

## VIETNAM TOWN SEES

# Political Strife Continuing

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MOCHOA, Jan. 16—The great decisions of international policy are being made far from here, but it is in hundreds of dusty towns like Mochoa that the true judgment on the future of Vietnam will probably be rendered.

From the perspective of this small, out-of-the-way capital of Kientuong Province in the Mekong Delta at least one conclusion already seems clear: the long years of war have merely set the stage for the same political struggle between Nationalists and Communists that led to the fighting in the first place.

"We hear so much about a cease-fire," one prominent local businessman, an anti-Communist of long standing said today, "but it seems odd to us because we don't see where any of the Vietnamese problems have been solved."

"Maybe there is all the talk," he said, "because the Americans have grown weary and put pressure on us to stop the hostilities."

The hostilities will doubtless end soon, but the fighting in Mochoa has proved little if anything about which side will eventually gain the upper hand. Ten years ago, at the end of 1962, the first large unit battle of the second Indochina war took place nearby at Appac. The South Vietnamese were outfought by a smaller Vietcong force.

## Adviser's View

The communists have mounted no assaults of any size lately, but an American adviser, one of the few remaining here, estimated that if the government militia were withdrawn, every one of the 61 hamlets in Kientuong Province would "go down the tube."

Kientuong is a sparsely populated province—only about 50,000 people—in the northern delta on the Cambodian border. It has a routine reputation for nastiness, is poorer than many provinces, better off than others and has a sizable minority of Catholics among other political and religious groups. It is, in so far as such a thing exists at all, fairly typical.

The earnest but bored officers on the American advi-

sory team show little interest in Mochoa's political complexities, but their harsh military judgment reflects an awareness that the Saigon government has failed to gain the allegiance of the people so crucial to ultimate success.

There is, on the other hand, no reliable measure of Communist popularity either. Still, a day of interviews with local notables—provincial officials, the priest, leader of small opposition political parties—found all in agreement that the Communists have both the strength and the will to carry on.

"There is no doubt they will violate the cease-fire," said the chairman of the province council, and we must be prepared to protect ourselves."

One respected Catholic leader, a Nationalist himself but an opponent of President Thieu's government, particularly pessimistic about what lies ahead. The past 10 years, he said, have brought some economic and military progress, but at the price of "social degradation."

## Charges Corruption

The Thieu government, he complained, is autocratic and corrupt.

He said that a number of members of his own party had left to join President Thieu's Democracy Party, now being organized, because they were afraid of losing their jobs if they didn't. Others less outspoken politicians would only smile knowingly when asked about such coercive tactics.

As for corruption, the Catholic leaders said that some persons had been arrested in Kientuong since last spring allegedly because of Vietcong ties. About half have been released, he said, and many have told him personally that their arrests were simply a form of extortion: to be released they had to pay sums as high as \$2,500.

Despite his objections to the government, the Catholic (along with every other politician available today) said he was concerned that the United States in its eagerness to get out of Vietnam will make vital concessions to the Communists.

"Don't sign anything that will hurt us," implored the proprietor of Mochoa's ice-making plant, head of the

province chapter of the Revolutionary Daiviet, a durable right-wing nationalist group. But in the next breath he was excoriating Thieu.

"What kind of democracy is it when people can't run for the Senate or the House?" He asked referring to a recent presidential decree that will prevent smaller parties from putting up candidates.

## Informal Meeting

The grumbling about an American sellout, dark Communist designs and Thieu's shortcomings came in an informal meeting of Mochoa's political "outs," who gathered for cognac and dried shrimp while a few hundred yards away, the province chief held a luncheon to inaugurate the Kientuong chapter of the Democracy Party.

For the occasion, the nondescript streets of the town were decorated with anti-Communist slogans and the party flag—the color the reverse of the North Vietnamese flag. The main speaker, an aide to Thieu, spoke of preparations for what he called "the upcoming new stage" in the battle with the Communists.

"Peace," he said, "does not mean we accept Communism, the allies can only help with material and money, but the real struggle is our own." The audience, a listless crowd of mainly civil servants, teachers and other quasi-government employes, applauded politely.

In tone, in manner and in substance the events today recalled another political party started by a Vietnamese president—the Can Lao of Ngo Dinh Diem.