

Princes Who Lead Laos Along Separate Paths

Souvanna Phouma

Odd and distinctly un-Laotian noises sounded in the Vientiane villa of Prince Souvanna Phouma yesterday: the popping of champagne corks. Yet it was both appropriate and predictable that the Laotian Premier, who is of the most august Indochinese lineage, should break out French wine to usher in the peace. After all, the prince is very much of a Frenchman in many of his tastes and habits; he is nothing if not debonair. And after heading his Government during a decade of intermittent crisis, he has a lot to celebrate.

**Men
in the
News**

One of his four children, Mrs. Moune Stieglitz, said in Washington yesterday: "I hope after all this struggling that he'll be able to stop and look after himself now."

Notions of noblesse oblige have loomed large in the prince's family for generations. A junior branch of the ruling dynasty, it has traditionally produced senior officials who served Laotian kings.

Souvanna Phouma (pronounced POO-ma) was born at Luang Prabang, the sleepy royal capital, on Oct. 7, 1901. His mother was Princess Thongsy and his father was Prince Boren Khong, an oft-married aristocrat. Prince Souvanna Phouma was one of five half brothers—another is Prince Souphanouvong, the perennial Pathet Lao chief.

At an early age Prince Souvanna Phouma was packed off for French-style schooling in Hanoi. Then he went to France where he received an engineer-architect's diploma from the University of Paris and another diploma in engineering from Grenoble University.

At the age of 30, he returned to Laos, which was then a French Protectorate, and began a 19-year career in the public works agency.

In Exile for 3 Years

After World War II ended, he joined with Prince Souphanouvong and another half-brother, Prince Pethsarath, in setting up a provisional government. After French troops moved back into Laos, he went into exile for three years until the country gained the status of an independent state within the French Union in 1949.

Then he began the long career at the highest levels of the Laotian Government. He has held many ministerial posts, including those of de-



The New York Times

A family tradition of public service.

fense, of posts and telecommunications, of planning and information. He has also served as President of the Council of Ministers and deputy premier.

He was also Premier several times, and he emerged as head of the coalition government that functioned after the international conference on Laos was held in 1961 and 1962.

But the coalition did not work, and the Laotian civil war sputtered on year after year, with the Prince still Premier—and still debonair.

Deft Tennis Player

Now, at the age of 71, he is in good health, smokes many large black cigars and plays a deft though conservative brand of tennis. He also plays poker with various Vientiane notables, including the United States Ambassador, G. McMurtrie Godley.

The Prince's office is in his residence, a white stucco villa that overlooks the muddy Mekong River with the Thai border on the opposite bank.

The Prince is a Buddhist, and he generally maintains the outward serenity that Buddhists prize. But some say he gets a little frazzled-looking before he takes his annual vacation in France.

The Prince is married to the former Aline-Claire, Allard, who is of French and Laotian ancestry. They have three children besides Mrs. Stieglitz, who is married to an official of the United States Information Agency, and five grandchildren.

Souphanouvong



Associated Press

Learned about Communism on docks in France.

A former dockworker who has read Lenin and Marx, Prince Souphanouvong, the perennial Pathet Lao leader, is not exactly a model prince. But then, even his princely antecedents are unorthodox by some accounts: he is said to be the child of an oft-married Laotian aristocrat, Prince Ouphat Bounkhong, and a court concubine.

"I must say, though, he has a certain charm," one noted Laotian aristocrat observed not long ago, and sympathetic visitors have found him serene and scholarly: a passionate reader, he is said to have literary tastes that range from Marxism-Leninism to Greek tragedy.

The Prince makes his headquarters at Sameua, the Pathet Lao capital, but he has been known to correspond with his elder half-brother, Prince Souvanna Phouma, the Premier of the Vientiane regime. Life in Samneua is relatively austere, and Prince Souphanouvong has had himself photographed in a cave in recent years to show how the Pathet Lao side bears up under aerial attack. But an American official said yesterday, somewhat testily, that the United States has not bombed the Samneua area "for years."

Photogenic Prince

Below ground or above, the Prince is photogenic, with his squarish face and his trim moustache. "He is good-humored, with a very strong personality, and very bright indeed," an old Laos hand reported yesterday, "and he likes to make jokes."

Yet the Prince's unorthodox life has had its share of hardship; one of his sons was reported to have been killed a few years ago as a result of rivalry within the Pathet Lao leadership.

The Prince himself is said to have been under strong challenge within the Pathet Lao ranks over the years, and some defectors have reported that he was an embattled champion of Laotian nationalism opposed by elements more friendly to North Vietnam.

Yet the Prince owed the start of his political career to the Vietnamese Communist leader, Ho Chi Minh. Not long after the end of World War II, it was Ho Chi Minh who provided the Prince with a letter of introduction to his

forces in Laos, and an armed escort of 50 men to help him get from Hanoi to Vientiane. Ironically, it had been an American general who arranged for the Prince then a 33-year old highway engineer, to meet the Vietnamese-Communist.

The Prince got his engineering degree in France after receiving his secondary education in Hanoi when it was under French rule.

After finishing his studies in France he worked for a year on the docks at Le Havre — and got to know French Communists.

When asked years later, whether he himself was a Communist he parried the question by saying, "What is a Communist? If being for schools, better health for the people, national independence, an end to corruption in government and opposition to imperialism is Communism, then I am a Communist."

In 1950, the Prince was at a secret meeting in Northern Laos at which the Pathet Lao organization was set up, and a decade later he was in the coalition government set up after the Geneva conference of 1961 was convened. But he fled Vientiane after that government broke up, and his activities have been shadowy since then.

The Prince married a Vietnamese beauty before the war, and is said to have had 11 children.