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# Premier Says Laotian Coalition Continues Intact

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BANGKOK, Thailand, Aug. 24—"Everything is calm here, always calm. There is no change. I am still Prime Minister."

The voice of Prince Souvanna Phouma sounded strong and authoritative in the brief telephone interview this morning, within hours of the re-opening of communication with Vientiane, the capital of Laos, which had been cut off from the outside world for 24 hours.

Victory celebrations of the take-over of Vientiane by the Communist-led Pathet Lao had prompted the cutoff. They continued today and the Premier described them "grand, with more than 200,000 people."

The interview lasted less than five minutes before the connection was broken from Vientiane. The Prince insisted that the national coalition Government, with equal representation of the Pathet Lao and the right-wing Vientiane side, continued intact, despite the proclamations and extensive celebrations yesterday of the take-over of Vientiane by the Pathet Lao and the "people's revolutionary administration."

Vientiane Province was the last of the country's provinces to be taken over by the Communists, a process marked by the arrival of the Pathet Lao troops in strength. Despite the view expressed by Prince Souvanna Phouma, other reports from Vientiane made it clear that the coalition arrangement had ended.

There was no way of confirming absolutely that the person speaking on the telephone today was the Premier. There was scant reason for doubt, however, since he recalled a lengthy conversation he had with this correspondent nearly three months ago in his home in Vientiane.

## Conversation in French

The phrases he used to describe his situation and that of the coalition Government were almost identical with those used in the personal meeting. He spoke in the same meticulous French.

"This is only the municipal,

the provincial administration," the Prince said to describe the take-over of Vientiane. "The coalition is whole and intact."

After being reminded that the original concept of the latest coalition, of which he himself was the principal architect nearly two years ago, provided for rightist control of previously right-wing areas and joint control of Vientiane, he was asked whether this take-over of the capital by the Pathet Lao was not in effect an end of the coalition concept.

"No," he replied, "the coalition continues."

One Western diplomat now in Bangkok but accredited to Vientiane said today that most observers in Laos believed that the Pathet Lao did want to continue, at least as a matter of form, both the coalition and the reign of King Savang Vat-

thana as head of state, at least until an election next year.

"By that time they will have everything very much sewn up, everything will be legal and the coalition will end," the diplomat said. "Not that it hasn't already ended," he added.

Asked whether the ban on visits to Laos by foreign correspondents would be lifted, Prince Souvanna Phouma said, "Apply to the embassy." Then he paused and the line went dead.

Both the Premier and the King had planned to leave the country on separate trips within the last few weeks but the Pathet Lao apparently prevailed upon them not to go, wanting the presence of both in the country during their victory celebrations, apparently to provide an air of legitimacy.

The King and the Premier, who is also a member of the royal family, have powerful emotional appeal and the Pathet Lao seems to welcome their continued presence as long as they do not interfere with its political expansion.

The Pathet Lao has its own shadow government—the Lao Patriotic Front headed by Prince Souphanouvong, a half-brother of Souvanna Phouma,

and a real Pathet Lao leadership with headquarters in the remote northeastern Province of Samneua. It is that administration, headed by the secretary general of the central committee, Kaysone Phomvihane, that is believed to be the real Pathet Lao force and that may now emerge somewhat from its isolation.

Both the Vientiane radio and the Pathet Lao radio were continuing to broadcast recordings of the nearly four hours of speeches at the huge rally yes-

terday on the parade grounds at the That Luong Pagoda.

The principal speech was delivered by Phao Phimphachan, who as chairman of the "people's revolution administration of the Vientiane municipal area," is apparently the new "governor" of Vientiane.

He is said to be a member of the central committee of the Lao Patriotic Front—an organization that functions like the old National Liberation Front in South Vietnam, as distinct from the central committee of the Communist party. It is the Pathet Lao central committee that has the real power.

In his long speech, Mr. Phimphachan announced a 10-point "policy" that includes a pledge to "respect and uphold the throne," to support the coalition Government with Prince Souvanna Phouma as Premier and the Neo Lao Hak Xat, or Lao Patriotic Front, with Prince Souphanouvong as its president, and to "carry out the duty of making Laos a peaceful, independent, democratic, neutral, unified and prosperous country."

[According to a Reuters report from Vientiane, however, Mr. Phao Phimphachan said at a news conference later that with completion of the Pathet Lao take-over of local administration throughout the country, the coalition Government had lost its meaning.]

Mr. Phao Phimphachan declared in his speech: "We are determined to relieve all unsuitable, rotten and reactionary elements of administrative power and oppose and smash all acts of corruption, embezzlement and suppression of the people."

He said that the new administration would also "strive to

maintain good relations between Laos and Thailand."

However, the border between the two countries remained sealed. There has been mounting friction that has included conflicts between Mekong River patrol boats and expulsion by each country of diplomats of the other. The borders were sealed by each side during the period of the victory celebrations, which are expected to last three to five days.

Late in the ceremonies in Vientiane, Phoune Sipvaseuth, a Pathet Lao leader who is the Acting Deputy Premier and Foreign Minister, also spoke. According to the broadcast by the Pathet Lao radio, there were "shouts of support" from the crowd as he said: "We deem the seizure of power by the people in the Vientiane municipal area and in the province as a correct and just move."