

Laos Mob Seizes

MAY 15 1975

Vientiane, Laos

A student mob ransacked an American agency yesterday in the town of Savannakhet and took three staff members captive, a U.S. Embassy official reported.

The Americans were believed to be unharmed and

being held in the province governor's house in the Mekong river town just across from Thailand.

The mob, apparently demonstrating against both high food prices and the U.S. presence, broke into the compound of the Agency for International Development

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3 Americans

and ransacked it of rice and other food supplies.

U.S. Chargé d'Affaires Christian Chapman presented an official protest over the attack and the seizure of the Americans to Premier Prince Souvanna Phouma.

The coalition government, in which the Communist-

oriented Pathet Lao recently gained dominance through the resignations of important rightists, was to send investigators from both its right and left wings to Savannakhet today.

A similar student mob

Back Page Col. 7

From Page 1

sacked the AID compound in Luang Prabang, the royal capital 200 miles north of Vientiane. The four Americans there were thought to be safe, embassy sources said.

The disorders made the position of Americans more precarious in this landlocked Indochinese nation of 2.7 million persons.

The U.S. State Department said in Washington it would begin cutting the size of its embassy staff in Laos by the end of the week. Spokesman Robert Funseth said there are no plans to close the embassy, but all American officials have been called into Vientiane from outlying posts.

Fragmentary radio reports from Luang Prabang said a mob of about 3000 students, teachers and pedicab drivers ransacked the AID compound there and raided its rice supplies. They also reportedly seized food from stores in the city of 50,000.

The reports said the mob

occupied the provincial governor's offices and began to distribute the rice taken from American stocks, apparently in protest against the country's 70 per cent inflation and skyrocketing prices. Reports circulated that similar demonstrations would be held in Vientiane today or tomorrow.

Earlier in the day, the government named General Bounchan Savanthphaysan to replace General Atsaphanthong Pathammavong, the strong rightist commander of the joint security force.

While also a rightist, Bounchan is a less powerful figure and is expected to be more agreeable to Pathet Lao demands. The joint security force is made up of a 1000-man Pathet Lao battalions and another 1000 men from the rightist side.

Student demonstrators earlier had demanded the removal of General Atsaphanthong, charging that he worked for the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency.

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