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•The Case of Deputy Chau

President Nguyen Van Thieu of South Vietnam silenced another political foe last week under conditions that reflect discredit not only on the Saigon regime but also on the United States. Deputy Tran Ngoc Chau was sentenced to ten years of hard labor by a military court acting with questionable legality on charges that were of even more doubtful validity.

Mr. Chau had been dragged from his sanctuary in the National Assembly on the basis of a legislative petition that may have been fraudulently obtained and also unconstitutional. Several of the original petitioners subsequently withdrew their names. Leading members of the legislature have charged that in lifting Mr. Chau's legislative immunity the President "discredited

the National Assembly" and "tore up the Constitution."

The military court, the legitimacy of which is also in question, convicted the Deputy on charges arising out of admitted contacts with a convicted Communist agent, his brother, although these contacts were approved by top American officials in South Vietnam. Several of these officials have testified in the United States that they believe Chau to be a loyal, patriotic South Vietnamese and certainly not a Communist. But the American Mission in Vietnam failed to stand up in his defense.

The prosecution of Deputy Chau is only the latest incident in an intensified effort by President Thieu to suppress opposition to his regime and to intimidate those South Vietnamese who favor some kind of compromise settlement of the war. Washington's acquiescence in such acts of repression undermines the credibility of President Nixon's professed goal of achieving a negotiated peace in South Vietnam that will establish a government in Saigon representative of all of the people of South Vietnam.