

# Dr. Dan, Successor to Thieu?

By Edward L. Block

DEKALB, III.—Broad opposition to President Nguyen Van Thieu's leadership has been mounting steadily.

Numerous charges of corruption, maladministration and political repression in South Vietnam have so threatened Mr. Thieu's political strength that his removal from office in the near future appears highly possible.

In the event that Mr. Thieu leaves, the United States preference would certainly be a crucial, if not deciding, factor in the selection of a successor.

One man mentioned is Dr. Phan Quang Dan, now Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Social Welfare and Land Development and Hamlet Building. He oversees the expenditure of most United States humanitarian aid funds provided to the South Vietnamese Government by the Agency for International Development.

Dr. Dan, a Harvard-trained physician-turned-politician, is one of the very few nonmilitary officials in the upper ranks of Saigon's ruling oligarchy. Only three years ago, he was a relatively unknown and largely powerless minister of state without portfolio. It is no secret in Saigon that Dr. Dan has considerably increased his bureaucratic domain, and thus his political influence, as a result of public-relations activities guided by high United States officials in Saigon.

Since Dr. Dan has taken over the program, United States aid for refugee relief and rehabilitation has jumped from less than \$10 million in the 1972 fiscal year to a proposed \$116.5 million in the current fiscal year.

Dr. Dan's ability to attract such significant amounts of financial backing at a time of strong Congressional

pressure to reduce the American commitment in Indochina may well overcome his disadvantage as a civilian in a military-dominated dictatorship.

In heading the refugee program, Dr. Dan has been aggressive, energetic, politically astute, a strong leader, and a capable diplomat who is highly regarded by the foreign community in Saigon.

Nevertheless, the refugee program has suffered from severe administrative difficulties under Dr. Dan's direction. He has run it almost as a one-man operation, keeping important data and information to himself, and rarely delegating significant responsibility to his subordinates. Among the results have been inadequate planning, long delays, lack of coordination and poor logistical services.

Despite his reputation for honesty, Dr. Dan has had little success in controlling the expenditure of millions of dollars provided by the Agency for International Development. Resettlement funds have been spent for unauthorized purposes, and accounting procedures have appeared to disintegrate once funds have been released to the provinces.

Dr. Dan's greatest weakness arises from his identification with policies that have totally disregarded the refugees' safety, needs, and welfare. He has reduced refugee rolls in camps by relocating large numbers of refugees to concentrated settlements with inadequate facilities and poor land that is insufficient to maintain even a subsistence income.

Far worse is the cold-blooded policy of settling refugees in contested areas as a means of establishing, or re-establishing, Saigon military control—in effect using "resettled" refugees as Trojan horses—causing uncounted

casualties, hunger and malnutrition, and growing despair.

But this does not carry much weight with United States officials in Saigon. Many of them consider Dr. Dan a sophisticated and brilliant manager who succeeded in eliminating a major drain on the economy by clearing the camps of over 300,000 refugees in little more than a year. In fact, the figures have merely been juggled—the number of refugees remains the same whether they are in or out of camps.

Judging his record in this light, Dr. Phan Quang Dan, as president, would mean more of the same for the unfortunate people of South Vietnam. Only the "cosmetics" might be improved when A.I.D. officials have to go before Congress to request additional millions for South Vietnam.

*Edward L. Block, a former official of the Agency for International Development, was adviser to the office of land development and hamlet building in South Vietnam in 1972-73.*