

## **October 17, 1968**

### **Discussion between Chen Yi and Le Duc Tho**

#### **Citation:**

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#### **Summary:**

Chen Yi criticizes Vietnam on past concessions to the US, which undermine China and the NLF; Chen Yi also criticizes Vietnam's acceptance of Soviet proposals to negotiate.

#### **Original Language:**

Chinese

#### **Contents:**

Translation - English

CHEN YI AND LE DUC THO[1]

Beijing, 17 October 1968[2]

Chen Yi: (1) Since last April when you accepted the US partial cessation of bombing and held peace talks with them, you have lost the initiative in the negotiations to them. Now, you accept quadripartite negotiations. You lost to them once more. Therefore, this will cause more losses for the Vietnamese people, especially the people in the South.

(2) At present, Washington and Saigon are publicizing the negotiations, showing the fact that you have accepted the conditions put forward by the US. Your returning home for party instruction all the more proves it to the world's people. With your acceptance of the quadripartite negotiations, you handed the puppet government legal recognition, thus eliminating the National Liberation Front's status as the unique legal representative of the people in the South. So, the Americans have helped their puppet regime to gain legal status while you have made the Front lose its own prestige. This makes us wonder whether you have strengthened the enemy's position while weakening ours. You are acting in contradiction to the teachings of President Ho, the great leader of the Vietnamese people, thus destroying President Ho's prestige among the Vietnamese people.

(3) This time, your acceptance of quadripartite negotiations will help Johnson and [US Vice President and Democratic Party presidential candidate Hubert H.] Humphrey win their elections, thus letting the people in the South remain under the rule of the US imperialists and their puppets. You do not liberate the people in the South but cause them more losses. We do not want you to make another mistake. We believe that the people in the South of Vietnam do not want to surrender and they will win the war. But now the cause is more difficult and the price [for victory] more expensive.

(4) In our opinion, in a very short time, you have accepted the compromising and capitulationist proposals put forward by the Soviet revisionists. So, between our two parties and the two governments of Vietnam and China, there is nothing more to talk about. Nevertheless, as President Ho has said, our relationship is one of both comrades and brothers; we will therefore consider the changes of the situation in November and will have more comments.

Le Duc Tho: On this matter, we will wait and see. And the reality will give us the answer. We have gained experience over the past 15 years. Let reality justify.

Chen Yi: We signed the Geneva accords in 1954 when the US did not agree to do so. We withdrew our armed forces from the South to the North, thus letting the people in the South be killed. We at that time made a mistake in which we [Chinese] shared a part.

Le Duc Tho: Because we listened to your advice.[3]

Chen Yi: You just mentioned that in the Geneva Conference, you made a mistake because you followed our advice. But this time, you will make another mistake if you do not take our words into account.

[1] Le Duc Tho (1910-1990), senior member of the ICP who was deputy secretary of COSVN (under Le Duan) 1949-1954. Member of the Lao Dong Politburo from 1954. From 1963 head of the committee for supervision of the South, held secret talks with

Henry Kissinger in Paris from February 1970, and served as the DRV's chief negotiator during the peace talks in Paris. With Kissinger, in 1973 awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, which he declined.

[2] On the way back from the Paris talks, Le Duc Tho stopped in Beijing. He met with and reported to Chinese Foreign Minister Chen Yi. He then asked the latter to inform Mao Zedong, Zhou Enlai as well as the CCP CC and the Leadership Group of the Cultural Revolution about the contents of the conversation. On October 17, Chen Yi met Le Duc Tho again to convey Zhou Enlai's personal comments based on general directives of Chairman Mao and the CCP CC.

[3] See the introductory essay to 77 Conversations Working Paper by Stein Tonneson for a comment on the pronouns used in this exchange.