

## **Activities of the Constitutionalist Party in Cochinchina (1919 - 1942) by**

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### **Abstract:**

Since 1919, many political parties in Cochinchina were born and active in association with the use of press forums as the official mouthpiece. Bui Quang Chieu's Constitutionalist Party, a party representing the interests and political views of the great landowners and bourgeois in Cochinchina, was born and operated in that context. The Party is very conscious in using the press as its mouthpiece, from La Tribune Indigène, La Tribune Indochinoise and later L'Écho Annamite. Influenced by bourgeois democratic thought, they had certain fighting voices. But because the interests are still closely attached to the French colonialists, loyal to the policy of "France - Vietnam is equal". As a result, the Constitutionlists were abandoned by the people, the Constitutionalist Party weakened and ended its role.

**Keywords:** Cochinchina, Constitutionalist Party, Indochina, French colonial period.

### **1. Make a problem**

In the resistance movement against the French colonialists in Vietnam in general and Cochinchina in particular, each class and class in Vietnamese society made different contributions. How did the indigenous bourgeois force in Cochinchina contribute to the patriotic movement? Why are they not supported by the people to become the leading force of the movement for national liberation? Through the analysis of the birth and operation of the Constitutionalist Party established by the bourgeois forces, the article will analyze and clarify the reasons why the Constitutionalist Party was initially born and was expected by the people, but later on that gradually weakened and gave way to the activities of other political organizations.

### **2. Theoretical basis and research methods**

*Rationale:* The article is researched based on the viewpoint of current Vietnamese history. In the process of approaching the research problem, the authors focus on using a comprehensive, contextual approach - a systematic approach according to dialectical materialism and historical materialism.

*Research Methods:* The article uses a synthesis of research methods suitable to the research content, mainly using the method of historical criticism to assess the reliability of relevant historical sources. Regarding the research content, based on historical sources, the research team applies historical - logical, analytical - synthesis methods to analyze and prove scientific arguments related to the research problem.

### **3. Results and discussion**

#### **3.1. The Birth of the Constitutionalist Party**

At the beginning of the twentieth century, during the Minh Tan movement in Cochinchina, a number of new intellectuals, great landowners, etc., the Vietnamese officially participated in the establishment of companies dealing in hotels, rice and commodity production. They were the first capitalists in Cochinchina. After the first world war the Vietnamese bourgeois force gradually grew along with the development of economic activities of the Vietnamese community. Vietnamese bourgeois in Cochinchina operate in many fields, from trading rice, providing services to plantation business, handicraft production.

Under the colonial regime in Cochinchina, the bourgeoisie had a strong Westernization tendency, from ideology to daily life, many of them also acquired French citizenship, worked in the colonial political system such as participating in the colonial political system. The county council, the agricultural council, the trade council, and those with french nationality are also entitled to publish newspapers (in french) to express their views in defense of the interests of their class. Among the most active and powerful activities are Nguyen Phu Khai, Bui Quang Chieu, Nguyen Phan Long...

Nguyen Phu Khai received a French education, but when he returned home, he did not apply for a job in the French colonial office, but established himself the first Vietnamese-owned rice mill in My Tho in 1915 to compete with the Chinese. Nguyen Phu Khai: "The reason the Vietnamese people are poor is because the French mandarins oppress and exploit them, while the overseas Chinese abet their economic destiny. It is the origin of a poor and slow-moving colony, he has repeatedly promoted this stance with articles exhorting, economic expansion, and people's intellectual improvement (Nguyen Ngoc Phan, Truong Ngoc Tuong, 2015). . In August 1917, Nguyen Phu Khai established La Tribune Indigène (Indigenous Forum) to serve the discussion, expression of views and political opinions representing the interests of the newly emerged bourgeoisie in South Vietnam

Nguyen Phan Long is famous for being fluent in French and politically savvy, he has become the editor of L'Echo Annamite, La Tribune Indochinoise and Torch of the South Dynasty, once appointed by the Director of Cochinchina Department of Justice Paul Arnaux describes: Nguyen Phan Long as "the most gifted writer in this colony" (Peycam, Phillippe M.F, 2012).

Bui Quang Chieu studied abroad in France until 1897 returned home, he worked for the Department of Agriculture (Service Agricole) under the Governor General of Indochina. During his time in Hanoi, in August 1906, he was the first President of the Mutual Society (Société de Secours Mutuel) established in the North. After returning to Saigon, he campaigned for an association of Collège Chasseloup-Laubat alumni and expanded the Society for Mutual Education (Société d'Enseignement Mutuel). In 1918 he was President of both societies. Bui Quang Chieu, Nguyen Phu Khai and some like-minded people demanded democratic reforms for the Indochina colony to really bring progress to the colony as claimed by the authorities, they active in associations led by Bui Quang Chieu and discussed in La Tribune Indigène.

After a period of organizing the activities of the above associations, Bui Quang Chieu submitted a dossier to establish the Indochinese Constitutionalist Party to the French government but did

not receive a response from the government. Reflecting on this issue, Trung Lap newspaper republished Nguyen Phan Long's statement in the Southern Doc newspaper as follows: “Mr. Bui Quang Chieu and Mr. Duong Van Giao stood up and founded the Constitutionalist Party in France. Present the party's charter at the Seine district palace. When he returned to this side (ie Cochinchina - the author), Mr. Bui brought the charter to the government of Cochinchina. Since then, there has been no response from the government to him about it” (Neutral newspaper. 1930b).

On April 17, 1919, the front page of La Tribune Indigène published the headline “The Body of the Constituent Party”. This is considered a milestone marking the birth of the Constitutionalist Party, whose goal is to fight for reform, reform the country, make a constitution, and expand freedom for indigenous people. Following the activities of La Tribune Indigène, on August 6, 1926, the “Constitutional group” published La Tribune Indochinoise newspaper to serve as the official mouthpiece of the Indochinese Constitutionalist Party. Through La Tribune Indigène newspaper, La Tribune Indochinoise newspaper and speeches and parliamentary activities, the Constitutionalist Party expressed its struggle views, leaving an imprint on the cultural and ideological aspects of fighting along the line of “France - Vietnam to draw” of the founders of the Party.

### **3.2. Organization and activities of the Constitutionalist Party**

#### **3.2.1. Organization and politics**

The Constitutionalist Party registered to operate, although the government did not respond, but did not ban it when those who registered to form the Party wrote “Agency of the Constitutionalist Party” in La Tribune Indigène and then La Tribune Indochinoise, the Political activities in the press, giving speeches in the name of the Constitutionalist Party are not prohibited. Mr. Bui Quang Chieu identified himself as the leader of the Constitutionalist Party (Chef du parti Charternaliste) when he signed official documents and was approved by the French colonial government.

In terms of organization, the Constitutionalist Party does not have a clear organizational system, but rather a group of advocates including the main members, Mr. Nguyen Phan Long (journalist), Nguyen Truc (journalist), Duong Van Giao (lawyer), Tran Van Don (doctor), Truong Van Ben (bourgeois), Diep Van Ky (law student), Tran Van Kha, Le Quang Liem, Nguyen Tan Duoc, Nguyen Kim Dinh, Nguyen Van Thinh and the founder of La Tribune Indigène (August 1917) was Mr. Nguyen Phu Khai, but the person behind the push was Mr. Bui Quang Chieu.

Regarding party members, due to the above organizational status, the Constitutionalist Party did not organize registration and admission of party members. Regarding this issue, Trung Lap newspaper number 6190 analyzed: “Now we call ourselves members of the Constitutionalist Party, that's why we call them that, we don't know who the party members are. But only believe that the trumpet has only Bui Quang Chieu as the party leader. As for Mr. Duoc, Mr. Ben, Mr. Sam to other men, we also only dare to understand that they are members of the Constitutionalist Party...” (Neutral newspaper. 1930a).

Regarding the Party's principles and purposes, according to Tran Van Giao, the main ideology of the Constitutionalist Party of Bui Quang Chieu is to build the Constitution and fight for the freedoms and democracy of the people of Annam by fighting method peaceful, anti-riot and within the framework of recognition of the French protectorate. Both the goal and the method are evident in the name of the party. It hoped to achieve, through the actions of the French themselves, reforms that would lead to renewal of the country and a greater degree of freedom for the people.

On May 18, 1919, La Tribune Indigène newspaper made requirements for the French Government, which clearly stated four basic goals of the Constitutionalist Party: “The first thing that the Annamites expect is reform in election, so that the Annamites can truly and fully participate in the management of public affairs in this country. Taxpayers must become citizens of Indochina (Le citoyen Indochinois), able through their representatives to effectively control the governing apparatus; The second reform, concurrent with the electoral reform, is for the Annamites to have freedom of press and freedom of speech; The third thing, please have a date for Indochina to be as autonomous to France as Canada is to Britain; The fourth article, for the people of Annam to issue a Constitution” ([Thai Vinh Thang, 2011](#)).

Bui Quang Chieu and the Constitutionalist Party supported A. Sarraut's stance of “France, Vietnam, and peace” but always fought for Vietnam to have a constitution (so his party was called the Constitutionalist Party) for the sake of the Lap Party. Constitution said that: “until now, the policy of colonial rule of France has not been based on a certain framework”. According to Mr. Chieu, “there is a constitution so that the people know how to live and act according to the constitution”. Many people commented that, despite being pro-French and trained by the French, Bui Quang Chieu was also considered by the French colonialists in Indochina as a “thorn in the side” ([Nguyen Ngoc Phan, Truong Ngoc Tuong, 2015](#)).

Bui Quang Chieu once declared: “I swear before the soul of Mr. Phan Chu Trinh that I am devoted to the country, and my compatriots can count on me and the leader of the Constitutionalist Party of our country. But patriotism is not foolishness, but must be friendly with the French, the French are a race that respects justice and humanity; Just believe in people and communicate with them honestly. So hold your heart and wait, don't bow your head and wait. It must be known that the one who dares to wait is the one who has the courage; Wait until the French do nothing but make empty promises, then at that time we will handle it” ([Tran Van Giau 1997](#)).

In a speech delivered at a tea party of Vietnamese people in France in January 1926, which was republished by Indochina Times on March 10, 1926, Bui Quang Chieu also expressed his displeasure with the policy that the Vietnamese people had adopted. The French imposed it in Vietnam and wanted to make a change: “We look back at the history of our ancestors thousands of years ago, and see our spiritual and moral capacity, it's clear. The destiny of the country and just follow it. According to our evolutionary level, compared to the evolutionary level of our neighboring. We must be bitter, must be angry with who has wasted so much of our time, wasted so much resources, my property, consuming so much of my energy, that now I have to stomp my feet and shout: Compatriots, hurry up! Let's resolve to move forward together. We do not deny the material progress in our country about 60 years ago, but let's think if they stop implementing that narrow, short-sighted colonial policy, don't be for the sake of the former. If the eyes are petty and oppress our people's souls and minds, and scorn our legitimate requests, will our people's evolutionary step today only come here?” ([Tran Van Giau, 2006](#)).

### **3.2.2. Activities of the Constitutionalist Party**

On August 28, 1919, La Tribune Indigène announced that there would be a boycott and commercial competition with the Chinese. Two days later, the Société Commerciale Annamite was established, and held its first meeting at the headquarters of the Société d'Enseignement Annamite, and organized the Economic Conference. Cochinchina (Congrès Économique de la Cochinchine) brings together representatives of 16 provinces in the South.

At the end of November 1919, the Constitutionalist group launched a campaign to support one of the candidates in the election for the deputies of Cochinchina (depute la Cochinchine). With the policy of peaceful struggle, demanding a constitution for Vietnam, in mid-1921, also in La Tribune Indigène newspaper, launched a campaign to demand reform of the Colonial Council

and expansion of the Colonial Council, in which with the participation of representatives of the Vietnamese people. This campaign has achieved a number of successes. According to the decree of the Governor of Cochinchina on June 9, 1922, the number of indigenous representatives in the Colonial Council was increased from 6 to 10, expanding the number of Vietnamese voters from about 1,500 to more than 20,000. . By that time, however, the actual number of French members of the Colonial Council had increased to 14, so the French remained the majority of the Council (R.B. Smith, 1969).

In October and November 1922, in the first election to the Colonial Council according to the new regulations, 10 native members were elected and all were members of the Constitutionalist Party. Among them, the most prominent is Mr. Nguyen Phan Long, who became Vice Chairman of the Council, and was the main spokesman of the Constitutionalist Party in the Colonial Council, representing the Saigon area electoral unit. At this time, Mr. Bui Quang Chieu was elected to the Cochinchina District Council.

In 1923, on the occasion of the French capitalist ambition to monopolize the rice trading market through Saigon port - which was mainly in the hands of overseas Chinese bourgeoisie. The French capitalist company Homberg bribed a number of delegates in the Cochinchina Colonial Council to pass a resolution officially granting that company the exclusive right to do business in the port of Saigon in 1923 (J. H. Ellen, 1966). The bourgeoisie and Cochinchina landlords launched by the Constitutionalist Party vehemently protested, creating a strong wave of reactions. The movement took place quite enthusiastically in the press, in rallies with the response of all classes of people, attracting the participation of a large number of young intellectuals of the bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie in Saigon. Saigon and Nam Ky provinces. The struggle has resonated as far as France, enlisting the support of the progressive forces in France. Due to the pressure of the mass movement as well as the public opinion in Vietnam and France, the Indochina government was forced to postpone the implementation of the resolution of the Colonial Council.

In 1925, when Governor General Varenne entered Saigon, the Constitutionalist Party drafted a 50-page claim, setting out a number of aspirations for reforming the French naturalization procedure, the rule of law, education, and a draft law allow freedom of the press. Varenne promised to consider reforming some points of civil service for Vietnamese people and opening more schools, but maintained his stance of restricting crowds and censoring the Vietnamese-language press (J. Carter, 1993). Therefore, Bui Quang Chieu went to France to lobby the French National Assembly to comply with the claim of 9 articles: Freedom of speech, Freedom of the press, Freedom of assembly and association, Freedom of movement, Education reform, Adjusting the wage regime for equality between the French and Vietnamese, Expanding political representation, Improving working life, Abolishing economic monopoly, but without success. On the afternoon of March 24, 1926, he returned to Saigon and was greeted by a demonstration of the French colonialists against the ideas of him and members of the Youth Party. When learning of the compromise attitude, following the policy of France-Vietnamese reconciliation, the Youth Party protested, many people expressed disappointment in Bui Quang Chieu and the Constitutionalist Party.

On the evening of March 24, 1926, Phan Chau Trinh died in Hoc Mon. The Constitutionalist Party seized this opportunity and actively promoted the organization of Phan Chau Trinh's funeral with the intention of linking Uncle Phan's patriotic ideology with the policy of France-Vietnam reconciliation in order to lead the masses to support the position of Phan Chau. Constitutionalist Party.

In August 1926, the Constitutionalist Party launched La Tribune Indochinoise newspaper, founded by Bui Quang Chieu and managed by Nguyen Kim Dinh, opening a new period of operation of the Constitutionalist Party.

In March 1927, *La Tribune Indochinoise* criticized Nguyen An Ninh and Tran Huy Lieu for organizing a separate protest at Phan Chau Trinh's grave a few days before his death anniversary. In April 1927, Tran Huy Lieu's Youth Party issued an appeal to the French to withdraw from the colony, which was followed by the election of a Vietnamese Parliament and full independence. When he was challenged by a conservative French-language newspaper demanding that he publish his position, Mr. Chieu refused, dissociating himself entirely from the appeal; he just said that young men are always hot (R.B. Smith, 1969).

In 1929, Mr. Bui Quang Chieu and his lawyer Duong Van Giao went to Calcuta to attend a meeting of the Indian National Congress party, "This is the first time Bui Quang Chieu has been allowed to go to a Western colonial country other than France and attend the National Congress of India. Bui Quang Chieu considers this event the first act in international life of the Annamites in the Far East" (A. Larcher-Goscha and K. J. Abu-Zeid, 1928). They took the opportunity to visit Tagore's university at Santiniketan. Although the two did not meet Rabindranath Tagore, a year later they persuaded the poet to visit Saigon. On this occasion, Bui Quang Chieu wrote a series of articles in *La Tribune Indochinoise* praised both Gandhi and British rule in India, and his aspiration was to be able to play a role like Gandhi in India's struggle for independence.

In the mid-1930s, there were many demonstrations led by the Communist movement in the country. On June 5, 1930, the Governor of Cochinchina Krautheimer invited Mr. Bui Quang Chieu, Le Quang Liem, Nguyen Phan Long, Truong Van Ben, Nguyen Van Sam..., to the Governor's Palace to probe the attitude of the Constitutionalist Party. The *Trung Lap* newspaper published on June 12, 1930, published this event, but the censorship court cut off a paragraph of comments from the Constitutionalist leaders.

In 1932, Bui Quang Chieu was elected to the National Assembly of Cochinchina at the Colonial National Synod in Paris. During the period from 1932 to 1941, Mr. Chieu was active in France as a member of the Indochina Parliament in the French National Synod.

### **3.3. The Decline and End of the Constitutionalist Party**

After Bui Quang Chieu was elected to the National Assembly of Cochinchina at the Colonial National Synod in Paris, the Constitutionalist Party was divided internally. The Constitutionalist Party has since been seen as a pro-French political party. And even in the Colonial Council, at the elections of 1939, the three Trotskyites defeated their Constitutional opponents, but they were arrested a few months later when the French authorities cracked down on the Communists. By 1941, the Constitutionalist group was no longer influential in the political scene in Saigon. The initiative of the movement was passed on to the newly formed parties. In 1942, *La Tribune Indochinoise* along with other newspapers were not approved by the Japanese government in Indochina and were closed, closing a period of existence and activities of the Constitutionalist Party.

## **4. Conclusion**

Along with patriotic political organizations such as the Youth Party, the Indochinese Labor Party, and the High Hope Youth in Cochinchina, the Constitutionalist Party initially aimed to claim freedom and democracy, but for the sake of class and the French bribes, the Constitutionalist group gradually entered the path of compromise, followed the Franco-Vietnamese doctrine of reconciliation, went against the interests of the nation, was separated by the masses and the party also lost their minds weaken and end its influence.

Although the Constitutionalist Party follows the nationalist tendency, the Party's policy of demanding freedom and democracy in the newspapers *La Tribune Indigène*, *La Tribune Indochinoise*... has attracted the attention of the public and created a culture of controversy. The first public debate in Cochinchina surrounding the antitrust campaign against Saigon port. The

Constituent Party of the bourgeoisie, although only representing the interests of a group of people, is not yet a voice for the needs and aspirations of the masses, but has contributed to the vibrant political atmosphere of Cochinchina in the past the 20s of the twentieth century.

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