

Opposition Press In Saigon Muffled As 14 Papers Close

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SAIGON, South Vietnam, Sept. 15—South Vietnam's opposition press was virtually silenced today with the permanent closing of 14 daily newspapers and 15 other periodicals that failed to pay large bonds demanded by the Government of President Nguyen Van Thieu.

In a decree on Aug. 4, President Thieu ordered all South Vietnamese newspapers and many of the nation's other periodicals to post bonds equivalent to \$47,000 each. The deadline passed today. In a speech, Mr. Thieu had made it plain that his intention was to drive many of the publications out of business and it was clear today that the plan had succeeded.

The amount of money involved proved too great for many of the publications, which operated on very small budgets. The Government demanded the bonds as guarantees against possible fines to be levied against publications that violated the press code.

Several of the newspapers

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that closed were politically neutral. They had small circulations and failed for purely financial reasons. None of the papers involved was known to have a pro-Government position.

Under the new code, virtually any criticism of the Government or the armed forces is punishable by confiscation of issues, fines and prison terms for publishers, editors and reporters, and possible permanent closing.

President Thieu has described the press as one of the avenues by which Communism seeks to take over the country; recently, he also described the measure of democracy granted to South Vietnamese in the past as excessive.

The newspapers closed today included the Vietnam Guardian, one of Saigon's two English-language dailies, and Journal d'Extrême-Orient, the nation's only French daily and the oldest foreign-language publication in South Vietnam, dating from the French colonial era.

In all, 10 of Saigon's 25 Vietnamese-language dailies, three of its 14 Chinese-language dailies, one of its two English-language dailies and its only French-language daily were closed.

Also shut down were 15 out of 18 periodicals that had been ordered to pay bonds. Some 38 other publications dealing with sports, technology or other fields unrelated to politics or general news, were not affected.

Only one opposition daily, Dai Dan Toc, was able to pay its bond and survive the purge. Its publishers, two Opposition deputies, Ho Ngoc Nhuan and Vo Long Trieu, even announced that the paper was expanding its staff.

The main opposition dailies forced to close were Xay Dung, identified with North Vietnamese Catholic refugees; Dan Chu Moi, of the leftist opposition; Duoc Nha Nam, Opposition; Dien Tin and But Than, both of which opposed the Government and supported retired Gen. Duong Van Minh, a former candidate for President; and Dong Nai, whose publisher is

chairman of the Saigon Publishers Association.

Each of the dailies that closed had about 50 employees, nearly all of whom are now without jobs.

The Government also announced today that henceforth, servicemen might no longer work as journalists when off duty. The decree charged that servicemen working for local or foreign news organizations had "sometimes disseminated arguments harmful to the nation."

The Farewells Are Few

The President dispelled all hope that he might relax his hard line against free expression when he gave a speech on Aug. 11 in the coastal city of Quinhon. Mr. Thieu, characterizing earlier press laws as "too benign," said:

"When newsmen can be bribed, the Communists will bribe them. The Communists are now spending money buying newsmen, publishing newspapers, taking advantage of the disorderly and broad freedom and democracy in the South."

President Thieu did not explain why he apparently felt that the Communists would not be able to afford the \$47,000 bond money that he demanded from publications.

Editorial criticism of the new

press decrees has not been permitted by the Saigon censors. There have been few parting editorials.

A front-page editorial published today by the Dan Chu Moi, part of which was censored, said that this, the 730th issue of the paper, marked the end of a publication that had been confiscated 92 times and prosecuted 200 times. "We are feeling pain in the heart writing this letter of good-by to our readers, but we have no other choice," the newspaper said.

On Monday, the daily Dien Tin published its final editorial, which read, in part:

"Today we close. We want to write a protest, but we will not do it. The life and death of a newspaper is not something to protest while the war is still going on.

"We also want to write a complaint, but again we will not do it. A complaint would remain unheard amidst the sounds of gunfire, the cries and moans of millions of Vietnamese.

"Our country of wasted land is being engulfed in darkness and storm. Like a horse, Dien Tin has collapsed by the side of the road, without howling. It only wished to be pardoned by its master, Dien Tin's readership."