

Hostility to Americans Growing in South Vietnam



At University of Hue in South Vietnam, police blot out "Americans" and substitute "Reds." Then it's students' turn.

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HUE, South Vietnam, Feb. 6 — The charred nameplate from a Ford truck was tacked above a neatly lettered sign saying, in Vietnamese, "Burn American cars to avenge the people."

Elsewhere in the room at the University of Hue, students had hung photographs of American soldiers and planes and slogans condemning American actions in Vietnam.

The exhibition of anti-American material, the centerpiece in a "cultural week" at the university, was one of the strongest statements so far in a growing climate of open South Vietnamese hostility to the American involvement here.

Embarrassed and Angry

Just how representative the exhibition is of South Vietnamese feelings is impossible to judge. But those who have studied the country carefully suspect that nowhere is the bitterness so great as in Hue, which has evolved as a center of extreme nationalism and radical politics.

There is widespread agreement that nearly all Vietnamese feel some degree of resentment toward the United States and its people—an attitude seemingly traceable to the deep Xenophobia bred through hundreds of years of foreign domination.

What began as aid from

the United States led to dependence, and all too many South Vietnamese, many of them embarrassed and angry, know that they are at the mercy of the President of the United States and Congress.

So far, nonetheless, there has been only a relative handful of assaults on Americans in Hue and other cities.

There were several days of street demonstrations in Hue against the United States toward the end of the summer after American soldiers killed two students—one in a traffic accident, the other by rifle fire as he allegedly attempted to steal some PX goods. Some of the student opposition to President Nguyen Van Thieu's one-man election campaign also had strong anti-American overtones.

Since the Oct. 3 election the whitewashed walls of the two-story, block-long building that houses the schools of sciences and letters has been plastered with anti-American slogans and caricatures of President Nixon. There has been a running paintbrush battle between the students and the police. The students paint something like "The people of Hue hate the American imperialists." With a few deft strokes policemen blot out "Americans" and substitute "Reds." At the weekend the student seemed to be slightly ahead.

For the moment officials in Hue do not appear to be prepared to force a confrontation with the students. They chose to ignore the exhibition, sponsored by the Hue Students Union, an influential group, even though it included some material critical of President Thieu and his troops as well as of the Americans.

Little Criticism of Vietcong

The principal objection to the Americans seemed to be that they were intruders in a Vietnamese problem. Some distaste for war was evident, but there was no criticism of the Vietcong in the exhibition and accompanying dramatic presentations or from most of the students interviewed.

Under a copy of a Pulitzer Prize-winning photograph showing a Vietnamese mother and her children struggling in flood waters up to their necks, the students had written, "Disaster by nature and disaster by Americans is the same."

Another shows a Vietcong soldier being dragged behind an American armored vehicle. The caption reads: "Millions of people will rise up to avenge you and burn this tank to ashes." "We consider the 32 million people living from the northern tip of Vietnam to the southern tip all to be Vietnamese," said Le Van Thuyen, chairman of the student union, speaking

through an interpreter. "What we do to each other is an internal affair. Even though we commit condemnable crimes, we can still forgive each other. But it is unforgivable for foreigners to commit crimes in our country."

Red Infiltration Suspected

Such nationalistic talk has been a mainstay of the Communist radio. Some American military men in Hue maintain that the university has been heavily infiltrated by the Communists, but that is difficult to prove.

One display that attracted considerable attention featured reproductions of a photo taken during the My Lai massacre. The students crowding around the grisly scene had followed the disclosures of the atrocity in Vietnamese newspapers.

"Extremely cruel," said a young man who is studying to be a teacher. "The Americans are extremely cruel." Then, in the kind of balanced reflection that seems rare among Hue students, the young man, who would not give his name, shook his head sadly. "I believe the Vietcong did the same thing," he said.

"That's why I feel very desperate for the Vietnamese people," he added, "because Vietnam has been used as a testing area for the two blocs."