

5 SAIGON PAPERS ARE CLOSED DOWN

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Government Steps In After
Printing of 'Indictment'
of President Thieu

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By JAMES M. MARKHAM

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SAIGON, South Vietnam, Feb. 3—The Government of President Nguyen Van Thieu closed down five opposition newspapers today and continued a wave of arrests of journalists that began quietly during the weekend.

Yesterday the Government confiscated the editions of those papers and four others that published a new "indictment" of Mr. Thieu issued by the Roman Catholic-led People's Anticorruption Movement, headed by the Rev. Tran Huu Thanh.

The "indictment" says that Mr. Thieu should be "charged with high treason" for a series of political crimes. "As long as Mr. Thieu remains, there can be no peace, for he is a product of the war, he is nourished by the war and he can only survive with the war," the document said.

The Information Ministry said in a statement today:

"The Government has just arrested a number of Communist underground agents who

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had infiltrated into the staffs of a number of newspapers in the capital to carry out sabotage activities."

The statement expressed the Government's "respect for the right to free speech of every citizen," but said the Government was "determined to smash all attempts by the Communists to sabotage the press in order to protect national security and maintain public order."

Ly Chanh Trung, an editor of the opposition daily Dien Tin one of the papers closed, responded: "They can say whatever they want—but that's a lie."

The challenge to Mr. Thieu by the press and Father Thanh's movement, which have collaborated in the past, comes at a particularly awkward moment for the Government.

Thieu Appeals for Aid

The Ford Administration has put forward a request for \$300-million aid for Saigon, and Mr. Thieu and his Government have been at pains to appear in a good light. Last week, for the first time in years, Mr. Thieu granted a series of interviews to foreign journalists to appeal for the extra aid.

Mr. Thieu ritually terms many of his opponents "lackeys" of the Communists. In an interview, Mr. Thieu said:

"I have warned all of them that everything you do against me, against the Government, I don't care about. But look inside your movement to see if there is any Communist infiltration."

On Sept. 8, Father Thanh, a 59-year-old Redemptorist priest with a conservative political background, issued a six count "indictment" of Mr. Thieu, accusing him and members of his family of various forms of corruption. This became the catalyst of a revitalized opposition and, for the first time since Mr. Thieu's one-man presidential race in 1971, Saigon saw a series of small but occasionally violent clashes between demonstrators and the police.

11 Journalist Listed

But then, mixing concessions with tough police tactics in the streets, Mr. Thieu managed to subdue the opposition. In the interval, the North Vietnamese and the Vietcong have stepped up their attacks in the southern part of the country, giving the President a reason to appeal for a "calm rear area," as he has put it.

A list compiled by the Free Press Struggle Committee gave the names of 11 journalists who, it said, have been arrested. Some are well known and one is the editor of the mildly oppositionist daily Doc Lap.

Several publishers said that a number of their employees—reporters and printers—were absent from work today and that they suspected that the absentees had either been arrested or intimidated by the police from coming at work.

Lawyers from a committee set up last fall to defend the press toured the Saigon jails today and this evening, looking for journalists or others involved in the newspaper business who might have been arrested.

Press Law Changes Due

The newspapers that received orders of temporary suspension from the Interior Ministry are Dien Tin, Song Than, But Thiep, Dong Phuong and Tia Sang.

Dien Tin and Song Than are outspoken in their opposition. The three others shifted gradually to an opposition stance after Father Thanh issued his first "indictment."

Article 19 of Press Law 007—which is in the process of being softened by the National Assembly, in part at Mr. Thieu's behest—permits the Government to close any newspaper that has been confiscated twice for violations of "national security."

Father Thanh's latest "indictment" charges among other things that "the nationalist cause and the constitutionality of the regime have been destroyed because Mr. Thieu has used the anti-Communist cause to build up powers for himself and to serve the interests of his own family and group."