mass media in reflecting public criticism of bureaucracy and authoritarianism. For Truong Chinh, the chief value of self-criticism and criticism lay in its function as a social control mechanism:

\[\ldots we\ use\ criticism\ and\ self-criticism\ as\ a\ weapon\ to\ counter\ whatever\ influence\ of\ unproletarian\ ideologies;\ we\ criticize\ the\ petty\ bourgeois\ ideology,\ fight\ the\ impact\ of\ bourgeois\ and\ other\ erroneous\ ideologies,\ and\ strengthen\ solidarity\ and\ unity\ within\ the\ Party.\]

He was in favour of public involvement in party building and thought the public should have the opportunity to criticise cadres and Party members and to nominate people for admission to the Party.

The main impression which emerges from this review is that the purpose and form of self-criticism and criticism has changed as communist parties have made the transition from clandestine to ruling parties. From a survival mechanism it has gradually developed into an instrument for keeping those parties in power. The balance between its party-building and social control functions has shifted accordingly, with social control becoming more dominant. However, this balance can vary from time to time in response to changing party needs. Historically, the Vietnamese Communist Party seems to have used self-criticism and criticism campaigns to consolidate support within the Party for new policy directions, to bring about organisational change, and to battle undesirable tendencies within the bureaucracy which might damage the Party's public credibility.

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63 Le Duan, *This Nation and Socialism are One* (Chicago: Vanguard Books, 1976), pp. 88-89.
3 The Economic Context

A key contention of this thesis is that a legitimacy crisis was a major factor contributing to the Party's decision to conduct the self-criticism and criticism campaign in 1986. That legitimacy crisis was the result of the Party's failure to satisfy the expectations of its own members and the population at large. The economy was the domain in which it had failed them most. To appreciate the extent of the credibility gap facing the Party in the mid-1980s one need only recall what the Party had promised after the war and what it had in fact delivered a decade later. In early 1976, the Party's Secretary General Le Duan had told the Vietnamese people they could expect a better life "in five or ten years" and had even predicted "a radio set, a refrigerator, and a television set for each family in ten years time."\(^1\) By 1986, it was clear that the Party had fallen far short of this goal. Most Vietnamese were barely managing to eke out a daily existence. Malnutrition was widespread — it was estimated that one in ten children were dying of gastro-enteritis brought on by malnourishment.\(^2\) For a Party which had prided itself on its close ties with the people and its concern for their well-being, this situation spelled disaster. It represented a direct challenge to the Party's mandate to govern. The purpose of this chapter is to trace the economic developments which led to this legitimacy crisis and to examine the impact of the economic turmoil on the lives of different groups within the society. This will demonstrate the pressure the Party was under when it decided to undertake the 1986 self-criticism and criticism campaign.

Overview of economy to 1985

After the war ended in April 1975, the Party had to come to grips with the problems associated with reuniting the country. At first it seemed that the top leadership would allow the two different economic systems operating in the north and south to co-exist for a time. There were elements in the Party that favoured such a cautious approach.\(^3\) This is not what happened. Instead, the Party decided to undertake a wholesale process of socialist transformation of commerce and agriculture in the south. The results were disastrous. Many peasants in the Mekong delta resisted government attempts to incorporate them into production collectives and it is estimated that over 10,000 of the 13,246 collectives set up in 1979 had collapsed by the beginning of 1980.\(^4\) Rice production in the southern provinces declined from 6.6 million tonnes in 1976 to 5.5

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\(^2\) Ibid., p. 89.

\(^3\) Nguyen Kien, *Vietnam: 15 Years after the Liberation of Saigon* (Hanoi: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1990), p. 23

million tonnes in 1978. The transformation of commerce fared no better. The dismantling of private businesses, mainly owned by ethnic Chinese, led to skyrocketing prices and inflation and the destruction of market stability in general.

Naturally, these initiatives did not endear the Vietnamese Communist Party to the southerners, many thousands of whom decided to vote with their feet and leave the country illegally. Yet, there are indications that many southern Party cadres and members themselves did not fully support the uncompromising nature of the transformation. It is significant, for example, that Nguyen Van Linh, then a top Party cadre in the southern Party apparatus, was relieved of responsibility for running the campaign to transform private industry and commerce after he was accused of "rightism". The Party leadership felt he was not pursuing the shutdown of the private sector vigorously enough. He was replaced by his deputy, Do Muoi, who had been involved in the collectivisation of agriculture in the north in the 1950s and was remembered for his motto "Capitalists are like sewer rats; whenever one sees them popping up one must smash them to death."

The haste with which the Party sought to transform the south was but one aspect of an approach to economic development that was doomed to failure. Vo Nhan Tri has referred to this approach as the Stalinist-Maoist economic development strategy and has asserted that this strategy was the primary cause of the intractable problems which plagued the Vietnamese economy. Characteristics of the strategy were a great emphasis on heavy industry at the expense of agriculture and light industry; antipathy towards the household and individual economy; disregard of material incentives for producers; the socialist transformation of private industry, trade and agriculture; and excessive centralised economic planning. One could add to this list a heavy reliance on the use of subsidies on certain staples and consumer goods for the urban population and on production inputs such as electricity and fertiliser. Despite some piecemeal attempts by the Party to modify this model to cope with the roller coaster economy, it remained essentially intact until 1986 when the Party finally acknowledged the full extent of the damage this strategy had inflicted.

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5 According to Nguyen Kien, simultaneous efforts in the north to group small co-operatives into larger ones caused similar productivity declines, from 6.4 million tonnes in 1976 to 6 million tonnes in 1980. See: Nguyen Kien, op. cit., p. 29.
7 The departure by boat of several thousand ethnic Chinese in the late 1970s was actually assisted by the Vietnamese authorities who saw it as an effective way of ridding the country of disaffected elements. A much larger number fled across the land frontier to China, again sometimes with Vietnamese encouragement or assistance.
10 Vo Nhan Tri, op. cit.
11 Ibid., p. 108.
The economic development strategy had the aim of turning the whole Vietnamese society into an integrated, goal-oriented structure that moved, inexorably, towards communism. This sort of approach is, according to Harry Rigby\(^\text{12}\), typical of communist states. In effect, the structures and systems appropriate to a wartime environment become permanent features of a society where the war is not against external aggression but in support of the struggle for communism. Whether or not the systems are sufficiently well-designed to achieve the goal is irrelevant. The main consideration is that the goal itself is the basis on which the regime claims legitimacy. In the Vietnamese case, however, this mode of legitimation began to develop cracks in the late 1970s as the economic crisis in Vietnam mounted.

The application of the Stalinist/Maoist economic development strategy to the South in the late 1970s contributed significantly to the economic turmoil which developed in that period. Other factors made the situation even worse. Vietnam's invasion of Kampuchea in late 1978 and China's consequent attacks along Vietnam's northern frontier generated further economic instability. High levels of defence expenditure depleted Vietnam's budget and the occupation of Kampuchea led to the termination of both western and Chinese aid.\(^\text{13}\) Natural disasters like typhoons and floods did not help matters either. Finally, the population growth rate was so high, at 2.4 or 2.5 per cent per annum in 1980, that it was outstripping increases in food production.\(^\text{14}\)

In the period 1976-1980 the growth rate of the Vietnamese economy as a whole was only 1.5%. Industrial production had not increased since 1976 and agricultural production was growing by just 2% annually.\(^\text{15}\) Per capita income had decreased by 20% in 1975 and continued to decrease annually by 2-3%.\(^\text{16}\) By 1979, the budget deficit was $US1,480 million and Vietnam's foreign debt had hit disturbing heights. Reports from the IMF indicated that by the end of 1978, Vietnam's outstanding debt in convertible currencies stood at $US 1.1 billion while the debt with the socialist bloc in the same period reached the equivalent of $US1.4 billion in non-convertible currencies.\(^\text{17}\)


In 1979 the Vietnamese economy was at rock bottom and it was patently clear that the Party would have to take drastic measures to rescue it from the abyss. Recognition of this fact led to a significant rethink in the Party and a decision at the 6th Plenum of the Party Central Committee in August 1979 to phase in a comprehensive package of economic reforms designed to stimulate production. The reforms have been likened to the Soviet Union's New Economic Policy of the early 1920s. They also bore a striking resemblance to the important economic reforms announced by Deng Xiaoping in China the previous December, which laid the foundations for China's modernisation program.18

On the agricultural front, the measures announced at the Sixth Plenum provided for a quota and contract system for production collectives and individuals in agricultural cooperatives. Land was to be subcontracted to families and individual peasants, and cooperatives whose output exceeded quota sales to the government would be able to sell that excess on the open market, where the state would compete for a share at negotiated prices.19 Agricultural taxes would be reviewed20 and purchase prices for agricultural products would be adjusted to reflect more closely their market value.21 In industry, the reforms focussed on improving productivity in consumer goods and handicrafts and on supporting the participation of private enterprises and small cooperatives in light industries and export industries.22 In addition, the factories were to be given greater autonomy.23 Associated with these changes, a directive was issued in August 1979 after the Fifth Party Plenum providing for road checkpoints to be closed down to encourage the more efficient distribution of goods between city and countryside.24

In approving the package of reforms, the Party leadership was essentially acknowledging that the long-term goal of communism was not sufficient to sustain its legitimacy in the short-term. To survive, the regime would have to show that it could deliver a rudimentary standard of living to the Vietnamese people. In other words, it would have to shift to some extent to a performance-related mode of legitimation. Over the next few years, however, there would be a continuing struggle between proponents of the different models of development represented by these modes of legitimation. This struggle delayed the implementation of the Sixth Plenum reforms for years.25 In a speech on 21 April 1980 commemorating the birth of Ho Chi Minh, Politburo member Le Duc Tho articulated the position of supporters of centralised planning and control. He

18 Vo Nhan Tri, Vietnam's Economic Policy, p. 82.
22 Tan Teng Lang, op. cit.
23 Stern, op. cit.
24 Beresford, op. cit.
asserted that problems in economic management should be tackled by increasing rather than decreasing administrative control of the economy. His proposed solution was to improve the organisational apparatus of the Party and government.26 His underlying assumption was that the existing system was functional and that the problems arose from deficiencies in personnel and administration.

By the Party's Ninth Plenum in December 1980, little progress had been made in implementing the reforms, and the economic situation was worsening. While agricultural output had increased by 5.8% in 1980, compared to 1979, in the same period, industrial output declined by 9.6% and the real gross domestic product dropped by 3.7%.27 Wide cross-sections of the Vietnamese population were experiencing hardship. Workers in urban areas were receiving very low wages, not enough to make ends meet. It was estimated that in the State sector, the wages and salaries of workers and public servants could cover only from a third to a half of their minimum essential expenditure. Similarly, most peasants found it difficult to survive, especially those who had to cope with the additional burden of food shortages in regions hit by natural disasters.28 Indeed, in 1980 there were food riots and peasant unrest in Nghe Tinh and around Haiphong.29 What upset the populace even more than their own hardship was the much better lifestyle enjoyed by highly placed officials through their abuse of office and through their collaboration with black marketeers, for example, by their redirection of State-owned goods to the free market.30

Only at the beginning of 1981 did the Party Central Committee actually issue directives to facilitate application of the Sixth Plenum economic policies.31 From January that year, the new product contract system in agriculture was introduced all over north Vietnam and then gradually in the south (it was not widespread in the south until 1982). There were indications that the contract system was finally introduced in response to increasing demands from the peasants and the danger of co-operatives disintegrating due to a go-slow strike by the peasants and corruption among their managing cadres.32 Piloted initially in Haiphong years earlier, the system allowed individual households to be allocated plots of land by the collective. Under individual contracts between the households and collectives, the households would receive important inputs to production such as fertiliser. In return, the household had to provide a contracted amount of grain to the state after each harvest. Any output over and above the contracted amount could be

27 Tan Teng Lang, op. cit., p. 37.
28 Nguyen Kien, Vietnam: 15 Years, p. 43.
29 Tan Teng Lang, op. cit., p.34.
31 Tan Teng Lang, op. cit., p. 36.
32 Nguyen Kien, 15 Years, p. 49.
retained by the households for their own use or could be sold on the open market or to the state at negotiated prices. It is of interest to note that this kind of product contract system had been tried first in 1968 in Vinh Phu province but had been opposed vehemently by Politburo member Truong Chinh.33

In May 1981, apparently in line with IMF advice, the official prices of most goods were brought closer to prevailing free market prices in an effort to reduce the burden of subsidies on the budget. Wage rises were granted to workers, government employees and the armed forces so that they could weather the price hikes.34 A new system of enterprise management introduced in 1981 provided for wages to be paid according to a worker's productivity and for enterprises to be given greater independence in production, trade and finance.35 The foreign trade sector was decentralised, so that provinces and major cities could set up import-export companies to trade directly with the outside world.36 By the end of 1981, the results of the reforms appeared promising. Industrial output seemed to have recovered — it was 12.5% higher than the previous year and real gross domestic product had risen by 5.1%. Even greater increases occurred in 1982. Significantly, most of the increase in industrial production had taken place in industries under local management,37 confirmation of the effectiveness of the decentralisation policy. While production increased, however, inflation also grew at a rapid pace as increased supply failed to keep up with even greater demand.

At the Tenth Plenum of the Central Committee, held from 9 October to 3 November 1981, there were continuing signs of serious disagreements about the reforms. After 26 days, the Plenum failed to come up with a draft of the Third Five Year Plan. In an article in the Party daily Nhan Dan, conservatives like Vice-Premier Le Thanh Nghi criticised the contract system, the slow pace of socialisation in the south, the private ownership mentality of peasants and the declining ethics of cadres in the south.38 On the other hand, Politburo members Vo Van Kiet and Nguyen Van Linh called for more far-reaching reforms, including the introduction of a small capitalist sector and the outright dismantling of the system of subsidies.39

Intense debate over the reforms delayed the holding of the Fifth Party Congress. Originally scheduled for late 1981, it was not actually held until March 1982. Many Party

34 Max Spoor, "State Finance", in Marr and White, Postwar Vietnam, p. 119.
36 Asia 1984 Yearbook (Far Eastern Economic Review Ltd., 1984), p. 286. Beresford notes that the cities of Ho Chi Minh City, Hanoi, Haiphong and Da Nang were permitted to establish import-export (IMEX) companies. See: Beresford, op. cit., p. 163.
38 Ibid., p. 39.
members argued that the leadership should be implementing policies that inhibited private trade and capitalism instead of stimulating them. They feared that the upsurge in private trade had caused a growth in "capitalist mentality" amongst peasants and workers. Indeed, some complained that the only ones not benefiting from the reforms were those who had sacrificed so much during the war for the Party — Party members, workers and the armed forces. The demoralisation of these groups had become acute as they struggled to survive on minimal fixed salaries. Although government workers' salaries had been increased in 1981 they had failed to keep up with inflation which ran at close to 100% that year. This state of affairs led to further drops in efficiency and growth in corruption, as workers took on extra jobs or participated in illegal activities to try to make ends meet.

In presenting the Central Committee's Political Report to the Congress, Secretary General Le Duan conceded that Party and government leaders had failed to anticipate the economic and social upheaval which would follow the war, and admitted the regime's inexperience in economic management. The leadership also admitted at the Congress that the 1976-80 five year plan had not given enough consideration to the actual situation facing the country, had laid down unachievable objectives, and had failed to issue guidelines to facilitate implementation of the new policies.

The Party Congress tackled the underlying problem of acute production shortages by calling for a shift of investment away from heavy industrial projects and towards the five areas of energy, agriculture, transport and communications, exports and consumer goods. However, this did not mean in any way that the Party was forsaking the Stalinist-Maoist economic development strategy and its traditional emphasis on the importance of heavy industry. Rather, the shift was seen as a way of laying the groundwork for a more vigorous development of heavy industry. There was believed to be a dialectical unity between industry and agriculture, with the former contributing to the modernisation of agriculture and the latter providing a basis for the development of industry. From self-criticisms made later at the Sixth Party Congress in 1986, it is clear that there was no appreciable shift in investment away from heavy industry as a result of the Fifth Party Congress.

A major outcome of the Congress was the decision to renew the drive for agricultural co-operativisation in the South, with the aim of completing the process by the end of

40 Asia 1984 Yearbook, p. 286.
42 Duiker, Vietnam Since the Fall of Saigon, p. 64.
43 Hanoi Home Service 0400 gmt 2 April 1982 (BBC SWB FE/7001/C/4, 14.4.82).
1985. At the same time, encouragement was given to the "family economy", which had previously been considered part of the non-socialist relations of production and hence suppressed. Under the "family economy", families could farm intensively on 5% of land allocated to them by the co-operative and could sell their produce on the open market. By 1983, the family economy provided peasants with 50-60 per cent of their total income, and more than 90% of the pork, chicken, vegetables and fruit consumed by them. The Congress decisions represented a compromise between the centralised planning adherents and those in favour of greater decentralisation. Significantly, Nguyen Van Linh was dropped from the Politburo at the Fifth Party Congress, as was Vo Nguyen Giap. Both had favoured wide-ranging economic reforms.

By early 1983, the Government was unable to control the increased volume of goods produced in the country, inflation was increasing rapidly, and corruption was on the rise. While small producers and traders were benefiting from the reforms, high inflation was cutting away at the incomes of cadres and other people with fixed wages. Party officials estimated that some 70% of all goods in circulation were controlled by the free market. This represented a significant decrease in the government's share of trading activities. In response to these developments, the government launched a campaign to expand the state trading sector, prohibit state enterprises from dealing with the free market and clamp down on private trade by imposing stiffer taxes. In the same year, the collectivisation drive in the South was renewed for the first time since late 1979. In addition, when it was discovered that export-import companies in Ho Chi Minh City were bidding against each other — hence adding to inflation — foreign trade was suspended pending the creation of a unified company under strict central government control. The export of 25 commodities was reserved exclusively for centrally managed state enterprises and all imports had to conform with the priorities set out in the annual plan. This was a tangible sign of the Party's retreat from decentralisation.

46 Ibid. By 1985, only 25.1% of peasant households in the south had joined collectives and co-operatives, according to Ngo Vinh Long, "Cooperativization in Mekong Delta", in Marr and White, Postwar Vietnam, p. 165.
47 Vo Nhan Tri, op. cit., p. 84.
48 There were indications that the dropping of these leaders may not have been popular with the public. The author was told by a Vietnamese acquaintance in Hanoi in 1984 that despite his removal from the Politburo, Vo Nguyen Giap continued to enjoy significant public support. Apparently, at a play attended by Giap and other leaders, a bouquet of flowers intended for a more senior leader had been given to Giap even though he was several rows behind. Giap also received a standing ovation while the other leader did not.
50 Asia 1984 Yearbook, p. 286. In discussions with the International Monetary Fund early the following year, Vietnamese officials said the private retail trade had increased from 20 percent of total distribution in 1980 to about 50 percent in 1983. See the IMF's Staff Report for the 1984 Article IV Consultation, 18 May 1984, p. 8.
51 Nayan Chanda, "A Liberal Malady", p. 50. In Vietnam in 1984, the author was told by other foreigners who had lived in Vietnam for some time that several restaurants had been closed down in Ho Chi Minh City by the state since 1983. During the author's own posting in Vietnam in 1984-85, she was informed by several shopkeepers that they were under pressure to enter into cooperative arrangements with the state.
53 Asia 1984 Yearbook, p. 286.
54 International Monetary Fund, Staff Report for the 1984 Article IV Consultation, pp. 2 and 8.
At the Fifth Plenary session of the Central Committee in early December 1983, Party General Secretary Le Duan acknowledged that there were differing views within the Party on the question of economic management. He criticised saboteurs, the bourgeoisie and the free market. At the same time, Duan left no doubt that the liberal policies would continue. He said that a crucial factor in Vietnam's recent economic success had been "the renovation of economic management, including economic planning and incentive policies. This renovation has stimulated working people in their production efforts and encouraged all levels and branches." The Plenum resolution affirmed this line.55

Christine White has confirmed that internal Party debate at this time was between proponents of centralised political and administrative control of economic production on the one hand and those who asserted that the economic goals of socialism could be better achieved by allowing socialist enterprises, households and individuals more autonomy.56 Nguyen Kien, in an official Vietnamese publication in 1990, described the debate as one between those who thought the economic crisis arose from the very fundamentals of the economic structure and institutions, and those who blamed the crisis on the poor performance of officials at lower levels. According to Kien, this controversy raged until the Sixth Congress when a compromise solution emerged.57 These two interpretations can be reconciled as the economic fundamentals referred to by Kien did add up to centralised control. Similarly, those Party figures who opposed the grant of more autonomy to enterprises, households and individuals usually justified their position by pointing to alleged poor performance of cadres at these lower levels.

An editorial on the Plenum outcome in the Party daily Nhan Dan gave a further indication of the disagreement within the Party about the pace of economic reforms:

>We should overcome Rightist thinking and reluctance to carry out the socialist transformation of privately owned trade, eliminate the black market and reduce the free market while calming the impatience that urges us to eliminate immediately the free market.58

This seemed to be an effort to steer a middle course between the approaches advocated by these two groups in the Party. Such compromise was also evident in reports on the plenary session in July 1984 which focussed on the need to improve economic managerial skills and to encourage decentralisation of decision-making in order to promote local

56 Christine P. White, "Alternative Approaches to the Socialist Transformation of Agriculture in Postwar Vietnam", in Marr and White, Postwar Vietnam, pp. 135-137.
57 Nguyen Kien, Vietnam: 15 Years, p. 43.
58 Nhan Dan, 18 July 1984 (BBC SWB FE/7701/B/2, 21.7.84).
The Plenum confirmed the continuation of the economic reforms, while re-emphasising the need to ensure there was no straying from "the socialist road."\(^\text{60}\)

It is possible that the attack at the Plenum on "conservatism and sluggishness" in economic management may have been partly a response to Soviet pressure, as the Plenum immediately followed a meeting in Moscow of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance which was responsible for much of the foreign aid given to Vietnam. There are indications from official Vietnamese sources that as a result of this meeting Vietnam felt obligated to boost production, improve economic management, and progress the economy generally.\(^\text{61}\) Le Duan confirmed this in his speech to the Plenum where he underscored the impact of Soviet economic concepts and management practices on Vietnam's economy.\(^\text{62}\) There was still no acknowledgement at this stage of the fundamental weaknesses of the Stalinist-Maoist economic development strategy. Indeed, Le Duan re-asserted the position of heavy industry as the core of the "modern economic industrial - agricultural structure".\(^\text{63}\)

The Soviet Union's concern about the misuse of its aid funds was longstanding. Soviet diplomats in Vietnam had voiced complaints privately about the way the Vietnamese economy was being managed. Significantly, in view of his later ascendency to the Soviet leadership, Mikhail Gorbachev, then a junior politburo member, had headed the Soviet delegation to the Vietnamese Party Congress in March 1982. In his speech to that Congress, Gorbachev had stressed the need for Vietnam to make the most of the production potential already created by Soviet aid. A similar message had been conveyed to the Vietnamese when the Long-Term Program for Vietnamese-Soviet Co-operation was signed in October 1983\(^\text{64}\) and during talks in Moscow in June 1985 between Le Duan and the newly elected Soviet General Secretary Gorbachev.\(^\text{65}\)

The Vietnamese economy showed some improvement in the early 1980s as compared to the late 1970s. It experienced a growth rate of 5.9% per annum in 1981-1985 as compared to 1.5% in 1976-1980. Industrial production grew at the rate of 15.2% and agricultural production at 5.9% annually.\(^\text{66}\) Exports experienced an annual growth rate of 7% between 1979 and 1985.\(^\text{67}\) Nevertheless, Vietnam's foreign reserves remained

\(^{59}\) Duiker, *Vietnam Since the Fall of Saigon*, p. 81.
\(^{60}\) "Communique of Plenum of CPV Central Committee", *Vietnam News Agency* (in English), 1557 gmt 18 July 1984 (BBC SWB FE/7700/B/4, 20.7.84).
\(^{63}\) Ibid.
\(^{64}\) *Vietnam News Agency*, 4 November 1983.
\(^{65}\) *Pravda*, 30 June 1985.
perilously low at $US 16 million and 77% of all export revenue went towards the servicing of the country's foreign debt. At the end of 1982 the IMF reported Vietnam's total debt in convertible currencies to be $US 1.46 billion out of a total debt of $US 5 billion. Defence expenditure was still a considerable burden on Vietnam's economy. By 1983, the strength of Vietnam's armed forces had increased to over one million, of whom 180,000 were said to be in Cambodia. The defence outlay comprised more than 50% of the total national budget.

**Economic Situation in 1985**

By 1985, the growth enjoyed by the economy in the early 1980s had given way to a period of poor economic performance, exacerbated by a series of natural disasters. According to To Huu, a minister with economic responsibilities, the price and wage reforms in 1981 and 1982 had run into difficulties partly because they had failed to recognise the profound malady of bureaucratism and subsidisation. Bureaucratic centralism was creating bottlenecks and impeding economic development. Higher level planning authorities set very rigorous targets for production units but often failed to provide the materials required to achieve the targets. Production units seeking such materials from the private sector risked censure, so they often found it easier to sustain losses.

The disadvantages of the centralised structure of the Vietnamese economy can be gauged from the calculation that state-run industry was operating at only half its capacity. On state farms, only 35-40% of planned acreage and 50% of machinery/equipment capacity were being exploited, and labour output was low. The subsidy bill had increased four times since 1981 and it was the largest single item in the budget after defence expenditure. Another symptom of the disarray produced by the centralised system was the endemic theft of state property. The incidence of embezzlement was so worrying that a symposium was organised by the Ministry of Interior, Central Committee and Marx-Lenin Institute in Hanoi from 28-29 November 1985 to discuss measures to deal with it. Theft was worst among the following types of goods: grain, nitrate fertiliser, coal, petroleum, cement, chemicals, steel, timber, fabrics and medicine. The worst-affected cities were Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City, Haiphong.

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69 Beresford, op. cit., p. 167.
73 Chanda, "Toeing a Liberal Line", p. 32.
74 *Hanoi Home Service*, 2300 gmt, 7 November 1985 (BBC SWB FE/8109/B/6, 15.11.85).
and Danang. Many of the goods described above are raw materials. It is not surprising that such illegal use of state materials occurred when one considers that the value of production inputs such as raw materials, electricity and coal on the open market was ten times the price attached to them by the state. Many state personnel profited from this price differential by selling state goods on the free market.

State and Party personnel did not usually act alone in their corrupt activities. Often, they were linked in to a "protective umbrella" system which included officials at various levels of the bureaucracy and which provided a cover for those involved in speculative activities. Lower-level cadres were sponsored by senior Party officials who shielded them from punishment for corruption and theft.

In 1985, natural disasters, partly due to floods, drought and pest problems added to the country's economic woes. Foodgrain production did not achieve the target of nineteen million tons set by the Fifth Party Congress. Floods and storms submerged hundreds of thousands of hectares of rice in northern provinces such as Ha Nam Ninh, Ha Bac, Ha Son Binh, Hai Hung and Thanh Hoa. In the central province of Binh Tri Thien, typhoons and floods claimed more than 1,000 dead, missing or injured. Hundreds of thousands were left homeless as 61.4% of all houses in the province collapsed, were washed away or seriously damaged. In the South, some provinces experienced prolonged drought. In Hau Giang province, 153,000 ha of rice were affected by drought with more than 17,000 ha of rice plants and seedlings being written off as a complete loss. Pests were a problem throughout Vietnam, with armyworms, stemborers and brown planthoppers all taking their toll of the autumn rice crop. Of course, the damage caused by these events could have been ameliorated, particularly in the case of pest problems, through the prudent use of pesticides, new seed varieties and new techniques. As early as 1983, the International Monetary Fund had predicted that achievement of the 19 million ton target for foodgrain production in 1985 would depend largely on the success of yield-raising techniques. In other words, some of these agricultural losses were due to economic mismanagement and could have been averted.

By 1985, Vietnam's debt to some 30 non-Communist countries and international organisations totalled US$1.7 billion. This included $US200 million to the IMF and $US170-180 million to Japanese banks. While these debts were rescheduled, Vietnam

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77 Hanoi Home Service, 2300 gmt, 5 December 1985 (BBC SWB FE/8136/B/5, 17.12.85).
78 Porter, op. cit., p. 73.
79 Ibid., p. 75.
81 BBC SWB FE/8101/B/9, 6.11.85.
84 International Monetary Fund, Staff Report for 1983, p. 7.
was still required to pay $US600 million immediately to convertible (currency) area countries.\textsuperscript{85}

**Economic Situation of Different Groups in the Community**

Even with the help of subsidies, in 1985 fixed income earners were barely managing to survive. While they had received wage increases in 1981 and 1984 to compensate them for cost of living increases, their real wages fell. Their income simply could not keep pace with the increasing prices of consumer goods. Ration cards enabled government workers and students to buy basic commodities such as rice, meat and fish sauce at low prices, but even so the overall monthly salary of a thrifty fixed-income earner barely covered a third of his or her monthly budget. Such workers had to meet the rest of their costs by raising poultry or pigs, selling gifts from relatives overseas or engaging in illegal trading.\textsuperscript{86} The poverty was such that a large proportion of Vietnamese children were malnourished. They were far behind children in other parts of the world in height and weight and one in ten died of gastro-enteritis brought on by malnourishment.\textsuperscript{87}

The situation faced by the growing ranks of the unemployed was even worse. Their ration cards only covered the purchase of rice and so they had to buy everything else in the free market. Many young people became disaffected as they found it increasingly difficult to find jobs after leaving school. While the state was obliged to find positions for those it had trained to tertiary level, others with little schooling had to locate jobs through their own networks.\textsuperscript{88}

While peasants' living conditions had improved markedly during the first three to four crops under the contract system in the early 1980s, subsequently, in many localities the state raised the contract quota, so the peasants had little surplus to sell in the free market.\textsuperscript{89} The Government taxed farmers heavily. When peasants began to falsify their yields to evade taxes, the Government raised procurement prices but the prices still remained far below those prevailing in the free market. There were indications that people were required to make "informal payments", presumably bribes, to authorities at district and higher levels.\textsuperscript{90} To add to the peasants' problems, by 1986 the state was supplying only one-fifth of the fertiliser to cooperatives that it had provided in 1980,\textsuperscript{91} forcing them to buy the inputs in the free market. The situation was so bad that about three million

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{85} Francois Nivolon, "Rescheduling, Re-thinking" (Interview with Tran Phuong), *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 19 December 1985, p. 98.  
\textsuperscript{86} Vo Nhan Tri, *Vietnam’s Economic Policy*, p. 162.  
\textsuperscript{87} Ibid., p. 164.  
\textsuperscript{88} This information was provided to the author in Hanoi by a young Vietnamese university graduate in October 1984.  
\textsuperscript{89} Vo Nhan Tri, *Vietnam’s Economic Policy*, p. 163.  
\textsuperscript{90} Nguyen Kien, *Vietnam: 15 Years*, p. 51.  
\textsuperscript{91} Porter, "The Politics of 'Renovation', p. 74.}
peasants in the North experienced food shortage each year between harvests. Many peasants left farming altogether or only grew enough rice to meet their own families' needs. One can see, therefore, why this group might have become disillusioned with the Party.

By 1985, Vietnamese society was in a state of "extremely serious crisis". It was in this context that the Party announced the Eighth Plenum Reforms.

**Eighth Plenum Reforms**

In June 1985, the Eighth Plenum of the Vietnamese Communist Party's Central Committee announced several reforms in an effort to improve the economic situation. The reforms involved the termination of subsidies given to government workers for basic foodstuffs and other key commodities, and the introduction of cash salaries indexed to the cost of living. They were aimed at increasing production by raising prices to levels determined by the cost of production, and reducing the burden on the budget imposed by the ration system. It is significant that at this Plenum, Nguyen Van Linh, who had long advocated the elimination of subsidies, was reinstated to the Politburo.

In September, the Government put the Eighth Plenum reforms into effect by bringing prices of many consumer goods closer to the market price. Agricultural quota procurement prices were raised tenfold in the north and six to sevenfold in the south. The prices of industrial products increased by 5 to 26 times as they were brought into line with production costs. The decree did not, however, call for the complete abolition of subsidies. Afraid that the sudden elimination of subsidies would push prices to levels unacceptable to society, the Politburo opted for a "transitional solution" incorporating fixed official prices for key commodities. The problem was that the Politburo failed to distinguish clearly between the goods which would have fixed prices and the ones which would have market prices. This meant that the reform could not be implemented effectively. Also in September 1985, the Council of Ministers issued a decree providing wage system reforms for workers, civil servants and the armed forces. The aim was to stimulate productivity by ensuring that wages were linked to labour output, quality and efficiency and that preferential treatment was given to those occupations and trades.

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92 Vo Nhan Tri, op. cit., p. 163.
93 Porter, op. cit., p. 74.
94 Nguyen Kien, op. cit., p. 58.
96 *Asia 1987 Yearbook*, p. 265.
97 Porter, "The Politics of 'Renovation'", p. 76.
99 Porter, op. cit., p. 77.
demanding hard work or high skills.\textsuperscript{101} Payment according to productivity was also to apply in the agricultural sector.\textsuperscript{102}

The Currency Change

The price and wage reforms coincided with a wholesale currency change. There are indications that the decision to conduct the currency change at this time was made in response to a desire by conservatives to attack the flourishing black market. Yet there was disagreement within the Politburo about the decision. Leaders such as Nguyen Van Linh and Vo Van Kiet opposed the move, believing that the economy would not be able to cope with so many sudden changes. Apparently, the timing of the currency change was decided by first vice-premier To Huu and that the money conversion order was signed by Truong Chinh.\textsuperscript{103}

Rumours of an impending currency change had been circulating amongst the population for some time, especially in the lead-up to the 10th anniversary of the fall of Saigon on 30 April 1985.\textsuperscript{104} It was not until 13 September 1985, however, that the Council of Ministers announced the currency change. The change was effective from 14 September and was to be conducted over a three to five day period. The exchange rate between the old and new currency was 10 old dong to 1 new dong, with a more favourable exchange rate applying to money deposited in state savings banks.\textsuperscript{105} Another regulation issued on 13 September provided for the immediate withdrawal and exchange of 100 dong, 50 dong, 30 dong and 20 dong banknotes. Only old 10 dong and smaller denomination banknotes would continue to be circulated at the new official exchange rate.\textsuperscript{106}

The primary objective of the currency change was to eliminate illegal cash holdings and hence contract the money supply. Thus the amount of old currency that could be exchanged for new dong was strictly limited. Families were allowed to exchange a maximum amount of 20,000 old dong, while single people could exchange 15,000 old dong.\textsuperscript{107} Amounts in excess of these limits had to be handed in to the exchange centres which would put individual cases before money withdrawal and exchange steering committees for consideration.\textsuperscript{108}

\textsuperscript{101} Hanoi Home Service, 1100 gmt, 19 September, 1985.
\textsuperscript{102} Hanoi Home Service, 2300 gmt, 12 September 1985 (BBC SWB FE/8061/B/2, 20.9.85).
\textsuperscript{104} The author was in Vietnam at the time and recollects such rumours circulating in Ho Chi Minh City, especially amongst small traders.
\textsuperscript{105} Hanoi Home Service, 2300 gmt, 13 September 1985 (BBC SWB FE/8057/C/1, 16.9.85).
\textsuperscript{106} Hanoi Home Service, 0500 gmt, 14 September 1985 (BBC SWB FE/8057/C/2, 16.9.85).
\textsuperscript{108} Ibid.
The currency change proved to be a disaster for the Vietnamese economy. It led to unprecedented inflation and seriously damaged industrial production,\(^{109}\) and it did not succeed in its aim of controlling the market and the circulation of money. From the start, a leak about the planned currency change and the decision of the government not to issue new notes in small denominations defeated the goal of contracting the money supply. The new official exchange rate was fixed at 40 new dong to one US dollar, but by February 1986, it had risen to 250.\(^{110}\) After the currency change, rumours about commodity price rises continued to cause runs on commodities, with the prices of goods going up two to three times.\(^{111}\) Joint private-state enterprises were criticised for taking advantage of the uncertainty following the currency change:

\[\ldots \text{many shareholders of joint state-private shopping outlets smuggled goods out to the free market and replaced them with cash and their own merchandise.} \ldots \text{turning these outlets into places for selling goods provided by speculators, smugglers, counterfeiters and those manufacturers evading business registration.}^{112}\]

The authorities were particularly concerned about the involvement of government or co-operative employees in corruption and speculation.\(^{113}\) Speculation often took the following form:

[Speculators would order] their henchmen to spread the rumour that the state was going to destroy all old banknotes of 10-dong denomination for the purpose of inciting the gullible to buy up any kinds of goods from state stores. Once these stores had run out of their stocks, the unscrupulous traders would release their own stocks for sale at high prices to rake in cash. They never hid their goods in their own homes but often rented different places for this purpose. The places they leased were normally owned by cadres or poor workers.\(^{114}\)

Another adverse consequence of the currency change was the loss of liquidity amongst state-run enterprises. Since the state banking system had encouraged deposits but not withdrawals, most enterprises that held contracts with private suppliers had kept their earnings in cash. Some establishments in Quang Nam - Da Nang province had maintained cash reserves that exceeded the authorised level by 5-10 times.\(^{115}\) The currency change effectively wiped out a significant proportion of these funds, leaving the

\(^{109}\) Asia 1987 Yearbook, p. 265.
\(^{111}\) Hanoi Home Service, 2300 gmt, 7 October 1985 (BBC SWB FE/8080/B/3, 12.10.85).
\(^{112}\) Hanoi Home Service, 2300 gmt, 29 November 1985 (BBC SWB FE/8130/B/3, 10.12.85).
\(^{113}\) Hanoi Home Service, 2300 gmt, 21 November 1985 (BBC SWB FE/8118/B/5, 26.11.85).
\(^{114}\) Hanoi Home Service, 2300 gmt, 24 September 1985 (BBC SWB FE/8068/B/6-7, 28.9.85).
\(^{115}\) Hanoi Home Service, 1430 gmt, 14 September 1985 (BBC SWB FE/8059/B/3, 18.9.85).
enterprises little scope to expand production. It also resulted in enterprises stockpiling whatever they produced, leading to further price rises.\textsuperscript{116}

The most adversely affected members of Vietnamese society were the fixed income earners who no longer had access to subsidised goods and who had not received further wage increases. Whereas subsidised rice cost 0.40 dong a kilogram before the currency change, it rose to 150-180 old dong per kilo in the free market after the change.\textsuperscript{117} Eventually, the Government was forced to reintroduce rationing of essential goods.\textsuperscript{118} Hence, the objective of abandoning subsidisation, a key aspect of the economic reforms, was not achieved.

The National Assembly was enraged by the government's mishandling of the currency change. At its December 1985 session, the Assembly described the currency change as an act of sabotage and demanded the dismissal of the officials responsible.\textsuperscript{119} In response, Vo Van Kiet conducted self-criticism on behalf of the Council of Ministers and told the Assembly that any shortcomings brought to the Council's attention would be "analysed, criticised and overcome in the spirit of self-criticism and criticism and with a sense of responsibility by the managers, especially those in the Council of Ministers".\textsuperscript{120} The fall-out continued into 1986, with widespread criticism being directed at the Government by Party cadres and the population at large.\textsuperscript{121} In February 1986, the government dismissed vice-premier Tran Phuong, the man in charge of the currency reform but possibly also a convenient scapegoat. On 28 February 1986, the Politburo, Central Committee Secretariat and the Standing Committee of the Council of Ministers conducted self-criticism. They admitted that the socioeconomic situation had deteriorated since the third quarter of 1985, and that the implementation of three reforms simultaneously had caused great difficulties. Prices had skyrocketed, the market had plunged, the trade sector had been damaged, and there were growing difficulties in production, circulation and the people's lives. The Politburo and other central organs acknowledged that they were principally at fault for this situation but they also tried to sheet some of the blame home to others lower down the Party hierarchy. They called upon all levels of the Party to conduct self-criticism and criticism and accept responsibility for their shortcomings.\textsuperscript{122}

\textsuperscript{116} Asia 1987 Yearbook, p. 265.
\textsuperscript{118} Hanoi Home Service, 2300 gmt 28 February 1986 (BBC SWB FE/8198/B/6, 4.3.86).
\textsuperscript{119} Asia 1987 Yearbook, p. 262.
\textsuperscript{120} Hanoi Home Service, 1100 gmt 24 December 1985 (BBC SWB FE/8143/C1/7, 30.12.85).
\textsuperscript{121} Asia 1987 Yearbook, p. 265.
\textsuperscript{122} Hanoi Home Service, 2300 gmt, 28 February 1986 (BBC SWB FE/8198/B/4-6, 4.3.86).
Thus, by the end of 1985, the standard of living of the Vietnamese people, which had already been precarious, suffered a further blow as a result of the disastrous currency and price/wage reforms. A wide cross-section of the community was now completely disillusioned. Party and government workers were affected adversely by the partial elimination of subsidies and subsequent inflation. Despite their many sacrifices for the Party during the war, they felt they were the ones losing out from the peace. The peasants were being squeezed with heavy taxes and poor procurement prices for their grain. Urban workers generally were losing their struggle to earn a living on fixed incomes. Southerners had become alienated from the Party much earlier, after the hasty socialist transformation of agriculture and commerce in the late 1970s, and subsequent economic developments had only confirmed their views. What this disillusionment added up to was a legitimacy crisis for the Party and state, which were incapable of providing even a rudimentary standard of living for their own staff and the public. Material deprivation had been accepted by the populace during the war and even in the first few years after reunification. By 1986, however, the people's patience was wearing thin. Party leaders had not lived up to the promises they had made a decade earlier. There appeared to be little hope of the economic situation improving, and there were increasing demands for change or "renovation".¹²³ This was the potentially explosive situation facing the Party leadership in 1986 and it helps explain why the Party conducted the self-criticism and criticism campaign.

The 1980s posed new and considerable challenges for the Vietnamese Communist Party. Parallel with the vigorous debates on economic policy, discussed in the previous chapter, there was also much soulsearching within the Party about its own performance. The Party had been used to operating in a wartime environment, united by external threats. After the war ended in 1975, the Party found itself in very different circumstances. The sorts of skills and structures appropriate in times of war were not necessarily useful in times of peace and, indeed, could prove counterproductive. Major organisational adjustments were needed to bring about Vietnam's reconstruction and to re-establish the Party's public credibility, which had taken a beating due to increasing inefficiency, mismanagement and corruption. This chapter will explore the organisational problems and challenges facing the Party in the post-war period and the efforts made to address them, and will assess the extent to which these issues precipitated the 1986 self-criticism and criticism campaign.

Declining "ethics" of Party members

A repeated complaint of Party leaders in the post-war period was that Party members were losing their "revolutionary qualities", the qualities which had helped the Party withstand great hardship during the war and which had created a strong bond with the Vietnamese people. Le Duc Tho, former head of the Central Committee's Organisation Department, was particularly concerned about this issue. He maintained that the history of the Vietnamese Communist Party could be divided into two historic stages. First was the period of conflict from 1930 to April 1975, when Party members were united against external threat and the challenge was to make sacrifices in terms of blood, flesh and lives. Second was the period from April 1975 onwards when, he said, the challenge for Party members was to resist material temptation, "bourgeois lifestyle", money and commodities. While the Party had risen to the challenge in the first period, Tho was worried that it might not do so in the second:

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2 Hanoi Home Service 1100 gmt, 5 and 6 May 1986 (BBC SWB FE/8257/B/2, 13.5.86).
It may be said that in our party there has not previously been a degeneration of virtues and the way of living as is the case now. This is a major, very serious issue. It is not merely a matter of lifestyle as some comrades put it. It involves the party member's behaviour and the virtues of the revolutionary combatant. It deals with the ethics of the communist.\textsuperscript{3}

Tho was essentially blaming Party members and their declining ethical standards for the Party's ills. Yet, it is quite clear from our earlier examination of the economic situation in Vietnam that severe structural problems created fertile ground for the growth of corruption. The two price policy and other features of Vietnam's model of economic development generated opportunities for profit-taking by those in positions of power. In addition, the wages earned by Party and State functionaries were often simply not enough to make ends meet, and workers had to resort to second and third jobs, and often corruption, to survive. Functionaries with families to support were in an even more difficult situation, and the more powerful one's position, the more pressure one was under to do favours for one's relatives.

In the early 1980s, however, and even up until the Sixth Congress, some elements in the Party leadership were reluctant to acknowledge this linkage and continued to call for disciplinary measures against individual "degenerate" Party members rather than structural changes to the system.

The Party had high expectations of its members. It expected them to sacrifice their own material interests in pursuit of the common good, to be humble before the people, and to be ever-enthusiastic in the implementation of Party directives. In the face of evidence that these standards were not being met, Party leaders tried a range of measures to reform transgressing Party members. Self-criticism and criticism were a traditional approach, but members considered beyond redemption were expelled from the Party. After the Fourth Party Congress in 1976, the Party introduced a system of membership cards in an effort to weed out so-called "unqualified" members. Members were assessed individually before they were given a membership card. Those who failed the assessment did not receive a membership card and so, for all intents and purposes, were expelled from the Party. By the Fifth Congress in 1982 about 86,000 people or 5\% of the Party's total membership had been expelled.\textsuperscript{4} Still not convinced that it had expelled all "unqualified" members in the first sweep, the Party organised a review of Party card issue to ensure that no "unqualified" members remained in the Party. This review coincided with a political indoctrination drive reportedly aimed at increasing members'

\textsuperscript{3} Ibid., p. B/3.
"understanding" of Fifth Party Congress documents and improving Party members' "quality".\(^5\)

Given the juxtaposition of the review and the indoctrination drive, it is possible that the "unqualified" members included some people regarded as half-hearted in their support of Party policies enunciated at the Fifth Congress. It is significant, for example, that Nguyen Van Linh, who had been accused of "rightism" for not fully supporting the transformation of the southern commercial sector in the late 1970s, was dropped from the Politburo at the Fifth Congress. Others further down the hierarchy who shared his views may have been even more vulnerable. Overall, the proportion of Party members expelled during these campaigns was quite small, given the endemic nature of corruption in the Party. In the southern province of Vung Tau - Con Dao, 5.4% of Party members were expelled,\(^6\) and a similar figure was quoted for a district in Hanoi.\(^7\) One cannot help wondering whether the expelled Party members were really corrupt or whether they were just more susceptible to attack because of their policy views or their lack of a "protective umbrella".

Significantly, the Party was prepared to involve the public in the identification of "unqualified" Party members, reportedly to increase public participation in the "party building task."\(^8\) This concern with popular participation in such campaigns had an important legitimating function for the regime. It may also have provided an opportunity to attack political opponents under cover of public criticism.

There was some disagreement within the Party leadership on how strict the Party should be with transgressing Party members. Some pointed sympathetically to the poor standard of living of many Party members at the lower levels and said that the struggle for survival motivated such members to engage in corruption\(^9\). Other leaders like Le Duc Tho acknowledged the economic causes of corruption but asserted that it was precisely during such hard times that Party members and cadres had to make a special effort to demonstrate their revolutionary qualities. Any difficulties they faced in daily life, said Tho, should not be used as an excuse "to condone wrongdoings in violation of state policies and property, corruption, embezzlement, exploitative business, and so forth."\(^10\)

Thus, instead of acknowledging the systemic, economic factors underlying corruption, there was a tendency to attribute declining ethics to poor party building work,

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5 *Tap Chi Cong San*, September 1982 (BBC SWB FE/7182/B/2, 13.11.82).
6 *Nhan Dan*, 4 March 1983.
7 *Nhan Dan*, 7 September 1982, p. 3.
8 *Tap Chi Cong San*, op. cit., p. B/2.
9 Ibid., p. B/3.
10 Ibid., p. B/7.
including lax ideological education, and inadequate cadre management and disciplinary measures against errant Party members. Typically, there were also suggestions that external influences were at work, forces which were responsible for introducing a "bourgeois lifestyle" and increasing the "individualism" of party members:

The cause of the decline in quality and degeneration in lifestyle of a number of Party members lies in individualism. We know how seriously such negative phenomena have developed due to the influence of the bourgeois life-style and neo-colonialism since the liberation of the South. Due to weakness in the face of the tempting bait set out by the enemy and the lure of material wealth and money, some persons have completely lost their revolutionary spirit and struggle orientations. Obviously, a number of weak and cowardly Party cadres have been hit and destroyed by the enemy in its multi-faceted war of sabotage.11

One could read into these comments the implication that certain forces in southern Vietnam were exercising a malevolent influence over Party members. Could this have been a snide attack on reformists in the Party who were introducing policies that hardliners saw as encouraging the return of capitalism?

The consequence of this approach to corruption was that the proposed remedies were purely organisational in character. There was a belief that better control of Party members, improvement of Party procedures, and use of methods such as self-criticism and criticism would be sufficient to restore members' "ethics" and other qualities:

Developing the spirit of collective mastery in every person; stepping up criticism and self-criticism; broadening democracy internally; combating totalitarianism, patriarchalism, and privileges and prerogatives; tightening control over Party members; and consolidating and qualitatively enhancing the activities of Party chapters - all these activities will help promote and forge the qualities of Party members . . .12

Not surprisingly, this strategy for dealing with corruption and other lapses in Party members' ethics was not very successful. Perhaps some elements in the Party did not want it to be. High-ranking cadres engaged in corrupt activities may have only been interested in a diversionary crackdown which would focus on lower-level corruption and leave their own operations intact. As Vietnam entered 1986, the problem of corruption plagued the Party and state bureaucracies on a massive scale and generated considerable antagonism amongst the public.

11 Hanoi Home Service 2300 gmt, 8 November 1984 (BBC SWB FE/7806/B/4, 21.11.84).
12 Hanoi Home Service 2300 gmt, 8 January 1985.
Leadership succession

The ageing of the Party's leadership was a big issue in the 1980s, as many of the country's veteran leaders were now septuagenarians or even octogenarians. They had led the Party from its earliest days, through the anti-colonial struggle against the French and in the war for South Vietnam. They shared the common experience of operating clandestinely for lengthy periods and some had even been in prison together. This shared experience created a very strong bond between the Party's top leadership, a bond which accounted for the collective style of leadership. They had maintained political stability during turbulent times, but now had to make way for the next generation.

Le Due Tho raised the issue of the ageing leadership as early as the Fifth Party Congress, when he commented:

Many comrades are advanced in age and physically frail, and their economic and technological knowledge is limited ... Nearly 100 percent of the members of the party Central Committee joined the Party before or during the resistance against the French. More than 90 percent of the members of provincial and city party committees joined the party before the anti-US struggle for national salvation and more than 62 percent of the members of these committees gained party membership before 1954.13

This characterisation was more true in the north of the country than in the south, where many cadres had been killed during the Vietnam war. Nevertheless, it did highlight the magnitude of the problem. What was the solution? The Party did not favour dramatic leadership changes at the top. It sought change, but it also wanted some measure of continuity. Accordingly, it supported a phased approach of leadership change where a number of leaders retired or were stood down at successive national Party Congresses. Just as the Congresses themselves had become more regular events since the end of the war, so was the process of leadership change becoming regularised.

The ageing of the leadership is not completely satisfactory as an explanation for leadership changes in the Politburo. For example, while six members of the Politburo were dropped at the Fifth Party Congress in 1982, the average age of the new Politburo was actually higher than the average for the Politburo elected in 1976.14 Carlyle Thayer has pointed out that while the average age of Politburo members as a whole was higher, the new members were younger.15 Nevertheless, the fact that Nguyen Van Linh, considered lukewarm in his support of the nationalisation of commerce in the south in the

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14 Ibid., p. 161.
15 Ibid.
late 1970s, was dropped in 1982 suggests that policy differences also had a role to play in the leadership changes.

The passing of the older generation from the scene was perhaps more noticeable in the Central Committee. If one looks at the fate of Central Committee members first elected in 1951, one finds that 63 per cent still held their positions at the 1960 congress, but this declined to 20 per cent in 1976 and 11 per cent in 1982.16

Through an analysis of the changing composition of the Party's Central Committee from 1951 to 1986, Carlyle Thayer has come to the conclusion that leadership changes were also due to the evolution, increasing complexity and differentiation of the Vietnamese political system. He asserts that "interest group" politics have been developing in Vietnam, and that Central Committee members now represent regionally or sectorally based constituencies. To support his argument, he points out that during the thirty five year period, the percentage of "secondary-level" officials, mainly comprising provincial Party secretaries, economic specialists and technocrats, increased from 11 to 49 per cent. Whereas in 1960 only three provincial Party secretaries were represented on the Central Committee, in 1986 the figure was at least thirty.17 Their new-found power at the centre of the Vietnamese political system had tremendous implications for future policy making by the Central Committee. For a start, they were likely to lobby for policies which maximised the autonomy of their home provinces and to support the top Party leaders who favoured decentralisation. These groups were a natural constituency for such leaders as Nguyen Van Linh and Vo Van Kiet.

On the other hand, central-level officials elected at the 1976 Party Congress remained the most stable group in the Central Committee, leading Thayer to conclude that they formed the pool from which future Politburo members would be selected.18 It is of interest that 50 per cent of the current Politburo and 62 per cent of the Secretariat were first elected to the Central Committee in 1976. Did this mean that the centralists would continue to hold most sway in the leadership? Another noticeable trend over the past 35 years has been the declining representation of the military, a predictable development after the end of the Vietnam War. Their representation dropped from 16 to 7 per cent in the decade after reunification.19

Regular leadership changes were also occurring at lower levels of the party and in the state apparatus. Elections at Party organisation congresses in 1982 and 1983 brought

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17 Ibid., p. 187.
18 Ibid., p. 188.
19 Ibid.
significant changes to the membership of Party committees. Between 30 and 40% of Party committee members were newly elected, many of them were young, and some 20-30% had postgraduate degrees or were college graduates.\textsuperscript{20} From 1982 to 1985, the Party promoted or reassigned as many as 40% of the ministers, vice-ministers and other cadres holding senior positions. Among leading cadres in enterprises, corporations, staff departments, line departments and institutes, the replacement rate ranged between 40 and 50 per cent.\textsuperscript{21} Perhaps such changes in the state apparatus represented efforts by the top leadership to achieve a better match between the skills of individual leaders and their area of responsibility. However, if one looks at the Soviet practice, especially under Krushchev, of regularly reshuffling officials to create dependency on the top leadership and prevent challenges to that leadership, one could well ask whether the Vietnamese leadership also had such ulterior motives for regular reshuffles.

In conclusion, by the mid-1980s, the Party was undergoing a process of leadership change directed from the top but also responsive to pressure from increasingly powerful interest groups below.

**Recruitment**

Parallel with efforts to ensure a smooth leadership succession at the top, the Party was also concerned to ensure that a sufficient number of new recruits were coming into the Party at the grassroots level. According to Le Duc Tho, more than 375,000 people joined the Party in the five years before the Fifth Congress in 1982. Over 85% of them came from the Ho Chi Minh Communist Youth Union. Altogether, 39,766 new Party chapters had been formed since the Fourth Party Congress in 1976, taking the total to almost 150,000 Party chapters.\textsuperscript{22}

The Party was particularly keen to increase its recruitment of women, manual labourers, members of ethnic minorities and young people. Of course, the Party's ability to increase its representation amongst these sectors in the community would enhance its legitimacy. As a Marxist-Leninist party committed to the vanguard role of the working class, the Vietnamese Communist Party must have been embarrassed by the fact that workers comprised only a small proportion of its membership. Accordingly, it took every opportunity to publicise any progress in the recruitment of workers. A newspaper article on the recruitment of 5,000 people into the Party in Ho Chi Minh City in 1984

\textsuperscript{20} *Nhan Dan*, 8 April 1983 (BBC SWB FE/7337/B/6, 19.3.83).
\textsuperscript{22} *Hanoi Home Service* 0400 gmt, 2 April 1982 (BBC SWB FE/7001/C/6, 14.4.82).
focussed on the fact that 67.5% of the recruits in industrial enterprises were workers directly involved in production.\textsuperscript{23}

The Party had a credibility problem as far as Vietnamese youth were concerned. While most of the new Party members came from the Communist Youth Union, the Party was finding that the younger generation did not share the same revolutionary fervour as their forebears and they did not seem as interested in the Party's work. It may not be stretching the point to say that they just did not care much for the Party itself. Essentially, the youth were disillusioned. Many of them could not find jobs, even when they had university qualifications and the Party seemed to offer little prospect of future improvements in their situation. They tended to be cynical about the reasons why other youth entered the Party, believing them to be opportunists, and they were careful not to "appear to be too thick with the party members".\textsuperscript{24} Even within the Party, younger members did not see eye to eye with their elders, a situation which was attributed to the age gap and the very different contexts within which the two groups had grown up. No doubt, the older members believed that their younger colleagues did not appreciate the sacrifices that they and the Party had made to achieve Vietnam's independence and reunification. For their part, the youth probably felt that the sacrifices were to no avail if the Party could not now "manage the peace" and deliver tangible improvements in the people's standard of living.

There was resentment amongst young people about the Party entry requirement that they provide full details on personal history forms of any "errors" committed against the Party by their parents or relatives. They felt that they should not be held responsible for their relatives' actions. Predictably, this problem arose frequently in the south. Recruitment of Party members there was obstructed by very rigorous analyses of candidates' political background. For example, the Party theoretical journal \textit{Tap Chi Cong San} reported in 1978 on the complex process that recruits to the Party's Youth Union had to go through:

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\textit{Nhan Dan}, 31 January 1985 (JPRS-SEA-85-061, 16.4.85), pp. 122-123. According to \textit{Vietnam News Agency}, 12% of the 5000 new recruits were workers (VNA, 3 February 1985; BBC SWB FE/7867/B/5, 5.2.85). Elsewhere, it was reported that by 1985 Ho Chi Minh City had 1,953 basic Party organisations and nearly 54,000 Party members, more than 50% of whom had been admitted recently in various localities of the city. This compared with about 4,000 Party members in 102 Party chapters in the early days after the end of the war in 1975 (\textit{Hanoi Home Service} 2205 gmt, 3 June 1985; BBC SWB FE/7967/B/5, 13.6.85)
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In some localities, new Youth Union members must go through six levels of scrutiny —
Youth Union subchapter, youth group chapter, party chapter, village youth chapter committee, village party committee and district youth union chapter . . . The responsible comrades in those localities usually argue that they must be very vigilant and careful because the political and social situation in the south is very complicated; there are too many people related to the former regime and the time for testing them since liberation is still insufficient.25

In 1983, 50 per cent of basic Party organisations at the precinct and district level and one third of the Party organisations in the various enterprises in the south did not admit any new members. When this was brought to the notice of senior Party leaders, they confirmed that the "wrong concept" of political involvement had been used. A subsequent organisation congress in Ho Chi Minh City Party in early 1984 criticised the "conservative" and "narrowminded" thinking behind this approach and called for the stepping up of the recruitment effort.26 Nevertheless, the Party's tendency to screen out individuals who were even remotely suspect politically probably turned away many people who could have brought considerable skills and capability to bear on Vietnam's socioeconomic problems.

There was, indeed, a continuous tension between the Party's desire for members who were politically reliable and the country's desperate need for officials with economic management and other specialist skills. Ideally, the Party wanted new Party recruits to have specialist skills as well as the revolutionary qualities of a "good" cadre."27 This combination was not easy to achieve in practice. Certain elements in the Party believed that revolutionary qualities were more important and they complained when recruitment practices emphasised the cadre's level of knowledge and capability while neglecting these other qualities.28 As earlier statistics on the changing composition of the Central Committee show, however, gradually the proportion of high-ranking cadres with economic management or other technical skills did grow.

Tension between the centre and periphery

Historical factors have created a continuous tension in the Vietnamese Communist Party between the central organisation and its branches in the provinces. During the long years of resistance against the French, the Party was forced to operate clandestinely. It was often difficult for widely dispersed groups of Party members to remain in contact and this

26 Nhan Dan, 24 February 1984, p. 3.
bred a tendency towards autonomy amongst regional Party committees. For example, a major uprising in Nghe Tinh province in 1930 occurred without prior approval from the central Party organisation. Party leader Ho Chi Minh reinforced this trend towards autonomy during the period between 1945 and 1954 by encouraging local leaders to develop their own responses to changing circumstances facing the Party in their locality. Another famous historical example of a situation where a regional Party committee acted on its own initiative was the rebellion organised by the southern Party organisation in 1940.29 As in the case of the earlier Nghe Tinh uprising, the Party centre decided to support the rebellion after it had started.

The legacy of these historical events is that provincial Party and state authorities, and indeed lower level authorities as well, often tend to operate as "independent kingdoms" in their relations with Hanoi ("big men in little provinces").30 The author experienced this first hand during her posting as an Australian immigration officer to Vietnam in 1984-85. The Australian Government had been making considerable representations to the Vietnamese Government on behalf of one Vietnamese family that was being refused permission to emigrate. Finally, the authorities in Hanoi gave the family permission to leave but the family did not show up for the Australian immigration selection interview because local authorities had not handed them the exit permits approved by Hanoi. Thus, the bizarre situation arose where the family's details were on an official list of cases approved by the Vietnamese Government, but that Government could not enforce its decision on its own lower-level authorities. Several months passed before the case was finally resolved.

This general issue of the autonomy of local authorities became tangled up with the debate about whether there should be greater decentralisation of decision making in the economic domain. Some elements within the Party favoured decentralisation as a means of stimulating economic development. Others feared that it would break down Vietnam's system of centralised planning. The Party's proposal to expand the role of the "district" as a sociopolitical unit was one issue which generated controversy. On the one hand, it could be viewed as a positive step towards decentralisation, a policy which was generally supported by provincial and local leaders. On the other hand, provincial authorities were suspicious that it might be an attempt by the centre to increase its control over the economy by reaching past them to deal directly with district level administration, especially in regard to the two-way flow of goods between the peasants and the state. Suspecting that the transfer of functions to the district could reduce their own powers, these officials not only dragged their feet in implementing relevant regulations and

30 Thayer, "Renovation and Vietnamese Society", p. 3.
directives, but also justified their lack of action by criticising district "mismanagement and irresponsibility". One wonders to what extent the self-criticism and criticism campaign in 1986 might have become a forum for this power struggle between the centre and periphery.

Significantly, on 15 January 1986, the Council of State postponed elections of people's councillors at district, village and equivalent levels. Originally scheduled for February to April 1986, these elections were put off until April 1987, thereby coinciding with the election of deputies to the Eighth National Assembly. One cannot help speculating whether certain groups in the Party thought they could gain a political advantage by postponing the elections until after the Sixth Party Congress. Perhaps, they needed extra time to reinforce the standing of their own candidates for election to the councillor positions. In this connection, it is also interesting to note that a Party Directive issued in May 1986 enlarged the size of the district/precinct party committees by about one third, ordered the lowering of the average age of committee members and the recruitment of more women. This could have been used by some leaders to stack Party committees with their supporters or to break up troublesome cliques of cadres who were too difficult to dislodge by other means. A group with growing power in the Party, for example those in favour of decentralisation of decision making, may have found this a useful device for increasing their influence at lower levels of the Party.

North/South Differences

Just as there was tension between the centre and periphery of the Party, there was also an uneasy relationship between the northern and southern Party organisations. As stated in an earlier chapter, the Party organisation in the south had been decimated during the war and large numbers of cadres from the north had to be sent down after the war to help administer the southern provinces. There was a feeling amongst surviving southern Party members that their colleagues from the north were insensitive to the needs of the southern population. The harsh Party policies of the late seventies, including the attempted rapid socialist transformation of agriculture and commerce, confirmed this view. Nguyen Van Linh, a northerner who had spent many years in the south during the war, shared this concern. Indeed, as noted in Chapter Three, he was relieved of responsibility for running the program of socialist transformation of commerce because he was considered too half-hearted about the program.

32 Pike, "Vietnam", p. 252.
33 In Vietnam in the mid 1980s, there seemed to be a standing joke that northerners who moved to the south tended to turn into southerners. It did not take them long to adopt the southern free-wheeling approach to the market place and to become attached to the more freely available consumer goods.
The tension between the northern and southern Party organisations related in particular to economic policy. Having experienced a form of market economy under the old regime, albeit one propped up by American aid, southerners were reluctant to move to a system of centralised planning that took economic decision making out of their hands. As Hanoi's economic policies showed disastrous results in the late 1970s, the influence of southerners on economic policy increased, and continued to do so into the 1980s as the southerners demonstrated the success of their economic strategies.

The lack of co-ordination and conflict between the northern and southern bureaucracies was evident in other fields as well. The author sometimes found this in dealing with Vietnamese Government officials on matters relevant to Vietnamese emigration. By the mid-1980s, many of the practical, day-to-day aspects of bilateral emigration programs and the American component of the Orderly Departure Program were handled by southern officials. Authorities in Ho Chi Minh City also had responsibility for issuing exit visas to applicants in that city, which tended to be the majority of all applicants. The author gained the impression that the southern authorities ran their own show for the most part and did not appreciate interference from Hanoi. Conversely, Hanoi officials did not always seem to have an accurate idea of how the programs were going in the south. Of course, there was much scope in the program for profit-taking by corrupt officials and no doubt this consideration, rather than likely eligibility, influenced the issue of a significant number of exit permits. Matters came to a head when it was found that thousands of exit visas had been issued to people in the south who had been rejected subsequently for migration by immigrant receiving countries like the United States and Australia. These people would have to be reintegrated into Vietnamese society, a difficult process as many of them had already had their ration cards withdrawn, their children taken out of school and sometimes their houses taken over by the state. As a consequence of these developments, and no doubt other political considerations, Hanoi began to "centralise" the programs. The sheer workload involved in running the programs, however, was more than it could handle and the pendulum swung back subsequently towards greater southern control of program operations. Policy control remained, as always, with Hanoi. It is important to point out, however, that these developments could be interpreted not only in the context of North/South rivalries but also as an example of the contest for power between the centre and periphery.

Overlap of functions between Party and State

The source of many of Vietnam's problems in the first decade after the Vietnam War was the overlap of responsibilities between the Party and state bureaucracies. Theoretically, the Party was supposed to "lead", and the state "manage", the affairs of the nation. In
practice, the Party involved itself in every area of administration. The gravity of this problem was highlighted in 1981 by erstwhile Party propagandist Dr Nguyen Khac Vien in an open letter to the National Assembly. He asserted that Party committees had monopolised every aspect of state activity, from the grassroots to the very top, and he accused the Party Organisation department of encroaching on the powers of the Government. Vien also expressed disappointment that the institutions that were supposed to act as watchdogs and prevent such a situation arising had been completely ineffectual. He complained that unions, the youth movement and other mass organisations were "not playing any role" and that the media simply repeated the official line, failing to reflect public opinion on government policies. Vien's criticism of the Party Organisation Department has been interpreted as an attack against the Department's head, Le Duc Tho, who was said to be directing the government from behind the scenes, leaving Prime Minister Pham Van Dong with little real power.

In his Party-building report to the Fifth Party Congress in 1982, Le Duc Tho also expressed frustration about the lack of a clearcut allocation of responsibilities and authority among the various elements of the Party and state system. In particular, he seemed concerned about the role of Party affairs committees in Government ministries, pointing out that while these committees had performed a useful function immediately after reunification, they were now counterproductive as they compounded confusion about Party and state cadre responsibilities. The report which Le Duc Tho delivered had been approved beforehand by the Politburo and Central Committee, and was an amalgam of viewpoints within the Party. Hence, it is not so surprising that some of the points raised in the report resembled Vien's grievances. Perhaps Vien's comments did find their mark, as Tho was removed from his position as head of the Organisation Department just before the Congress. Nevertheless, Tho seemed to continue playing a prominent role in relation to cadre policy right up until the Sixth Congress.

As long as the overlap of responsibilities between Party and state persisted, it would be next to impossible to run government and the economy efficiently. Most high- and middle-ranking cadres in the state apparatus were Party members. They could interfere in the implementation of economic policies at all levels of government and in state enterprises. This was especially a problem if they were opposed to economic reforms - they could virtually sabotage them through the state bureaucracy. There was evidence, for example, that cadres in some areas had resisted the introduction of the agricultural

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35 Ibid.
36 Ibid.
38 Thayer, “Renovation and Vietnamese Society”, p. 4.
product contract system. They could redirect state property to the free market if they had a sufficiently strong "protective umbrella" and if they gave others involved a share of the profits. They could use their influence to find jobs in the system for their immediate family and relatives. Relations between Party and state cadres were so incestuous that it was next to impossible to make them truly accountable for their actions.

Increasing isolation from the public

The Party was becoming increasingly alarmed by the widening credibility gap between itself and the Vietnamese people. It was concerned that the good relations which had existed during the war were now dissipating due to the excesses of many Party cadres. As corruption and nepotism flourished amongst cadres, the populace, which continued to suffer severe privations of food and material necessities, became increasingly alienated. Party cadres were seen to have become more arrogant, authoritarian, and indifferent to public concerns. According to Nguyen Khac Vien, people also could not understand "why those high-ranking individuals who have made mistakes have not been punished." This credibility gap was a problem of considerable magnitude for the Party as it threatened its legitimacy, and hence its very survival as a governing party.

The Party leadership responded by exhorting cadres and members to consult with the people and listen to their views. It, or at least some elements of it, still held the view that it could improve the situation by changing the behaviour of individual cadres, for example through self-criticism and criticism or threats of expulsion from the Party. This conviction would persist in 1986, as demonstrated by the self-criticism and criticism campaign. Nguyen Khac Vien said that what was needed was the acknowledgement by leaders of their errors and their resignation from their positions. Yet, even this measure was not enough. As noted earlier, a lot of the problems were structural, and would not be resolved until the Party made concrete changes to the inefficient structures and systems which riddled Vietnamese society.

The preceding examination of internal Party developments in the postwar period suggests that by 1986 the Party was facing a number of major challenges. Of particular concern were personnel problems such as growing corruption and abuse of power, ageing of the Party leadership and the lack of economic management and other skills in the Party membership. The overlap in Party and state responsibilities was making the

40 Ibid., p. 160.
41 Quinn-Judge, "A Vietnamese Cassandra", p. 16.
42 Ibid.
task of nation-building almost impossible. There was a contest for power between the Party centre and periphery and between north and south. Every day, the Party's standing with the Vietnamese community was sinking lower and lower. In this context, one can understand, perhaps, why the Party in 1986 turned to a traditional tool of Party development to help it address these challenges. Self-criticism and criticism had held a central place in Party life from its early days as a means of looking inward, acknowledging mistakes and searching for a way forward. At a time of peril, different to that of war but serious nonetheless, the Party called into play its "law of development".
5 The International Context

The 1986 self-criticism and criticism campaign in Vietnam did not occur in a vacuum. As demonstrated in earlier chapters, it was influenced by factors such as the state of the economy and developments within the Communist Party itself. Yet these domestic factors must surely have been complemented by developments in other countries. In particular, one would imagine that Vietnam was influenced by events in the Soviet Union, its major benefactor, and in the People's Republic of China, its giant northern neighbour. This chapter will examine developments in the 1980s in the Soviet Union and China to draw out those elements which bore some similarity or relevance to the situation in Vietnam in the lead up to the self-criticism and criticism campaign.

A survey of developments in the USSR, China and Vietnam in the 1980s reveals similarities in the kinds of challenges facing their governing communist parties. In all three countries, there were expressions of disquiet about the growing level of corruption and deterioration of "ethics" in the Party and state apparatus, and the increasing isolation of Party cadres from the grassroots of the Party and the public. Communist Party leaders were ageing, signalling the need for the handover of power to a younger generation. The governing elites were relying increasingly on their performance in the economic domain to sustain their legitimacy, yet this strategy was fraught with pitfalls, especially if they failed to deliver promised improvements in the people's standard of living. Many cadres in the Party and state bureaucracies simply did not have the economic management and other skills needed to progress their nation's economic development. There were growing signs that rank and file Party members and the public were becoming dissatisfied and disillusioned with their respective communist parties.

Leslie Holmes has suggested that communist systems as a whole were experiencing a legitimacy crisis by the 1980s and that symptoms of this crisis were anti-corruption campaigns which sought to involve the public in attacks on corrupt cadres. Significantly, in all these countries, such attacks focussed more on lower level cadres than top leaders, supporting Holmes' contention that a Party seeking popular legitimacy will be prepared to turn the public against its own staff in order to restore the legitimacy of the regime as a whole. It is also of interest that mass campaigns against corruption and inefficiency used self-criticism and criticism as a means of exposing and responding to these phenomena.

In both the Soviet Union and China during this period, new Party Secretaries-General tried to consolidate their own power and authority by dismantling the power bases of their

1 Leslie Holmes, Crisis, Collapse and Official Corruption, pp. 221-240.
predecessors and by recruiting cadres more likely to support their reform programs. Thus, in the Soviet Union, Andropov and later Gorbachev sought to remove Brezhnev cronies from the Party and state apparatus. In China, Deng Xiaoping used campaigns to expunge cadres associated with the excesses of the Cultural revolution from leadership positions. It is not so easy to compare this particular situation with Vietnam, where the position of Secretary-General did not change hands until Le Duan's death in July 1986, well after the beginning of the self-criticism and criticism campaign. However, Le Duan had been ill for some time, highlighting the imminence of a leadership succession. In addition, the ongoing debate within the Vietnamese ruling elite about the direction of economic policy laid the foundations of a power struggle which led to similar efforts to consolidate support at all levels of the Party.

Beyond the similarities in the challenges confronting these three countries, there was a strong bilateral relationship between Vietnam and the Soviet Union which predisposed Vietnam to Soviet influence. The Soviet Union contributed massive levels of foreign aid to Vietnam each year (see Chapter Three). It was also Vietnam's chief ally and trading partner. Vietnam could not ignore developments in Soviet politics. Events there must have had some influence on Vietnam's course of action in 1986. Chinese influence had been declining since the 1970s due to the strains in Sino-Vietnamese relations arising from Vietnam's treatment of its ethnic Chinese minority, its invasion of Kampuchea in late 1978, and the subsequent Sino-Vietnamese border war of early 1979. The expanding diplomatic links between China and the United States were another factor behind the cooling of Sino-Vietnamese relations. Nevertheless, there is evidence of some Chinese influence on Vietnamese economic policy at this time. The economic reforms announced at the Vietnamese Communist Party's Sixth Plenum in August 1979 bore more than a passing resemblance to the significant economic reform program launched by Deng Xiaoping at the end of 1978.

The Soviet Union

The 1980s were a time of momentous political change in the Soviet Union. The decade saw the passing of the Brezhnev era, the fleeting rule of Andropov and Chernenko and the emergence of a more dynamic Party leadership under Mikhail Gorbachev. While the most important changes in the USSR of relevance to this thesis occurred during the Gorbachev era, some had their roots in the regime of Yuri Andropov.

As in Vietnam, the Soviets had long-standing problems of corruption and inefficiency in the ranks of the Party and state bureaucracy, which had developed particularly during the Brezhnev period. It was Andropov, a former chief of the KGB, who began an anti-corruption campaign to battle these ills. Andropov also supported the freer circulation of
information and opinion about national problems to improve the performance of the Party and State and make them more accountable to the public.\textsuperscript{2} The anti-corruption campaign was not, however, aimed only at improving performance and popular legitimacy. It was also used as a cover by Andropov to build his own authority by breaking up the networks and power bases of former Brezhnev supporters in the provinces and returning control of the Party organisation to the centre. To do the job, Andropov brought in his own trusted KGB man to reorganise the police force and recruited thirty thousand youth from the army and Young Communist League (Komsomol) into police ranks. He also authorised anti-corruption squads to investigate Communist Party machines run by Brezhnev supporters in the provinces and rejuvenated the people's control commissions, intended to function as public watchdogs over the administration.\textsuperscript{3}

After Andropov died and Chernenko came to power, the anti-corruption drives ceased, and it was only towards the end of his period in office that Chernenko began referring to the need to improve cadre work, to battle corruption and practise criticism. His interest in these activities appears to have been spurred by resistance within the bureaucracy to his policies. This is evident if one reads between the lines of Chernenko's following comments in an article in the journal \textit{Kommunist}:

\begin{quote}
Policy is implemented by people. Today, when there is an urgent need for profound qualitative changes in all spheres of society, the problem of cadres has special importance. This is why the Central Committee is raising the question not only of improving work with cadres but also of \textit{cadres policy at the present stage}. This means that appropriate changes are needed in the entire system of the selection, training and promotion of cadres... We must resolutely combat all kinds of abuse of official position and manifestations of favoritism and parochialism. The Central Committee will permit no leniency here, because this is a political question - a question of the Party's prestige and the trust of the masses.

The most important thing is to create an atmosphere in which the slightest deviation from the norms of Party ethics and the slightest violation of socialist legality immediately receives a fitting appraisal from both the Party masses and higher agencies. To this end, we must further develop principled criticism and firmly curb all attempts to suppress it, let alone to persecute people for it.
\end{quote}

Ideological-upbringing work is not only a matter of the dissemination of scientific ideology and the provision to the masses of systematic information about our policies. We also take into account the enormous role of propaganda as a means of 'feedback' from the masses. The widespread and free expression of people's opinions in the press, businesslike criticism and the extensive discussion of decisions from the public and letters from the working people are a sort of safeguard against voluntarism and subjectivism in policy-making, one that makes it possible to select optimal decisions and to make timely adjustments in them.4

Significantly, the Vietnamese Communist Party's theoretical journal *Tap Chi Cong San* presented a detailed and favourable review in its March 1985 issue of Chernenko's book, *Some Matters Concerning the Work of the Party and State Apparatus*. The journal commended Chernenko's for providing many lessons of theoretical and practical importance, and it related in detail what Chernenko had to say about the role of self-criticism and criticism.5 The review of Chernenko's work by the Vietnamese Communist Party journal suggests that Soviet thinking on issues of Party development, including the use of self-criticism and criticism, did receive detailed attention in Vietnamese Party circles. The very fact that a Vietnamese language edition of Chernenko's book was issued suggests that the intended audience was quite large, within the Party at any rate.

Chernenko died on 10 March 1985. The next day, Mikhail Gorbachev was elected General Secretary of the Soviet Communist Party.6 In his first speech as General Secretary, Gorbachev raised an issue which was to become a feature of his period in power. Referring to Lenin's observation that the state is strengthened by the awareness of the "masses", he called for an expansion of publicity about Party work on the basis that "the better informed people are, the more intelligently they act and the more actively they support the Party . . .".7 Gorbachev regarded criticism and self-criticism as a means of bringing about this awareness:

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5 *Tap Chi Cong San*, No. 3 (March 1985), pp. 45-53.
7 Ibid.
I would like to stress once again that the policy of broadening glasnost and developing criticism and self-criticism, rather than playing at democracy, is a matter of principle for our Party. We regard the development of glasnost as a way of accumulating the various diverse views and ideas which reflect the interests of all strata, of all trades and professions in Soviet society. We won't be able to advance if we don't check how our policy responds to criticism, especially criticism from below, if we don't fight negative developments, don't prevent them and don't react to information from below. I cannot imagine democracy without all this...

He declared that *glasnost* and criticism and self-criticism had to become a *norm* in the Soviet way of life and that no radical change was possible in their absence. His comments confirm that Gorbachev viewed self-criticism and criticism as a means of mobilising the bureaucracy and the public in support of reforms, of providing a feedback mechanism on public reaction to policies and, most importantly, of enhancing the Party's authority and prestige.

Gorbachev saw the mass media as an important channel for promoting *glasnost*:

The mass media are called upon to make a profound analysis of events and phenomena, to raise serious problems and offer ways of solving them by providing meaningful, prompt and competent information. An intelligent word from the Party addressed to the people stimulates their thinking, encourages their initiative, and cultivates their intolerance to shortcomings... And it goes without saying that any attempt to suppress or ignore well-grounded criticism should be opposed by the Party from positions of principle.

Yet he also used the media to undermine his political opponents. Articles criticising the lack of *glasnost* in a particular area usually indicated an attempt by Gorbachev and his supporters to change the personnel there. The building of legitimacy and support for his reform program was the aim rather than real democracy, as evidenced in Gorbachev's following statement on the subject:

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9 Ibid., p. 79.
11 Gross, op. cit., p. 72.
The main task of the press is to help the nation understand and assimilate the ideas of restructuring, to mobilize the masses to struggle for successful implementation of party plans... We need... 'glasnost', criticism and self-criticism in order to implement major changes in all spheres of social life... but criticism should reflect the interests of the party.12

Similar objectives were apparent in Gorbachev’s preparations for the 27th National Party Congress, due to be held in late February 1986. At a Central Committee Plenum in April 1985, Gorbachev stressed the need for new faces in the cadre ranks, and for frank discussion about such issues as the quality of Party leadership, the evaluation of Party work, and the record of implementation of Party policies.13 Around this time, Gorbachev revived efforts of his predecessors to return greater control over cadre policy to the Party centre. During the Brezhnev years, the power of patronage had gone to regional and local leaders, who had used it to build up their own following. To break down regional loyalties, Gorbachev introduced a requirement that potential regional leaders be rotated through the Central Committee for a fixed period.14 In addition, cadres were brought in from outside to take up leadership positions in particular regions.

At the same time, however, Gorbachev appointed many regional Party leaders to key positions in the central leadership. No doubt this was part of an effort to consolidate his own power base. It also reflected the increasing economic management expertise which was developing in the regions as a result of modernisation, for example, the growth of high technology industries in the Urals and the agricultural modernisation of the south.15 This managerial talent would be an asset to Gorbachev in his efforts to implement economic reforms. A similar trend emerged in Vietnam, as a greater number of provincial Party officials with proven managerial skills were elected to important leadership positions at the centre.

The Soviet Union exerted direct influence on Vietnamese leaders through frequent bilateral leadership summits. In June 1985, a Vietnamese delegation headed by Party General Secretary Le Duan visited the Soviet Union and attended talks with Gorbachev. A “Joint Soviet-Vietnamese declaration” issued after completion of the talks referred to an exchange of views between the delegations on their preparations for their upcoming Party congresses, and this was confirmed by Gorbachev in a later dinner speech:

12 Ibid., p. 73.
13 Moscow Home Service 1400 gmt 23 April 1985 (BBC SWB/SU/7934/C/17, 25.4.85).
14 Gustafson and Mann, “Gorbachev’s First Year”, p. 6.
15 Ibid., p. 9.
We have held thorough and intense talks. As before, they were marked by a cordial and truly comradely atmosphere. Both in the Soviet Union and in Vietnam, work has got under way on a large scale now to prepare for the 27th CPSU Congress and the Sixth CPV Congress. This lends special political significance to our exchange of opinions.16

It is likely that the Soviets used such opportunities to reiterate their concerns about Vietnamese misuse of Soviet aid funds (see Chapter Three) and to seek remedial measures.

At the 27th National Congress of the Soviet Communist Party, Gorbachev sharply criticised the Brezhnev era, while not actually naming Brezhnev. He asserted that the growth of the Soviet economy had suffered badly during that period and that radical reform was needed to reverse the inertia, stagnation and conservatism of the 1970s and 1980s.17 He did not, however, specify the nature of the radical reforms nor did he question the systemic causes of the situation, such as the demand economy. The only speaker at the Congress to allude to such problems was the new Moscow Party chief, Boris Yeltsin. Instead of challenging the system which was the basis of their power, leaders engaged in introspective self-criticism and emphasised the need to improve the system by changing the people who managed it, by strengthening Party discipline and by reducing waste, corruption and fraud. This approach had the advantage of preserving the system by accusing individuals for the system's shortcomings.18 In other words, it was a strategy for regaining legitimacy. At the same time, Gorbachev used this vehicle to remove his political opponents under cover of allegations of corruption and inefficiency. This approach had parallels in the Vietnamese leadership's decision to use a self-criticism and criticism campaign to assess Party cadre performance.

The Soviet Party Congress agreed to change Party rules to require that future admissions to the Party membership take place in open meetings with non-Party members present. Primary Party organisations such as factory or office based Party cells were given a say in the development of cadre policy. They now had the right, for example, to nominate people for inclusion on the list of Nomenklatura candidates, that is, candidates for future leading Party and State positions. The Congress affirmed the right of individual Party members to criticise their officials, and it laid down a requirement that officials inform Party organisations regularly of their progress in responding to criticism and suggestions put to them.19 Another significant change was that Party members who committed crimes could now be subjected to both Party discipline and prosecution before

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18 Ibid., pp. 202-204.
the courts. Previously, they could escape police charges by submitting themselves to Party discipline. All these changes served to apply greater pressure on the middle ranks of cadres who were most likely to pose obstacles to Gorbachev's policy agenda. Gorbachev and his supporters were unsuccessful in reinstating a rule first established by Krushchev that Party officials be limited to three terms or fifteen years in office. This meant that he was stuck with many of Brezhnev's cronies unless he could remove them by other means. Gorbachev's efforts to strengthen his power base through the selection of new Central Committee members also did not reach his expectations, as fifty nine per cent of Brezhnev's old Central Committee members were reinstated.

The Vietnamese Communist Party and the Vietnamese media took a close interest in developments at the 27th Congress of the Soviet Communist Party. In Ho Chi Minh City, the Saigon Giai Phong and other newspapers reported and commented comprehensively on the Congress and related developments. Most commentaries praised the frankness with which economic and political problems had been tackled at the Congress and said that the Congress had offered "valuable experiences" for the Vietnamese Communist Party. A Nhan Dan editorial called for local and provincial Party congresses to follow the Soviet example by displaying the same frankness and willingness to remove incompetent or corrupt cadres. In view of the radical nature of some of his remarks at the Soviet Party Congress, it is interesting that Boris Yeltsin's speech had the most dramatic impact in Vietnam. Journalist Tran Dinh Van, writing in Saigon Giai Phong, reported:

On the day that Nhan Dan Newspaper began to carry Yeltsin's report, I was working in Haiphong and Quang Ninh. The report generated unusual interest. The party paper, like a magnet, drew everyone's attention to the report and made it compulsory reading...

The lesson of foremost importance drawn from the 27th Congress of the CPSU --- to speak the truth --- immediately sent a shock throughout our country. Rarely have I seen readers waiting as anxiously for the next issue of Nhan Dan as they were for the issue carrying the next instalment of Yeltsin's report. At many agencies, so many persons wanted to read the paper when it arrived that one person had to read it aloud to the others.

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20 Ibid., pp. 98-99.
22 Hanoi Home Service 1430 gmt 13 April 1986 (BBC SWB FE/8238/B/2, 21.4.86); Saigon Giai Phong, 21 March 1986, pp. 1 and 4 (JPRS-SEA-86-111, 30.6.86); Saigon Giai Phong, 12 April 1986, pp. 1 and 4 (JPRS-SEA-86-102, 16.6.86).
24 Tran Dinh Van, Saigon Giai Phong, 23 March 1986, p. 2 (JPRS-SEA-86-087, 22.5.86).
Tran Dinh Van went on to describe a debate he had witnessed at the Quang Ninh Province Hotel, where cadres had discussed the extent to which the matters raised by Yeltsin were relevant to Vietnam. Overwhelmingly, the cadres concluded that they were relevant, that "speaking the truth" was the essential, "paramount virtue" of every cadre and Party member. It is interesting to note, however, that only excerpts from Yeltsin's report were published in the Vietnamese media, prompting Tran Dinh Van to conclude that cadres in high positions felt threatened by such articles:

Some cadres of position and authority who have committed many mistakes but continue to smugly live under protective umbrellas would surely be absolutely startled by a demand that they be named and would certainly do everything in their power to prevent this from happening, their desire being that newspaper articles demanding that truth be told not be widely disseminated.

These reports give us an image of a Vietnamese Communist Party thrown into a vigorous and intense process of debate and introspection by developments in the Soviet Union. Those developments struck a chord in Vietnam precisely because of the serious errors in economic policy which the Party had made and the acknowledged widening of the credibility gap between the Party and the people. What the Soviet Congress engendered in Vietnam was a desire for an open and frank evaluation of the Party's performance.

**People's Republic of China**

There are some similarities between the China of the late 1970s/early 1980s and Vietnam during the same period. A period of disastrous economic decline in both countries had forced the ruling Communist Parties to put the active struggle for communism to one side and to focus on improving the performance of the economy. Like the Vietnamese communists, the Chinese Communist Party acknowledged that its legitimacy had been shaken by a "crisis of trust" and it tried to restore public confidence by emphasising economic development and the raising of living standards. This shift in focus reflected a move by the Party away from a purely goal-oriented mode of legitimation towards a more evdaemonic mode where performance, especially economic performance, was the priority. There would, however, continue to be tension between these two modes of legitimation.

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25 Ibid.
26 Ibid.
Following the disastrous Cultural Revolution in China in the late 1960s and 1970s, there was general agreement at the Party's Third Plenum in December 1978 on a program of economic reform. The aim was a so-called "socialist commodity economy" which combined elements of both centrally planned and market economies. Under the reforms, agriculture was decollectivised. A new family responsibility system allowed peasant households to enter into contracts for the use of land for periods of fifteen years or more. They were also allowed to sell any produce in excess of quotas for the State either on the open market or to State agencies at prices above those set for the quotas.28 Significantly, at its Sixth Plenum just eight months later and despite continuing military confrontation on the Sino-Vietnamese border, the Vietnamese Communist Party adopted a very similar package of agricultural reforms, although it was years before the reforms were fully implemented.

Just as Gorbachev had done in the Soviet Union, Deng Xiaoping used anti-corruption campaigns to blame individual cadres for systemic problems in the Chinese economy and society, and to build his own power and authority. He also used them to consolidate support for his reform program. The mechanism he established in 1978 to control this process was the Central Discipline Inspection Commission (CDIC). Similar in function to the Vietnamese Communist Party's Control Commission, the CDIC was headed by Chen Yun, a Party hardliner.29 Besides playing the role of a watchdog over the Party membership, the Commission was responsible for rehabilitating victims of the Cultural Revolution and for responding to public complaints and accusations against Party cadres.30

From 1979 to early 1983, the Commission waged a struggle against cadre corruption. Commission circulars banning waste and special privileges were publicised, and the press was heavily involved in exposing corrupt practices.31 Following the Party's Second Plenum in October 1983, the Commission launched a four year Party rectification campaign. The campaign's stated purpose was to clean up corruption, promote Party unity, rectify "Party style" and strengthen Party discipline.32 It relied mainly on the study of required texts as well as criticism and self-criticism. In practice, the campaign was aimed at building support for Deng's economic reform program in the context of a fierce factional struggle. The main targets for expulsion from the Party during the campaign were the "three types of persons" — those who had risen to prominence during

28 Brian Martin, China in Crisis (Canberra: Legislative Research Service, Department of the Parliamentary Library, July 1989), pp. 28-29.
30 Ibid., p. 606.
31 Martin, China in Crisis, p. 33.
32 Xinhua, 1427 gmt, 22 December 1984 (BBC SWB FE/7836/BII/1, 31.12.84).
the cultural revolution, those who were seriously "factionalist in their ideas" and those who had indulged in beating the people, "smashing" and "looting". In other words, they were the political enemies of Deng Xiaoping.

While the first stage of the rectification campaign had concentrated on weeding out remnant leftist ideology, policies and personnel of the Cultural Revolution era, the second stage — beginning in the winter of 1984-85 — focussed on rectifying a new series of "unhealthy tendencies" within the Party which were the product of Deng's economic reforms and which were causing considerable public discontent. Many cadres in the Party and state apparatus had taken advantage of the reforms to establish themselves or their families in business. They had used their power, through their official positions, to determine the distribution of raw materials and bank loans and hence advance their businesses. By April 1986, it was reported that 27,000 illegal trading firms involving 67,000 state cadres were under investigation. Typically, low-ranking cadres bore the brunt of the crackdown, while the adult children of powerful cadres were treated leniently by the law. Barbara Sands has argued that the real reason for the campaign against corruption was the significant income redistribution caused by economic reforms. Corruption was merely the political forum chosen by the affected parties to do battle. Sands also maintained that the campaign had a public relations purpose by showing that the government shared public concern about corruption, and by encouraging the public to police cadres from below. The third stage of the Party rectification campaign, beginning at the end of November 1985, was aimed at corrupt and incompetent cadres and diehard Maoists in the rural party apparatus who were said to be obstructing Deng's economic reforms.

Deng complemented his rectification campaign strategy with other efforts to bring about the leadership changes he needed to bolster his position. He sought cadres who would not only support his economic reforms but who would also have the specialist skills needed to implement them. At the Party's 12th National Congress in September 1982, he won endorsement for reforms of the Party's organisational structure and for high-level personnel changes. From 1982 to 1983, about half of the Party Central Committee members and 950 top provincial leaders retired. He then turned his

36 Ibid., p. 57.
38 Baum, "China in 1985", p. 46.
39 do Rosario, op. cit., p. 46.
attention to reform of Party committees at the provincial and autonomous region level. As a result of personnel changes in early 1983, the average age of cadres in these committees dropped and there was an infusion of more technically and professionally qualified cadres into the leadership.40

Deng considered that the two most important criteria for assessing potential leadership cadres were moral integrity (de) and ability (cai). These Chinese terms have their equivalents in Vietnamese — "due" and "tai" — reflecting their common origins in Confucian thought and in the Marxist-Leninist-Maoist concept of "red" and "expert". In judging moral integrity, one had to assess the candidate's commitment to the "socialist road" and the leading role of the Party.41 The Party's Organisation Department laid down even more specific requirements for leaders of provincial Party committees. Of the three leading cadres in these committees, the Department directed that one should be 55 years of age or younger. One third of the standing committee members should be in this age range, and about one third should have a college education.42 In the next few years, the Vietnamese Communist Party was similarly prescriptive about the preferred age range for leading cadres at various levels of the Party, and it also called for more educated and specialist cadres to be recruited. This was one of the issues addressed during the 1986 self-criticism and criticism campaign.

Deng's most ambitious experiment in leadership succession was his planned creation of a Third Echelon in the Party leadership. Announced in 1985, the plan was to be executed in two stages in conjunction with the ongoing rectification campaign. In the first stage, one thousand of the nation's most promising young and middle-aged cadres would be selected at the provincial and national levels to be groomed as a strategic "reserve" to replace the first two echelons of leaders as they were phased into retirement. In the second stage, some thirty thousand talented and educated younger cadres would be selected for special preparation at the prefectural and municipal levels, with a further one hundred thousand selected at the county level. Altogether, then, the Third Echelon would comprise 131,000 members, who would form an elite corps of 2% of the nation's cadre force of nine million.43

In April 1985, significant personnel changes at the provincial and ministerial level were announced, including the appointment of 126 young and middle-aged cadres to senior administrative positions. The average age of the appointees was under 50 years and 80% were college educated. Deng's next step was to push through further changes in

41 Ibid., pp. 620-621.
42 Ibid., pp. 622-623.
43 Ibid., p. 33.
the top Party leadership at a special Party conference following the Fourth Plenum of the Central Committee in mid-September 1985. Fifty-four full members and ten alternate members of the Central Committee resigned, including twenty-eight elderly cadres in their 70s and 80s. Ten of the twenty-four member Politburo retired. Many of the cadres appointed to replace the sixty-four retiring Central Committee members belonged to Deng’s Third Echelon — 76% were college educated and their average age was just over fifty years.44

There are clearly some parallels between the situation in China and Vietnam in the early 1980s. The ruling communist parties in both countries had introduced economic reforms and were coping with problems of implementation, outright resistance from some elements in the Party and state apparatus, and unintended consequences. They had similar views on the kinds of skilled, dynamic personnel needed to get the reforms going. Both countries also experienced the growth of corruption, speculation and dissatisfaction amongst some sections of the population as the reforms began to take effect. In these circumstances, and given the common Marxist-Leninist traditions of both nations, it is not surprising that some of the methods they used to address these problems were similar. China conducted an ongoing Party rectification campaign to fight corruption, recruit a new generation of cadres and consolidate support for Deng’s economic program. Vietnam had similar drives against corruption and made similar efforts to bring in more young, skilled cadres, in particular during the 1986 self-criticism and criticism campaign. Yet, there were also significant differences between the methods used by the two communist parties. The rectification campaign in China was clearly a tool for consolidating Deng’s personal power and campaigns in that country seem to have been carried out with far more ferocity than has been the tradition in Vietnam, with the exception of Vietnam’s land reform of the 1950s. In Vietnam, efforts to build support for a particular economic strategy occurred within the context of a collective leadership and there was a stronger tradition of seeking consensus. Vigorous intra-Party debates did occur but the ultimate decision was more likely to be a compromise.

44 Ibid., pp. 34-35.
By 1986, in both economic and political terms, the Vietnamese Communist Party was in deep trouble. It had failed to deliver a better standard of living to the Vietnamese people, as it had promised to do ten years earlier. Indeed, the disastrous currency change of September 1985 had put the economy into a tailspin, with inflation running at up to 700 per cent. Rank and file Party members became increasingly disaffected as they fought to survive on lowly salaries. There were reports of a "bitter" mood in the capital, with many officials speaking openly of their disgust at the Government and the need for "old men to leave". Similar sentiments were expressed by the populace as a whole. People were fed up with the Party's economic mismanagement, corruption and the arrogance and indifference of Party cadres to their concerns. They were seeking a younger, more dynamic leadership prepared to introduce the changes needed to set Vietnam on a course to prosperity. Vigorous debate in the USSR about problems facing the Soviet Communist Party, discussed in the previous chapter, generated demands in Vietnam for a similarly frank appraisal of the Vietnamese Communist Party's performance. In addition, the Soviet Union's displeasure at Vietnam's misuse of its aid funds placed considerable pressure on the Party to improve its economic management. All these developments occurred in the context of preparations for a national Party Congress, a now regular process which provided a natural focal point for review of the Party's past performance and debate about future policy directions.

Thus, in 1986 we saw the convergence of several factors which together laid the basis of a legitimacy crisis for the Party amongst both its own staff and the public. It was not the first time the Party had faced such a situation. In 1979, the country had come close to economic collapse after overzealous efforts to socialise the relations of production in the South, its invasion of Kampuchea and the subsequent "lesson" it had suffered at the hands of China. On that occasion, however, there was not the same widespread disillusionment within the Party's own ranks. Party members had expected that the path to economic prosperity would be fraught with difficulties in the aftermath of a protracted war. This explanation did not hold much currency by 1986. Perhaps a closer parallel in terms of rank and file disillusionment was the outcome of the land reform of the mid-1950s, which created a legacy of years of bitterness amongst Party cadres who had been treated unjustly.

Party leaders recognised that resolute action was needed to address the legitimacy crisis and put a credible program together in time for the Sixth Congress. They did not, however, necessarily agree on the form which that action should take. As noted earlier in this thesis, the debate within the leadership can best be characterised as one between proponents of continued centralised control of the economy and society, and advocates of greater decentralisation of decision making and the use of incentives. In a situation of legitimacy crisis, these two groups proposed different solutions to the country's ills. Those supporting centralised control blamed the crisis on the poor performance of officials and the Party organisation and so emphasised organisational measures such as self-criticism and criticism, discipline or dismissal of corrupt cadres, and recruitment of new, more "qualified" cadres. Comparing the Party to a human organism, they attributed its mistakes to an "illness". The implication was that once the "illness" was identified and treated through such methods as self-criticism and criticism, the Party would return to good health.4 On the other hand, the supporters of decentralisation argued that the answer lay in giving enterprises, households and individuals more autonomy and in generally freeing up the economy in the hope that improved economic performance would restore confidence in the leadership.

This debate had flared up again in late 1985 and early 1986 in a publicly aired disagreement between Vo Van Kiet, Chairman of the State Planning Committee and Pham Hung, the Interior Minister. Kiet asserted that the planning process was inflexible, that it had become too involved in the detail of economic management, and that it imposed unacceptable requirements on lower levels of the bureaucracy. He advocated that central agencies confine their attentions to broad strategies and to monitoring developments at lower levels, while devolving greater responsibilities and decision making powers to these levels. Pham Hung, however, argued for continued strong Party control over the process of economic reform and, predictably, urged that Party organisations throughout the country be strengthened by improving the training of members and by recruiting more cadres with specialised and technical skills to cope with the new demands of economic management. By late February 1986, the debate had been taken out of the public domain, perhaps to smooth the way for the Congress preparations,5 but it continued within the Party.

The debate was not contained to the upper reaches of the Party leadership. It was played out at all levels of the Party. There were indications, for example, that the Eighth

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Plenum economic reforms of 1985 had not been implemented effectively because of resistance from middle-ranking cadres:

One of the things that led to serious mistakes in implementing the price-wage-currency policy is that the party did not give prompt and careful attention to changing personnel. It allowed people whose viewpoint and thinking was not in total agreement with the new policies of the party to undertake the task of implementing these resolutions.6

The supporters of the reforms pointed to the Soviet Union which had, in the previous year, taken steps to remove cadres opposed to the implementation of new Soviet Communist Party policies. They called for the Vietnamese Communist Party to do the same.7 Demands for the removal of cadres blocking the Party's economic reforms were particularly strong in the South and no doubt found expression through reformist Politburo members like Nguyen Van Linh whose political power base lay in the South. In this context of power struggle, the self-criticism and criticism campaign may have been a means for reformers in the regime to remove from Party and state positions cadres obstructing the reforms. Both sides of the debate, then, saw the need for personnel changes to bring about improvements in the Party's performance. The subsequent official encouragement of public criticism of corruption amongst existing cadres created a climate conducive to such changes.

The push for personnel changes can also be viewed as a logical response by an organisation to a rapidly changing economic, political and social environment. Most of the Party's cadres had joined the Party during the period of resistance against the French or the subsequent war against the Americans and the Republic of Vietnam. Loyalty and willingness to fight for the Party, and war-related skills had been the prerequisites for cadres at that stage. By the 1980s, the situation had changed and so the personnel requirements had also changed. In the new environment, where reconstruction and economic development were the priorities, the Party needed educated staff with more specialised skills, in particular, in economic management.

The imminence of a leadership succession in the Politburo due to the ageing of the leadership was another major challenge facing the Party at this time.8 In the process of leadership change, there must surely have been rivalry between potential successors and an attempt to influence those who might have a say in the selection. According to Myron Rush (see Introduction), the main agencies involved in decisions about leadership changes in communist states are the Politburo itself, the Central Committee, "subelites"

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7 Ibid. Also see: *Saigon Giai Phong*, 6 April 1986, pp. 1 and 4, (JPRS-SEA-86-099, 12.6.86), p. 78.
such as provincial leaders and technocrats, public sentiment, and the Soviet Union. We already know that the Soviet Union was placing pressure on Vietnam to improve its economic management, especially in relation to massive Soviet aid funds. This was one agency that the top leadership had to satisfy through leadership changes. The self-criticism and criticism campaign offered the Politburo, and contending groups within it, an opportunity to influence the other three agencies. By involving the public in the campaign, top leaders sought to appease public sentiment and to channel public opinion in a direction favourable to their interests. Of course, the conflicting interests and views alluded to above made the outcome of the public aspect of the campaign unpredictable. This was especially so in the case of the media role, as will be shown later in the chapter.

The leadership could apply pressure on members of the Central Committee and "subelites" by directing that they submit themselves to self-criticism and criticism and then using the results of this assessment as an input into the subsequent congress elections. It is significant in this regard that one of the stated objectives of the self-criticism and criticism campaign was to develop a personnel policy to "assist" in the selection of new Central Committee members at the Sixth Congress and of delegates to congresses at all levels. It is also relevant that the Party statutes require new provincial Party secretaries to be endorsed by the Central Committee. No doubt, those elected to the Central Committee would have to be approved by the Politburo. On the other hand, Central Committee members and "subelites" could also exert influence upwards by virtue of the constituencies they represented.

Thus, the self-criticism and criticism campaign appears to have been a response to three converging developments: a legitimacy crisis; the debate over the policy measures required to overcome the crisis; and the need for a smooth leadership succession. In all three cases, the question of Party performance, in particular the performance of individual cadres, became a focus for Party activities during the campaign, but for different reasons.

Why was a self-criticism and criticism campaign used as a medium for responding to these converging developments? Quite simply, self-criticism and criticism are considered the law of development of the Vietnamese Communist Party, with roots going back to the earliest days of revolutionary struggle. In those early days, the Party relied on self-criticism and criticism to help prevent mistakes, to promote the continuous development of new strategies, and to maintain Party discipline and unity. These were matters of life and death for a clandestine party besieged by outside forces. Although the Party was now in government, it still turned to the tradition of self-criticism and criticism when it, or elements of it, faced great challenges. Unlike a clandestine revolutionary party, however,
a ruling Communist Party could launch self-criticism and criticism in the context of a co-
ordinated, mass campaign.

The Secretariat Directive on the Self-criticism and Criticism Campaign

On 11 March 1986, the Party Central Committee Secretariat issued Directive 79 which
called for a self-criticism and criticism campaign to be held at all levels of the Party. The
Secretariat was a tremendously powerful body in the Party. It basically managed the
Party in between meetings of the Politburo and prepared agenda and other papers for
meetings of both the Politburo and the Central Committee. Control over the Secretariat
essentially meant control over the whole Party organisation. Four out of the ten
Secretariat members were Politburo members. At the time the self-criticism and criticism
campaign was announced, these four were the General Secretary Le Duan, Le Duc Tho,
Vo Chi Cong, and Nguyen Duc Tam. It is unlikely that Le Duan played a major role in
guiding the initial stages of the campaign as he was very ill and undergoing treatment in
Moscow.9 In determining the possible motives of the other three Politburo members in
endorsing the self-criticism and criticism campaign, it may be instructive to look at their
likely views on the policy debate described above. Having been involved in the
implementation of economic reforms in the South in the late 1970s, Vo Chi Cong appears
to have been positively disposed towards decentralisation and incentives-based policies.10
Leaders holding such views may have seen the campaign as an opportunity to consolidate
support within the Party for such economic reforms and to counter resistance in middle
ranks of the Party to the policies. On the other hand, a self-criticism and criticism
campaign would fit in well with Le Duc Tho's long-standing concern about the
deteriorating performance of the Party and his evident preference for organisational
solutions to the Party's loss of legitimacy. While he had given up his position as head of
the Party's Organisation Department in 1982, he reportedly retained two of that office's
most important responsibilities. One was to decide before each national congress who
would be nominated to the Central Committee, and the other was to specify the job that
each candidate would occupy, after carrying out an individual assessment and making
sure that the candidate was acceptable to others in the leadership.11 This focus was
evident in the stated objectives of the campaign, which are outlined below. As Le Duc
Tho's successor in the Organisation Department, Nguyen Duc Tam could be expected to
view organisational responses as a valid means of dealing with the Party's ills. It should
be noted that Tam was Le Duc Tho's cousin and it is open to speculation whether these
two Politburo members used the campaign, in part, to achieve certain personal objectives.

10 FEER, Asia 1987 Yearbook, p. 262.
11 Interview with Le Duc Tho by Sylvana Foa, reported in The Nation Review, 9 and 10 April 1985
For example, as a result of the election process, Le Duc Tho's brother Mai Chi Tho became a member of the Politburo.

The stated objectives of the self-criticism and criticism campaign, as outlined by the Secretariat, were twofold:

1. Through assessing the work already performed and drawing upon experience since the fifth party congress, improve leadership capability and the ability to organize the implementation of party lines, contribute to promoting ideological and organisational unity within the party and enhancing the sense of organization and discipline among party cadres and members, strengthen the relationship between the party and the masses (sic) and create conditions for fully grasping and satisfactorily implementing the resolutions of the sixth and upcoming National Party Congress at all levels.

2. Assess and evaluate cadres in a correct and comprehensive manner; and, proceeding from this, devise a personnel policy to help in selecting members of the party Central Committee, sixth tenure, as well as in nominating delegates for congresses at various levels.¹²

Both of these objectives related in some way to improving Party performance, including individual cadre performance. The desire to improve Party performance was closely linked to the Party's search for renewed public legitimacy, as indicated by the reference in the directive to the need to strengthen the relationship between the Party and the "masses". During the war, the Party and people had united around the goal of national reunification. After reunification, the Party's attempt to substitute the goal of an early transition to socialism proved to be unworkable, as demonstrated by the disastrous experience with agricultural co-operativisation and nationalisation of industry in the south. The Party had to seek a new model that would help to meet rising public expectations of an improved standard of living. It began to shift slowly towards eudaemonic legitimation. As noted in the Introduction to this thesis, a regime which adopts an eudaemonic mode of legitimation relies for its popular legitimacy on its performance, especially in the economic domain. This may be an appropriate strategy for a regime which can deliver the performance expected of it. Unfortunately for the Vietnamese Communist Party, by 1986 it was clear that its economic management credentials were woeful. Through the self-criticism and criticism campaign, Party leaders hoped to reduce the discontent amongst the Party rank and file and the public by identifying scapegoats for the errors and by renewing the Party organisation, for example through personnel changes, in an effort to improve the Party's performance.

The intention to introduce change to the district and province level committees was demonstrated by the Secretariat's issue — on the same day as the self-criticism and criticism campaign was announced — of a directive concerning congress preparations which called for more youthful vigour in the leadership. The directive specified that cadres in provincial and city Party committees should be in the 40 to 49 year age group, and that in district and precinct level Party committees they should be mainly between 35 and 45 years of age, or younger.13 Le Duc Tho's influence can be detected here also. For years, he had urged the Party to rejuvenate itself. Indeed, two months after the campaign was announced, in an important article in *Tap Chi Cong San (Communist Review)*, Tho stressed that unless the Party recruited, trained and promoted young cadres to replace ageing ones, the Party would "have the ground cut out from beneath it."14

The second stated objective of the campaign referred to the development of a personnel policy to assist in the selection of Central Committee members and delegates to Party Congresses. As noted above, this suggested a link between the campaign and leadership changes. The Party intended using the individual cadre assessments obtained during the campaign in the selection process for these officials. A cadre maligned during the campaign for real or imagined shortcomings had little chance of being selected for one of the positions unless, of course, he or she had powerful supporters in a position to influence the decision.

As we shall see below, the objectives of the different players associated with the campaign coalesced into a three pronged approach involving: the identification of scapegoats; the unleashing of public anger against them to dissipate adverse public opinion and undermine political opponents; and the selection of their replacements.

**Campaign strategy**

As noted above, the parameters of the self-criticism and criticism campaign were first spelled out in Directive 79, issued on 11 March 1986. That directive focussed on the evaluation of Party performance, in particular the performance of cadres. On the same day, separate directives were issued on the convening of Party congresses and on the desired age range of Party committee members at each level of the Party. In other words, the self-criticism and criticism campaign was tied in very closely with preparations for the Sixth Congress. That linkage was strengthened further when the Party Secretariat issued additional guidance on the campaign following its meeting on 9 April 1986. Now it proposed that the campaign have two phases. The first phase would concentrate, as already planned, on the evaluation of Party cadres, while the second phase would link in

14 Cited in FEER, Asia 1987 Yearbook, p. 262.
directly with the congress arrangements. Specifically, the second phase of the campaign would start when the Central Committee's draft congress reports became available and it would continue until the grassroots, district and province level Party congresses had been conducted.

The second phase was supposed to focus, according to the Secretariat, on the "understanding" of Party lines and viewpoints and on their implementation. This wording suggests that the Secretariat was barring debate in the second phase, and merely seeking an enthusiastic acceptance of the Central Committee's views as expressed in the draft congress reports. It was as if the first phase was intended to provide the opportunity for catharsis, while in the second phase cadres had to submit themselves to central direction and to implementing directives from above. We know from an earlier examination of the Party statutes that the Party leadership was required to distribute the draft reports to Party members in advance of the Party congress to give them a chance to consider the contents. This process had resulted in a vigorous debate before the fifth Party Congress in 1982. Why were members now discouraged from debating the Sixth Congress draft reports? It seems likely that while the top Party leadership, and the Secretariat in particular, was prepared to accept criticism of its middle-ranking cadres in the first phase of the campaign it was not willing to countenance criticism of its own actions. Such criticism would be implicit in any criticism of the draft congress reports, which were probably drafted by the Secretariat. Despite this admonition by the Secretariat, there was vigorous debate and criticism of the draft reports, as we shall see later in this chapter.

Another interesting aspect of the revised arrangements for the campaign was the provision in a subsequent directive (Directive 80) that the campaign include "direct criticism of upper echelons of authority." How high were the "upper echelons" and who was the Secretariat trying to target by introducing this new facet to the campaign? It is possible that the Secretariat was aiming this at province level leaders as there are indications that in many provinces the self-criticism and criticism campaign was not being taken seriously and that resistance to central Party directives often came from these leaders. At its meeting on 9 April, the Secretariat noted that "a fairly large number of localities have not yet made careful preparations; have proceeded in a simplistic, subjective, and perfunctory manner; and have not yet developed democracy and seriously carried out self-examination". In May, the Party issued a directive aimed at strengthening the role of the district and enlarging the party committees at this level by

16 Pike, "Vietnam", p. 252.
about one third. Perhaps this was also aimed, in part, at putting constraints on provincial leaders' power from below.\textsuperscript{18}

The self-criticism and criticism campaign did not occur everywhere in the country simultaneously. Rather, the traditional strategy was to start off such campaigns in selected pilot centres and, if all went well, introduce them elsewhere. No doubt, this strategy facilitated damage control if the campaign were to take an unforeseen direction. Once a pilot centre was selected, provincial Party committee cadres travelled there to help the local Party apparatus conduct the drive.\textsuperscript{19} Party committees also held training sessions to familiarise committee members with the requirements of the campaign, so that the information could then be passed on down the line.\textsuperscript{20}

The more senior cadres were expected to take the initiative and criticise themselves before calling on their subordinates to contribute supplementary criticisms:

> It is especially necessary for key cadres to do self-criticism in the proper manner. Only by setting a good example of self-criticism can these comrades motivate other cadres and party members to properly carry out self-criticism and criticism. Wherever key leaders fail to set good examples, it is impossible to create a wholesome, frank, and truthful atmosphere and psychology necessary for self-criticism and criticism; under such circumstances, the masses will feel apprehensive and dare not criticize leaders for fear of prejudice and revenge.\textsuperscript{21}

Senior cadres were required to complete self-critique sheets in which they summarised their achievements and failings. These critique sheets then became publicly available so that party and mass organisations could provide input. After this feedback was incorporated, the critique sheets were submitted to the cadre's Party committee for review.\textsuperscript{22} In some places, conferences and opinion polls were organised amongst cadres and Party members to seek their views on leading cadres. In other localities, Party committees arranged "political days" on which cadres at all levels met with members of the public, workers, civil servants and military personnel to obtain feedback on their performance.\textsuperscript{23}

An important part of the strategy, and consistent with the campaign's role in reversing the Party's loss of legitimacy, the media were used extensively to convey information to

\textsuperscript{18} Pike, op. cit., p. 252.
\textsuperscript{19} Quan Doi Nhan Dan, 12 April 1986, p. 1 (JPRS -SEA-86-104, 18.6.86), p. 68.
\textsuperscript{22} Nhan Dan, 30 April 1986, p. 3 (JPRS -SEA-86-117, 16.7.86), pp. 70-71.
\textsuperscript{23} Quan Doi Nhan Dan, 12 April 1986, p. 1 (JPRS -SEA-86-104, 18.6.86), pp. 67-68.
the rank and file and the public about the campaign and to encourage them to become involved by writing to the press to expose cases of corruption or inefficiency.

**Geographic Variations**

The self-criticism and criticism campaign was a national campaign, covering both northern and southern provinces. Media reports give the general impression that the campaign was conducted more actively in the north of the country. One possible explanation for any North/South differences in the campaign's geographic coverage may be the smaller number of Party members in the southern provinces. According to the Central Committee Secretariat, in many southern localities, the highest level of Party organisation was a Party cell in a factory.\(^{24}\) Another explanation for the difference could be a bias in the sources used by the author.\(^{25}\) It is clear, nevertheless, that the focus of the campaign in the south was different to that of the north in that it gave greater emphasis to the issue of relations between the Party and the public. There was more reference to the arrogant and authoritarian bearing of middle-ranking cadres in their dealings with the public, reflecting the southerners' continuing and severe disaffection with the Party. Thus, the self-criticism and criticism campaign became, to an extent, a vehicle for the outpouring of this public discontent. It is also no coincidence that at the same time as the self-criticism and criticism campaign was launched in Ho Chi Minh City, a "mass movement" was initiated there to allow the public to express their views of the Party.\(^{26}\) Reportedly, it was the first time since 1975 that residents were able to voice their grievances about the Party at public meetings. As a consequence there was a reported drop in the level of tension in the city. According to foreign residents:

> The police have relaxed, residents seem less scared and are speaking more freely...One has the feeling that since the campaign started, officials have adopted a low profile, and that the noose around the city has been loosened.\(^{27}\)

Commenting on the liberalisation, one official said that it would last because the public demanded it.

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\(^{24}\) *Hanoi Domestic Service*, 14-16 October 1984.

\(^{25}\) Two major sources, the Party daily *Nhan Dan* and the *Hanoi Domestic Radio Service*, tended to focus on developments in the north because their offices were based there. When the author was able to locate articles from the southern newspaper, *Saigon Giai Phong*, they suggested that the campaign had been conducted intensively there as well. It should also be noted that the author could not access provincial Vietnamese newspapers and so missed out on any relevant articles they may have contained.


\(^{27}\) *Hong Kong AFP*, in English, 0858 gmt, 4 June 1986 (FBIS 5.6.86), p. K 4.
Phase One of the Campaign

The focus of the first phase of the campaign was almost entirely on the performance of individual officials. It was the phase in which cadres deemed responsible for the regime's shortcomings were identified and punished. It was an opportunity for catharsis, for disaffected elements of the Party and the public to vent their anger and frustration against specific targets. How were these scapegoats to be identified? First, the Party put in place a set of guidelines for the assessment of cadre performance. Secondly, it involved the media and the public in the exposure of corrupt or inefficient cadres.

Assessment of cadre performance

Party guidelines for cadre assessment provided for cadres to be evaluated against specific criteria, including the following:

1. their success in implementing resolutions of the fifth national party congress and subsequent resolutions;
2. their organisational and management skills and working methods;
3. their implementation of "Party lines" as a whole;
4. the extent to which they demonstrated desirable personal qualities and behaviour including militant revolutionary will, responsibility, organisation, discipline, dynamism, concern for the people's lives and for the building of the party, an understanding of the importance of democratic collectivisation, an appropriate work attitude, and a sound, clean, and simple way of life.\(^{28}\)

The standard set by these guidelines was such that almost any cadre could have been found deficient in some way. Corruption was a fact of life within the Party. In this context, one must ask: Who was most vulnerable to attack? This issue is examined below.

Type of cadre criticised

An examination of media reports on the campaign reveals that a range of officials were targeted, not only in the Party apparatus itself, but also in the state bureaucracy. In the Party, the targets tended to be members of district and village Party committees,\(^{29}\) state officials and Party members.\(^{30}\) What they all had in common was that they were "small fry", in other words, officials of low or middle rank. They were most vulnerable to attack because their corrupt activities were clearly visible to the rank and file members and the public who had to deal with them every day. At the same time, they were probably

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not fortunate enough to have "protective umbrellas" strong enough to shield them from attack.

The Party daily Nhan Dan acknowledged that many Party organisations avoided "unveiling or wrestling with the errors of cadres in high positions." In Thai Binh province there were complaints that disciplinary action against corrupt cadres had gone "easy on the higher echelons and hard on the lower echelons." Clearly, high-ranking Party officials had the capacity to direct attention away from their own illicit activities. In view of revelations two years later about the corrupt Party Secretary of Thanh Hoa province, Ha Trong Hoa, it is significant that he was not targeted during the self-criticism and criticism campaign. In June 1986, it appears that he may have been one of two province level Party officials, including an unnamed official from Thanh Hoa, who were due to go on trial, but there was no subsequent report on the trial and no indication that it actually took place. Journalists who tried publishing articles about his corrupt activities were ordered to stop when the Party decided later in 1986 to appoint him as a full member of the Central Committee. In fact, it would take almost two years of investigative reporting, considerable public outcry and fourteen inspection teams from the Central Committee to bring about his eventual dismissal in 1988. In other words, it was only when Hoa became an extreme embarrassment to the Party or otherwise expendable that he was removed. Until then, his umbrella of contacts and patrons had been prepared to protect him. Those who exposed him, however, paid a heavy price. Members of the fourteenth inspection team that successfully brought about Hoa's indictment and dismissal were expelled from the Party.

The majority of state officials criticised during the campaign seemed to hold positions which gave them some control over the use and distribution of State-owned property and materials. In Nghe Tinh province, the chief of a district material supply company and a deputy chief of a committee for building were accused of corruption. In Ho Chi Minh City, the targets included warehouse chiefs, while in Long An province it was the deputy director of the provincial agricultural service. Once again, however, lower level officials in the state system were more likely to be the scapegoats and those at higher levels were often insulated from criticism.

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31 Nhan Dan, 27 May 1986 (BBC SWB FE/8286/B/5, 16.6.86).
35 Ibid.
While there was a shake-out of the top leadership of the Government mid-year and of the Party at the Sixth Congress, the machinations preceding these changes occurred almost entirely behind the scenes.

**Kinds of shortcomings identified**

It is useful at this point to reiterate that the stated purpose of the campaign's first phase was to assess the performance of cadres by reference to their personal qualities, their organisational and management skills, working methods and success in implementing Party resolutions. One would expect, therefore, to see these factors mentioned in any Party analysis of the outcome of the first phase. In fact, a comprehensive analysis of cadre performance was not provided in media reports. What was made available to the public gaze was mainly a catalogue of some of the negative personal qualities of individual cadres, of their corruption, their increasing indifference to public concerns, and their bureaucratic work practices. Little was said about the other factors. This suggests that the media reporting of this phase of the campaign was mainly a public relations exercise which offered a means for the expression of grievances by dissatisfied Party rank and file and the public. The shortcomings exposed were precisely those which impacted most directly on these groups. The evaluation of cadres' success in implementing Party resolutions, especially in relation to the Eighth Plenum economic reforms, seems to have been more of an internal Party matter, although it is possible that ammunition for removing opponents of these reforms could have been obtained through public allegations of corruption.

Predictably, there was considerable media emphasis on the high incidence of bribery and corruption. As noted above, a degree of corruption was an accepted part of everyday life in Vietnam. In fact, in some ways it performed a useful function for producers in the economy. It helped them obtain the production inputs they needed by bypassing bottlenecks in the distribution system. The stage at which this corruption became "unacceptable" was when it became so blatant that it attracted adverse reaction from the community and Party rank and file; when it threatened the Party leadership's ability to implement its policies; or when rival groups in the Party decided to use it as a pretext for attacking their political opponents. In 1986, all these factors appeared to be operating in Vietnam.

Corrupt activities which led to conspicuous wealth and consumption by cadres generated considerable public animosity and were often targeted during the self-criticism and criticism campaign. These activities included the misappropriation of communal land, the construction of private housing on such land, and the illicit acquisition of consumer

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goods. The Ly Nhan district Party committee in Ha Nam Ninh province reported several serious cases of illegal land acquisition:

Cases of land nibbling have been reported in various villages. In Bac Ly village, there have been 223 cases of land nibbling involving 31,000 square meters of land. Of these, 36 cases are reported to have involved party members 40

In Nghe Tinh province, members of the Thach Ha district Party committee were accused of using low-priced government materials in the construction of their houses, of purchasing motorbikes with public funds and illegally appointing relatives to government positions.41 Indeed, some twelve districts and six organisations in that province used government funds to import hundreds of motorcycles and sell them to "key" cadres at discount prices.42

Widespread nepotism also came under critical scrutiny. Family connections were an important avenue for obtaining a good position in the Party or state bureaucracies. During the author's posting to Vietnam in the mid-1980s, it was common knowledge that many Vietnamese locally engaged staff at foreign diplomatic missions in Hanoi were related to officials within the Vietnamese Foreign Ministry or had other good connections in the Party or state bureaucracies.43 The author also recalls attending one particular function at which a Vietnamese official expressed genuine surprise on hearing that the author's parents did not work for the Australian Foreign Ministry. There was an expectation that one owed one's occupational status to family or other connections.

The increasing isolation of cadres from the Party's grass-roots and the broader community was of major concern to the Party and it was routinely attacked during the campaign. Many people expressed the view that cadres had become too autocratic and arrogant. In an article in Tap Chi Cong San in May, Le Duc Tho articulated this concern:

There are comrades in key positions at echelons and sectors who are very patriarchal and autocratic, who do not listen and do not want to listen to the opinions of the masses, party members and lower-echelon cadres. They are even prejudicial or vengeful toward those who harbour views different from theirs. 44

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43 At that time, Embassies were assigned local Vietnamese staff by the Services Department of the Foreign Ministry. Embassies were not allowed to pay local staff directly. They paid the Services Department in US dollars which then paid local staff in Vietnamese dong.
44 Tap Chi Cong San, May 1986 (BBC SWB FE/8257/B/4, 13.5.86).
Combined with the burgeoning corruption and nepotism in the system, this was steadily eroding the Party's legitimacy.

In the south, there were accusations of cadre "oppression" of the public.\textsuperscript{45} Indeed, the most frequent southern complaint during the campaign was about the activities of the police and local militia.\textsuperscript{46} By exposing such "shortcomings" in the media, the Party hoped to regain the population's confidence.

Criticism of inefficient work methods and failure to implement Party policies adequately did not seem to be issues raised very often by people who wrote in to newspapers. They were more likely to be discussed in newspaper editorials, reflecting debate, and probably power struggles, within the Party itself. Work methods were criticised for being "bureaucratic and ineffective in dealing with issues concerning the grassroots level and the people's life" and much time was said to be wasted on meetings and paperwork.\textsuperscript{47} There were accusations that lower level Party authorities were openly ignoring Party directives or were even blocking their implementation. As noted earlier in this thesis, there was evidence that middle-ranking cadres in certain localities had resisted the introduction of the product contract system in agriculture. There had also been opposition amongst some cadres at this level to the Eighth Plenum reforms. The leadership may have been trying to remove such cadres by criticising them openly for not adhering to party directives. In addition, these public criticisms may have been aimed at provincial officials, some of whom had been resisting the centre's efforts to strengthen the role of the district.\textsuperscript{48}

Another issue raised during the course of the self-criticism and criticism drive was the Party's perceived failure to recruit and train a new generation of cadres with the skills needed to advance Vietnam's reconstruction. For example, the Hanoi Party Committee castigated itself for failing to "grasp the cadre situation" and to rejuvenate its ranks.\textsuperscript{49} The issue of whether skills should be given priority over "revolutionary virtues" in the selection of cadres was a vexed one. The inevitable trend was for specialist cadres to be recruited in greater numbers in response to the rising demand for their skills but this created resentment amongst veteran cadres who lacked specialist skills. The existence of such bad feeling is clear in the comments below of two engineers who wrote to a southern newspaper during the campaign:

\textsuperscript{46} Hong Kong AFP, in English, 0858 gmt, 4 June 1986 (FBIS 5.6.86), p. K 4.
\textsuperscript{47} Nhan Dan, 8 May 1986, p. 3 (FBIS 19.5.86), p. K 5.
\textsuperscript{48} The difference of opinion on the role of the district was outlined in Chapter Three which dealt with internal Party developments.
\textsuperscript{49} Hanoi Domestic Service, 2300 gmt, 23 May 1986 (FBIS 29.5.86), p. K 7.
... party cadres are often mean, wicked people who form their own cliques with secret connections to protect their own behinds and who with subtlety and cunning restrict or eliminate those cadres who are upright persons working effectively with good technical skills, because they are afraid of the competition of younger cadres with technical skills.50

Hence, the self-criticism and criticism campaign may have become a forum for the acting out of these conflicts as well as an opportunity to break down some of the resistance to new recruitment practices.

**Opportunists take advantage of the campaign**

Notwithstanding the Party leaders' motives for conducting the self-criticism and criticism campaign, once the campaign started, it became a vehicle for the advancement of all sorts of interests within the Party. There were growing claims of cadres using the campaign to settle old scores or victimising people who had accused them of wrongdoing. Conversely, cadres often avoided involvement in the campaign for fear that criticism of their superiors would damage their careers or even their personal safety. Senior General Chu Huy Man highlighted these problems at an army cadres' conference in Hanoi:

... some cadres and party members have become fearful, face-saving, easy-going and insincere in their struggle, fearing an 'adverse' impact on themselves. There have also been cases of people taking advantage of the occasion to vent malicious attacks. It is truly dangerous to use criticism to exalt and protect some while finding fault with and attacking others, 'flattering', and seeking 'self-advancement'.

In many cases, people were justifiably concerned about their safety. There were reports that people making criticisms were being threatened and subjected to physical abuse. The head of a subward Party committee in Ho Chi Minh City was exposed to "severe" attack because of her frank criticism of other subward leaders.52 Such events must have raised doubts in the minds of many Party members about whether exposing corrupt cadres was worth the possible risk to themselves. They also highlight the inadequacy of a campaign of this kind in really bringing about concrete change. There were too many vested interests involved. More structural measures were needed to break down the barriers to change and to make officials accountable.

**Rectification of shortcomings**

The rectification of shortcomings exposed during the self-criticism and criticism campaign was handled within the normal Party structure. Higher echelons in the Party were

51 Tap Chi Cong San, May 1986 (BBC SWB FE/8308/B/10, 11.7.86).
responsible for overseeing the rectification efforts of lower levels and party members failing to take corrective action were to be subjected to Party disciplinary measures.\(^5\) The lack of an independent arbiter of the rectification process meant that there was no guarantee that Party members and cadres accused of shortcomings would receive a fair hearing. Cadres who lacked an extensive "protective umbrella" were likely to face the brunt of disciplinary measures while those who did enjoy such protection were able to escape punishment.

Reflecting its concern to regain public confidence, the Party gave most priority to rectifying mistakes occurring in Party units that dealt directly with matters affecting the public. Particular attention was also paid to resolving cases in which Party members or cadres had been accused unjustly of wrongdoing by other cadres. Party members and the public were encouraged to participate in the rectification process.\(^5\)

Rectification took a number of forms, depending on the shortcoming. The most severe measure was prosecution on criminal charges. The chief accountant of a grain supply company in Hoang Lien Son Province, who had reportedly co-operated with seventeen other people to swindle state funds and assets, was sentenced to a total of twenty years in prison, eighteen years for "grafting socialist assets" and two years for giving bribes. Eight accomplices received prison terms of between six and fourteen years and nine others received suspended sentences of between one and three years.\(^5\) Perhaps the most prominent case of corruption dealt with in 1986, and one which went against the usual trend of targeting lower-ranking cadres, involved the Minister of Engineering and Metals, Nguyen Van Kha. He was indicted in September, together with eight other officials, on charges of graft associated with an automobile assembly plant in Ho Chi Minh City. This was apparently the first time a criminal charge had been laid against a standing Cabinet member.\(^5\)

Another disciplinary measure was dismissal from the Party. Thach Ha district in Nghe Tinh province asked one Party committee member to resign because of his involvement in the illegal purchase and resale of motorcycles.\(^5\) The Party organisation in Ha Bac province either dismissed from their jobs or expelled from the Party some 681 Party members,\(^5\) and in Ha Nam Ninh Province, the Ly Nhan district Party organisation "released" eight co-operative chiefs from their positions.\(^5\)

In cases of nepotism, the beneficiaries were sometimes removed from their positions. For example, the son of the Thach Ha district people's committee chairman was dismissed and sent back to "agricultural production" after it was found out that he had been appointed to his job through family connections, but the only discipline imposed on the committee chairman was that he undertake self-criticism before the district Party organisation's executive committee. In the case of another leading Thach Ha district administrator who had appointed nine of his children or other relatives to government positions, local authorities dismissed only one of the official's nine offspring. The punishments applied in these cases were far from severe and it is hard to believe that they could have had a deterrent effect on other Party cadres.

In cases of misappropriation of state funds or property, the offenders were usually required to reimburse the State. Commodities purchased by cadres at less than market price through their abuse of office had to be resold at market price, with the proceeds returning to the State coffers. As a result of the self-criticism and criticism drive in Phu Khanh province, many Party members returned property and goods that had been obtained illegally. The Chairman of Tuy Hoa district people's committee returned a plot of land that he had bought illegally. Only a warning was served on the Thach Hoa village people's committee chairman in Nghe Tinh Province who had "indulgently allocated 1,020 square metres to a person to build houses against the prescribed plan".

The disciplinary steps taken against corrupt officials were inconsistent. The kind of offence that led to dismissal from the Party or prosecution in one case led to a mere slap on the wrist in another. It leads one to speculate that the extent of punishment depended on whether the offender had friends in high places or whether the relevant Party committee was actually committed to cleaning up corruption. Even the draft Political Report of the Central Committee commented on the inadequacy of the disciplinary measures. It said that although in previous years tens of thousands of members had been expelled from the Party, and some had been tried in court, this time punitive measures as a whole were not serious enough and many "disqualified members" still retained Party membership.

The Party prescribed measures for dealing with another major problem highlighted by the campaign — that of an increasing alienation of cadres from the grass-roots of its membership and from the population as a whole. One of the preferred solutions was to lay down specific requirements for regular consultations between leading cadres and

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grassroots Party units and the public. In Lai Chau province, provincial Party committee members were directed to spend 30 percent of their time visiting grass-roots Party units.\textsuperscript{64} In Vinh Phu province, 25 percent of office time was to be allotted to this task,\textsuperscript{65} while in Ha Son Binh province, key cadres at all levels were required to spend the first three days of each month visiting production installations and listening to the "pleas and aspirations" of the public.\textsuperscript{66}

By early August, the first phase of the self-criticism and criticism drive had, for the most part, reached its conclusion. The period of catharsis was over. The basis had been laid for the second phase of the campaign. A representative of the Nha Trang Party committee noted that the first phase had helped to create an:

... atmosphere of true democracy within the party that is very favourable for the assignment of personnel — one of the issues that was very time-consuming during the previous congresses — and consequently, making it possible to devote more time to studying and discussing the documents to be presented to Congresses at various levels.\textsuperscript{67}

It is difficult to judge the success of the self-criticism and criticism campaign in improving the Party's standing amongst the general population. There are some indications that it may have had a positive impact. For example, a Vietnamese emigre from France who visited northern Vietnam during this period found that people were satisfied and "proud" of the campaign which they felt had brought some welcome results. One peasant reported that people in his district had managed to overthrow a "clique" of corrupt district officials. At the Sixth Congress, a delegate from Quang Ninh province also indicated that the handling of cases of corruption during the campaign had begun to restore the people's "sympathy and confidence".\textsuperscript{68}

**Role of the media**

The media played a critical role in the self-criticism and criticism campaign. First, it served a relegitimation function by conveying the regime's "mea culpa" over its shortcomings and its efforts to redress them, and by giving the public an opportunity to be involved in this process. Secondly, it was a vehicle for turning the public against individual cadres and hence rebuilding confidence in the regime by showing that it was prepared to deal with the excesses of its staff. Finally, it provided a feedback mechanism through which the regime could identify issues of greatest concern to the populace.

\textsuperscript{64} Hanoi Domestic Service, 1100 gmt, 24 May 1986 (FBIS 29.5.86), p. K 9.
Ho Chi Minh had once described self-criticism and criticism in the press as a "weapon" to help the Party and the people redress their mistakes and develop their strong points. In fact, the media had been employed mainly to communicate the Party's policies to the populace and to mobilise the public to implement them, as suggested by the following excerpt from a 1972 Politburo directive:

Criticism and self-criticism in the press are aimed at improving political and spiritual singlemindedness in our society, ensuring satisfactory implementation of our party and state policies and lines, improving all fields of activity, bolstering our combative strength, improving our socioeconomic construction and management abilities, developing the people's collective mastery, helping our party cadres and members as well as our people achieve quick progress, thereby contributing to building new socialist men.69

There was tight control over the issues the media could cover. Nothing that threatened the regime was published:

... there is no room in our press for ill-intentioned or dubious 'criticism' that sows confusion and division, distorts or smears our regime, causes the leakage of secret information, or is motivated by individualism.70

Gareth Porter has suggested that in the period leading to the Sixth Party Congress, there was a shift in the role of the print media from that of a propaganda machine to a vehicle for the expression of contrasting views:

Journalists were encouraged for the first time to investigate cases of wrong-doing by prominent state and party cadres, to reveal the oppression visited on the public by the state apparatus, and to expose the unvarnished social and economic realities of Vietnamese life.71

Judging from the earlier analysis of the types of cadres criticised during the campaign, it is open to question whether the media did in fact report in any significant way on wrongdoing by "prominent" Party and state cadres. It is precisely these high-level cadres who seemed to escape detailed press attention.

The media became involved in the self-criticism and criticism campaign early in the year. In Ho Chi Minh City, which had 14 press, radio and television outlets,72 the media began a feature called "Contributing Ideas to the Party" whereby people could make

70 Ibid.
suggestions for consideration by the city's steering committee and other Party organisations. In a period of fifteen days during the first phase of the campaign, the newspaper Saigon Giai Phong received 255 letters, of which 166 made suggestions about the Party's "positions and policies", including 114 which dealt directly with the way in which the self-criticism and criticism campaign itself should operate. The remaining letters exposed or complained about the transgressions of specific cadres.73 Douglas Pike provided far higher figures for the public response. He said that in one weekend alone in Ho Chi Minh City, 1,300 letters arrived at a city newspaper office. Most of the complaints had to do with the economy, and the next major complaint related to officious or corrupt Party cadres and state bureaucrats.74 In the second phase of the campaign, a nationwide invitation to readers to contribute suggestions through various media channels to the Party Congress apparently yielded 15,000 suggestions in a three month period from August to October. The Party's Central Committee reportedly drew on these suggestions in redrafting the political report to be presented at the Party Congress.75

There is some suggestion that the media took to their allotted task with more enthusiasm than the Party had intended. While commending the press for creating an atmosphere of democratic political activity which would help to inspire public confidence in the Party, a meeting of the Standing Committee of the Ho Chi Minh City Party Committee concluded that some of the media reports had been inaccurate or had not dealt with issues appropriately. Indeed, the Committee claimed that a number of articles had "even exposed secrets on economic affairs" 76 As a result, the city press was directed to liaise more closely with Party and mass organisations, and to engage in more "positive" reporting in addition to their revelations about cadre shortcomings.77 It is clear, then, that in the mind of some leaders, the press had overstepped the mark in its reporting and needed to be brought back into line.

While these developments may create the impression that the media had been released from censorship requirements for at least some periods during the self-criticism and criticism campaign, according to Gareth Porter, journalists were still subject to severe editorial requirements.78 This was an extremely onerous requirement. The Army newspaper Quan Doi Nhan Dan complained about the restrictions, pointing to the need for officials to give journalists more serious and objective information, and denouncing

74 Pike, "Vietnam", p. 251.
77 Ibid.
the tendency to "show off what is good and hide what is bad". The newspaper praised the new Soviet style of dealing with the media and suggested that Vietnam explore this approach.

In the context of these continuing constraints on press freedom, the question arises — what criteria were used to decide on the particular cadres who would be exposed during the campaign and who would be protected? As noted earlier, it seems likely that amongst the most vulnerable were cadres who had run foul of the powerbrokers within the Party, those who opposed current Party policies and those who had not developed strong power bases and "protective umbrellas". The allegation that some articles had even exposed "economic secrets" suggests a breakdown in the censorship process which led to a degree of local autonomy in the media. Possibly, the approval procedure for media articles had become so unwieldy that some decentralisation of decision-making had evolved. On the other hand, it is likely that southern Party leaders used the media to expand their political influence and to undermine their political rivals. Releasing economic secrets may have suited their purposes, especially if those secrets related to Vietnam's economic crisis and could be used to embarrass those regarded as responsible for the crisis.

Phase Two of the Campaign

The second phase of the self-criticism and criticism campaign had two main tasks, first, to ensure consideration of the draft congress reports at all levels of the Party and secondly, to assist in the election of Central Committee members, Party committees and delegates at Party congresses.

Consideration of Draft Congress Documents

The Party leadership was required by the Party statutes to distribute drafts of the Congress documents throughout the Party organisation so that Party members would have a chance to consider them before the Congress. In July 1986, key Party cadres from all provinces and sectors met to consider the draft documents. Both Truong Chinh and Le Duc Tho addressed the conference. While Truong Chinh had for many years opposed incentives-based economic policies, by 1986 he was supportive of these and other reforms. His speech revealed that the debate on economic strategy was still raging within the leadership. He referred to the reluctance of "a number of comrades" to acknowledge the debilitating effects of bureaucratic centralism and asked rhetorically: "If centralism is stressed to the point that we lack commodities and goods circulation is stalemated, what is the purpose of centralism?" He also stressed the need to change people's attitudes,

especially on economic matters, in order to bring about improvements in the economic situation. Truong Chinh saw the self-criticism and criticism campaign as one means of achieving attitude change and of uniting Party members behind the economic reforms.

There were signs even at such preliminary conferences that cadres were dissatisfied with the contents of the reports. For example, at one conference 250 leading cadres from the central province of Binh Tri Thien made 3,000 suggestions about the organisation and content of the report.81 There were similar reactions at subsequent Party congresses. By the end of August, Party organisation congresses had been held in eight thousand basic-level Party units.82 Party delegates to these congresses were not prepared to accept the contents of the reports without debate. According to an *Agence France Press* report, many delegates damned the report for being "far from reality" and "vague", and criticism was particularly virulent in the south.83 Given the position of the south as a constituency of those Party leaders seeking greater decentralisation of decision making, the southerners' criticism of the documents suggests that the contents were not consistent with this favoured policy line.

Criticisms of the report continued at the next wave of congresses, held in four hundred districts from early September.84 Delegates from the Thach Ha district congress in Nghe Tinh Province, the heartland of the Communist Party, criticised state policies and strategies as ineffective and attacked "centralism" in particular. Describing the precarious situation of the peasants in that province, which was one of the poorest and frequently affected by natural disasters, they stressed the need for the Party to adopt a more rational agricultural policy. The product contract system was threatening to break down because of poor management by the collectives and the state's chronic failure to provide peasants with adequate quantities of raw materials such as fertiliser. Peasants often had to buy production inputs in the free market and as a result they were operating at a loss.85 The Thach Ha Congress' message to the Party leadership was straightforward — address the problems, or risk losing the support of the peasants. As noted in Chapter Three, these problems with the product contract system were being experienced by other provinces as well. They were exacerbated by corrupt officials throughout the Party and state apparatus who were either profiting from the redirection of raw materials to the free market or were obstructing the effective operation of the system for political reasons.

There were similar debates about the draft documents at other district level congresses but the media reporting of them was not very expansive. For example, news items on the

81 Ibid., p. 356.
84 Pike, "Vietnam", p. 250.
Nha Trang Municipal Party Congress indicated that it had to extend its discussion of the
draft political report to a day-long exchange of opinions before it achieved a "complete
identity of views". Media reports on Lang Son Province's Van Lang District Party
Conference referred to "lively discussions" on the draft report. No details were
provided on the content of those discussions. While the Central Committee was said to
have considered the criticisms of the draft political report, it advised critics that only by
adhering to the Central Committee's views would provinces, districts and Party units be
able to resolve their problems.

There was far less evidence of vigorous debate about the draft Congress documents at
the province level congresses. Once again, media reports referred to discussions of the
draft documents, but no details were forthcoming. Perhaps the leadership, concerned
about the widespread criticism expressed at the basic- and district level congresses, made
it clear that it would not tolerate the same degree of criticism at province congresses. The
Hanoi Domestic Radio Service, for example, called on provinces to "fully grasp the
economic viewpoints" of the Politburo. On the other hand, the same radio broadcast
said that the province congresses should contribute ideas to, and discuss the draft reports.
It is possible that the draft Congress reports presented to the provincial congresses were
revised versions and hence were more acceptable to those congresses than the earlier
versions had been to lower level congresses. After all, by October, the Political Report
had already been redrafted several times. Perhaps provincial Party officials had less
reason to complain than their district level colleagues about the way they were faring
under the status quo. Another likely explanation is that the debate on the documents at the
provincial congresses was held behind closed doors and hence not reported.

Lewis Stern has suggested that the provincial congresses focussed less explicitly than
the lower-level congresses on problem policy areas and that they were somewhat evasive
on "critical questions of consensus regarding the reformist economic platform". There
was an attempt at the congresses to project an image of broad national agreement and
continued unity on the reformist undertakings. For example, a Nhan Dan editorial,
commenting on the results of Party congresses, claimed that they had achieved:

... a complete identity of views with the renovative spirit of the party Central Committee
and the sixth party congress regarding the renovation of the way of thinking, especially
economic thinking, renovation of workstyle, renovation of organization, and renovation

88 Hanoi Home Service, 2300 gmt, 27 November 1986 (BBC SWB FE/8428/B/6, 28.11.86); Also, Hanoi Home
Service, 2300 gmt, 23 October 1986 (BBC SWB FE/8411/B/4, 8.11.86) and FBIS 21.10.86, p. K 4.
90 Ibid.
of cadres. The entire party has shown a high identity of views with Comrade Secretary Truong Chinh's statement. For our country, renovation is an even more imperative demand, a matter of vital importance.

We know, however, that such unity did not yet exist. There were still disagreements in the top levels of the Party about the nature, scope and pace of the reforms, and this was evident in some of the comments made by top leaders in speeches at provincial congresses. At the Tenth Congress of the Hanoi Party Branch in October, Truong Chinh, whose support of the "reformist" side was crucial at this time, again acknowledged the fundamental problems caused by Vietnam's adherence to an economic development model that emphasised heavy industry and centralism:

we have built an economic structure overemphasizing large-scale industry that exceeded our real possibilities; that we have maintained for too long a bureaucratic subsidy-based system of [macro-economic] management... leading to a great deal of dependence on foreign aid; that we have been hasty in seeking to complete socialist transformation

Yet, at the Cuu Long provincial congress, Interior Minister Pham Hung predictably expounded a centralist viewpoint, emphasising that central control over economic decisions would be maintained, even in the context of a progressive devolution of authority, and that socialist transformation would be a "regular and continuous" task. Perhaps Hung viewed the district as the administrative unit through which the centre could exert its control more effectively. As noted in Chapter Three, provincial authorities had suspected that this might be the case.

The Politburo thrashed out these economic policy issues and the final version of the Political Report at a series of meetings following the provincial congresses. As a result of these discussions and a brief plenary meeting of the Central Committee, it reached a compromise that partially endorsed the reformist program.

Leadership Changes

Besides consideration of the draft Congress documents, the other stated purpose of the second phase of the self-criticism and criticism campaign was to develop a personnel policy that would assist in selecting members of the new Central Committee and in nominating delegates for congresses at all levels of the Party. In fact, the personnel

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95 Stern, ibid., p. 359.
policy would also be applied to the selection of new Party committees. From the very beginning of the campaign, the Party had specific ideas about what the personnel policy would contain. There were certain age targets for each level of the Party, namely 40 to 49 years of age for provincial and city Party committees and between 35 and 45 years of age (or younger) for district level Party committees. Another long-standing concern, often expressed by Le Duc Tho, was to increase the representation in Party ranks of women, youth, workers and ethnic minorities.

Efforts to change personnel are, according to Leslie Holmes, a predictable response by a regime to a legitimacy crisis. It is also typical of the tendency amongst some leaders, notably Le Duc Tho, to pursue organisational solutions to these crises. On the other hand, personnel changes were also necessary due to the increasing complexity of the tasks that cadres had to undertake, particularly in economic management. This was an inevitable development in a post-revolutionary situation where the emphasis was shifting from military preparedness and mass mobilisation to the tough grind of managing a diversifying economy and society. Now, knowledge, technical expertise and administrative ability were priorities and many of the current cadres simply did not fit these requirements. Without skilled personnel to implement them, the Party's economic reforms could wither on the vine. How successful was the Party in ensuring that the kinds of cadres it wanted were selected at the Party congresses?

It was reported that elections at district Party congresses led to the replacement of two thirds of Party Committee members. Figures in Table 1 suggest the replacement rate was 53.7 per cent. There was a reduction in the average age of party committee members, but it was not dramatic, declining from about 42 years to 40 years (Table 1). In the absence of statistics on the age spread of the Party committees, it is difficult to judge whether the Party's objective of having most district Party committee members in the 35 to 45 year age range was achieved. One sample survey of 31 districts, precincts and cities can provide some indication. That survey found that the percentage of Party committee members aged 34 or younger had increased from 14.4 per cent to 19.4 per cent, the proportion in the 35 to 45 year age group had risen from 50.9 per cent to 55.6 per cent and the proportion over 46 years of age had decreased from 34.3 per cent to 24.9 per cent. In other words, some 75 per cent were in the desired age range.

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96 Holmes, Crisis, Collapse and Official Corruption, pp. 224-225.
97 Hong Kong AFP 1414 gmt 11 November 1986 (FBIS 12.11.86,K9).
98 Hanoi Domestic service 2300 gmt 3 October 1986 (FBIS 10.10.86), p. K 2. Southern Provinces: In Di Linh district, Lam Dong province, the average age of committee members decreased from 42 to 38. In Duyen Hai and Ha Tien districts, Kien Giang province, the average age fell by about 5 years (HDS 2300 gmt 3.10.86, FBIS 10.10.86, p. K2) while in the First Precinct, Ho Chi Minh City, it fell almost 7 years to 41.2 years.
There was little information available on changes in the representation of workers and ethnic minorities in district Party committees, although it was reported that the number had increased.\(^9\) The representation of women rose by a modest 2 per cent.\(^{100}\) Party success in recruiting more specialist cadres is also difficult to verify and the only possible gauge would be the level of education of Committee members. According to one report, the percentage of cadres in district Party committees with college or higher education increased by 12 per cent.\(^{101}\) Statistics from other sources, however, suggest an increase of only about 4 per cent (Table 1). The difference could be in the definition of higher education used by the two sources.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1: Comparison of Party Committees Elected in 1982 and 1986</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Factor/Attribute</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>---------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average age</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School education</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>University education</td>
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*Source: SRV Embassy, Canberra*

The selection of delegates to the National Congress was another task of the province and district Party congresses. One celebrated case demonstrated that the selection of these delegates was not always left to the discretion of the congresses. Where its political interests were at risk, the top leadership had no compunction in intervening in the process. At a congress in the Vietnamese People's Army, the electors refused to select the then Defence Minister General Van Tien Dung as their delegate to the National Congress. General Dung's wife was said to be involved in smuggling activities. It was


\(^{100}\) *Hanoi Domestic Service* 2300 gmt 3 October 1986. There was considerable variation in the representation of women in Party committees from province to province. In Hanoi, over 20% of the new Party committee members were women, while in Tan Hiep district, Kien Giang province, the proportion was 15% - roughly equivalent to the proportion of women in the district Party organisation as a whole - *Hanoi Domestic Service* 2300 gmt 28 September 1986 (FBIS 3.10.86), p. K6.

\(^{101}\) Reference?
only when the top leadership intervened that the decision was reversed. As we shall see in the next chapter, however, the General would be stood down from the Politburo at the Sixth Congress.

There were also significant personnel changes in provincial Party committees as a result of elections at provincial congresses, although not as sweeping as at the district level. Overall, about half of the provincial officials were replaced. The average age of committee members fell from an average of 50 years or more to the mid-40s, which fell into the age range desired by the Party. As in the case of the district congresses, there were not reliable national statistics on other demographic changes resulting from the provincial congress elections. Some congresses gave figures for their own province. Thus, the Hai Phong congress reported that the proportion of workers in its new Party committee rose 10 per cent. This far exceeded the proportion of workers (15 per cent) in the Party membership nationally. Predictably, the border provinces had a significant number of ethnic minority cadres in their new Party committees, but the national figures remained negligible. There seems to have been a significant increase in the number of provincial officials with tertiary education, with one estimate putting the increase at 12 per cent (Table 1).

Generally speaking, the Party expressed satisfaction at the results of the district and province congress elections:

On the basis of bringing into full play the results obtained from the criticism and self-criticism drive, truly broadening democracy, and carefully upholding standards, the elections of party committees have, generally speaking, achieved good results in further rejuvenating party committee membership.

To what extent was the Party prepared to put a broom through the highest levels of the Party and state? Did a rejuvenation occur there? The first indications of major changes came in May 1986 when the Central Committee held a gruelling 19 day plenary meeting to discuss arrangements for the National Congress, to consider the draft Congress documents, and to address the serious challenges facing the Party, especially in the
context of the economic crisis. The Central Committee, Politburo, Secretariat and Standing Committee of the Council of Ministers undertook self-criticism in relation to their leadership and performance and considered ways in which they could restore public confidence.\textsuperscript{110} Shortly after this Plenum, the axe fell on eight government ministers, including To Huu, the man in the Politburo and Secretariat held responsible for the currency change fiasco.\textsuperscript{111}

Significantly, the ministers were replaced mostly by officials who had been in the forefront of economic reforms in the provinces. The new Minister of Home Trade, Hoang Minh Thang, was Party secretary of Quang Nam Danang province. He had helped increase the supply and distribution of goods in his province by extending tax incentives to small traders and establishing a market-oriented pricing policy. The foreign trade portfolio went to the Haiphong Party secretary, Doan Duy Thanh, who had made several innovations in the trade sphere in that city. Luu Minh Chau, the only native southerner in the group and the new head of the State Bank, had helped Vietnam earn nearly 50 per cent of its 1985 hard currency earnings when he was director of Ho Chi Minh City's Import-Export Company.\textsuperscript{112} These appointments signalled the growing influence of provincial officials and technocrats in national politics and helped consolidate those forces within the Party who favoured moving towards a decentralised market economy.

Myron Rush predicted that in seeking support from "subelites" such as provincial leaders, the central Party organisation in a communist state would find its own power diminished.\textsuperscript{113} This was the cost the centre had to pay for that support. However, the rise of these provincial officials and technocrats was attributable to some extent, as stated above, to their obvious success in economic management. This ability was becoming an increasingly important selection criterion for Party and state officials as Vietnam sought to extricate itself from its economic mire. A similar trend had emerged in the Soviet Union under Gorbachev see Chapter Five).

Le Duan's death on 10 July prompted a reshuffle in the Politburo but no changes in personnel. Truong Chinh assumed the post of Secretary-General until the National Congress and immediately began advocating "renovation" in Vietnam.\textsuperscript{114} Nguyen Van Linh was appointed to the Central Committee Secretariat\textsuperscript{115} and was soon being referred

\textsuperscript{111} Hanoi Domestic Service 1100 gmt 30 June 1986 (FBIS 1.7.86), p. K 2.
\textsuperscript{112} Chanda, "Changing the Guard", Far Eastern Economic Review, 10 July 1986, p. 11.
\textsuperscript{113} Rush, How Communist States Change Their Rulers, p. 23.
\textsuperscript{114} Nguyen Kien, Vietnam: 15 Years, p. 63.
\textsuperscript{115} Tap Chi Cong San, No. 7, July 1986 (JPRS -SEA-86-193).
to as a standing member of the Secretariat, interpreted by some to be an indication that he was the heir apparent to Truong Chinh. Indeed, a Japanese news report in late July suggested that Linh was on probation for the leadership, and that his success in gaining the top job would be determined by his performance in economic management and in reorganisation of the Party before the National Congress. It is likely, then, that Linh used the self-criticism and criticism campaign as a vehicle for achieving some of these changes and so bolstering his political fortunes.

The final manoeuvrings and debate about the leadership succession occurred in the Politburo meetings and Central Committee Plenum at the end of November. At those meetings, the composition of both the new Central Committee and the Politburo were discussed. The outcome of those deliberations was endorsed at the Sixth Congress.

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The Sixth Party Congress and Beyond

The Sixth Party Congress, held in Hanoi from 15 to 18 December 1986, was the event towards which the self-criticism and criticism campaign had been directed and, as such, it should provide us with a means to evaluate the purpose and outcome of the campaign. In particular, we should be able to determine whether Congress deliberations provided any support for the hypotheses that the campaign had been aimed at regaining public confidence in the Party; resolving intra-Party conflict concerning the scope and pace of economic reforms; and renewing the Party organisation, especially through leadership changes. This chapter will also look briefly at developments after the Congress to gain a broader perspective on the campaign and its objectives.

National Party congresses are important occasions for communist parties. They provide an opportunity for a stocktake of Party achievements and for the charting of future directions. They are an occasion for introspection concerning Party strengths and weaknesses and for putting forward remedial measures. During the long years of the resistance, the Vietnamese Communist Party held national Party congresses only rarely. After the Second Indochina War, they came to be held on a more regular basis and the political system as a whole became more differentiated and complex as it struggled to adjust to the range of economic, social and political challenges facing the nation. Of course, the National Congress was unlikely to spring any major surprises on the Party leadership. As with most political gatherings of this kind, compromises would have been thrashed out before the actual event so that the Congress would more or less formalise what had already been agreed. It is for this reason that the self-criticism and criticism campaign of 1986 was important. It was a forum in which many contending views and conflicts could be aired before final decisions were made on the Party's future direction.

Truong Chinh acknowledges legitimacy crisis

The Political Report, presented to the Congress by Secretary-General Truong Chinh was strongly critical of the Party's performance, and particularly of its mishandling of the economy. The report noted that the Vietnamese people faced numerous difficulties in their daily lives. Millions of them were unemployed or underemployed and many of their most basic material and social needs were not being met. Even those who were employed, in particular, workers and state employees, were enduring much economic hardship. Added to this, social justice had been violated, the law was not strictly observed and many abuses of power and corruption by Party and state officials remained unpunished. This deplorable situation had "lessened the confidence of the masses in the
party leadership and in the functioning of state organs."¹ In other words, the Party leadership acknowledged that it was experiencing a legitimacy crisis. This crisis was confirmed by other delegates to the Congress. For example, a Hau Giang province Party delegate implied that the leadership was out of touch with the real situation of the peasants and that this threatened peasant support for the Party:

\[
\ldots \text{we would like to report this real situation to the congress because a few comrades may not have gone to the outlying areas and learned about the livelihood of our peasants. They might think that peasants now have a stable life with high income. Some have even hinted at adjusting peasants' income. If such a view is carried out} \ldots \text{This will affect the worker-peasant alliance.}²
\]

In explaining the origins of the legitimacy crisis, the report laid the blame fairly and squarely on the prevailing mode of economic development: the overemphasis on heavy industry, the headlong rush towards socialist transformation, and the system of centralised planning based on subsidies. Truong Chinh noted that due to "hastiness and wishful thinking" and its failure to appreciate that the transition to socialism was a long historical process, the Fourth Party Congress had set unrealistic targets. Although the Fifth Congress had endorsed more appropriate policies, the Party had simply failed to implement them effectively. Who was responsible for this failure? While the report seemed to point the finger at "centralist" elements in the Party, it coated the bitter pill by suggesting that both "left" and "right" deviations were at fault.³ The leadership admitted that it lacked management expertise and had not learned from past experience.

Digging still further for an explanation of its shortcomings, the leadership concluded that the answer lay in the Party organisation itself:

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The errors and shortcomings in economic and social leadership originated from shortcomings in the Party's ideological and organisational activity and its cadre work. This lay at the root of all other causes.⁴
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Curiously, side by side with an "anti-centralist" interpretation of the state of the economy was a typically "centralist" attribution of blame for Vietnam's problems on organisational factors. This reflected the compromises which had been made when putting the Political Report together after the vigorous debates of the preceding months. On the other hand, both groups within the Party had something to gain by tinkering with the Party organisation. They both needed to improve its performance in order to regain

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⁴ Ibid.
the confidence of the public and rank and file members. By strengthening the Party organisation, the centralists hoped to maintain the Party's close control over the economy and society. For advocates of decentralisation, organisational change was necessary to remove those cadres who had blocked their reforms and to bring in new personnel with the skills and inclination to implement those policies effectively. There was, indeed, a common recognition of the need for better qualified and trained cadres, and more efficient systems, to cope with the increasingly complex nature of economic management tasks. The existing organisational structure was simply not handling the new demands placed on it. As the Report noted:

> We must ... frankly admit that, faced with new developments and trials in the building of socialism, our party's ideological and organisational activity was unable to keep pace with the revolution's requirements.5

Most importantly, the Party organisation's inability to cope with the changing economic and social challenges was attributed to its failure to appoint leaders appropriate to the new circumstances.

**Leadership Changes**

The Political Report said that the Central Committee, Politburo, Secretariat and Council of Ministers were largely responsible for shortcomings in the Party leadership because they had ignored the need for infusion of new blood into the leadership:

> ... the delay in correctly effecting a transition in the nucleus leading body was a direct cause for the inadequacy of party leadership in recent years in meeting the requirements of the new situation. The Central Committee wishes to self-criticise earnestly before the congress over its shortcomings.6

This issue of leadership change, both at the top levels of the Party and at the middle and lower ranks, was of central concern in efforts to "renew" or renovate the Party organisation. The Party did not, however, want rapid leadership change. It sought a gradual generational succession. Therefore, the leadership changes in 1986 need to be viewed in the context of a generational transition that had been under way since the Fourth Party Congress in 1976.7 At the Fifth Party Congress, six Politburo members had stood down. The Sixth Congress saw the departure of a further six Politburo members.

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5 Ibid.


7 Thayer, "The Regularization of Politics", p. 189.
Veteran Politburo members Truong Chinh, Pham Van Dong and Le Duc Tho did not put themselves forward for re-election on the grounds of "advanced age and failing health". There were rumours that Truong Chinh and Le Duc Tho did not retire voluntarily but were forced to do so by their Central Committee colleagues. One account of a plenum before the Congress suggests that a Central Committee member had hurled these words at Le Duc Tho: "You have repressed the people for the past 40 years and dismantled the party. Forty years is too much. It is now time to retire from political life and let the people live". The veracity of this account is difficult to determine and it may have been a gross exaggeration or even a fabrication based on popular rumours. Nevertheless, it does give an indication of people's attitudes towards Le Duc Tho and the reference to his authoritarian tendencies rings true. Agence France Press suggested that the decision on the three leaders' departure from the Politburo was taken at the last minute and was a response to strong pressure from the grassroots level of the Party which wanted younger leaders at the helm. In any case, these three leaders did not disappear from the political stage. They retained great influence in the Party through their appointment to special new positions as advisers to the Politburo.

A further three Politburo members, To Huu, Van Tien Dung, and Chu Huy Man, were ousted or resigned at the Congress. To Huu's fate had already been sealed as a result of his association with the disastrous currency change of 1985. The political demise of former Defence Minister Van Tien Dung was attributed to his wife's use of his position in her smuggling activities, although it seems likely that this was the cosmetic reason and that a more important motive was at work. The four new additions to the Politburo were Tran Xuan Bach, Nguyen Thanh Binh (both had been members of the Party Secretariat), Doan Khue and Mai Chi Tho. Two candidate members of the Politburo were elevated to full membership, namely, Foreign Minister Nguyen Co Thach and Dong Si Nguyen. The promotion of Tran Xuan Bach to the Politburo is of particular interest in view of his subsequent dismissal in 1990 for advocating political pluralism. Also of relevance is the fact that both Tran Xuan Bach and Mai Chi Tho had

12 Huynh Kim Khanh, "Vietnam's Reforms: Renewal or Death", p. 5.
13 Porter, "The Politics of Renovation", p. 79.
14 Nguyen Thanh Binh was formerly Party Secretary in Hanoi, and was said to have been an important figure in science and technology while on the Central Committee Secretariat. Doan Khue was a lieutenant general whose military commands had been mainly in the Danang region. The new alternate member, Dao Duy Tung, had been director of the Central Committee's Department of Propaganda and Training since 1982 and was a former editor of the Party theoretical journal Tap Chi Cong San. See Pike, "Vietnam", p. 249.
a close association with Le Duc Tho. As noted in Chapter Six, Mai Chi Tho was Tho's brother. Bach had been Le Duc Tho's protege in Kampuchea. As a result of the abovestated leadership changes, the Politburo now had 14 members (13 full, 1 alternate), one less than in 1982 due to the loss of one alternate position.\(^{15}\)

The top five ranked members of the Politburo all had long associations with the South. Nguyen Van Linh and Vo Van Kiet were both former chairmen of the Ho Chi Minh City Party Committee; Pham Hung had headed the Party's Central Office for South Vietnam during the war; Vo Chi Cong had also served in the Vietcong forces in the south and had later been responsible for the socialist transformation of agriculture there,\(^{16}\) and Do Muoi had been in charge of the transformation of southern industry and commerce. Yet, the new Politburo also reflected the compromise which had been reached on the economic debate. While Linh, Kiet and Cong could be characterised as supporters of greater decentralisation, Pham Hung was a major proponent of continued centralised Party control over the economy. Do Muoi was also very orthodox in his views, as reflected by the harshness with which he had crushed private commerce in the south in the 1970s.

Changes within the Central Committee indicated that the process of generational transition, begun at the Fourth Congress in 1976, was continuing. The proportion of Central Committee members serving in the Committee since the 1951 Congress dropped to 3 per cent as compared to 11 per cent in 1982,\(^{17}\) but the new Central Committee members were not necessarily younger (see Table 2). The changes also reflected the increasing differentiation and complexity of the Vietnamese political system as the demands for an efficient war machine gave way to the challenges of reunification, reconstruction and economic development, a process which Carlyle Thayer has described as "regularisation".\(^{18}\) Besides an increase in the size of the Central Committee, there was also a shift in the representation of various sectoral groups in the Party in response to changing domestic and external circumstances. Thus, for example, the representation of the military had declined from 16 per cent of the Central Committee in 1976 to a low 7 per cent at the Sixth Congress. Conversely, provincial Party secretaries, economic specialists, technocrats and other "secondary" Party and state officials had increased their representation from 11 per cent in 1976 to 49 per cent in 1986.\(^{19}\) The emergence of these leadership types created a greater focus on economic issues and a ready-made constituency for economic reformers.

\(^{15}\) Stem, "The Vietnamese Communist Party in 1986", p. 360.
\(^{16}\) Ibid., p. 362.
\(^{17}\) Thayer, "Regularization of Politics", p. 189.
\(^{18}\) Ibid., p. 190.
\(^{19}\) Ibid.
Overall, there was a significant increase in the level of educational attainment of the new Central Committee members (see Table 3). The proportion with a high school education rose by about 10 per cent, but the number with vocational school, university or postgraduate qualifications increased by a much less impressive 2 per cent. Despite the increase, the Central Committee members were still, on average, far less well educated than their counterparts at province and district level (See Table 1 in Chapter Six).

Table 2: Age of Central Committee Members

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Sixth Congress (%)</th>
<th>Fifth Congress (%)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under 30</td>
<td>23.60</td>
<td>21.42</td>
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<tr>
<td>31-40</td>
<td>32.15</td>
<td>35.94</td>
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<td>41-50</td>
<td>22.00</td>
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<td>51-60</td>
<td>14.59</td>
<td>13.45</td>
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<tr>
<td>61-70</td>
<td>6.07</td>
<td>5.04</td>
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<tr>
<td>Over 70</td>
<td>1.57</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Source: SRV Embassy, Canberra, 1991*

Table 3: Educational Attainment of Central Committee

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Sixth Congress (%)</th>
<th>Fifth Congress (%)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>16.75</td>
<td>23.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>48.37</td>
<td>49.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School</td>
<td>34.68</td>
<td>25.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocational/Uni. graduates</td>
<td>7.22</td>
<td>5.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master's/Ph.D.</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>0.14</td>
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</table>

*Source: SRV Embassy, Canberra, 1991*

The leadership changes announced at the Congress may not have gone far enough to appease public opinion. There are indications that many people in the Party and in the population at large felt that the changes were half-measures because they did not extend beyond the Party to the government. Some dissatisfied elements went so far as to call the leadership changes a "sham". Young people were particularly disillusioned. According to *Agence France Press*, the Party Congress had in fact made a last minute decision to defer a second phase of the leadership reshuffle until the next National Assembly session in an effort to ease the year old divisions within the Party on policy and the leadership
transition. On the other hand, there are suggestions that the deferral of changes to the state leadership may have worked in favour of reformists who hoped to be in a position to push their own candidates for leadership positions by the next National Assembly session.

The Party Organisation

The Political Report attributed the failings of the leadership in large measure to their neglect of Party-building work. While there was no separate Party-building report presented at the Sixth Congress, as had been the case at the Fifth Congress in 1982, a sizeable section of the Political Report dealt with the subject.

Like the rest of the Report, this section also reflected the compromises between those in the Party who wanted to expand the autonomy of lower levels and those who wanted to hang on to central Party control. It noted that only by means of "renovation", particularly renovation of "thinking", could the Party adapt to the rapidly changing world environment and to the ever-increasing expectations of the population, and it called for the "conservatism and inertia of old concepts" to be overcome. Yet most of the Party-building section re-iterated the need for continued Party control over virtually all aspects of daily life, and there were several critical references to the perceived tendency of lower level Party organisations to ignore directions from the centre. The Report said that no leader had the right to speak and act in contravention of decisions taken by the collective leadership, and no lower level authority had the right to disobey directions from a higher body even if the authority was headed by a Central Committee member. This admonition confirms the existence of coalitions of interest between Central Committee members and their constituencies which sought to act independently of the ruling elite. Further evidence of such tensions between different levels of the Party, and between centre and periphery, is also provided by the following passage from the Report:

23 Ibid., p. C1/51.
There is lack of consensus on a few viewpoints and lack of co-ordination in the work style and relationship among a number of leading cadres at various levels. Parochialism and departmentalism are rampant. Owing to the characteristics of our revolutionary struggle, the formation and growth of the contingent of cadres in different parts and regions present some discrepancies. They have therefore some difficulties in fully understanding one... another. The enemy and bad elements have made use of this state of affairs to instigate the people and sow division.24

The implication in the last sentence is that this conflict between centre and periphery had spilled out into the public domain. To battle the insubordination by Party branches at the periphery, the Report demanded that Party members and organisations submit to the principle of democratic centralism.

While the Party-building section of the report advocated changes in cadre leadership at all levels of the Party "quickly and resolutely", it also said in the same sentence that "hasty change should be avoided."25 There was obviously some sensitivity in the Party about the efforts to recruit younger and better educated cadres at the expense of older cadres. Thus, the Report warned against basing leadership changes only on age groups and academic degrees, and overlooking "able and qualified cadres with many years of seniority".26 The Party-building section could quite easily have been written by Le Duc Tho. It bears his style and raises many of the same issues which he had discussed in previous articles and in his Party-building report to the Fifth Congress in 1982.

Decisions on Economic Policy

While the Party-building section of the report reflected primarily the viewpoint of the centralists, the sections of the report dealing with future economic policy bore the stamp of those supporting greater decentralisation of decision-making. There were still, however, the obligatory references to such sacred cows as democratic centralism.

Reflecting the seriousness of the Party's legitimacy crisis, the report stressed the need to direct all efforts to meeting the basic requirements of the population. This meant gearing the economy towards intensification of agricultural production, and increasing the production of consumer goods and exports,27 a policy direction that had been set at the Fifth Congress but never implemented effectively. The report also called for the decentralisation of economic planning and management by distinguishing between the functions of the central and state organs and the functions of grassroots economic units.

24 Ibid., p. C1/54.
26 Ibid., p. C1/50.
It defined the centre's responsibility for strategic planning, the responsibility of localities to take the initiative in respect of economic management in their own region, and for grassroots economic units to have autonomy over their business.  

The Report emphasised the importance of building up the role of the district as an economic unit, and stressed that the district unit would not turn into another cumbersome bureaucratic structure. Whether provincial leaders were reassured by this undertaking is open to question and it is significant that after the Congress, little was done to turn this concept into reality. The Report also tried to justify the continued existence of non-socialist economic sectors during the "transition" period by invoking Lenin's assertion that a multi-sector economy was characteristic of a transition period. At the same time, it renewed the Party's commitment to continue socialist transformation and to eliminate sources of "ill-gotten incomes".

The Report said it was necessary to focus on cadre recruitment and training to ensure that cadres had the appropriate skills to implement the economic reforms. It recognised that overcoming resistance to the reforms would be a major challenge given the many vested interests which were threatened.

**Improving Party/public relations**

Reflecting the Party's recognition of the loss of legitimacy which had resulted from its errors, significant attention in the Political report was given to the question of improving Party/public relations. In particular, the importance of involving the public in the Party's decision-making processes was emphasised. The Report stated that Party committees or administrative bodies should henceforth organise public consultations to "let the people know, discuss, carry out and inspect policies" before making decisions. There was renewed stress on the role the public could play in helping to identify corrupt and inefficient cadres.

There were also indications in the report that the Party aimed to enhance its public legitimacy by giving new emphasis to the rule of law and by strengthening certain institutions such as the National Assembly. This suggested a gradual shift by the Party towards a legal/rational mode of legitimation. Thus, the Political Report called for state bodies to respect and guarantee citizens' rights laid down in the constitution and to operate according to the law; for new legal codes; and for the strengthening of the role of the

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28 Ibid., p. C1/22.
29 Ibid., P.C1/18.
31 Ibid., p. C1/22.
32 Ibid., p. C1/41.
National Assembly, the State Council, and People's Councils at all levels. It also announced that Party members who violated the law would in future be handed over to judicial organs for trial rather than have their cases heard as "internal affairs", a process which had enabled many Party members to escape prosecution. Significantly, the Soviet Communist Party's 27th Congress had decided to introduce a similar provision in February 1986.

The Sixth Congress resolution stated: "We must strengthen socialist legislation and must manage society by law". This confirmed the increasing importance attached by the Party to the rule of law. Whether it would live up to this ideal was another question.

The Birth of Doi Moi

The package of reform measures endorsed at the Congress and the commitment to Party renewal heralded what has become known as *doi moi*, literally meaning *change new*, but usually translated as *renovation* or *renewal*. *Doi moi* encompassed "Renovation in thinking, first of all economic thinking; renovation in organisation; renewal of the cadre contingent; renovation in the style of leading and work," and it was considered a matter of life and death for the Party.

Huynh Kim Khanh has described the *doi moi* process as a "revolution from within", involving both democratisation and an overhauling of the Party's political machinery, especially personnel, to overcome resistance to economic reforms. Similarly, Gareth Porter has speculated that *doi moi* was introduced in response to the belief that the *intellectual power* needed for economic development could be mobilised only by allowing free debate within the Party and society as a whole. This call for debate was articulated by the phrase "speak straight, speak the truth" (*noi thang, noi that*). Self-criticism and criticism were to be used to try to promote this openness. There are strong parallels between this aspect of *doi moi* and the Soviet process of *glasnost*, as indicated in an earlier chapter. Indeed, the Party acknowledged openly the Soviet influence on *doi moi*:

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33 Ibid., pp. Cl/41,44,45. This was a reference to the tendency for cadres, especially high ranking ones, to evade prosecution by recourse to internal Party disciplinary measures.
37 Huynh Kim Khanh, "Vietnam's Reforms: 'Renewal or Death'", p. 3.
39 Huynh Kim Khanh, op. cit., pp. 4-5.
Besides the maturing of internal factors, there was the impact of democratization in the Soviet Union since the 27th CPSU Congress (early 1986) and the great example of openness set by the Soviet press. The trend for renovation in the Socialist community starting from the Soviet Union has reached Vietnam and has boosted the drive for renovation in our country making it an irreversible one.40

The Party's adoption of doi moi reflected its acceptance of the need to obtain popular support to ensure the successful implementation of policies, and its admission of the importance of observing objective laws of development, especially in the economic sphere. At the same time, doi moi assumed a continuing leading role for the Party, although more debate within the Party itself would be encouraged within the limits of democratic centralism. Some years later, Prime Minister Do Muoi would confirm that doi moi was aimed at making socialism work more effectively, not at renouncing it.41

The fight against corruption was considered essential to the success of doi moi.42 A wide-ranging "purification" campaign in 1987, encompassing both the Party and state and focussing especially on corruption at high levels43, also relied on media and public participation. However, the media role was subject to stronger party control than in 1986.44 A series of articles in Nhan Dan and Saigon Giai Phong, under the heading "Things which must be done immediately", generated considerable momentum in the purification campaign. Signed mysteriously by NVL, who turned out to be Nguyen Van Linh, the articles targeted specific instances of corruption and suggested possible remedial action. Yet they apparently caused consternation amongst some of Linh's colleagues who felt threatened by them:

... some comrades expressed the misgiving that this action was tantamount to discrediting our own party and blackening our own system in an excessive manner. I thought things must be publicised in the press so as to accelerate efforts to improve the situation...45

Despite the stated preparedness to tackle high level corrupt cadres, the reality was that criticism of top Party leaders was not considered appropriate, and often public complaints were not followed up or dealt with quickly.46 In January 1988, Nhan Dan alleged that

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41 Thayer, "Renovation and Vietnamese Society", p. 9.
42 According to Vu Kien, the "pressing demand of the current situation is to re-examine the organisational and cadre apparatuses of the party and state at all levels, especially the central levels. It would be pointless to mop up drops of water in the house without mending the leaks in the roof." See: Kien "The Party and the Media's Struggle", p. 8.
43 Hanoi Home Service, 1100 gmt, 14 August 1987 (BBC SWB FE/8649/B/2, 18.8.87).
44 Hanoi Home Service, 1100 gmt, 24 September 1987 (BBC SWB FE/8686/B/4, 30.9.87).
45 Hanoi Home Service, 1100 gmt, 6 February 1988 (BBC SWB FE/0075/B/5, 15.2.88).
46 Hanoi Home Service, 2300 gmt, 29 May 1987 (BBC SWB FE/8584/B/2, 3.6.87)
there were still cases which had not been settled even though conclusions on them had been reached.  A *Nhan Dan* review of the purification campaign concluded that many localities had failed to resolve serious public complaints due to attitudes of "deference, rightism and protectionism", especially in situations involving high ranking cadres. As in the case of the 1986 self-criticism and criticism campaign, the purification campaign did achieve some successes in the fight against corruption but the core of the problem remained. It required far stronger institutional and legal responses. This is where the strengthening of institutions like the National Assembly became important.

**National Assembly**

After the Sixth Party Congress, the National Assembly came to be viewed as more than just a paper tiger. There were efforts to make it a more representative and effective legislative body. In the elections on 19 April 1987, electors were given a greater choice of candidates - 826 candidates for 496 seats in the National Assembly. One year later, there was open debate on who should be the new Chairman of the Council of Ministers. Almost 40% of the Assembly voted for Vo Van Kiet, even though it was obvious that the Party wanted Do Muoi. Do Muoi was seen publicly as largely responsible for the introduction of socialist economic policies in the south in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Public displeasure at the elevation of Do Muoi was evidenced by the fact that 300 voter representatives met with Ho Chi Minh City delegates to grill them on the issue. The public was now demanding that representatives be more accountable, for example by meeting with them more frequently and conveying their concerns to the Assembly.

The Assembly's sub-committees, such as the sub-committee on law headed by Madame Ngo Ba Thanh, were rejuvenated and became more active in vetting draft legislation. Assembly deputies became progressively more assertive and critical. At the June 1988 session, the Assembly criticised the Council of Ministers and various state bodies for mismanagement, especially in relation to grain shortages which had led to widespread hunger. This culminated in a self-criticism by the Council of Ministers, delivered by Do Muoi at the December 1988 session:

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47 *Nhan Dan*, 16 January 1988 (BBC SWB FE/0059/B/2, 27.1.88).
50 *Tuoi Tre*, 5 July 1988 (BBC SWB FE/0202/B/3, 13.7.88).
51 *Hanoi Home Service*, 1100 gmt, 27 March 1987 (BBC SWB FE/8531/B/3, 1.4.87)
... the Council of Ministers' macroeconomic management has been sluggish, inconsistent, perfunctory and still marked by the old way of thinking and work in various aspects. On behalf of the Council of Ministers, I admit these shortcomings before the National Assembly and promise to draw experience from them to overcome all deficiencies and strive to carry out more satisfactorily all the tasks entrusted to us by the National Assembly and the people.53

The deputies followed this self-criticism by debating heatedly such issues as the food problem, taxes and wages.54 Particularly stringent criticism was directed against the Finance Minister Hoang Quy whose tax policies were said to have stifled production and forced many state companies out of business. Deputy Nguyen Thi Thi, head of Food No. 1 Company in Ho Chi Minh City, said her bakeries had gone bankrupt because an import of 1000 tonnes of wheat flour had been taxed half a dozen times.55 This criticism of the Finance Minister and his Vice Minister continued at the next Assembly session in June 1989, fuelled by a petition from voters in Ho Chi Minh City calling for their dismissal.56

By late 1988, the working relationship between the Party and the Assembly had experienced significant change. While in the past, problems associated with the state budget and plan had been worked out and decided upon by the Party before presentation to the Assembly, for the December session the Politburo only laid down general policy orientations and left decision making concerning the content, targets and means of implementation of legislation to the National Assembly.57 As Do Muoi told delegates:

If the National Assembly does not make the appropriate decisions, then we, members of the Council of Ministers, will meet with deep bewilderment when it comes to implementation.58

It is also significant that at this December session, the media were allowed to attend any group discussion they wanted to at the Assembly.59 The following year, portions of National Assembly proceedings, including debates and questioning of Ministers, began to be broadcast over television and radio.60 This concern with keeping the public more informed about the political process confirms the Party's recognition of the importance of regaining popular support. By trying to demonstrate that the system did function

54 VNA in English 1500 gmt 23 December 1988 (BBC SWB FE/0345/B/7, 29.12.88).
56 Saigon Giai Phong, 21 May 1989 (BBC SWB FE/0489/B/4, 22.6.89).
57 VNA, in English, 1500 gmt, 23 December 1988 (BBC SWB FE/0345/B/7, 29.12.88).
60 Thayer, "Renovation and Vietnamese society", pp. 6-7.
according to clear rules and in a publicly accountable way, the Party hoped to enhance its public image. Yet, as Gareth Porter has pointed out, the Party set clear limits to the autonomy of the National Assembly which highlighted its unwillingness to open up the system to real political competition.\textsuperscript{61}

Real autonomy, which would be manifested in the Assembly's assertion of control over the legislative agenda, would require an electoral system in which candidates for the assembly are selected without the intervention of the VCP. However, the party has always 'recommended' the candidates for the 100 electoral districts around the country.\textsuperscript{62} To be effective, the Assembly would also need to have its own research staff, an independent library and the capacity to check on the implementation of laws.

Media

The media was another area where the Party sought to relax its grip, if only temporarily, in order to promote the kind of debate and openness which it thought was necessary for the success of \textit{doi moi}. Thus, it encouraged the media to undertake investigative reporting to uncover instances of corruption and other "negative phenomena" and to publish public complaints and opinions. In 1988, it dropped the requirement for articles to be vetted before they were published.\textsuperscript{63} Yet the Party became extremely uncomfortable when the media struck close to the bone by exposing corrupt practices of high level cadres.

As in 1986, the media continued to test the limits of the Party's tolerance. This was especially true of the southern media. The Party found it difficult to control the media, even though the editors and many editorial assistants were Party members. Both in 1986 and subsequently, the media went beyond what the leadership considered acceptable. This reflects the increasing fuzziness which seemed to surround the role of different institutions in Vietnamese society. The Party said it wanted to be more open, to be more accountable, but when the consequences of this policy struck home, the leadership retreated and sought to re-establish control. In this context, it is not surprising that the National Assembly, still controlled by the Party, voted to retain a provision in the press law which prohibited the establishment of privately owned newspapers.\textsuperscript{64}

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext[61]{Porter, "The Politics of 'Renovation'", p. 82.}
\footnotetext[62]{Ibid.}
\footnotetext[63]{Ibid., p. 84.}
\footnotetext[64]{Thayer, "Renovation and Vietnamese Society", p. 8.}
\end{footnotes}
Mass organisations

Mass organisations had been criticised at the National Congress for being sclerotic and out of touch with the needs and aspirations of their constituents. Accordingly, efforts were made after the Congress to transform them into more effective and democratic bodies while still, of course, under the control of the Party. The Federation of Trade Unions and Ho Chi Minh Communist Youth Union were ordered to improve their performance. The Collective Peasants' Union became the National Peasants' Union which was open to all peasants rather than just co-operative members. Once again, however, the Party's tolerance of a diversity of views was limited. When the Club of Resistance Fighters, an organisation of former guerillas who had fought in the south during the war, became vocal in its criticism of Party policies, its members were co-opted into the regime sponsored Vietnam Veterans' Association. The Party wanted it both ways — the appearance of more public participation in the political process and the maintenance of its real control over the mass organisations.

Reaction to the threat of political pluralism

As indicated above, the Party made forays into socialist legality as a means of enhancing its legitimacy and, perhaps, in a genuine effort to make the political system perform more effectively. However, it was not prepared to accept the resultant inroads into its power. There was evidence of a divergence of views within the leadership on this question. Politburo member Tran Xuan Bach argued that socialism would lose its persuasiveness and appeal if its labour productivity was lower than that of capitalism and if its citizens had no democratic rights and freedoms. In March 1990 he was dismissed from the Politburo for daring to speak in favour of political pluralism, although the reason given for his dismissal was that he had violated Party discipline. The army paper Quan Doi Nhan Dan also published articles calling for far-reaching political reforms, modelled on the Soviet Union's separation of the roles of the Party and the State.

At the closing session of the Sixth Plenum of the Party in March 1989, Nguyen Van Linh felt it necessary to respond to the "small number of ill-intentioned people" who, he said, "hold that the impediment to the process of renovation and democratisation is our party and its leadership". He pointed out that the Party itself had initiated these policies and warned:

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65 Ibid.
66 Hanoi Home Service, 1430 gmt, 26 October 1988 (BBC SWB FE/0300/B/2, 4.11.88).
67 Quan Doi Nhan Dan 19 January 1989 (SWB FE/0380/B/1-2, 9.2.89).
We advocate broadening democracy and reaching a consensus (sic) through debate, but we do not tolerate pluralism. Democracy needs party leadership; and conversely, party leadership must be based on democratic methods.68

Linh reinforced this message in his National Day address in September 1989. He said that the Vietnamese people had fought a long time, and shed a lot of blood, to build socialism. The leadership would not allow the establishment of opposition parties. Such "limitless" democratisation would only lead to political instability and entail unforeseeable consequences for renovation.69 In the same address, Linh also reacted to Western attempts to portray the reform process taking place in socialist countries as evidence of the impending death of socialism. He affirmed the importance of restructuring and reform in "fraternal" countries and conceded that many trials lay ahead. But he criticised the "imperialists", especially the United States, for launching frenzied attacks against socialism:

They are on the one hand trying to advertise 'the free world', the 'eternity' of capitalism and predict the collapse of socialism. On the other hand they have in the name of democracy, political pluralism and human rights, incited the opposition forces and intervened deeply in the internal affairs of a number of socialist countries in an attempt to make these countries deviate from the socialist path.70

This examination of events during and after the Sixth Party Congress has provided further insight into the role of the 1986 self-criticism and criticism campaign. The campaign approach was a familiar, and hence comforting, method invoked by the Party in response to the multiple challenges and tasks it faced in that year. It offered a controlled means for the public to vent frustrations about a corrupt and inefficient bureaucracy that was making daily life a bitter struggle for survival. It was an effective feedback mechanism for some leaders who felt they could use the campaign to identify and remove cadres who were opposed to their policies. In addition, it was a useful party-building device in terms of its focus on Party renewal through leadership changes.

While the campaign did seem to bring about significant changes in personnel, as confirmed by the Party Congress, it did not make many inroads into the intractable problems of corruption and inefficiency. The public may have enjoyed a kind of immediate catharsis during the Party's public exposure of its dirty linen, but the subsequent failure by the Party, as indicated in this chapter, to deal with the cases exposed must have severely dented the Party's credibility. Similarly, some elements in

68 Hanoi Home Service (i) 1430 gmt (ii) 2300 gmt 30 March 1989 (iii) 0500 gmt and (iv) 1100 gmt 31 March 1989 (BBC SWB FE/0424/B/7, 3.4.89).
69 VNA, in English, 0831 gmt, 2 September 1989 (BBC SWB FE/0552/B/3, 4.9.89).
70 Ibid., p. B/3.
the Party and broader community felt that the leadership changes had not gone far enough. As the Party had failed to gain public approval in the domain of economic performance, it began to shift towards a legal-rational mode of legitimation. It made efforts to strengthen political institutions such as the National Assembly and to increase public involvement in those institutions. However, the Party was not prepared to go so far in its support of legal mechanisms as to endanger its own monopoly on power. This meant that the Party would in future rely on a mix of approaches to satisfy the public. Where possible, it would seek to improve its performance, especially its economic performance, in the hope that this would put off demands for further political change. Where this approach was not sufficient, the Party would build up the role of other participatory institutions. However, it would circumscribe their role so that they would not become a threat to the Party.
Conclusion

The aim of this thesis is to explore the origins and role of the self-criticism and criticism campaign in the context of the Vietnamese Communist Party's Sixth Congress. In the Introduction, several propositions were put forward to explain the campaign and these have been investigated in the course of the thesis.

The author's principal contention is that the campaign was a response to the Party's legitimacy crisis, and that it was an effort to restore that legitimacy. By examining Vietnam's economic situation in the 1980s, the internal state of the Party, its relations with other sectors of Vietnamese society, and possible international influences, the author has been able to demonstrate that the Party was in crisis. At the heart of the crisis was the Party's failure to adapt to the demands of reconstruction and economic development which followed the Second Indochina War. This failure manifested itself in economic disarray and in dysfunctional Party structures and systems. External factors, such as Soviet concerns about Vietnamese mismanagement of aid funds, contributed further to the crisis.

The impending national congress brought the legitimacy crisis into even greater focus. That congress, and the lower level Party congresses leading up to it, provided a natural focus for debate about the Party's past performance and its future direction. Party leaders realised that they would have to put together a credible set of policies for addressing Vietnam's problems in time for the national congress. In particular, they realised that they would have to restore public confidence and improve economic performance.

Their initial response to the crisis was to confess their errors in a public self-criticism in the hope that this would appease the Party rank and file and the population at large. They did not necessarily agree, however, on other response strategies. As noted in the thesis, some leaders believed that the reason for Vietnam's poor economic performance was inadequate control of the economy and deficiencies in the Party organisation, especially in the cadre ranks. By removing inefficient and corrupt cadres and appointing more specialist cadres, they thought that they could improve the Party's performance. Others believed that the best strategy was to free up the economy in the hope that subsequent economic growth would restore public confidence. These leaders also wanted to replace cadres, but mainly those who were resistant to the reforms they advocated, and they sought to replace them with cadres who had the skills to implement the reforms effectively. In other words, the two groups had a common interest in significant personnel changes. The self-criticism and criticism campaign became a vehicle for achieving this objective.
It was not so surprising that the Party turned to a campaign of this type to address its problems. Such campaigns had been used in the past for similar purposes. The targeted cadres could be removed from their positions under the cover of corruption and other allegations. As foreshadowed at the beginning of the thesis, this approach amounted to a search for scapegoats. By blaming individual cadres for Party shortcomings, the ruling elite could divert attention away from the deficiencies of the regime as a whole. In addition, by encouraging public criticism of cadres, the regime could demonstrate that it was prepared to act on public concerns. This approach conforms with Leslie Holmes' hypothesis that a regime experiencing a legitimacy crisis will be prepared to turn the public against its own staff in order to regain legitimacy.

What became evident as a result of the research on this thesis was that there was a very public and a very private side to the campaign. The first phase, which can be seen as largely an effort to restore public faith in the Party, was very open, with a high level of media coverage. The second phase, which began with the release of the draft political report to Party organisations, was much more of an internal Party process screened from public view. This part of the campaign was concerned with reaching a compromise on the question of economic strategy and deciding on new Party leaders. It was only possible to gain a sense of the intense intra-Party debate occurring at this time from snippets of information provided in the press and from foreign media commentaries.

Nevertheless, we know that the draft political report was vigorously debated within the Party, most openly at the basic and district level congresses. We also know that as a result of wide-ranging criticism from Party members it had to be redrafted several times. This, in itself, indicates the depth of dissatisfaction within the Party. From the contents of the final political report presented at the Sixth Congress, it is clear that a compromise had been reached and that it was tilted in favour of those seeking structural changes, while the trade-off was a continuing commitment to socialist transformation and democratic centralism.

The southern Party organisation must also receive some credit for the outcome of the debate on economic strategy. Southerners had voiced amongst the most virulent criticisms of the draft political report during the second phase of the campaign. The fact that security restrictions on southerners were eased in 1986 and that special efforts were made in the south to involve the public in the self-criticism and criticism campaign shows that the leadership was trying hard to improve the Party's popular legitimacy there. Public and media criticism proved to be useful channels through which southern leaders could enhance their influence in the national leadership, including on crucial matters such
as economic reform. In particular, the southern media had played an important role in articulating southern concerns during the campaign.

As predicted at the beginning of the thesis, the regime carried out significant leadership changes at all levels of the Party in response to the crisis. Between a half and two thirds of the cadres in district level Party committees were replaced and about half of the provincial Party committee members. There were also substantial changes in the composition of the Central Committee and the Politburo. In the Politburo, there had been a shift in the power balance towards pro-autonomy forces. Nguyen Van Linh, who had been dropped from the Politburo at the previous congress was now elevated to the post of Party Secretary-General. Out of the five top ranked Politburo members, three could be described as supporters of the freeing up of the economy. Yet, as noted in Chapter Seven, there was compromise here as well, as the other two high ranking Politburo members, Pham Hung and Do Muoi, held more orthodox views on economic strategy. Other evidence of the continuity in leadership was the retention of Le Duc Tho, Pham Van Dong and Truong Chinh as advisers to the Politburo. These leadership changes appear not to have generated the positive public and rank and file response that may have been expected. There were claims by some in the community that the leadership changes had not gone far enough and that they were a sham.

By the end of 1986, it was clear that important sectoral groups such as provincial leaders and technocrats had enhanced their power as a result of the year's events. Both groups were now heavily represented in the Central Committee as well as in the state ministry, providing a powerful source of support for Nguyen Van Linh and other advocates of economic reforms. Obviously, then, during the course of the self-criticism and criticism campaign, some concessions had been granted to them. To some extent, this meant a loss of power by the centre, a phenomenon which Myron Rush has indicated is typical of such situations in communist states.

Besides the leadership changes, the other tangible evidence of the ascendancy of Nguyen Van Linh and his supporters was the package of economic measures endorsed at the national congress. This and the general restructuring process of doi moi represented a significant departure from earlier approaches. The self-criticism and criticism campaign helped create a climate conducive to the introduction of doi moi, both through the removal from office of cadres likely to resist the reforms and their replacement by younger, better educated cadres who were presumably better equipped and motivated to implement the reforms.

Doi moi aimed to tackle some of the underlying structural problems at the base of the Party's legitimation crisis, in particular, the Stalinist economic development model. It
also sought to change the attitudes and behaviour of Party cadres and members in favour of the reforms. By deciding at the Sixth Congress to place greater importance on the rule of law, and by strengthening the role of participatory institutions such as the National Assembly, mass organisations and the media, the regime was signalling its concern to obtain public approval and support. Indeed, the increasing emphasis placed on legal mechanisms can be seen as a tentative step by the regime towards a legal-rational mode of legitimation. This is not to say that the eudaemonic mode was losing its dominance. The two modes operated together, and the self-criticism and criticism campaign had helped to breathe new life into the eudaemonic mode. Rather, it was the goal-rational mode — if the goal is taken to be the struggle for communism — which was losing its appeal to wide cross-sections of the society and amongst rank and file Party members. Along this road seemed to lie continued poverty. Although communism was still held up as the goal, it was recognised that the so-called period of transition towards communism would be very long indeed.

Events subsequent to the Party Congress showed, however, that the shift towards the rule of law and greater political participation by the public was very fragile indeed and, in fact, was subject to reversals. This was apparent particularly in the context of the events in 1989 in Eastern Europe which alarmed the Party and elicited from the leadership renewed affirmations of the leading role of the Communist Party and the firm rejection of calls for a multi-party system. The Party did not, however, renounce its economic reforms which it hoped to quarantine from demands for political reforms.

By 1991, with the Seventh Party Congress on the horizon, it appeared that the results of doi moi were not what had been hoped, and there were, once again, warnings from several sources of the dire peril facing the Party. In a citizen's petition, deputy editor-in-chief of the Party daily Nhan Dan declared that there were signs of hesitation and "moving backwards" in implementation of the reforms and called for more far-reaching and resolute reforms to resolve the continuing crisis. He even argued for a temporary "U-turn" away from socialism to a democratic system where socialism was an "option", as he said there was no justification for pursuing distant objectives when it would take a long time to even achieve more immediate objectives.¹

Another influential Party figure, Nguyen Khac Vien, voiced similar misgivings, warning that the Seventh Congress was the Party's last chance to continue its leading role and avoid stepping into years of darkness. Significantly, he pointed out that "As long as the Party holds on to power and degenerates, no amount of study nor self-criticism can

¹ Bui Tin handed this petition to the Vietnamese Ambassador to France on 27 November 1990 in Paris requesting that it be transmitted to Vietnam. The full text of the petition was transmitted by the BBC on 28 November 1990 in its Vietnamese language program.
untangle the mess."\(^2\) He was putting the Party on notice that such traditional methods of responding to crisis were no longer tenable and had to give way to more structural changes in the Vietnamese economy and political system. He was, in effect, calling for a further shift in the direction of a legal-rational mode of legitimation involving the strengthening of democratic institutions.

Hence, by 1991, the Party was at another crossroads. The decisions of the Seventh Congress would help determine whether the Party would be a relevant and effective regime or whether it would gradually sink further into disarray and, perhaps, political oblivion. While it was beyond the scope of this thesis to explore the issues being raised in the run-up to the Seventh Congress, and to see whether a self-criticism and criticism campaign had a role to play in preparations for that Congress, the subject merits future study. This thesis could provide a useful benchmark for such a study.

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