

Thieu's Foes Trying to Unite to Defeat Him

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SAIGON, South Vietnam, Sept. 23 — South Vietnam's many opposition groups, often considered weak cells of protest, are trying to band together to stop President Nguyen Van Thieu in his unopposed bid for re-election next month.

One indication of the growing anger over President Thieu's decision to go ahead with the election on Oct. 3 despite the absence of opponents is a resolution passed by the South Vietnamese Senate yesterday that called for its postponement. The resolution was backed by some former supporters of President Thieu. Men who for years have remained silent are now joining the opposition to the President's decision to run unopposed.

Among President Thieu's enemies are the militant students, the intellectuals and the nucleus of deputies who hate him but who so far have not been able to hurt him seriously. Others are the organized disabled war veterans and half a dozen minor peace groups that are often composed of Vietnamese who once had pow-



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Anti-Thieu demonstrators burning voting cards outside An Quang Pagoda in Saigon

er or political influence.

They have now been joined in their frantic, but often feeble efforts to arouse the Vietnamese public against President Thieu by some factions of the Roman Catholics and by the strongest group of the nation's Buddhist leaders, the An Quang faction. Leaders of the Hoa Hao religious sect—considered traditionally as anti-Communist as most Catholics—have this week also criticized the one-man elections.

Military's Stance Vital

So far the efforts of these groups have presented no real threat to President Thieu. The support of the army in any attempt to oust him is considered by most Vietnamese as essential, but the President says, with confidence, that the military is on his side.

Another weakness in the campaign to remove him is the limited ability of his opponents to persuade the people in the countryside either to boycott the elections or to vote against him. The reason is that the Government's control over the peasants is often stronger than its influence on city dwellers.

But the swell of opinion against President Thieu grows. A major theme of the attacks is anti-Americanism, born of a widespread disgust that it is foreigners who support and protect a Government they cannot tolerate. American officials here are skeptical about the effective-

ness of the anti-Thieu campaign but are watching the activity closely.

The actions of a progressive element of the Catholics in Saigon has done much to encourage President Thieu's opponents. Last week a group of Catholic priests, political figures and intellectuals burned their voting cards as a symbolic gesture of contempt for the election on Oct. 3.

"Our politics today are completely unlike those of our past," Prof. Ly Chanh Trung said recently. He is a Catholic who teaches philosophy at the University of Saigon.

"For the older Vietnamese, religion once came before the country," he continued. "Now for the younger Catholics the nation is just about as absolute as religion. Nationalists are those who cannot accept dependence on foreigners and more and more Catholics are saying no to the Americans."

Police Action Resented

What is unusual about this new movement against President Thieu and the Americans is its departure from the usual concern of Catholics to protect and preserve the identity of the church in a nation of Buddhists.

The role of these Catholics is believed to have spurred the An Quang Buddhist ranks into action. Last week they issued a statement deplored the one-man election

and advising the Vietnamese to "reject" it.

Demonstrations last Saturday by students and Deputies aroused some public anger against the American-equipped combat police. The protests also gained for the demonstrators worldwide publicity, which they want in order to arouse American public opinion against the United States Government's support of President Thieu.

Many Vietnamese intellectuals feel that unless they act now, even violently, their country's future will again be decided by foreigners and the men the foreigners have chosen. They admit that they may not succeed before Oct. 30. But they call this period of deliberate disorder "the first phase."

We don't want the election to take place, but if it does then the second phase will be our opposition to the United States Government," a former Deputy, Ngo Cong Duc said. "In fact," he added, "the United States Government has become the one enemy for us. To attack and destroy Thieu, we must attack those who support him."

Mrs. Kieu Mong Thu, a Deputy and well-known opponent of the war and of President Thieu, said: "Mr. Thieu is tougher now that Mr. Nixon has pledged his support for him, but the tougher he is the quicker he falls.

She typifies many educated

Vietnamese who resent Mr. Nixon's decision not to cut aid to South Vietnam because of President Thieu's unopposed candidacy. They were outraged by Mr. Nixon's statement at his news conference last week that the democratic process in Vietnam "will not be met perhaps for several generations." They feel that they do not have a genuine democracy because of the interference of the Americans.

'Slave of the Americans'

"We are trying now to explain to the people that Mr. Thieu is only a slave to the Americans, and we must influence the American people to put pressure on their Government to get all Americans—military, civilian, and all their machinery—out of here," a student leader, Nguyen Xuan Lap said. He heads the Saigon Buddhist Student Group, which, with another group, the Saigon Student Union, is the key anti-Thieu, antiwar, militant group for the young.

The militant students are being supported by both Vice President Nguyen Cao Ky and Gen. Duong Van Minh, both of whom withdrew from the presidential race on the ground that Mr. Thieu had rigged the election in his favor.

"After the election if Thieu is still in power there will be all-out attacks on Americans," Mr. Lap said. "We will have no choice," he added.