

U.S.-LAOTIAN RIFT ON AID CONTINUES

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Disposal of Office Property
Remains Unresolved

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Five days before an important deadline, the Pathet Lao-dominated government has made no move toward discussing with the United States embassy a knotty issue in their uneasy and mutually suspicious relationship.

The issue is the turning over to Laos of all property of the Agency for International Development that is due to Laos and to allow the United States to remove all other property and personal effects of employees.

The embassy, negotiating under the duress of the occupation of the aid agency's compound by unruly demonstrators, signed an agreement on May 27 to wind up all aid activities by next Monday.

In the embassy's view, any further assistance to Laos, and thus the future relations between the two countries, is heavily dependent on an equitable solution of this issue.

However, the most important figures on the Pathet Lao side of the Government, led by Foreign Minister Phoumi Vongvichit, have been at Pathet Lao headquarters in northern Laos and inaccessible to the embassy for nearly three weeks, in their absence, the Minister of the Economy, Sot Petrasy, declines to meet with the American charge d'affaires, Christian A. Chapman, and the Foreign Ministry maintains that it can make no decisions.

U.S. Maneuver Charged

"We are awaiting the decision of the Government," said the principal Foreign Ministry official in an interview today. He is Soubanh Srithirath, Mr.

Phoumi's executive assistant. He said apologetically that he did not know when it would be forthcoming or when his minister might return.

Mr. Soubanh charged that the delay in resolving the dispute was a new American maneuver. Embassy officials contend that the distinction between property allocated to specific aid projects, on one hand, and property used in the administration of the aid program, on the other, was made clear throughout the negotiations and was embodied in the agreement.

In this distinction, typewriters used in the office of any given project go to Laos and typewriters in the office of the aid administrator to the United States. The embassy has informed the Laotian Government that it was prepared to give substantial amounts of equipment in the second category to Laos as well but must be allowed to inspect all such property to make a decision.

Furthermore, the United States has asked the Government to recognize the principle that it owes compensation for lost or damaged American property incurred during the siege and forced departure of the aid mission in the southern towns of Savanna-khet and Pakse. The United States has refrained from demanding the compensation itself.

Mr. Soubanh said the Government could not be held responsible because the Americans had not given the local authorities inventories of what they left behind when they were driven from those towns by demonstrations that are generally assumed to have been instigated by the Pathet Lao.