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Vientiane Talks of Seminars

Learning About Communism

Vientiane, Laos

THROUGHOUT LAOS, civil servants are attending seminars to rid them of what a high Pathet Lao official called "their erroneous conceptions."

"We want them to learn the new," the Communist official said, stressing that Laos, now dominated by the Communist side while remaining nominally under the leadership of a neutralist Premier, Prince Souvanna Phouma, would continue to need the technical expertise of the civil servants.

Almost all Laotians with higher education work for the government.

A high civil servant who has attended seminars reflected on his position under the new circumstances.

"I say to myself that if I was able to stay on with the corruption of the old regime, I must stay on with those who want really to create a new Laos," he said. "I am ready to sacrifice a certain material and intellectual comfort that I enjoy now because the only other choice is to leave the country."

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SINCE APRIL, when the Communists took over South Vietnam and Cambodia and the Pathet Lao influence grew rapidly in Laos, several hundred former officials — some whose purge was demanded in well-organized demonstrations by their staff and others who believed they would be targets of such demands — have fled across the Mekong River to Thailand.



The civil servant, educated in France, said that he had decided to stay although aware that under the Communist-dominated government he must limit the exercise of his critical judgment.

"We intellectuals must allow this judgment to be restrained by the necessity of reaching the objective of the new system," he said.

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HE DEFINED the objective as finding a way "how Laotians can have a decent existence in an independent country without having their destiny determined by whether they have money or not."

He added, with implied reference to uncertainty whether American aid will continue:

"Laos does not want to be poor, but if money and the comfort of some, like myself, would hinder the attainment of the objective, we will have to adapt to being poor. We may have to return to a primitive state."

In the new system, the official said, power comes from the masses and intellectuals are no longer entitled to tell others what to do just because they have had an education.

"The accent will be on the people, and the intellectual must identify with the people," he said.

The "seminars," he explained, are the theoretical part of putting civil servants completely into the new frame of mind.

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THE OFFICIAL said that "even if the leaders of the party are Communists, they are very humane Communists." He said that under the old regime, whose corruption he often criticized in the past, he had hoped for a Laos that would be socialist in the Scandinavian or Yugoslav fashion.

Reviewing the long American involvement in Laos, he said: "The Americans made it possible for me to see more than if I had always been under the Pathet Lao." But he condemned the United States for lavishly supporting a corrupt and inefficient regime.

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