

'Fact-Finding' in Saigon

Under belated pressure from the United States Embassy, the South Vietnamese Government has promised provisionally to abolish the inhuman "tiger cage" punishment cells uncovered by two unorthodox Congressional investigators, Representatives Augustus F. Hawkins of California, and William R. Anderson of Tennessee. The two Congressmen departed from an otherwise routine "fact-finding" junket to visit the prison and expose the "tiger cages" which had been described to them by a former prisoner.

It is essential that pressure be maintained on Saigon to eliminate the "tiger cells" forthwith. Americans who are deeply concerned about the treatment of their own prisoners in Hanoi cannot afford to allow a shadow of suspicion to fall on the treatment of Communist and other prisoners in South Vietnam.

This incident, damaging as it is, unfortunately is merely symptomatic of more serious difficulties that continue to arise from the close, and too often indiscriminating, American partnership with the Thieu regime. Instead of moving to correct conditions at Con Son Prison, as they should have done long ago. American authorities in Saigon who disperse funds and advice to the South Vietnamese penal system tried to hide the cells, then to discredit the criticism, and finally to disclaim the responsibility they share.

The 12-member investigating committee of which Representatives Hawkins and Anderson were members tried to suppress the unpleasant truths uncovered by its enterprising minority, thus betraying the essential purpose of its mission on behalf of Congress and the American people.

The behavior of both Administration officials and the majority of Congressmen in this sorry affair is painfully familiar and extends to matters of far greater consequence. There are a great many more unpleasant facts in South Vietnam that must be faced more firmly and honestly if this country is ever going to escape with some semblance of honor from the mess it has stumbled into in Southeast Asia.