

How Viet Dissent Grew

New York Times

Saigon

The opposition to President Nguyen Van Thieu, which has just begun to take to the streets, did not materialize overnight. It has been building during the 21 months of disillusion, economic decline and war that have followed the signing of the Paris peace agreements.

Though Thieu is now being attacked for the corruption and repressiveness of his regime, he is, at bottom, being blamed for presiding

**A
News
Analysis**

over non-Communist South Vietnam at a time when things have gone from bad to very bad.

And, as they look to the future, many informed Vietnamese have concluded rightly or wrongly that whatever government holds power in Saigon will not much longer be able to afford Thieu's policy of uncompromising military confrontation with the Communists.

Over the years many South Vietnamese, perhaps most, have come to believe that the United States is the arbiter of their destiny.

When they perceive that their small nation is no longer the pivot of Washington's foreign policy, when they see the American Congress halve South Vietnam's military appropriation, when they hear Thieu denounce his closest ally for betrayal of a supposed pledge of support — they draw their own conclusions.

"Now the United States and others are talking about national reconciliation and concord," observed an anti-Communist country parish priest who led thousands of Roman Catholics out of North Vietnam 20 years ago. "These are the words of the times."

Again, in the perception of Vietnamese, the Nixon resignation was a stunning blow to Thieu. It did not matter that, objectively, President Ford was probably better able to help Saigon with what it needed most — money. Mr. Nixon had stood by Thieu for five years; their destinies were seen to be intertwined.

To be sure, the Americans have not abandoned Thieu and there is no evidence that they have been manipulating his opponents. On the contrary, Ambassador Graham Martin has pledged

firm support to the government that the South Vietnamese people "have freely chosen, in their struggle against the cruel North Vietnamese aggression."

There is a bit of fiction in all this, since Thieu, when re-elected in 1971, was running against no one, and not many Vietnamese believe that fresh presidential elections in October, 1975, will lead them out of the present

The corruption issue cuts to the heart of Thieu's problem. When the Americans were here, corruption was tolerable; the fat came off Uncle Sam, not the average Vietnamese.

Today, South Vietnam has

impasse.

But as long as this continues to be the actual as well as the official American position, Thieu is generally given a chance of serving the rest of his term.

The next 12 months promise to be turbulent.

Abroad, South Vietnam seems to have the image of a monolithic police state, but there is still an astonishing degree of violent criti-

cism of the government. A loose coalition of Catholics, Buddhists, journalists, veterans groups, lawyers associations and South Vietnam's largest labor union is having its innings.

The opposition is still without a demonstrable mass base, but so is Thieu, who must rely almost exclusively on the army and police for support.

Mon., Nov. 4, 1974 ★★

San Francisco Chronicle 15

the third or fourth highest rate of inflation in the world; life has become extremely difficult. The long-institutionalized web of cor-

ruption — most important positions are believed to have their price — affects the dwindling incomes of ordinary Vietnamese.

Continued From Page 1, Col. 2

from what he described as the political opportunists and "underground henchmen" of the Communists.

At the same time, Mr. Thieu made an appeal for responsible constructive criticism, and promised action this month to soften the restrictive press law and a decree that effectively makes his own Democracy party the only legal political organization in the country.

He said that attempts to oust him from power would, wittingly or unwittingly, play into the hands of the Communists. He vowed to enforce law and order "to the maximum" and warned the Communists not to believe that an advantage was now at hand for them.

With his speech, the President appeared to be signaling a toughening stance toward his opponents, who have been demonstrating for two months for an end to corruption, for social reforms and restoration of civil liberties. The demonstrations have been led by a Catholic anticorruption front and participants have included Buddhists, Opposition legislators and newsmen.

Structure Is Shuffled

pressure of his opponents, Mr. Thieu during the last 10 days has obtained the resignations of four Cabinet ministers, transferred three military commanders and dismissed 377 army officers on corruption charges.

During the last two months, the Government exercised a policy of restraint toward the demonstrations, but this was broken by the clashes in the outlying neighborhood of Saigon.

While the President vowed in his speech to enforce law and order, he also said he was reorganizing his Government "to better serve the people." He said he was giving priority to economic and social-welfare measures, to the eradication of corruption and the promoting of governmental efficiency. But

the moves against him continued.

One newspaper, the opposition daily Dien Tin, was seized by the Government following the violence in the Catholic neighborhood known as Tn Sa Chau. Other papers gave conspicuous display to the street fighting, which broke out when policemen surrounded a church to keep demonstrators from staging a march on downtown Saigon, and several hundred youths charged a barrier, throwing stones and pieces of wood.

The newspapers published prominent photographs of bloodied youths, a beaten legislator and a burning police van.

Several papers were obliged by the Ministry of Information to delete references to a punch thrown at the Rev. Tran Huu-hanh, the leader of the Catholic anticorruption front. The priest said he had been struck by a plainclothes policeman.

It is difficult to gauge the impact either of the resurgent Opposition activity or Mr. Thieu's speech on the three million people who live in Sai-

gon. "Thieu talked a lot this morning — Vietcong, Vietcong, Vietcong," commented the wife of a policeman. "It's not true."

"I know that Thieu would like to kill me," asserted Ho Ngoc Nhuon, a prominent Opposition deputy, half in jest. "But would the police?"

"Now it is not the police who are acting," he continued, "but thousands and thousands of goons in plainclothes. Does the police machinery still work? That is the problem—Thieu and for us."

The use of plainclothes men, some of whom with only perfunctory police training, has become a conspicuous feature of the Government's effort to contain the Opposition. Many Opposition leaders are shadowed intensively; a Catholic priest was reportedly followed by three plainclothes men into a theatre where a Charlie Chaplin film was playing.

There is a widespread belief here that, wherever their sympathies may truly lie, the masses of Saigon have not yet committed themselves either to Mr. Thieu or the opposition.