

# Foes of Pathet Lao Stage Protest in Laotian Capital

NYTimes

SEP 30 1975

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Special to The New York Times

VIENTIANE, Laos, Sept. 29—

Opponents of the Communist-led Pathet Lao conducted a protest demonstration today, apparently the first since the Pathet Lao seized power from the old coalition government last spring.

Sporadic gunfire was heard in downtown Vientiane this afternoon, but it was not clear whether it was related to the demonstration. Armed Pathet Lao patrols were increased in streets and along the banks of the Mekong River.

The demonstration, by 400 to 500 people, was held to

demand the release of a prominent politician arrested last night and to protest forced attendance at re-education classes held by the Pathet Lao. The demonstration was peaceful and there were no arrests.

The arrested politician was Bong Souvannavong, a former Minister of Education and a widely respected owner of several private schools. He also heads the small Lao National Union party.

Mr. Bong was taken from his home in the center of this city of 200,000 last night by Pathet Lao soldiers, according to witnesses.

Today's demonstration, led by two of Mr. Bong's daughters from the balcony of their home, surprised many Laotians and diplomats here, because there has been virtually no opposition to the Pathet Lao forces since they swept down on Vientiane last spring after the Communist victories in Cambodia and South Vietnam.

Since then they have moved gradually but inexorably to install themselves in power, demobilizing the old Royal Lao Army, sending its officers off to re-education seminars and stripping government officials of any real power.

The re-education seminars have been the most common feature of the new life in Vientiane, which has outwardly has changed little. From what can be learned about them they consist mostly of attacks on American involvement in Laos and on the "right wing reactionaries" who cooperated with the United States.

## All Must Attend

Everyone from cabinet ministers to businessmen and secretaries to farmers have been required to attend them, often till late at night. Some have obviously gone willingly, hoping to earn a place in the new order, but at the same time there has been an underlying resentment at the growing regimentation.

Today, for example, Mr. Bong's two daughters and other demonstrators held up a copy of the Laotian Constitution and the charter issued by the Pathet Lao, both of which guarantee freedom of speech and assembly. Since the Communists took over, however, the press here resembles that in any Communist country.

Today's demonstration was particularly significant because Mr. Bong and his family are not linked to the widely discredited rightists, most of whom have either fled to Thailand or been taken to the Pathet Lao headquarters in the mountains of northern Laos for special re-education programs. Mr.

Bong is considered a high-minded patriotic man and his son is reportedly a senior official in the Pathet Lao.