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New Laos Leaders In Diplomatic Debut

By H.D.S. Greenway
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VIENTIANE, Dec. 5—The new leadership of the People's Democratic Republic of Laos was formally presented at a diplomatic reception here tonight in the former royal residence near the banks of the Mekong River.

The new president, Prince Souphanouvong, addressed the assembled diplomats and Laotian dignitaries. Standing with him were the new prime minister, Kaysone Phoumvihan, and his deputy, Nouhak Phoumsavanh, who until tonight had not been seen outside their mountain headquarters for 17 and 13 years respectively.

Also standing beside the new president while he spoke was his half-brother, Prince Souvanna Phouma, the outgoing prime minister who long opposed the communists in the Laotian civil war and sought national reconciliation.

On Wednesday, the pro-Communist Pathet Lao announced the abolition of the Laotian monarchy and the dissolution of the 19-month-old coalition government headed by Souvanna Phouma which followed the cease fire of February, 1973.

Symbolic of the now complete communist takeover here was the appearance of Kaysone and Nouhak who, unlike the new president, remained behind in the forests

when Pathet Lao ministers came to Vientiane to form the short-lived coalition government.

As secretary-general of the Lao People's Party, Kaysone, along with his deputy, have long been considered to be among the most powerful of the mysterious leaders who control the pro-communist Pathet Lao movement. Compared to them, leaders such as Prince and now president Souphanouvong have always been considered figureheads.

The grounds of the former royal residence were lit up with colored lights tonight as diplomats and guests arrived. Inside, President

Souphanouvong posed for photographs on a sofa flanked by Kaysone and Souvanna Phouma. The former prime minister has no real position in the new government of the People's Republic but, as a gesture to unity, he is listed as a "counsellor of the government."

The North Vietnamese ambassador, Le Van Hien, responded to the new president's brief address in his role as the dean of the Vientiane diplomatic corps.

Afterwards, the president and the prime minister went down the line shaking hands with diplomats. Souphanouvong spent a long moment with the Russian ambassador and only a little less shaking hands with the

Chinese ambassador. But his handshake with the American charge d'affaires, Thomas J. Corcoran, was merely perfunctory.

The new national anthem was played, slightly off key, by a military band, and everywhere the red and blue flag with the white dot—the Pathet Lao flag that is now the national flag—could be seen.

The outgoing prime minister, Souvanna Phouma, who could have wished for a different ending to his long struggle, spotted some Western journalists he recognized and said, "So you have all arrived, like crows."

Compared to the coming to power of the communists in Saigon, and particularly, Phnom Penh, the final victory of the Pathet Lao which was celebrated here tonight has been a peaceful and a gradual affair. Except for shortages of fuel and supplies, due to Thailand's closing of the frontier because of a border clash last month, Vientiane seems quiet and peaceful.

But the arrival of leaders such as Kaysone and Nouhak may herald a speeding up of the social revolution that the communists intend to bring about in this backward and traditionalist land. Both leaders have close connections with Hanoi (Kaysone is half-Vietnamese) and both are dedicated and long-time communists.