

# Villagers' View Of Viet Elections

## Anh Binh, South Vietnam

The people of this lush and prosperous village along a Mekong delta canal 100 miles from Saigon have heard about the political machinations in the capital the past few days.

In the evening, about the time the gas lanterns are turned on, they gather around their Japanese portable radios and listen to the 30 minutes of news on the government station.

But afterwards, sitting in the small local cafe, sipping rice wine and sampling snacks of tiny dried shrimps, it all seems very remote, especially when there is important work to do in Anh Binh like repairing a downed bridge or tending the rice crop.

"The people, they hear all about what is going on," said Nguyen Van Them, who has been village chief here for three years (he was re-elected once) "but many of them have little to comment because there isn't anything they can do."

### CANDIDATE

Across the wooden table from the chief was Nguyen Ngoc Tan, a bespectacled 51-year-old candidate for the lower house with a long record of opposition politics and a gift for folksy homilies.

"The sun is very far away," said Tan, "but the roof of your house is close."

"The question of who is president and who is vice president," Tan went on, "Let the Americans take care of that."

To hear Tan and the others

tell it, the weeks of maneuvering by presidential candidates culminating in the withdrawal of General Duong Van Minh on Friday and the reinstatement of Vice President Nguyen Cao Ky on Saturday has been like watching a puppet play: They observe it and await new developments but it is unreal.

And most often, it is the Americans that are said to be pulling the strings, assuring that Thieu will almost certainly be re-elected, no matter who runs against him.

### POPULATION

There are some 5000 people in Anh Binh, which is only a short boat ride from the province capital of Vinh Long, and 1800 of them are votes. The village has received the highest possible security rating from the military authorities and incidents are very rare.

"In Anh Binh they do more drinking than fighting" said a farmer turned out for the evening in a pair of immaculate black pajamas.

There is a consensus of sorts that Thieu, as the man already in power would probably make the best president, but he is by no means regarded with awe or admiration.

For Anh Binh, the four years past have brought a measure of peace and prosperity. If anyone in Saigon gets the credit it is Thieu. (Ky is disparaged as a man who likes cockfighting — a playboy.)

Summing up the attitude toward Thieu, Tan said pithily: "You can always be sure

of a fish that you have in your basket, but you can't be sure of a fish in the river."

Unlike other provinces in the delta where the campaigning has been marked by accusations that local officials have been harassing anti-government candidates, the politicking in Vinh Long has been uneventful.

Tan, a member of the gently oppositionist Nationalist Progressive Movement, is campaigning on a platform without promises. "I'm lazy and I'm smart," he said.

"If I promise everything, I'll exhaust myself trying to fulfill them. This way I don't set myself up for a fall. When people ask me, I tell them to judge me by my actions."

*Washington Post Service*