

Fulbright Accuses Thieu of Persecuting a Deputy

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By JOHN W. FINNEY

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WASHINGTON, Feb. 5—Senator J. W. Fulbright, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, said today that President Nguyen Van Thieu of South Vietnam was persecuting an opposition leader for exposing the President's "political bag man" with the National Assembly.

Senator Fulbright also said that the United States mission in Saigon had "shrugged its shoulders" over the case, despite instructions from Washington to intervene on behalf of Tran Ngoc Chau, the opposition leader who has been threatened with death by President Thieu.

The affair was described by the Senator as an "ominous development."

"Perhaps the story of Tran Ngoc Chau will prove to be the last chapter in the history of representative government in Vietnam," the Senator said in a three-page statement.

Senator Fulbright raised the issue as the committee concluded the opening round of hearings on various resolutions supporting and criticizing United States policy in Vietnam. The Vietnamization program was criticized in the hearings as supporting a corrupt regime in Saigon, and Senator Fulbright was evidently attempting to document this point with introduction of the Chau case.

"Perhaps the story of Tran Ngoc Chau will prove to be the last chapter in the history of representative government in Vietnam," the Senator said in a three-page statement, which he issued after having summarized the contents at today's committee session.

The committee concluded the opening round of its hearings on Vietnam in which the Nixon Administration's program of Vietnamization had been criticized as constituting support for a corrupt regime in Saigon. Mr. Fulbright was evidently at-

tempting to document this by introducing the Chau case.

Mr. Chau has been accused by President Thieu of having Communist connections. Senator Fulbright suggested that the real reason for President Thieu's attack was Mr. Chau's growing power as an opposition leader and as a critic of what Senator Fulbright said was President Thieu's attempt to corrupt the National Assembly.

President Thieu accused Mr. Chau of failing to report that, starting in 1965, he was in contact with his brother, Tran Ngoc Hien, a North Vietnamese intelligence agent.

Senator Fulbright said, "I know for a fact, from private sources, that he did report his contacts with his brother to a number of United States officials in Vietnam, including C.I.A. officers with whom he had daily contact."

Mr. Chau was designated by the Central Intelligence Agency in 1966 to be head of the training program at the Vungtau pacification center. According to Congressional sources, the C.I.A. at one point sought to have Mr. Chau enlist his brother as an agent.

Thieu's Aide a Target

After his election to the National Assembly in 1967, Mr. Chau became head of the Opposition bloc. Starting last year, he began to advocate a cease-fire and direct negotiations with the Vietcong.

According to Mr. Fulbright's account, Mr. Chau also began to attack Nguyen Cao Thang, a Saigon pharmacist and a member of President Thieu's inner circle. Mr. Thang was described today by Joseph Kraft, syndicated columnist, as President Thieu's "political bag man," a description used approvingly by Senator Fulbright.

Mr. Chau's brother was arrested in April and interrogated in July. It was not until November, however, that President Thieu began to attack Mr. Chau, a personal friend with whom he had once shared

quarters when they were both junior army officers.

"It appears," Senator Fulbright said, "that Thieu's open attacks on Chau began only after Chau had denounced the pharmacist Thang."

President Thieu succeeded yesterday in obtaining the 102 signatures needed on a petition lifting Mr. Chau's parliamentary immunity, thus exposing him to prosecution.

In his column today, Mr. Kraft said Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker had been directed to intervene with President Thieu on Mr. Chau's behalf but "the embassy has not bestirred itself."

See this file 12 Nov 71
for listing of clippings
on Tran Ngoc Chau.