

# Saigon Economy Strained, Refugees Say

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By FOX BUTTERFIELD

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Refugees coming out of South Vietnam say that economic conditions in Saigon are becoming increasingly difficult and that there is some continuing armed resistance to the Communists and a "resistance" radio that broadcasts daily.

The refugees, who escaped by fishing boat or left on legal flights, have also reported that some former South Vietnamese officers and officials taken away for re-education after the Communist victory last April have still not returned home. In several cases, refugees said, bodies of relatives sent for re-education have been returned in coffins after having been apparently killed while clearing minefields.

These reports coincide with official disclosures from Saigon in the last few weeks that the Communists, after a period of tolerating the old free-wheeling economy, are now moving more forcefully to establish their own type of society.

According to recent broad-

casts by the official Saigon radio, up to 100 businessmen have been arrested and their property has been confiscated, all banks except the official national bank have been closed, black-market filling stations have been put out of business, and Saigon's prostitutes, who had continued to ply their trade with North Vietnamese soldiers, are being re-educated.

The broadcasts charged that the arrested businessmen were "bourgeois monopolists" who were still "colluding with the

U.S. imperialists" by hoarding goods.

While accounts of the recent refugees from Vietnam may well be biased and could not be confirmed, the refugees themselves represent a fairly wide spectrum of Saigon under the old regime of Nguyen Van Thieu—a former soldier, a teenage student, a housewife, a businessman, an athletic instructor.

None of the refugees spoke of serious food shortages. But

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moset of those interviewed here said that there was widespread unemployment caused by the dissolution of the million-man army, the old government and the closing of many businesses.

The problem, the refugees said, was compounded in Saigon by the difficulty of withdrawing money from the banks. Before all private banks were shut this month, a depositor was permitted to withdraw only 10,000 piasters a month for every 100,000 piasters in his account, or about \$5 at current rates. Moreover, many refugees said, they often had to pay bribes to their neighborhood committee to get the proper withdrawal order.

"At first many people made up their minds to accept the Communists since we didn't have any choice," said a young housewife whose husband used to be a minor government clerk.

"But then the Communists turned out to be corrupt just like Thieu," she added.

The Communists' main effort to deal with the unemployment problem has been to provide food, money and housing materials to urban residents who resettle in the countryside. By official count, more than 200,000 of Saigon's two million residents have taken up the offer.

## Soldiers in Private Homes

Some refugees have reported that animosity between local people and the North Vietnamese has been increased by the practice of stationing two or more soldiers in many homes. According to two refugees from Cho Lon, the Chinese section of Saigon, the Communists began quartering troops in private homes in August. The

refugees said that the soldiers had brought their own food and were well behaved, but that there was natural friction.

Although it is often difficult in Saigon to separate rumor from fact, many Vietnamese and ethnic Chinese arriving in Hong Kong have reported stories of continued resistance to the Communists.

A 19-year-old woman, partly Chinese, who managed to get out on a French passport, said that she had been handed an anti-Communist propaganda leaflet wrapped around bread when she was shopping in the market. "I threw it away immediately, I was so scared," the soft-spoken woman said.

According to her account, the leaflet said, "We are not running dogs of the Americans, and we will not be their's either."

An athletic instructor who reached Hong Kong by fishing boat last week said that he had seen a similar leaflet on a wall in Bien Hoa, a community near Saigon made up largely of Catholic refugees from North Vietnam.

## Fighting Reported to West

Almost all the refugees reported hearing of continuing fighting, mainly in Tay Ninh Province west of Saigon and in the Mekong Delta. None had heard of an yin in the northern region of South Vietnam around Hue or Danang or in the Central Highlands.

But only one refugee said that he had actually heard firing—a teen-age Chinese student who was smuggled out of Vietnam on a fishing boat from the Mekong Delta. During a day's drive through the Delta, he said, he heard small-arms fire repeatedly and was frequently stopped by soldiers who checked to see if he was carrying arms. They were not interested in his travel papers, he said.

Another refugee, a 31-year-old former soldier of the South Vietnamese special Forces who also escaped by fishing boat, said that he had seen a terrorist on a motorbike toss a hand grenade into a crowded sidewalk cafe in Saigon, killing or wounding North Vietnamese, he estimated. On another occasion, he said, when he had gone to the nearby port of Vung Tau to look for a fishing boat to purchase, he had seen the bodies of three North Vietnamese who had been pulled during the night while they slept with prostitutes in the hotel where he stayed.

## Weakly Powered Radio

The former soldier, Vo Van Dinh, said that he had heard

of the resistance radio was broadcast early every morning, but he said that he had not listened to it himself. According to him, and other refugees, the weakly powered radio has called on Vietnamese to join the resistance in the "mountains and jungle to the west."

The threat from armed opponents is apparently not viewed as an immediate danger in Saigon. The authorities there recently reduced the curfew by four hours, so it now extends from 1 A.M. to 4 A.M.

Mr. Dinh reported that his brother, a former first lieutenant in the national police, had been taken away for re-education in June. His body, along with that of several friends who had also been police officers, was shipped home recently in a coffin, Mr. Dinh said.

The official explanation was that he had been "killed by a bomb in a field." Mr. Dinh believes that he was killed while helping clear minefields. There had been earlier reports that the Communists were using large numbers of former government officers to clear the thousands of mines and unexploded bombs in the Vietnamese countryside.