

Laos Pact: Reunion or Paralysis

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VIENTIANE, Laos, Sept. 14—The 6,000-word protocol signed today by the Pathet Lao and the Vientiane Government is a perfect recipe for national reconciliation—or for governmental paralysis.

The success or failure of this document, which is to institute a coalition government, will probably depend less on its much-honed language than on the attitudes of those who try—or fail to try—to make it work.

For the crucial ingredient of goodwill, both sides will have to look to Prince Souvanna Phouma, the durable 72-year-old neutralist who is Premier.

"I have always been isolated," he declared in a recent interview. "I have no partisans, no supporters. Those who want to support my policies are welcome, those who do not take the responsibility."

Paradoxically, Prince Souvanna Phouma's lack of a power base will be one of his strengths in the coalition, in which he will be Premier once again. Threatening no one, he will be able to appeal to both sides to search for common ground rather than perpetuate fears and suspicions. But the task ahead is enormous.

Portfolios Are Divided

For example, the protocol will establish, probably in October, a coalition Cabinet in which the Vientiane side holds three powerful portfolios (defense, interior and finance) and the Pathet Lao one prestigious one (foreign affairs). The rest are divided equally between the two sides, with two minor ones awarded to "personalities who work for peace, independence, neutrality and democracy"

All decisions "on important problems relating to questions of political orientation" are supposed to be unanimous.

But what are such questions? What will happen, say, when the Pathet Lao proposes recognition of the Vietcong's Provisional Revolutionary Government in South Vietnam? Or when the Vientiane side wants to expand an American aid mission?

Moreover, the protocol creates a National Consultative Political Council, in which the Pathet Lao holds several key positions. The council is "independent" and "equal" to the Government itself, according to the protocol. It is to advise the Cabinet on major issues and "collaborate" with it in organizing general elections—for which no date is given.

The protocol almost antici-

pates deadlocks between the two bodies when it declares, unhelpfully: "If, for whatever reason, the Provisional Government of National Union is not in agreement with the above-said recommendations, it must inform the National Political Consultative Council, giving clear, sufficient and suitable reasons."

According to several prominent Laotians, the immediate crunch may come in the military rather than the strictly political side of the accord.

Last-Minute Concessions

One of the major last-minute concessions that the rightists wrested from the Pathet Lao was a provision that troops stationed in Vientiane and the royal capital, Luang Prabang, withdraw "as rapidly as possible outside the urban perimeters of the two cities." A Cabinet minister remarked with a flicker of a smile that "as soon as possible" can mean a long time.

But if the rightists drag their feet on the "neutralization" of the two cities, which, theoretically, are to be patrolled by mixed police forces and garrisoned by equal numbers of troops from both sides, the whole atmosphere of the agreement may rapidly sour.

Similarly, if North Vietnam does not pare down the 60,000 troops it reportedly has in Laos to an acceptable figure, the rightists in the Government may begin to accuse the Pathet Lao and its powerful ally of bad faith.

The protocol requires all foreign troops and advisers to leave Laos within 60 days of the formation of the new government, but few people believe that the North Vietnamese intend to disappear.

And, of course, the attitude

of the Pathet Lao itself will be critical.

Some observers believe that there are at least two factions or tendencies in the Pathet Lao — the "nationalist" wing headed by Prince Souphanouvong, the titular leader, and a "hard" Communist wing led by Kaysone Phomvihane, head of the Pathet Lao's Marxist-Leninist Vanguard party.

An Encouraging Sign

If indeed there are two (or more) factions—and if they are inclined to different tactics and even strategies—this will obviously have an impact on the destiny of the coalition.

One encouraging sign is the cautiously optimistic attitude of the Vientiane rightists today, as contrasted with their bitter, alienated feelings after the signing of the February ceasefire, which they felt was a total sellout to the Pathet Lao.

The February accord was negotiated by a handful of men—and then presented to the rightists as a fait accompli. The new document, which will implement the February accord, bears at several points the rightists' wishes, or at least objections.

Led by Ngon Sananikone, a right-winger who is Minister of Public Works, the conservatives in the present Cabinet did succeed in squeezing concessions from the Pathet Lao. Consequently, Mr. Ngon Sananikone is congratulating himself instead of grumbling.

"We don't like this agreement," said a moderate rightist who is a Cabinet Member, "but we have to play the game. There is no other way."

If that attitude holds on both sides, there is still a chance that the theoretical nightmare signed today will turn into a dream come true.

CONGRESSMAN TELLS OF ASIAN DRUG OFFER

WASHINGTON, Sept. 14 (AP)—A New York Congressman reported yesterday that while in Bangkok last month he received and forwarded to United States officials an offer of a deal from Burmese guerilla leaders involving 400 tons of opium.

Under the reported offer, which the United States rejected, the guerillas would turn over the opium in exchange for \$13-million and American support in obtaining some independence for the remote Shan States of Burma.

Representative Lester L. Wolff, a Nassau County Democrat who is chairman of a House narcotics subcommittee, said in an interview that he had received the offer from a representative of the guerrillas

and had relayed it to United States narcotics agents and other officials with a suggestion that they study it.

Asked for comment yesterday, State Department officials said that it would be nice to think that there was a magic \$13-million solution to the opium-smuggling problem.

Swedish King 'Sinks Slowly'

HELSINGBORG, Sweden, Sept. 14 (Reuters)—The 90-year-old King Gustaf VI Adolf was said by his doctors tonight to be sinking slowly and peacefully towards death. The doctors said only the aged monarchs' strong heart was now prolonging his life after four major crises following a stomach operation last month. The latest bulletin tonight said the King now had a high fever and his kidneys had virtually ceased to function.