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2007

Le Duc Tho

Brian D. Behnken, Texas A&M University

Available at: https://works.bepress.com/brian_belnken/4/
Le Duc Tho (1911–1990)

Vietnamese revolutionary, member of the Vietnamese Communist Party’s Political Bureau, and chief negotiator at the Paris Peace Talks. Le Duc Tho was born Phan Dinh Khai in Nam Ha Province on 14 October 1911. He became active in communist political circles at a young age and in 1930 helped found the Indochinese Communist Party (ICP). During the 1930s he spent nearly a decade in prison for his anti-French political activities. In 1943 he helped form the nationalist Viet Minh organization with Ho Chi Minh and from the late 1950s largely directed the war in the Republic of Vietnam (RVN, South Vietnam). According to some sources, Le’s views actually prevailed over those of Ho.

Le is primarily remembered for his role in the Paris Peace Talks with the United States, which began in May 1968. He demanded an immediate halt to U.S. bombing of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV, North Vietnam) and the dismantlement of South Vietnam’s government. American negotiators, especially National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger, refused these demands. The negotiations and the bombings continued until 1972, when Le and Kissinger agreed to a cease-fire. Le again requested a halt to the bombings, but he softened his stance on Vietnam’s political self-determination. He eventually accepted a cease-fire that would leave South Vietnam’s President Nguyen Van Thieu in power but that also allowed North Vietnam’s People’s Army of Vietnam (PAVN) troops to remain in parts of South Vietnam. The final peace agreement was signed in early January 1973. The United States withdrew its troops in March of that year. Late in 1973 the Nobel Prize Committee awarded both Le and Kissinger its peace prize, which Le refused to accept because the war continued.

In 1975 Le traveled to South Vietnam to oversee the final offensive there, which resulted in the unification of the country in April 1975. Between 1975 and 1986 he continued as a member of the Vietnamese Communist Party Central Committee. In 1978 he oversaw Vietnam’s invasion of Cambodia. His power diminished in the mid-1980s, and following the economic reforms of 1986 he resigned his posts. Le died in Hanoi on 13 October 1990.

Lemass, Séan (1899–1971)

Irish politician, cofounder and leader of Fianna Fáil (the Republican Party), and Irish prime minister (1959–1966). Born on 15 July 1899 as John Francis Lemass in Dublin, Ireland, Séan Lemass joined the Irish Volunteers in January 1915, where he met his future political companion, Eamon De Valera. Involved in the 1916 Easter Rising, the Anglo-Irish War (1919–1921), and the Irish Civil War (1922–1923), Lemass went to prison three times. After his final release, he was elected to the Irish parliament as a Sinn Féin party member in November 1924. In March 1926 he resigned from the party because of ideological differences. Together with De Valera he formed a new party, Fianna Fáil, in 1930.

When Fianna Fáil won power in 1932, Lemass became minister for industry and commerce in De Valera’s cabinet and remained in this position until 1939, when he became minister for supplies during World War II. Lemass’s success at provisioning Ireland, which was a neutral power during the war, convinced De Valera to name him deputy prime minister in 1945. Fianna Fáil lost the 1948 election but won again in 1951. With De Valera again as prime minister, Lemass served once more as minister for industry and commerce during 1951–1954 and 1957–1959. On 23 June 1959, Lemass succeeded the retiring De Valera as prime minister and party leader.

The Lemass government’s successful economic policies went along with continued progress in international affairs. Ireland was elected to the United Nations (UN) Security Council in 1962 and was visited by U.S. President John F. Kennedy in 1963. Moreover, Lemass’s more moderate stance on the Irish partitioning issue enabled him to improve relations with Northern Ireland. He resigned as prime minister and party leader on 10 November 1966 but remained a member of parliament until 1969. Lemass died on 11 May 1971 in Dublin.

References


See also

Aiken, Frank; De Valera, Eamon; Ireland, Northern; Ireland, Republic of; Irish Republican Army; Lynch, John; Nationalism; Sinn Féin; United Kingdom.