

PATHET LAO BEGAN TAKE-OVER IN MAY

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End of Vientiane Coalition
Caps Gradual Revolution—
Compromise Moves Fail
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HONG KONG, Dec. 3—The abolition today of the six-century-old Laotian monarchy and of the country's coalition Government represent the culmination of a trend that began last May when Communist-led Pathet Lao forces moved into Vientiane, the capital, virtually without opposition and began installing their own officials.

There had long been hope that despite the failure of compromise agreements elsewhere in Indochina, the coalition Government established in April 1974 as a result of cease-fire accords reached the previous year might work in Laos. For the drowsy, isolated country of three million people had a history of political tolerance. Throughout the Indochina war, for example, both the Pathet Lao and the North Vietnamese, who did the bulk of the real fighting on the Communist side in Laos, were allowed to keep missions in Vientiane.

But instead, the Pathet Lao soon made it clear that they were interested in full-scale revolution in the Buddhist country.

They took all officers of the old Royal Laotian Army off to the countryside for "re-education" courses; many have not yet returned. They organized demonstrations that forced the closing of the large United States aid mission, once described in some quarters as being more powerful than the Vientiane Government itself. And they ordered all Laotians to participate in political indoctrination sessions, often until late at night.

Neutralists Arrested

The press, which had only limited circulation in a nation of low literacy, was muzzled,

and critics, even former neutralist supporters of the Pathet Lao, were arrested and sent off to the Communists' remote mountain headquarters in Samneua in northwestern Laos near the North Vietnamese border.

By comparison with the events that followed the Communists' triumph in Cambodia last spring, when all the residents of Phnom Penh, the capital, were driven into the countryside, the Pathet Lao's program in some ways seemed moderate, in keeping the gentler nature of the Laotian people.

But for many Laotians, not accustomed to sharp changes and harsh political demands, the Pathet Lao actions created deep anxieties. "Vientiane has become a city of fear," a former taxi driver remarked there

earlier this fall.

As a result, tens of thousands of Laotians, including most of the country's few doctors, teachers and lawyers, fled across the Mekong River to neighboring Thailand.

In the last few days, apparently today's sweeping changes, even the son of the Prince Minister, Prince Souvanna Phouma, and a son and brother of King Savang Vatthana, sought refuge in Thailand. Prince Souvanna Phouma's son, Prince Panya Phouma, a graduate of the Harvard Business School, had to swim across the river.

No word on Souvanna Phouma

There was no immediate word here tonight on the fate on the King or of the Prime Minister, Prince Souvanna Phouma, a 74-year-old former neutralist politician who is a cousin of the King and a half brother of the titular head of the Pathet Lao, Prince Souphanouvong. There had been speculation in Laos for several months that the Pathet Lao would allow both the King and the prime Minister to go France and retire.

The King, a heavyset, rather stolid man, has been widely venerated by the Laotian people, most of whom are uneducated peasants living in isolated villages. Though he is reported to be personally anti-Communist, he has not played an active role in Laotian politics and has remained in the quiet royal capital, Luang Prabang.

The King is said by some associates to suffer from a speech defect attributed to long inbreeding in the royal family. His son, Crown Prince Vong Savang, reportedly may be named chairman of the new People's Republic of Laos.

King Savang Vatthana is an avid gardener and often has stayed at a large farm he has maintained near Luang Prabang.

Prime Minister Souvanna Phouma, head of the coalition regime that was abolished today, was a key figure throughout the years of American involvement in Laos from the mid-1950's, following the end of the French Indochina war.

In the earlier years, as a neutralist, he opposed United States aid and support for the right-wing Laotian generals. But in the late 1960's and early 1970's he became increasingly dependent on American support as the number of North Vietnamese troops fighting in Laos multiplied.