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Thieu Opponent in Saigon Feels Betrayed by U.S.

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SAIGON, South Vietnam, Feb. 6—Tran Ngoc Chau, an Opposition deputy accused by President Nguyen Van Thieu of Communist affiliations, says he feels he has been betrayed by the America mission here despite a long and close working relationship.

Mr. Chau, whose situation was described in Washington yesterday by Senator J. W. Fulbright, said in an interview that he had repeatedly advised the United States Embassy and the Central Intelligence Agency of several meetings he had had between 1965 and 1969 with his older brother, Tran Ngoc Hien. The brother was convicted last July as a Communist spy and sentenced to life in prison. Mr. Chau is now being accused of pro-Communist activities because of those meetings.

Says U. S. Knew About It

"The Americans knew about it all along," Mr. Chau said. "They even wanted me to put them in touch with my brother, so they could find out what the Communists were doing. As far as I was concerned, their knowledge and encouragement of the meetings was tantamount to their approval.

"Now they refuse to admit this," he said. "This raises an important question: Is this the way the Americans treat their friends, people who have worked with them in the past? If so, it's a sad fact."

Mr. Chau is a 45-year-old political maverick who is one of three Lower House representatives that President Thieu has accused of serving as "tools of the Communists." Mr. Thieu has demanded that the House strip the three of their parliamentary immunity from prosecution so they may be tried by a military court.

Bribes Are Charged

During the course of a two-hour interview, Mr. Chau charged that an aide of the President had bribed a majority of his Lower House colleagues to get them to sign a petition lifting his immunity.

He said the aide, Nguyen Cao Thang, had paid bribes of as much as 400,000 piasters (about \$3,400) for some of the signatures on the petition.

In Washington yesterday, Senator Fulbright made a similar charge. The chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee said he had "very persuasive evidence" that Mr. Thieu had used bribery and threats to obtain the signatures of the three-quarters majority of the House members required to lift the deputies' immunity.

The South Vietnamese papers reported yesterday that the necessary 102 signatures had been obtained and that the petition would be forwarded to the President's office immediately after the Tet holidays, which last through this weekend. Mr. Chau presumably will be brought to trial shortly thereafter.

'Shrugged His Shoulders'

In his remarks in Washington, Senator Fulbright also said that the United States Embassy had "shrugged its shoulders" over the Chau incident despite instructions from Washington to intervene on the deputy's behalf.

A spokesman for the embassy declined to comment on this charge today. But a high-level American source confirmed that the embassy had had communication from Washington on the Chau case and said that Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker had recently discussed the matter with President Thieu.

Concerning Mr. Chau's charges, the source insisted that senior officials at the embassy had neither initiated nor encouraged the deputy's contacts with his brother. He conceded, however, that it was possible that Mr. Chau had acted with the knowledge and approval of lower level officials working for the C.I.A. or other agencies.

Close Relations Conceded

No one in the mission disputes the fact that Mr. Chau maintained close working relations with officials in the C.I.A., and embassy during his years as a province chief in the Mekong Delta, and as mayor of Danang. In 1966, he was a key official in the revolutionary development program, which was devised and operated by the C.I.A. As one of the administrators of the program, he worked on a day-to-day basis with C.I.A. agents.

Mr. Chau is currently hiding. Because he is afraid that the Government will arrest him at any time; he has slept each night for the last several weeks in a different house. He has remained in touch with his friends, however, and has seen a few foreign correspondents.

Mr. Chau acknowledges that he saw his brother, who is 48, eight times between 1965 and Mr. Hien's arrest last April.

Shortly after the first meeting, Mr. Chau said, he told two American C.I.A. agents that his brother had come south from Hanoi and was gathering political intelligence for North Vietnam.

"Later the agents asked me if I would bring my brother to meet them," he said, "but I refused because I didn't want to be the man to lead my own brother into a trap." A second request was also turned down.

"I always hoped to bring Hien over to our side, Mr. Chau said. "I've always believed that he was communist more by necessity than out of conviction."