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# Pathet Lao Pressure Building

## Each New 'Slice' Leaves Less Doubt About Who Is in Control

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VIENTIANE—"Don't give me that line about the gentle Lao people who spend their time listening to the rice grow and making love," said a European military officer with years of experience in the region.

"With the right kind of leadership, they can be as ruthless as the Vietnamese or anyone else. And the Pathet Lao have that kind of leadership."

Slowly but inexorably that leadership is clamping down on life here. Foreigners and Laotians alike are feeling the pressure. One day brothels are ordered closed. Dancing and gambling are banned. The next day bars located near pagodas are shut. The harassment at airports and traffic checkpoints grows.

Small incidents, usually, but more signs that life in Vientiane has changed. "Another thin slice off the salami" by the Pathet Lao, is the way one American diplomat put it.

Last week the young wife of an Australian diplomat began hemorrhaging, and local doctors advised that she should be flown out immediately to an American hospital in Thailand.

In the past, airport authorities routinely granted permission for such emergency evacuations. This time someone realized that the Pathet Lao had stationed anti-aircraft guns at the field, and permission from the crew would have to be obtained.

After several hours' delay that permission was obtained. But it was one more small incident, another slice off the salami.

With each slice, the Pathet Lao remove just a bit more of any lingering doubts that the Communists are in control, that the fiction of a national coalition government is allowed to continue because they want

it that way for the moment, that Laos is on its way through a cultural revolution.

Nevertheless, there are still some doubts. So far the revolution has been gradual, almost gentle. Few ordinary Laotians have suffered. But the revolution is still in its early stages.

Right now, a rumor is circulating through Vientiane that Prince Souphanoung, half-brother of Prime Minister Prince Souvanna Phouma, has been jailed at the Pathet Lao headquarters in Sam Neua, near the North Vietnamese border.

Souphanouvong, long the nominal leader of the Pathet Lao movement, has been considered a relative soft-liner. The hard-liners, those believed to be the real Communist powers, are Kay-sone phomvihane, secretary general of the Lao Communist Party, and Nouthak Phomsavan, a member of the party's central committee.

Both have close personal links in North Vietnam. The rumor of Souphanouvong's being jailed began circulating when Foreign Minister Phoumi Vongvichit, the leading Pathet Lao figure in the coalition government, flew to Sam Neua last week. Some political observers believe he is receiving orders to intensify the revolution in Vientiane.

For the people of Vientiane, the slices are coming off the Westernized, bourgeois way of life many of them had grown to enjoy in this drowsy little city on the Mekong.

The ban on gambling and dancing will be practically harder to accept. Laotians are inveterate gamblers who play cards and other games of chance at any opportunity, even at funerals. As to dancing, all those who'll be bothered will be youngsters, mainly students.

Until now, the students have been the Pathet Lao's major flag-wavers in Vientiane.

It was a group of students who raided the compound of the U.S. Agency for International Development and eventually forced AID to agree to leave Laos and turn all its property over to the government.

Now, the first hint of doubt is setting in. "I don't understand why they have to close down this place," complained Thong Bouaphat, a 19-year-old technical college student who was dancing with his girl friend at the Lido, the only Western-style discotheque in town.

Did he think that the ban on dancing indicated that life in Vientiane was going to get tougher and that this would be a good thing?

He hesitated. "Well," he finally said, "I suppose things will get tougher, but I suppose it will be good for us." And then, "I hope so anyway."

Some incidents are a bit more serious—for example, the continuing detention of Rosemary Ann Conway, 36, an American arrested by Pathet Lao police a week ago and still not charged with any crime. Under Laotian law, charges must be made within 72 hours of arrest or the individual released.

The Pathet Lao have circulated reports to local journalists that Miss Conway was a CIA agent and that she was involved in a plot to steal aging T-28 fighter planes from the Laotian air force.

A U.S. consular official and a doctor were finally allowed to see Miss Conway Thursday and they are trying to convince the authorities that she should be released in order to undergo medical treatment.

There are many other incidents, other slices off the salami.

More and more foreign diplomats tell stories of harassment at the airport, at the Mekong River crossing, at the marketplace.

Even the large Soviet embassy has begun to feel the sting. According to one

source, three Russian families have been robbed, and Soviet diplomats have begun to move personal possessions into the embassy building.

A number of Asian diplomats say they're being harassed by the Pathet Lao, too. Thais, Japanese and Filipinos all say their cars have been stopped and searched, apparently without reason.

"One more year," said the French manager of a travel agency. "That's all the time we have. In another year there will be nothing for any foreigner in this country." Some of his compatriots think he's optimistic.

So far, the French embassy has behaved as if it along stood above the fray. But several officers with the French military advisory mission privately confessed their concern.

"It happened in Cambodia and it will happen here, too," said a junior officer.

"You Americans are being treated as war-mongering imperialists, but don't forget that we were the colonialist-imperialists and the Pathet Lao feel we exploited them even worse than the Americans did."

There is the continuing "purging" of suspected right-wingers from government ministries and departments, the conclusion of a two-week indoctrination course for 200 senior military officers, the beginning of another indoctrination session for provincial governors.

Where will it end?

If the Pathet Lao themselves know, they're not discussing it with anyone.