

THIEU IS FORMING A POLITICAL PARTY

He Is Including Politicians
and Military Officers

By FOX BUTTERFIELD

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SAIGON, South Vietnam, March 9 — President Nguyen Van Thieu is working slowly and secretly to form a political party that will include not only old-line politicians but also large numbers of military officers, village leaders and most of the powerful province chiefs.

Informed political sources say that President Thieu's new party, named the Democracy party, will be made known to the public this summer and will compete in village and hamlet chief elections this August.

American officials here, who openly encouraged President Thieu in three abortive attempts to form a party in 1968 and 1969, have carefully avoided taking any stand this time. They are skeptical that he will succeed, but if he does they are concerned that the party will turn out to be a secret organization like the widely feared Can Lao party of the late President Ngo Dinh Diem.

The Can Lao party, which was run by Mr. Diem's brother, Ngo Dinh Nhu, forced Government officials and army officers to join it and was believed to have been responsible for the arrest of many opposition politicians.

Many Already Enrolled

According to some accounts, enrolled over 30 of 44 province chiefs, 400 of the 552 provincial councilors and scores of army officers, including the commander of the national police, Col. Nguyen Khac Binh.

Under the South Vietnamese Constitution it is illegal for army officers belong to a political party. But as one organizer of the Democracy party put it, "They can be sympathizers."

President Thieu has long appointed most high-ranking officers and the province chiefs, and the province chiefs in turn have influenced the appointment of district chiefs and the election of the village chiefs. It appears that the President may be trying to convert this informal system into a more coherent and effective political machine.

In a country with 23 legally recognized parties and over 50 other groups that call themselves political parties, many people doubt that President Thieu can form an effective and stable organization. Most parties have been little more than self-seeking groups that issue periodic pronouncements and resolutions.

The President's earlier attempts to form a party foundered when the leaders he planned to ally with demanded exorbitant sums of money or high office in exchange. The experience reportedly left Mr. Thieu, a life-long military officer, embittered against politicians.

Brother Is Organizer

The main organizers of the Democracy party are President Thieu's brother, Nguyen Van Khieu, the ambassador to Taiwan; Nguyen Duc Cung a member of the National Assembly from Danang, and Senator Nguyen Van Ngai.

Mr. Cung is said to be putting together a party chapter in northern Quangnam Province that will be used as a model for national organizations.

Senator Ngai, a former political science professor at Saigon University, asserted in an interview that the Democracy party would be an open, democratic party. "Mr. Thieu told me," the Senator said, pounding his fist on his thigh, "that he wants an effective anti-Communist mass organization and that he wants it to be open and democratic."

Because Mr. Ngai was jailed for six years under President Diem for his opposition to the Can Lao party, he says he does not want to see a return to that kind of politics. But he was vague about whether he was recruiting military officers and district and province chiefs.

'You Will See in Time'

"You will see in time," the youthful looking Senator said with a grin. Mr. Ngai also heads his own small splinter party, the Vietnam Democratic Force, which will merge with the new party.

Organizers of the Democracy party say it has not been difficult to recruit members. Few bureaucrats and army officers can probably afford to risk their jobs by refusing.

Since President Thieu's unopposed re-election last October there has been little public political activity in Saigon. The opposition political leaders like the retired General Duong Van Minh and former Vice President Nguyen Cao Ky have remained silent, temporarily overwhelmed by Mr. Thieu's victory.

Senator Ngai believes that one reason the Democracy party will succeed is that many Vietnamese now realize that with the American withdrawal they must close ranks.

"With the American troops here we could afford the luxury of quarreling among ourselves," he said. "But now many politicians sense that we must unite behind our leader. The crisis is upon us."