

NEWS  
MAY 23 1975

# Saigon Tries Persuasion In Restoring Rural Life

SAIGON, South Vietnam, May 22—The direction of the policy of South Vietnam's new leaders is becoming visible, one aspect of it being to persuade some of the people in overcrowded cities to return to the countryside.

For many the prospect of going back to the soil will not be too unpleasant. Because the closing of banks has virtually halted the flow of money, because unemployment is at an all-time high in the cities, some have already left them.

Communist cadres are sending out the word through block committees in the cities that families will be welcomed in their ancestral villages. This approach, a Vietnamese here said, is "more subtle" than that of the victorious Cambodian Communists, "who cleared Phnom Penh by telling the population the United States would bomb the city."

## Families Sending Scouts

Many families are sending one member to test the rural climate. A Vietnamese journalist said that his brother went to the family's village, and was greeted by a Communist official who told him: "Hey, ranger! You're welcome to come back and farm the land again."

"So his whole family headed out of Saigon," the journalist said.

A few weeks ago, a general who had commanded combat troops of the fallen Government was seen riding a bicycle in Saigon. The price of gasoline here is now the equivalent of \$8 a gallon.

Former President Tran Van Huong, 71, preferred to walk to his destination last Monday. He was seen hobbling past the Saigon basilica through Peace Square, the new name for John F. Kennedy Square, shaking hands with passers-by who recognized him.

The Communist authorities, moving cautiously toward a transformation of urban to rural society, are effecting these changes through communiqués issued by the Provisional Revolutionary Government's Military Administrative Committee, still in complete control of Saigon three weeks after the fall.

## New Mission for Soldiers

If diminished traffic in Saigon and other major centers is any indication, hundreds of thousands of people must have left for the countryside. Under the old Government, Saigon's population was about 3.5 million.

As in North Vietnam in the middle nineteen-fifties, after the war against the French, Communist authorities in South Vietnam are seeking total population control, most obviously by mixing soldiers with the population of the cities.

In hundreds of Saigon homes, regular soldiers either occupy one or two rooms, or take over completely the residences of Vietnamese who fled to the United States in the last days of the war. All homes so left have been confiscated by the state.

Precinct committees have been formed to indoctrinate Saigoneses. Rallies, on vacant lots, in parks and back yards, are now common in Saigon. The people participate without complaint, if not with initial enthusiasm.

## The Military Presence

Other changes are more subtle. Military forces are still predominant in South Vietnam. The Saigon area is under the Military Administrative Committee headed by Lieut. Gen. Tran Van Tra, who commanded Communist forces in the Tet offensive of 1968.

These forces occupy all strategic bases and camps. The gun barrels of Soviet-built T-54 tanks poke through the trees of parks and over barbed-wire fences. The presence of this overwhelming force of tanks, troops and artillery probably allows local authorities to grant wide latitude to the South Vietnamese, most of whom were under government control long before the Communist victory of April 30.

The apparent benignity of the victors has astounded officials and military officers of the fallen administration, who, at most, have been undergoing moderate indoctrination.

## Political Disappointments

Several civilians and officers sent their wives and families out of Saigon, and are now anxious that they return. There is concern, however. The new authorities seem to be concentrating more on consolidating their hold than on the destiny of the people, who were on the other side when the war ended, and now find themselves without jobs.

Some unhappiness is expressed by moderate politicians and their supporters, who expected a transitional political regime that would include them. This now appears unlikely.

What is going on now may be only a transition to an eventual referendum that will decide irrevocably for reunification of the Vietnamese.