

# THIEU LAUNCHES DEMOCRACY PARTY

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His Political Organization Is  
Formally Inaugurated 2  
Days Before U.S. Trip

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SAIGON, South Vietnam, Thursday, March 29—Two days before departing on a trip to the United States, President Nguyen Van Thieu formally inaugurated a new political party yesterday in an effort to consolidate his control over South Vietnam.

The Democracy party, Mr. Thieu's organization, has a membership estimated at half a million and is one of only three parties to survive the Government's strict new law regulating political organization. Seventeen other parties including all Buddhist and leftist and most older nationalist groups, were officially dissolved under the law, which came into effect Tuesday.

In a busy day of politicking, Mr. Thieu also dedicated three monuments to be built in downtown Saigon to commemorate South Vietnamese, American and other allied soldiers who died in the war.

At the site of the Freedom Fighter Memorial in Freedom Square, Mr. Thieu said, "I am laying the cornerstone to this monument to express our people's gratefulness toward those allied countries who sent their sons here to help us fight against Communist aggression."

## Bunker and Weyand Present

Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker, Gen. Fredrick C. Weyand, commander of United States forces in Vietnam, and the Canadian and Indonesian delegates to the International Commission for Control and Supervision were present. The Polish and Hungarian delegates did not attend.

Speaking at the Democracy party's first national convention, Mr. Thieu said that its main objective would be to compete with the Communists in the national elections required under the Paris agreement and to "point out to the people the Communist danger."

The convention, which elected Mr. Thieu party chairman, was attended by about 1,000 delegates from throughout the country, many of them local government officials. It was held in the Rex Cinema, a mod-

ern concrete edifice in downtown Saigon, decorated with an enormous Democracy party flag.

The flag—a red star on a yellow background—is the reverse of the familiar North Vietnamese yellow star against a red background, causing many passing Vietnamese to gape in confusion.

## In Preparation a Year

Preparations for the formal establishment of the Democracy party have gone on for over a year, but Vietnamese saw significance in President Thieu's choosing to inaugurate the party on the eve of the final American military withdrawal from Vietnam and his own departure for a meeting with President Nixon.

Mr. Thieu has long been under pressure from the American Embassy to broaden his base of support, particularly now that he faces the prospect of elections with the Communists. While he has so far resisted the attempts to make him bring opposition figures into his Government, he has taken special interest in the organization of the Democracy party, apparently banking on it as a source of strength.

According to knowledgeable Vietnamese, organizers from the presidential palace have ordered the powerful province and district chiefs, who are appointed by Mr. Thieu, to enlist all local government officials and functionaries under them as party members. Lavish ral-

lies, complete with parades and banquets, have been held in nearly all provinces and cities.

Since many if not most of the party's members have apparently joined out of concern for their jobs, there has been some question about the party's real power to compete with the Communists.

## 3 Months to Meet Terms

Whatever its popular appeal, the Democracy party was given a major lift by the law governing political activity, which Mr. Thieu passed just before his emergency decree powers expired last December.

Under the law, which gave political groups three months to meet its requirements, all parties must have chapters in at least a quarter of South Vietnam's 2,130 villages, and each chapter must include 5 per cent of the registered voters in the area.

The law also stipulates that to avoid being dissolved a party must win at least 20 per cent of the 136 seats in the National Assembly and also win 20 per cent of the national vote cast for the Senate. Senators are elected at large.

The only other parties to survive were the Freedom party, consisting of several well-organized Roman Catholic groups, and the Democratic Socialist party, made up of the Workers-Farmers party and several small pro-Government groups.