

Hungarian Embassy to North Vietnam, Report, 18 November 1956. **[Summary]**

The document notes that following the publication of the cultural periodicals "Nhan Van" and "Pham Mua Thu", the Union of the Vietnamese Writers and Artists (more precisely, its "training course" [?]) demanded that the VWP CC meet the delegation of the Union so as to discuss the innumerable injustices the writers and artists had suffered since the establishment of the "democratic system". The CC accepted the proposal. The general assembly of the Union elected 40 delegates. The subject of the debate was the freedom of opinion, press and creation. The meeting lasted from the morning 21 October 1956 to the late evening of 23 October 1956, though originally it had been planned that it would not last more than one day. Participants of the debate were: Truong Chinh; Xuan Thuy, member of the Vietnamese Patriotic Front's Standing Committee; To Huu, leader of the party's Propaganda Department; Nguyen Tuan, General Secretary of the Union; Nguyen Dinh Thi and Nguyen Tuong, two representatives of the Union; Deputy Minister of Culture Cu Huy Can; and poet Luu Trong Lu. Literary issues were discussed on the first day. It was a young and very popular poet, Le Dat, who spoke first, as he had suffered a particularly great number of injustices. Though he wrote a lot of Mayakovsky-style poems about the Resistance, he was accused of slandering the regime. In his speech, he criticized the CC very harshly: a) In principle, the party supported the artists and writers, but certain party leaders acted otherwise. The "trial" of poet Tran Dan was a typical example for the latter. b) Literary work was not appreciated and it was confused with propaganda. Writers were used as propagandists on the basis of Mao's statement, "Literature and art have to serve politics, ...", but the second part of this statement ("... but their main task is to serve the revolutionary cause.") was not taken into consideration. Those poems Tran Dan had written in 1952 about North-west Viet Nam were condemned by the party, because they did not suit the taste of a few "politicians". c) As a consequence of these errors, the writers and artists, unable to express their thoughts freely, found themselves in a blind alley. Those writers who wanted to write about the achievements of the land reform campaign, were in a difficult situation; they had to know not only the positive but also the negative aspects of the campaign. Those writers who dared to deviate from the general line of the Union and to write independently were exposed to constant injustices and harassment. This was illustrated by the prohibition of "Pham Mua Thu" and by the case of poet and composer Van Cao. The latter, having published one of his works, threw the pistol case he had had in his house into the Thien Quang lake as he was afraid of a possible house search. Le Dat named the following main errors: a) The party had not have yet a political conception concerning literature and art. Those forms of literature which had been understood by the people were sidelined. b) The organizations dealing with literature and art were headed by incompetent men (e.g. To Huu and Hoai Thanh). To Huu had great merits, stated Le Dat, but

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his faults were even greater. To Huu considered the writers and artists as petty bourgeois, and he thought that literature had merely to serve politics. In 1950, he compelled writer Nam Cao to write a work about the agricultural delivery system under the title "Contribution". Nam Cao wrote it in a hurry, uninformed about the details of the new taxation system and its effects on the peasantry. As a consequence, the work became of a very low quality. To Huu declared very weak works (e.g. Trong Hua's "La suggestion des malheurs") as socialist realist works, and published them in several thousand copies. Le Dat also criticized critic Hoai Thanh.

Though the latter had been a believer in *l'art pour l'art* under the French rule, he changed his mind in the years of the Resistance. Le Dat described Hoai Thanh as a bootlicker and sycophant, who had got his high position due to the intervention of To Huu. "We do not wish that a new Gorky or Lu Xun guide Vietnamese literature", Le Dat said, "but we ask that talented and competent men be given leading positions." He proposed the following to the CC: a) The CC should clearly determine the place of writers and artists in the revolution. b) It should guarantee the freedom of creation, and it should enable the writers and artists to establish contacts with domestic and foreign institutions. c) It should allow the press to develop freely and the operation of private publishing houses. d) It should maintain a permanent contact with the writers and artists. e) It should reexamine the erroneous political opinions, and condemn the deviationists and the incorrect working style of the leaders of the literary movement so as to inspire the latter to leave their positions voluntarily. After Le Dat, it was the representatives of "Nhan Van", the army and the southerners who spoke. They supported Le Dat's standpoint, but the representative of the southerners criticized "Nhan Van", which, in his opinion, had become "the mouthpiece of enemy propaganda", and he warned the CC that there were undesirable reactionaries around the weekly. On the second day of the meeting, it was the artists who had the floor. They criticized the dogmatism of the leadership and the cadres dealing with literature and art. The final meeting lasted until late night. The members of the CC welcomed the criticism. The final speech was made by Truong Chinh. He emphasized the sincerity and the rightful anger of the earlier speakers. He stated that those who had not spoke here could express their opinion in written form. He promised to inform the CC about these issues, and a plenary meeting would take place, with the participation of the involved, in order to come to the final conclusion. He asked the participants not to publish anything in the press about the debate, since a united standpoint had not been reached yet.

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