

NEW LAOS RULERS ARE INTRODUCED

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Government Leaders Meet Diplomatic Corps at a Vientiane Reception

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By FOX BUTTERFIELD

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VIENTIANE, Laos, Dec. 5—

The new Communist Prime Minister of Laos appeared at an official reception in Vientiane tonight to introduce the new Laotian Government, formed two days ago. He had not been seen in public since 1958.

The Prime Minister, Kaysone Phomvihane is also secretary general of the avowedly Marxist-Leninist Laos People's Party, which controls the Pathet Lao. For years he had been reported to be directing the Pathet Lao from the Communists' remote mountain headquarters in the northwest, near the North Vietnamese border.

The new Government, named in a surprise move Wednesday, replaced the six-century-old Laotian monarchy and the coalition administration established by the Vientiane peace agreement in February 1973. Both were abolished, according to an official Pathet Lao communiqué, and a Democratic People's Republic of Laos was set up in their stead.

At tonight's reception, held in the former Royal Palace, the new president, Prince Souphanouvong, and the new First Deputy Prime Minister, Neuhak Phoumsavan, also appeared and were introduced to Vientiane's diplomatic corps.

American Envoy Greeted

The three new Laotian leaders shook hands politely with the American chargé d'affaires, Thomas J. Corcoran, as he stood in a reception line. Mr. Corcoran, who is the senior United States official in Laos in the absence of an ambassador, said later that he had not actually spoken with the Communist leaders.

The American Embassy here, which during the height of the war was accused of being more powerful than the Laos Government, is the only United States diplomatic mission still

in Indochina.

Prince Souphanouvong, a broadly built man with a moustache, frequently smiled and gestured with animation as he greeted the diplomats. He is the younger brother of the former Prime Minister of the old coalition government, Prince Souvanna Phouma.

Prince Souvanna Phouma, who was named an adviser to the new Government, stood by silently on the steps of the palace tonight as the ceremonies proceeded. Although he was the key figure in Laotian politics from the nineteen-fifties until earlier this year, few people tonight paused to speak with him. The former king, Savang Vatthana, has been named adviser to the new presi-

dent.

The Royal Palace, by the banks of the Mekong River, was decorated with Christmas tree lights and guarded by young Pathet Lao soldiers in oversized green uniforms.

The new Government was officially greeted on behalf of the diplomatic corps by the North Vietnamese Ambassador, Le Van Hien, who is dean of the diplomats here. North Vietnamese troops did much of the actual fighting in Laos and the Pathet Lao are thought to be heavily influenced by Hanoi.

Brief Speech by Mr. Hien

Mr. Hien, a short, elderly man who was one of the original signers of the Vietnamese declaration of independence in 1945, said in a brief speech that he was "very glad to be able to partake with the Lao people in this great joy of total victory, which has great international significance."

Prime Minister Kaysone Phomvihane, the man considered the real leader of the new Communist Government, did not speak tonight.

A short, stolid-looking man with a full shock of graying hair and a broad face, he was dressed in a shiny dark gray suit and narrow red tie. Little is known about his personal life, though he is believed to be about 55 years old, to have had a Vietnamese father and to have gone to school in Hanoi.

Until the events of the last two days, few Laotians had any idea who he was.

Mr. Neuhak Phoumsavan, the First Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister, who is also the second ranking leader of the Laos People's Party, had also not appeared in public in Laos in many years, though he attended a conference in Helsinki in the nineteen sixties.

Vientiane Is Quiet

Despite the abolition of the widely revered monarchy and the dissolution of the coalition government, Vientiane itself is quiet.

The most important problem here appears to be the severe shortage of gasoline and food, brought about because the border with Thailand has been closed following an attack on a Thai gunboat on the Mekong River.

The shortages, and concern over the political changes, have driven the black market rate for the Laotian currency, the kip, up from 3,000 to the dollar to over 6,000 in the last few days. The legal rate is 200 to the dollar.