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Pathet Lao Complete Takeover

Reuter

A massive rally in Laos yesterday celebrating the Pathet Lao takeover of Vientiane marked the completion of the Communist takeover of all of former French Indochina.

The Pathet Lao news agency, monitored in Hong Kong, said more than 300,000 people took part in the celebrations—a figure far in excess of the known population of Vientiane, around 200,000.

International flights to Vientiane. Telex and telephone lines were cut for 24 hours to coincide with the celebration.

Martin Woolacott of the Manchester Guardian reported from Bangkok, Thailand:

The supposedly coalition government of Laos effectively came to an end in May, when several leading right wing ministers resigned and fled to Thailand, as did some generals in the Vietnamese army, including Van Pao, the Meo leader.

Since then, the Pathet Lao have taken over district after district and every substantial town, now culminating with Vientiane, by arranging rallies which end with calls for the resignation of virtually all non-communist officials as "pro-American backsliders."

They have also replaced their own senior representatives in the Vientiane government with new, and some say harder, men from Sam Neua, the Communists' chief town. Moderate ambassadors have been recalled, and the royal Lao army placed under the command of a Pathet Lao officer.

Throughout all this, the Pathet Lao have assiduously maintained that the changes are the result of action by progressive elements on the Vientiane side and that the coalition agreement has not been broken.

Souvanna Phouma, the elderly former neutralist, is still premier. Apart from his now limited influence and that of the king, all power in Laos is now in the hands of the Pathet Lao.

The U.S. presence, after a series of occupations of American establishments, now amounts to 22 men, including Marine guards at the embassy. The French, fearful of a similar attack, have reduced their substantial missions. The Thais, after two of their military attaches were arrested as spies and after numerous border incidents, have virtually closed their embassy.

Non-Communist members of the joint police force were sent off to reeducation camps on the orders of the national government. The Pathet Lao troops and police are thus now the only armed forces in the Laos capital.