

Thieu Moves to Control Senate by Next Election

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SAIGON, Jan. 5—President Thieu is moving swiftly to ensure that his supporters will win control of the South Vietnamese Senate in elections scheduled for next August.

If he succeeds, as many analysts here believe he will, it will enable him to dominate the only branch of the government that still maintains any semblance of independence.

Perhaps more important, however, is that Thieu's latest maneuvers reinforce his position that South Vietnam's existing governmental framework, as well as his own administration will be in place for some time to come, regardless of what happens in Paris.

The official view at the highest levels of the U.S. mission here is that Thieu is prepared to make political concessions to the left after a cease-fire.

As one authoritative U.S. source summarized this belief:

"Thieu has to move to the left, there's no room on the right. He knows he's going to have these characters from the National Liberation Front running around, holding press conferences and talking about corrupt province chiefs. There's no way he's going to be able to shut them up. He'll have to broaden the base of his government to deal with it."

Sources close to Thieu say the president recognizes that a peace accord along the lines worked out by the United States and North Vietnam and States and North Vietnam will create a legalized Communist presence in South Vietnam and force Saigon to negotiate with its representatives.

Expands Control

Thieu's proposal that the mountain resort town of Dalat be the site of the anticipated meetings was taken here as an attempt to minimize their importance and limit the NLF's access to the press and public.

Beyond his grudging acceptance of an agreement that would legitimize the NFL, however, Thieu has shown no inclination to make any concessions that would change South Vietnam's form of government or loosen his own grip on the machinery.

In the three months since a cease-fire became a serious possibility, he has expanded his political and military control over the country and he continues to avoid consultation—let alone partnership—with his non-Communist opposition.

Thieu's latest step is the preparation of a bill that would set the ground rules for the 1973 Senate elections. South Vietnam's constitution requires that the rules for each election—how the ballots will be arranged, how many slates will be on it, how much money the candidates will have to post as a guarantee of their serious intent—be set by the National Assembly.

On Monday the Lower House, which Thieu controls, is scheduled to begin debate on the proposed bill submitted by the palace to set the procedures for 1973.

If enacted unchanged, it would give Thieu's new Democracy Party a clear and perhaps decisive edge long before the actual balloting.

No Ad Hoc Slates

Thirty-one of the 60 seats in the Senate are up this year. Senators are elected at large, but as members of slates rather than as individuals. In 1970, for example, voters were asked to select any three slates of 10 members each from among 16 slates on the ballot.

Many of the slates were ad hoc groupings, formed for the purpose of running in the election. A group of Buddhists who represent Thieu's most effective parliamentary opposition was one of the three slates elected.

Under Thieu's new political party law, imposed by decree last week, no such arrangements are permitted this year. Only political parties which

meet stiff new requirements for legal status before the election are to be allowed to put forward slates of candidates.

The palace's election bill for this year is expected to provide that the 31 senators will be chosen in two groups, rather than three. This means that any party wishing to contest the election—and those parties that do not are to be abolished—must find at least 15 candidates who are party members of sufficient stature and wealth to run for the Senate. This is no small task in a country where regional and religious groupings, rather than political parties, have dominated electoral politics in the past.

Two Slates for Thieu

It is taken for granted that Thieu's Democracy Party, which is recruiting zealously all over the country and is backed by palace money, will field two full slates, or 31 candidates, and use its nationwide organization to promote their candidacy.

It is questionable whether any other party will be able to meet the requirements and find the candidates to field a slate.

One of Thieu's stated objectives in the political party law was to persuade some of the existing parties and factions to merge. The proposed election bill makes it likely, in the view of Vietnamese sources, that some existing parties will unite into new organizations that meet the legal requirements of membership and number of chapters, and that some religious or regional organizations will form themselves into parties so they can run in the elections.

This is a goal of South Vietnam's constitution, which calls for the creation of a two-party system, and an old and forlorn hope among South Vietnamese politicians, who are aware that the country's political forces are so fragmented as to be ineffective.

Catholic Bloc Potential

One potentially significant opposition alliance could emerge from meetings taking place this week in Saigon among representatives of vari-

ous Catholic factions.

Sources in the Catholic political leadership said that three groups—northern Catholics who came South in 1954, southern Catholics and followers of the late President Ngo Dinh Diem—are taking part in the talks and have agreed in principle to join forces.

Vietnamese sources said the country's Catholic hierarchy is supporting the idea of a unified Catholic political bloc, and that steps to unite the three groups into a formal party could be taken soon.

A likely leader of the Catholic bloc is the incumbent president of the Senate Nguyen Van Huyen, who has opposed some of Thieu's political methods but has supported him on the essential questions of Communist political activity and North Vietnamese troop withdrawal.