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Vietnam Election A Total Travesty

THE ELECTION IN SOUTH VIETNAM has become a total travesty, a rigged job, and another disaster of democracy in Southeast Asia.

No wonder the United States government is embarrassed and President Nixon deeply concerned over the prospects that a no-choice ballot will face the voters when they go to the polls October 3 to choose a new president. All these voters will be able to do, evidently, is to rubber-stamp their endorsement of President Nguyen Van Thieu, with no more freedom to pick another candidate than if the voting had been arranged by the Hanoi Communists instead of by our "democratic" allies.

President Thieu planned things this way and he is probably supremely well satisfied. It is clear that he maneuvered shamelessly to have Marshal Ky disqualified for the election by order of the Supreme Court on August 5, then just as shamelessly he seems to have reordered a turnabout on Ky by this docile tribunal.

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TO DENOUNCE THE THIEU MANEUVER and to refuse to participate in its fraudulence, as he did yesterday, was one of the more respectable of Marshal Ky's acts in a career that, despite the prejudice of many towards him, offers a number of examples of admirable integrity.

So here are we Americans, lined up alongside of Nguyen Van Thieu, the political rigger, and without either Big Minh or Marshal Ky to point to as names that could be taken to legitimize this South Vietnamese election as free, unfettered and representative.

Why has the U.S. Embassy allowed itself to be outmaneuvered by President Thieu to the degree that it comes up painfully embarrassed? Ambassador Bunker's own maneuverings have visibly involved him in attempting to persuade General Minh to stay in the race. After Minh indignantly turned him down, Bunker is said to have sought last Friday to prevail on Thieu to change signals on the disqualification of Ky. The court was successfully manipulated to do that, but not Marshal Ky.

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THE UNITED STATES WENT to Vietnam to support the people's right to a freely chosen system of government. Several Presidents have said our goal is to leave South Vietnam in a democratic posture. If the word is not to be a mockery, that means access to the ballot for all political factions. The United States should have been working all along to encourage a multichoice election, including even the choice (however unthinkable that might be to the Embassy) of a Communist candidate to vote for.