

Thieu Presses Formation Of a New Political Party

**Plans a 100,000-Member Mass Group to
Compete With Communists During
the Period After a Cease-Fire**

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By FOX BUTTERFIELD

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SAIGON, South Vietnam, Nov. 17 — President Nguyen Van Thieu and his top aides are rushing to complete the organization of a new mass political party, with membership of 100,000 that Mr. Thieu hopes will enable him to compete effectively with the Communists under a cease-fire.

The new organization, to be called the Democracy party, includes dozens of generals, almost all of South Vietnam's powerful province and district chiefs, and tens of thousands of village and hamlet officials, well informed South Vietnamese sources say.

In addition, four or five of Saigon's normally fractious political parties are reportedly preparing to merge with the new party.

But many South Vietnamese political observers here believe

the Democracy party, like three earlier attempts by Mr. Thieu to form a party, will prove at best a hollow success. For, according to many local officials who have joined the new party, they did so only after receiving orders from district or province headquarters to sign membership applications.

"The Democracy party is like a six-egg omelette—too big to be any good," said one disgruntled official who lost his job recently when he refused to force his subordinates to join.

"President Thieu had the right idea," he said. "We need a mass party to compete with the Communists—but a party of the people, not of army officers and bureaucrats."

"They don't have any real

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motivation except to advance their careers, and the people are still ignored," he said, shaking his head.

Mr. Thieu originally began organizing the Democracy party as early as last year and had intended to announce it this summer, organizers say. But the enemy's spring offensive intervened.

It has long been one of Mr. Thieu's pet projects to create an effective political party that would solidify his control over South Vietnam's sprawling military and governmental bureaucracies, the sources say.

Fourth Try by Thieu

Three earlier attempts by Mr. Thieu to form a party, in 1968 and 1969, foundered when the leaders he planned to ally with demanded exorbitant sums of money and high office in exchange. South Vietnam's political history, in fact, is littered with the wrecks of parties undone by the country's divisive traditions.

But with a peace settlement now apparently imminent, Mr.

Thieu is said to have given instructions to finish organizing the party as quickly as possible.

The President's chief adviser, Hoang Duc Nha; his political aide, Nguyen Van Ngan, and the Democracy party's most energetic organizer, Senator Nguyen Van Ngai have reportedly had lengthy daily meetings in the secluded Independence Palace for over a month to discuss how to operate under a cease-fire.

Visit by District Chief

Senator Ngai, a smooth, articulate professional politician who spent six years in jail during the regime of Ngo Dinh Diem, confirmed estimates of other politicians that the new party already had over 100,000 members. He added that its formation would be announced soon at a national convention.

Senator Ngai's own small party, the Vietnam Democratic Force, will soon merge with the new party, he said.

But he denied the reports that local officials have been forced to join the new party. "We want a dedicated and truly Democratic party," he insisted, "and membership is on a purely voluntary basis."

Hamlet and village officials

in Long An Province, among others, dispute the senator's view.

"The district chief came down here the other day and called all the hamlet and village workers to the school house," a village chief in Rach Kien district of Longan Province, south of Saigon, recalled. "He explained to us that President Thieu wanted to form the Democracy party, and he passed around application forms advising us to join."

"So we did what we had to," he said, "and now they have the application forms back in Saigon."

Local officials throughout South Vietnam, who include hamlet and village chiefs as well as their administrative councils, or about 20 officials for each village, have fallen under intense pressure from the district and province chiefs since they lost their elective status in a special presidential decree last August.

All of them except the village chiefs are no appointed, and the village chiefs are completely dependent on their district chiefs for financial and military support.

According to Senator Ngai, the Democracy party has prepared a platform, a manifesto and an indoctrination course. It also has a party flag, which for reasons no one seems able to explain, is a red star on a yellow background.

The makes it confusingly similar to the North Vietnamese flag, a yellow star on a red background.