

LETTER FROM INDO-CHINA

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FOUR months after the Vietnam cease-fire, hegemony over Indo-China is tipping more and more toward the Communist side. In Cambodia, before long, a "government of national union," which would include native Khmer Communists, and would have no choice but to accept the continuing presence of North Vietnamese troops, will probably evolve out of the current chaos. In Laos, a division of the country that would give the Communists full control over three-quarters of the territory and a third of the population, as well as an equal voice in the over-all government, should soon be agreed upon, while Hanoi's forces will continue to dominate the eastern border region along the Ho Chi Minh Trail. In South Vietnam, the prospects are for a long political struggle interspersed with military offensives by both the Communists and the Saigon government, but, whatever the outcome, the Communists are almost certain to retain their hold over the northern third of the country and over many of the regions that border Laos and Cambodia and front on the Gulf of Siam. In effect, what is emerging is a new political map of the Indo-China peninsula, consisting not of the previous four areas but of five: North Vietnam,

South Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, and a Communist-dominated central zone—a long, narrow stretch embracing eastern Laos, eastern Cambodia, and the northern and western portions of South Vietnam. The local governments that are formed in this zone, and eventually, perhaps, in the rest of Cambodia and Laos, will inevitably gravitate toward Hanoi, and, through Hanoi, toward the Soviet Union and, to a lesser extent, China; South Vietnam will find itself politically and militarily outflanked.

This is scarcely what four American Presidents—Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon—have fought and bargained for over the past two decades, nor is it what the American people, irrespective of their opposition to or bewilderment about the dirty and destructive war, have sought or foreseen. Certainly such an outcome of two Indo-China wars, with a third war quite possible, has not been worth the expenditure of between one and two million Vietnamese, Cambodian, and Laotian lives as well as more than fifty-five thousand American lives and approximately a hundred and fifty billion dollars. All this could have been avoided by the neutralization of Indo-China, perhaps even under some form of independent Communism akin to

that in Yugoslavia—a solution that could have been conceived and carried out nearly three decades ago if we had tried to strike a deal with Ho Chi Minh, as various people familiar with the area suggested at the time. Such neutralization would have avoided frightful misery and destruction. At present, it is doubtful whether any more rewarding form of "stability" will ultimately develop in Indo-China, and whether, as Prime Minister Lee Kuan-yew, of Singapore, and others have suggested, one by-product of the long, debilitating war has been time justifiably bought for creating stable independent states in the rest of Southeast Asia. Singapore and Indonesia—the latter with half of Southeast Asia's population—have in fact begun to prosper, and Malaysia has recovered from political and economic crises of a few years ago, but it is debatable whether the "containment" of Communism in Indo-China, so maladroitly managed by the United States, has had any truly positive influence in any of these results.

What is hardly debatable is that Indo-China remains a holy mess today, and that what President Nixon calls a "decent interval" for South Vietnam to organize itself and avoid going Communist has so far shown no sign either of being decent or of being more than an interval. Both sides have constantly and flagrantly violated the cease-fire agreement reached in Paris on January 23rd between Dr. Henry Kissinger and Le Duc Tho, and no matter how many more times the two men meet, as they have been doing in the past few days, to try to patch up the peace, events will proceed in their own fateful way. What has been described, in the odd lingo of the White House, as our "selective breaching" of the Paris agreements—it includes a resumption of reconnaissance flights over North Vietnam, the temporary cessation of mine-clearing operations in the harbors and rivers of that country, and two B-52 bombing operations over Laos—may yet result in further widespread heavy bombing. Nixon has insisted that bombing in Cambodia, where no peace agreement of any kind has yet been reached, will continue as long as the Cambodian government asks for it, and he has implied that a decision to renew bombing in North Vietnam will be based on the degree to which the North Vietnamese continue to violate the Paris agreements by sending large supplies of war matériel and fresh troops down the Ho Chi Minh Trail. Nevertheless, the





"I say the children have all left home now and you can move back in any time."

Getzelles, my eye! Woe to my miserable life. Murderer!" The last word Bessie uttered in Yiddish: "*Rutseach!*" She kicked the books, spat on them. "Where do we go now? God has punished me and taken away my reason. That witch bedazzled me with her sacred babble and phony love. A bandit, a racketeer, a gangster. I don't want to live anymore! Do you hear me or not?" Bessie moaned. "I want to die—this very minute." She clenched her fists and leaped at Jacob. Her red wig fell off and she stood with a bare skull from which only a few wisps of white hair hung down.

Something tore inside Jacob. "Be quiet. If we are going to die, let's die in a dignified way."

"There's nothing to live for. Everything is lost. Cursed be the day when I first saw your face and her face. She has made me a pauper. If you want to live, go to an old-age home."

"Bessie, I don't want to live."

"I'm going to the kitchen to turn on the gas."

"Yes, do so."

"Get up. I don't even have a cemetery plot. Let them throw me to the dogs."

Bessie ran over to the air-conditioning and turned it off. She grabbed the

cushions and the cover from the sofa, and ran toward the kitchen.

Jacob followed her. How strange: for the first time he felt a sort of love for this wild woman. In the kitchen Bessie shut the door, locked the windows, extinguished the pilot lights, and opened all the jets of the range. Jacob gaped at her. He didn't realize it but the fear of death had left him. He felt like one of those astral bodies he had read about—weightless, submissive, yielding to a power beyond his choice. Is this how one dies, he wondered. But he wasn't even curious. He was a child, and Bessie was putting him to sleep. She spread the sofa cover on the floor and threw down the cushions. "Let's not die on the hard tile."

Bessie helped Jacob lie down. She stretched out near him and kissed him. Her face was hot and wet. "If there is a God or whatever He is, we will soon know."

"There is nothing there," Jacob replied, baffled by his own words. The telephone rang in the corridor and Bessie started. "Who can it be? Never mind." The phone rang for a long while. Then it became silent.

Bessie embraced Jacob. She asked, "Shall I recite 'Hear O Israel'?"

And Jacob murmured, "Not necessary."

Those were his last words.

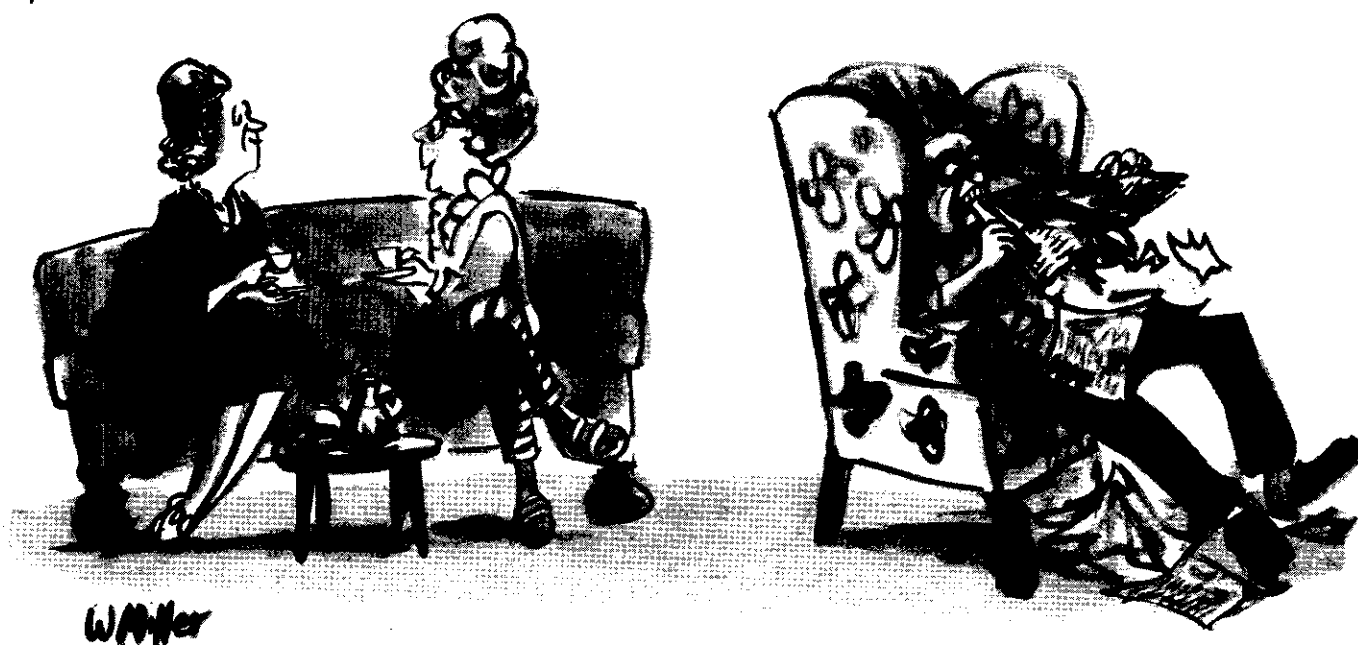
The next day he and Bessie were found dead. Months later, when Bessie's lawyers in New York were settling her estate, it came to light that she was still worth around four hundred thousand dollars, in addition to the properties that she had turned over to Phyllis and that the lawyers were trying to reclaim.

"She certainly did not die from want," said one of the attorneys, a little man with a pointed skull, pointed nose, pointed eyes. "Why didn't she leave a letter?" As he spoke, he began to sharpen a pencil that already had a long point. The other lawyer, a big fat man with yellow brows and a flabby double chin, pondered awhile and said, "I have read scores of letters from suicides, but none of them ever told the truth." —ISAAC BASHEVIS SINGER

(Translated, from the Yiddish, by the author and Ruth Schachner Finkel.)

About 65 per cent of the non-Communist world comes from one company, the International Nickel Company of Canada, Ltd.—*Burlington (Vt.) Free Press*.

How about that!



"Come July, it will have been a twenty-five-year honeymoon."

President's options are shrinking, and, no matter what is said publicly, the United States appears to be resigned to the indefinitely prolonged stay of at least some of the approximately two hundred and fifty thousand North Vietnamese troops now in South Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia—provided that, as one American official put it, off the record, they don't "over-violate." Whereas a month ago the President might not have hesitated to send American bombers and fighters from Thailand and Guam back over both North and South Vietnam, or to increase the bombing schedules over Laos and Cambodia, the Constitutional confrontation in Washington has assuredly given him more reason to take thought. On the other hand, being Nixon, and unpredictable, he could still decide to follow through on his warnings and bomb some more to enforce his impossible dream of an "honorable settlement." But more bombing will solve no more than it has solved throughout the war.

THOUGH bombing may be momentarily "saving" the Cambodian government from collapse, that unlucky country shows every sign of becoming, historically, almost as unfortunate an adventure as the Watergate affair for President Nixon, who began our large-scale involvement with the ill-conceived American-backed invasion in May, 1970. During my most recent visit to Phnom Penh, it was apparent that, of the various parts of the Indo-China puzzle, Cambodia at the moment is the most confused and con-

fusing. Over the past several months, the government forces have been subjected to increasingly severe Communist military pressure, and the reorganization of President Lon Nol's regime, following the April visit of General Alexander Haig, Nixon's personal envoy (now the White House chief of staff), is only the first, halting step in a belated effort to establish some order and obtain a cease-fire. It would be very difficult now to find a way of restoring Cambodia even to its status of four or five years ago, under Prince Norodom Sihanouk, whose overthrow by Lon Nol was a prelude to the 1970 invasion. Under Sihanouk—who may yet return from exile in Peking to resume a leadership role, if only for a time—the country was a supply base and haven for North Vietnamese and Vietcong troops, whose presence was sanctioned by a government trying to maintain a delicate balance between Communist and anti-Communist neighbors. Now whether such a schizoid nation can long avoid disintegrating further or going completely Communist is highly dubious.

Half of Cambodia's seven million people and two-thirds of its territory are under some form of Communist control or influence. The Khmer Communist insurgents and their North Vietnamese supporters, though they are far better organized and disciplined than the government's armed forces—estimated at a hundred and eighty thousand, only a relatively small proportion of whom are ready to fight at any given time—are by no means a unified force. Of a total of sixty Khmer in-

surgent battalions, made up of perhaps twenty thousand combat troops and nearly as many support elements—a possibly inflated figure, but one that reflects remarkable growth from three or four thousand three years ago—the predominant faction is under the general direction and supervision of some three or four thousand North Vietnamese and is led by three thousand Khmer cadres who have been trained in Hanoi over the past decade. The North Vietnamese frequently serve as both military and political officers, operate the heavy-weapon systems, and furnish commando units in support of the Khmer battalions. Despite reports to the contrary, several North Vietnamese regiments, including two not far from Phnom Penh, and a sapper battalion are still assigned to help the insurgents when necessary. Another twenty-five thousand or so North Vietnamese in eastern Cambodia are directing their entire attention toward preparing operations in South Vietnam. And among the Cambodians themselves, in addition to the Hanoi-inspired insurgents, there are some regarded as pro-Soviet and some who are pro-Sihanouk and some who belong to independent offshoots of the old Khmer Serei movement, which the Americans covertly supported against Sihanouk during part of the time he was in power. Following a secret visit by Sihanouk to Cambodia in March (he claims to have been in the country more than a month, but the best evidence indicates that he may have been there for a week or ten days, venturing no farther south than Stung Treng, near the Laos

border), the word has gone out to all insurgent forces to rally behind him. Getting them to do so may take a while, because Sihanouk has been absent from the scene for more than three years and because his alliance with Peking has alienated many of the insurgents, who are both anti-Chinese and anti-royalist.

Among the Cambodian insurgents, three names stand out—those of Khieu Samphan, who is Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of National Defense in Sihanouk's Peking-sponsored Royal Government of National Union of Cambodia, and two other officials of the underground government, Hou Yuon and Hu Nim. All three men were bitter

enemies of Sihanouk when he ruled in Phnom Penh, and in 1967 it was reported that all three had been executed on his orders. At that time, according to later stories, these men escaped to Peking after hiding in the Chinese Embassy in Phnom Penh. They are said to have returned to Cambodia secretly sometime in 1971 or 1972 to take charge of the underground movement in the jungles. Now Sihanouk, in Peking, has designated them his "government's" representatives in Cambodia. A Cambodian physician who is an old friend of the three men is said to have travelled into the jungle to discuss a possible truce with them, doing so with the knowledge of Hang Thun Hak, who was Lon Nol's Prime Minister at the time, and to have carried back to Phnom Penh the first of several letters to Hak from Hou Yuon, who is Minister of Interior in the rebel government. Hou Yuon, it appears, expressed willingness to negotiate but voiced considerable skepticism about the sincerity of the Lon Nol government. He is said to have maintained that any settlement, to be effective, would have to be guaranteed by the United States, the Soviet Union, and the People's Republic of China. One cannot help but wonder what the attitude of Hou Yuon and his two cohorts toward Sihanouk really is and whether they can wholeheartedly support a man who apparently once ordered them murdered. It is said that they and their insurgent forces favor neither an outright Communist regime for Cambodia nor some form of royalist Socialist government. (Sihanouk himself used to talk about a special form of Cambodian Socialism.)

Such conflicts only compound the difficulties faced by Lon Nol's new

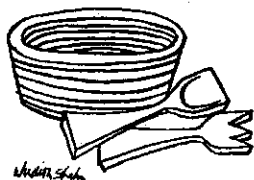
High Political Council, which took over in Phnom Penh at the end of April from a previous Cabinet, and consists of Lon Nol; his cohort in the coup against Sihanouk, Sirik Matak; Chen Heng, the former Chief of State and now the new Vice-President; and In Tam, the former head of the National Assembly (early in May, it recessed for six months) and now the Prime Minister. Lon Nol was joined in this setup by the three other men only when—at Washington's strong behest—the President's unpopular and dictatorial brother, General Lon Non, who commanded one of the country's four Army divisions and who became the behind-the-scenes power when Lon Nol suffered a severe

stroke two years ago, left the country. Lon Nol has now recovered about half his powers of speech and movement and has begun to visit troops again, but his popular support has waned; in an election last year, he only narrowly defeated In Tam. Lon Nol, who has never been a good administrator, is bound to have trouble getting the new council to function. (As President, he has only one vote but can cast another to break a tie.) It is an uneasy and mutually suspicious quartet, and the chances seem remote that it can curb the vast amount of corruption currently existing among Army officers, government officials, and businessmen; rally the demoralized and poorly coordinated soldiers (who get paid only irregularly, if at all); and, while doing all this, make effective contact with the various insurgent groups. The latest word is that Lon Nol plans a protracted trip to the United States for medical treatment, which will leave In Tam in a stronger position to deal with the opposing factions.

Even if one assumes that all this can be done, there remains the question of whether Sihanouk can or should be fitted back into the puzzle—whose pieces also include a number of other Cambodians now living in Peking. Of these, the one closest to Sihanouk is Ieng Sary, who is Hanoi's agent; Penn Nouth, a former Prime Minister, is considered acceptable by all sides as a negotiator, and he may eventually arrange with the new Phnom Penh regime—if it holds together—to have Sihanouk return in some capacity. Hanoi, in any event, remains the dominant influence in Cambodia, and, whatever arrangement may ultimately be reached by the diverse rebel elements and the government, the North Vietnamese will seek to assure the main-

tenance of their control in the eastern part of the country. And despite the Sino-Soviet differences elsewhere in Southeast Asia, Hanoi can expect the backing of both Moscow and Peking in this endeavor. The more independent-minded Khmer insurgents would undoubtedly be willing to make some sort of deal of their own if it would give them a strong voice in a coalition government. As for the North Vietnamese, they might go along with a truce arrangement that preserved their freedom of movement in the eastern parts of Cambodia adjoining Laos and South Vietnam—regarding this as preferable to their continuing to fight indefinitely, with the possibility of more American bombing, which the prospect of a full Communist takeover would make even more likely.

To any impartial observer, the B-52 bombing and the tactical air strikes mounted against Cambodia, mostly from the new Seventh Air Force base at Nakhon Phanom, in Thailand, can appear only as a cruel epilogue to the American participation in the whole messy conflict. It may be true, as Sihanouk recently said, that the bombing alone has saved the Lon Nol government from collapse during the past two months. The extent of our Phnom Penh Embassy's involvement in the attacks was disclosed in a staff report prepared by James G. Lowenstein and Richard M. Moose, of the Subcommittee on United States Security Agreements and Commitments Abroad of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Initially, for five frustrating days, the Embassy refused to cooperate with them, maintaining that it played only a minor role in the air operations. Then Lowenstein and Moose forced the issue by cabling Senator Stuart Symington, and the two staff members finally learned that the Embassy plays a key part in the aerial effort, aimed chiefly at the Khmer insurgents. Though Embassy officials deny that civilians have suffered unduly, they have admitted that the maps they are using are several years old, and so could not possibly allow adequate identification of new or relocated villages, inhabited by Cambodian peasants who had fled earlier bombings. The attacks have averaged about sixty B-52 sorties a day, and there has been a daily average of a hundred and eighty tactical sorties. The Embassy coordinates these attacks by acting as a communications-relay point, with American officers there using a radio-telephone system that links the Cambodian general staff, the Seventh Air Force, and both battlefield command-and-control planes and for-



ward air-control planes. The latter are directed by an area-control center in the Embassy in response to requests from the Cambodians or in accordance with tactical emergencies.

The Senate staff report concluded that "the United States had become far more deeply and directly involved than ever before in the conduct of the war in Cambodia, as well as in Cambodia's internal political affairs... [but] it was our impression that most Cambodians felt that it was now beyond the government's ability to do more than get out of the war, and that, indeed, they had no other choice." They qualified this, however, by adding that unless the Chinese and the Russians "consider it in their interest to take an active political role in bringing about a settlement, the war will probably continue as long as we are willing to defend from the air a Cambodian Army that does not seem to be able to defend itself on the ground." American officers privately acknowledge that we have done just about everything we can to help create a functioning Cambodian Army; one of them told me, "Cambodia's future survival depends entirely on its having good neighbors."

Despite the military outlook, it remains doubtful that the Communists want to capture Phnom Penh. Not only would American air attacks, if they continue, cause heavy casualties, but the Communists are probably not ready to administer the capital. Instead, the insurgents are doing all they can to cut off the city, which relies for its survival on large truck convoys that come in over the only major road from the port of Kompong Som, and on Mekong River convoys that arrive two or three times a month after running a gantlet of Communist shore fire. The insurgents seem more intent on capturing one or two provincial capitals—most notably Takeo, to the south of Phnom Penh—and on further disrupting and demoralizing the badly battered Cambodian forces.

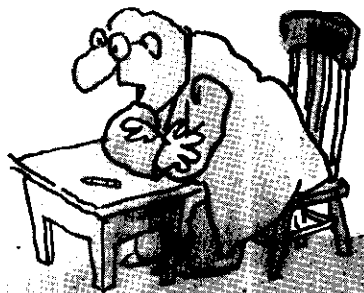
If there should be outbreaks of labor strife or demonstrations by unpaid soldiers, rebellious students, or mobs of unemployed within Phnom Penh, the government might collapse

quickly. However, although more than a hundred opponents of the government have been arrested and some three hundred have gone underground or fled to the insurgent areas, there was little or no sense of panic when I was in Phnom Penh. A gasoline shortage was creating long lines of cars at pumps, and there were almost daily electricity failures, but enough rice was on hand to feed the populace for two months, and restaurants were serving the usual good food and wine. The annual national deficit is running to about half the total budget, despite American and international-consortium aid, but the government was simply making up the difference by printing more money.

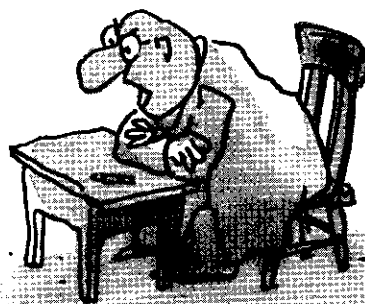
All in all, the Cambodians seem even more resigned and fatalistic than

the Vietnamese. At the five-story Cambodiana Hotel, which Sihanouk built as a luxury establishment but which was never opened to the public, three thousand refugees have occupied the ground floor for many months, settling down in what were supposed to have been a sumptuous lobby and ballroom but are now places of bare, cracked stone and ramshackle enclosures rigged up of blankets and cardboard. These refugees are a lot better off than people in the countryside, where the bombers have forced villagers to move constantly from one place to another and have caused uncounted deaths and injuries. Phnom Penh seemed an odd sort of besieged sanctuary. As always, foreigners were gossiping around the swimming pool of the Hotel Le Phnom (formerly the





"I think,"



"therefore I am."

Royal), and cyclo boys were offering "nice girls," the early curfew notwithstanding. Indeed, there was a general atmosphere of business-as-usual—and, at times, a macabre carnival spirit, as when, after the Communists moved into several villages just across the Mekong from the city, many people turned out to watch American fighter-bombers dive and strafe. By the time the planes arrived, the insurgents, it was reported, were dug deep into bunkers or had hidden in the marshes beyond, and it was hard to tell whether the spectators, eating ice cream, were cheering the acrobatics of the pilots or the daring of the revolutionaries.

THE Nixon Administration's belated awareness that peace throughout Indo-China is not readily obtainable was expressed by Kissinger at a news briefing in Washington on May 3rd, when he acknowledged that "the day is very far off" when the parties to the conflict will live "with a consciousness of reconciliation," let alone in "tranquillity" or "harmony." If Cambodia is the most seriously threatened country at the moment, South Vietnam is locked in an even more complicated political, military, and social struggle, which shows every indication of continuing indefinitely. The cease-fire mechanism established under the Paris agreements of last January has been thoroughly paralyzed by the unwillingness of both the Communists and the government to compromise on any basic issue other than prisoner exchanges, which themselves are still far from complete and are the subject of constant recriminatory debates. It appears that neither side is prepared to take substantive measures to set in motion a rational or feasible election procedure. In fact, very little has been done to create the basic conditions for reconciliation—such as restoration of "democratic liberties" and "freedom of move-

ment," which are two of the things called for in the agreements, and which should logically precede a political contest. On the contrary, though the mere presence of the largely ineffective International Commission of Control and Supervision, composed of officers from Canada, Indonesia, Hungary, and Poland, has helped reduce the level of military activity since the frantic early days of the post-cease-fire period, both sides give clear evidence of preparing for another round of serious fighting either this summer or this fall. It seems doubtful whether either Canada or Indonesia will remain on the commission very long, since the hope of "controlling" or "supervising" the two hostile sides seems vain; no one knows who might take their place if they leave. Meanwhile, the Poles and the Hungarians privately admit that their principal function is not to make the I.C.C.S. work but to support the interests of the Provisional Revolutionary Government and of North Vietnam and the Soviet Union.

The North Vietnamese, though they have not yet figured out how to deal with their serious postwar economic problems and simultaneously carry on their revolutionary ambitions in South Vietnam, have violated the peace agreement more blatantly than the United States has. Since the cease-fire, they have sent large amounts of modern war matériel, mostly Russian-made, across the Ho Chi Minh Trail or directly across the Demilitarized Zone or along the South Vietnamese coast. Of a total of fifty thousand fresh troops dispatched to the South since the first of the year, about thirty thousand are said to have arrived after the signing of the Paris accords. The trip down the Trail by truck now takes only a month, compared to three months in the years when most of it had to be made on foot; the traffic has recently dwindled, though. Mainly, some "special-pur-

pose" political, technical, and administrative cadres are still trickling through, to supplement some three thousand who have arrived since the first of the year and whose assignment is to bolster the Vietcong leadership, which suffered heavy losses during the period of severe fighting. At least three hundred and fifty armored vehicles, mostly heavy Russian tanks, have come south since the cease-fire, and so have more than three hundred pieces of field artillery, including powerful 130-mm. Russian guns, which have a range of seventeen miles and are now emplaced only forty or fifty miles from Saigon, and a hundred and fifty 57-mm. anti-aircraft guns, also positioned in what Saigon designates Military Region III—the area surrounding the capital.

These are the armaments and men whose dispatch President Nixon has denounced as gross violations of the agreement. Hanoi has been totally silent about them, in keeping with its long-standing policy of refusing to admit that it maintains any presence in the South, but it has indirectly defended itself by countercharging that the Americans have sent half a dozen ships carrying arms and ammunition to the port of Danang, in the northern part of South Vietnam, since the cease-fire, even though no agreement has been reached on an exact interpretation of the controversial cease-fire clause allowing replacement by each side of war matériel that has been lost or worn out, on a "piece-for-piece" basis through three "points of entry," one of them being Danang. The Americans have replied to the accusation regarding Danang by asserting that, in the absence of implementation of the accords, they have kept complete records for the I.C.C.S. to go over whenever commission teams may be sent to the points of entry.

Privately, the North Vietnamese say that they have had no choice but to re-



"I think."

spond in kind to the huge American shipments of arms to South Vietnam in the six or eight weeks preceding the cease-fire—a total of two billion dollars' worth—and that, lacking such equipment as the huge American C-5 cargo planes that brought most of these shipments in, they have had to bring in new matériel by slower, more conventional means. However one regards these arguments, there is no disputing the fact that both sides are getting ready for more action.

The North Vietnamese now have an estimated hundred and twenty-five thousand soldiers in South Vietnam, and this force, plus the twenty-five thousand soldiers operating against South Vietnam from eastern Cambodia, twenty-five thousand main-force Vietcong elements, fifty-six thousand rear-service North Vietnamese and Vietcong supply troops, nearly forty thousand regional Vietcong guerrillas, and about a hundred thousand Vietcong irregulars, gives the Communists a total of nearly three hundred and seventy-five thousand armed men in South Vietnam. Political cadres come to approximately fifty thousand more. The Saigon government still has roughly a million men under arms, including regular and territorial units, plus perhaps three or four hundred thousand poorly armed members of the local self-defense forces. (Claims of a million armed self-defense men in the hamlets and villages are exaggerations.) Both sides have morale problems. The increasing dominance of the North Vietnamese over the Vietcong, which the latter have been resenting for years, is still a sore point, though the Northerners keep saying that from now on the Communist Southerners will have to do more to fend for themselves.

Considerable political and ideological confusion exists in the Communist ranks. One typically ambiguous Provisional Revolutionary Government di-

rective urged "more military activity to support political positions firmly." In January, immediately after the cease-fire, when the Communists seized some three hundred hamlets and put up P.R.G. flags, hoping that I.C.C.S. teams would come by and recognize the hamlets as legitimate P.R.G. territory—something that never happened—a major directive ordered that the peace agreement be used to attain victory, and that armed force be resorted to only when necessary. By April, however, after the government had recaptured all of the disputed hamlets—and indulged in a good deal of land-grabbing and flag-raising of its own—the Communist attitude had begun to shift. Word went out to let the government troops attack first, and then "we will attack them in retaliation in various parts of the country." In contrast to the strategy during the 1968 and 1972 offensives, when towns and cities were the objective, one order this time said, "We will aim at capturing hamlets and villages only. We have learned that if we have a strong anti-aircraft system we will be able to capture new territory"—an indication that the Communists expect new air attacks of one sort or another.

The threat of such attacks emphasizes the danger of what a number of impartial observers fear could be an accidental outbreak of new, full-scale hostilities. The Communists seem intent on pushing the government into starting something. "If we attack our enemies, we will suffer politically," another directive said. "If we permit them to move into our areas, then counterattack, our political image will remain intact." With both sides obviously capable of renewing hostilities at any time, if not necessarily of sustaining them, and in the absence of any effective international machinery for avoiding or curtailing military action,

the outlook is scarcely hopeful, and many observers expect what is called a "high point" of new military activity to occur between now and September. In view of the refusal of the North Vietnamese to withdraw any of their forces from South Vietnam—a move that no one should have expected—President Nguyen Van Thieu has no intention of reducing his own forces. So far, this has had only a minimal effect on the morale of his troops (desertion rates are down from about twenty thousand to about twelve thousand a month), but if heavy fighting does recur, the morale problem could become serious—and this is something the Communists are counting on.

Since the 1972 offensive, the Communists have made themselves far stronger in Military Region I, just below the Demilitarized Zone. They have built fourteen missile sites around the old American base area at Khe Sanh, several of them fitted with radar and awaiting the emplacement of Russian SA-2 missiles. The old American airstrip at Khe Sanh has been lengthened to take Soviet MIG-19s and perhaps MIG-21s, and a new, smaller strip has been built. At least six other Communist airstrips have also been built in South Vietnam, most of them near the Laotian or Cambodian borders. Thus, for the first time, full-fledged air war in the South could take place between the two Vietnamese sides. (The North Vietnamese, by refuelling en route, could send planes all the way to the Delta.) Any offensive that the Communists launched would almost certainly be aimed at consolidating their hold in Military Region I and separating that region from the rest of South Vietnam for the purpose of political bargaining. Hué would be a natural target, as it was in 1968, and so would Danang. New roads have been covertly built from the Laotian border toward both cities. A diversionary at-

tack in Military Region II—the Highlands—and minor attacks in the Delta would probably be accompanied by another major attack in Military Region III, around Saigon. The main purpose of this would be to capture as much territory as possible along the Cambodian border and also to capture several district capitals and at least one provincial capital, such as Tay Ninh, to give the P.R.G. better leverage for future bargaining. Both the Communists and the South Vietnamese government seem to have accepted the fact that, for the time being at least, the areas held by the two sides will not be formally demarcated, with corridors of free movement created between them, as the Paris agreements stipulate. That neither the Joint Military Commission teams representing Saigon and Hanoi, provided for in the Paris treaty, nor the I.C.C.S. has been able to achieve this and that neither has been able to arrange for local commanders of the two sides to meet and arrange for truces and the disposition of troops are the two biggest disappointments of the broken peace agreements.

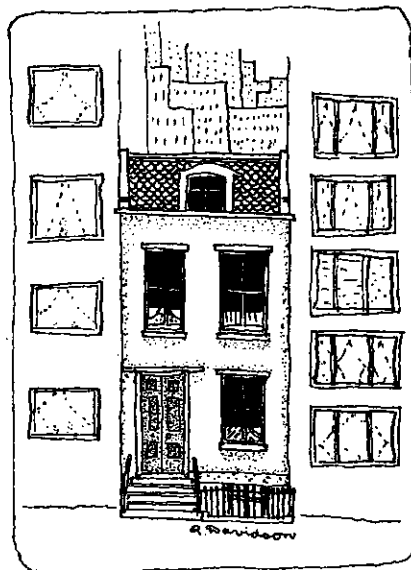
The greatest political disappointment has been the failure of the Paris negotiators for the P.R.G. and the Saigon government to organize a tripartite National Council of National Reconciliation and Concord, supposedly composed of equal-sized delegations from the two opposing sides and another made up of so-called "third force" personalities approved by both. This was to have been done by April 28th, ninety days after the signing of the cease-fire, but, despite seven plenary sessions and an undisclosed number of secret meetings, very little progress has yet been made. At the eighth session, on April 26th, both sides presented last-minute programs, not so much to break the deadlock as to place the blame for it on each other. The Communist program, presented by Nguyen Van Hieu, the chief P.R.G. negotiator, consisted of six points that were basically a repetition of the original Paris accords, especially in respect to the freeing of all civilian prisoners and the restitution of democratic liberties. Once these things are done, Hieu said, the Council could organize "free and democratic elections" to choose a Constituent National Assembly, which would "work out a [new] Constitution and set up a definitive government in South Vietnam representing the aspirations and will for peace, independence, democracy, and national concord of the entire South Vietnamese people." After that, he said, both sides should reduce the numbers of their

troops "in conformity with the postwar situation." The government's ten-point program, presented by its chief negotiator, Deputy Prime Minister Nguyen Luu Vien, was vaguer, and contained little that was new beyond a recommendation that elections be held on August 26th to choose "an organism to decide the political future of South Vietnam" and to determine "state institutions at both the national and regional levels." This "organism"—whatever that means—would "have full freedom of action with all options open." Once again the South Vietnamese demanded the prior withdrawal of all "non-South Vietnamese forces."

The chances that any elections in which both sides take part will be held in the foreseeable future remain negligible. Early in May, the government started holding new elections for village councils, and these will continue through the rest of the year. The Communists naturally claim that they are invalid. On August 26th, South Vietnam will elect thirty new senators—or half of the sixty-man Senate. The election for the larger House of Representatives is scheduled for next year. An attempt by Thieu to put his own restrictions on the Senate elections—by requiring that candidates must belong to recognized parties and that each such party must put up a large financial deposit—have just been defeated in the Senate, which encourages the hope that that body will retain some independence in the future, though the House is docile. Thieu is said to be willing to hold elections for a Constituent Assembly, but only on his terms, which, in addition to North Vietnamese withdrawal, include confinement of the Communists to the areas they now hold—mostly less populated ones, thus, as one American official put it, "giving

them no more than twenty per cent of the action." Free mobility of voters is the still elusive key to the problem. If there is not a great deal of fighting, the Communists are counting on what they call "the appearance of peace" to inspire many urban residents and refugees to return to their native villages, many in Communist-controlled areas, over the next few months. Some movement of this sort has already occurred, and Saigon has responded by forcibly moving some villagers from contested or Vietcong-controlled areas into areas controlled by the government. The Communists, for their part, are handing out identity cards permitting people to enter their own old areas, and quite a few people now carry two sets of cards. As was the case throughout the war, the American-created hamlet-evaluation system, which is still being used by the government's district chiefs, gives a distorted picture of the total number of hamlets considered "secure" and exaggerates the degree of government control in the countryside. Far more accommodation with the Communists is actually taking place, particularly on the part of the Delta peasants, than government officials are willing to admit.

When they speak of "the long political struggle still ahead," the Communists have in mind this process of erosion of government support. They continue to regard Thieu as a transitional figure, and his cumbersome and corrupt bureaucracy as an asset for their side. His declaration in mid-May that he will reorganize and decentralize the government is regarded as simply another meaningless maneuver. However, the Communists are having serious organizational difficulties of their own. Finding new leaders to replace the many old-time cadres lost during the war is a problem, and so is the tenuous relationship between the North Vietnamese, on the one hand, and, on the other, the leaders of the P.R.G. and the old National Liberation Front. There is evidence that the North Vietnamese are more determined than ever to see to it that the Party leadership in the South is controlled by the People's Revolutionary Party, the Southern offspring of the Laodong (Workers') Party in the North. There are also signs that Hanoi wants to reconstruct the N.L.F. and other front organizations in the South, which, they feel, have become slack and moribund or too willing to compromise with the government. It is admitted that Party discipline has weakened over the long war years and during the months of the uncertain cease-fire. These are all



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reasons that the Communists are not anxious to have elections held soon, while the government, feeling itself in an advantageous position at the moment, wants the election process set in motion quickly. The Communists are especially intent on recruiting more third-force elements, including people who have been living in Paris and whom they regard as being generally more favorably disposed toward them than toward Saigon.

Hanoi, in the speeches of its leaders and in its official articles, repeatedly hails the "great victory" that has been won over the United States and the "reactionary neo-colonialist forces," but adds that the revolution is by no means over and has simply "entered a new phase." The Southerners will "still have to continue their struggle, studded with difficulties and hardships, against the new schemes conducted by the new imperialists and the reactionary forces," said a recent article in *Nhan Dan*, the official Party paper. The North Vietnamese seem increasingly concerned about the problems of financing reconstruction and providing for future military and economic aid. A Party pronouncement on May Day said, "It is necessary to link economic development to the consolidation of national defense and constantly increase North Vietnam's economic and military potential." Earlier, Premier Pham Van Dong had said, "Everything has to be built from scratch." What worries Hanoi is just how much assistance it can expect henceforth from the Chinese and the Russians. Wilfred Burchett, an Australian journalist who has had close associations in Hanoi for many years, recently revisited North Vietnam and found that "some diplomats believe that China and the Soviet Union will feel relieved if they are not obliged to participate in the main part of reconstruction after having already contributed considerably to the supply of war materials during the war." There was no hint, Burchett wrote, that if the United States gave North Vietnam reconstruction aid (a topic now, understandably, far back on the shelf in Washington) there would be any weakening of Hanoi's ties with the Soviet Union and China. While the ratio of Chinese aid to Russian aid is increasing right now, Burchett said, the North Vietnamese always "express their gratitude in mathematically equal terms," but "whenever the two countries are mentioned either in speeches or in editorials the Soviet Union is always mentioned first and called the pioneer of the Socialist revolution."



The South is just as deeply concerned as the North about the economic future. Its rehabilitation problems, though not its reconstruction problems, are as great as the North's—especially the resettling of millions of refugees and the provision of a million new jobs for the unemployed, who include war victims and veterans, men and women who used to work for the Americans, and young men no longer being drafted, and will in time include demobilized soldiers. To support its humanitarian and rehabilitation needs, and to finance its import programs and maintain a projected annual growth rate of between seven and nine per cent, South Vietnam is seeking about six hundred and fifty million dollars from the United States in fiscal 1974, or about twice what it received last year. The South Vietnamese are not likely to get all this, given the present mood of Congress, but if they can obtain half or two-thirds of it, the rest could come from other nations, particularly Japan, through a consortium arrangement that might be established following visits of experts from the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund that are to take place during the next few months. The main difficulty at present is the rate of inflation, which is running at ten per cent and could easily double by the end of this year; prices are up twenty-five per cent over last year, as much because of world-market conditions as because of local ones. Foreign-exchange reserves have decreased by a third, to a hundred and fifty million dollars. There is one encouraging sign—a considerable increase in tax receipts. Investments are still sluggish, chiefly because of the uncertain military situation, but the Economics Minister, Pham Kim Ngoc, who accompanied President Thieu on his recent trip to America, believes there is reason to hope that by 1980 gross capital formation will more than double, from ten to twenty-two per cent, and that imports can be reduced by at least a third as production and investments increase along with tax receipts. However, unless there is, for example, a bonanza from offshore oil production—some thirty-two companies have so far applied for concessions—it seems unlikely that, as Ngoc also says he hopes, South Vietnam can become self-sufficient in eight or ten years.

THE problems of economic recovery and rehabilitation were readily apparent in the city of Danang, which I visited during a recent week-long trip through Military Region I. The



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city, whose population of four hundred and seventy-five thousand has been augmented by a quarter million refugees living in nearby camps, was much cleaner than it had been when the Americans were there, but virtually no business was being conducted in the shops, which were still filled with goods. With the help of American aid money, a small project had been started under which some of the unemployed were clearing out ditches and widening the sidewalks, but there was obviously not enough work for the majority of the wage-earning population; scores of men on Hondas were offering rides for one or two hundred piastres (the equivalent of twenty or forty cents). There seemed to be more activity in the surrounding villages, where the markets were busy, with farmers bringing in their produce despite continuing military operations. For instance, in the Dai Loc district, southwest of Danang—an area I have visited half a dozen times over the years, and one that has steadily been subject to Vietcong penetration and influence—the main street of a hamlet called Ai Nghia was jammed with people buying and selling. Government troops in jeeps and trucks were heading for the countryside to the south, where the Communists are especially active at night, coming down from the hills to collect rice and taxes. I rode back to the main highway over an empty road, through deserted, brownish, defoliated fields. On the way back up the highway to Danang, I stopped for a cool beer at the hamlet of Thanh Quyet, which the Communists attacked on January 28th, the morning the ceasefire went into effect. The people said that the Vietcong were still only half a mile away.

The following day, with Colonel Ha Mai Viet, the province chief of Quang Tri, I travelled by car to the completely destroyed city of Quang Tri. On May 1, 1972, it was captured by the North Vietnamese; on September 15th, it was retaken by the South Vietnamese with the help of American saturation-bombing attacks, and it has remained a vast pile of rubble. After weeks of argument, the I.C.C.S. had finally placed a team amid the ruins, in tents on the shore of the Thach Han River. This had been the site of prisoner exchanges a week before my visit, with seven thousand North Vietnamese soldiers crossing the river and, after receiving new uniforms on the Communist side, continuing north or heading west to rejoin new units coming down

the Ho Chi Minh Trail. On the opposite riverbank, a hundred yards away, the North Vietnamese were flying P.R.G. flags over their own camp. Sporadic firing took place back and forth across the river, I was told, but none of it had been directed at either of the camps. No decision has been made about rebuilding the city of Quang Tri. "They ought to leave it the way it is and call it a national park commemorating the war," an American accompanying us suggested.



Along bumpy dirt roads to the west of a highway strewn with rusted, shot-up trucks and tanks and other war debris, the first of a hundred thousand Quang

Tri Province refugees from the Danang camps who were scheduled to be returned to their former homes were being transported in big covered trucks. This marked the fourth time during the long war that I had seen such refugees returning home in this area, and, as in the past, I wondered how long they would be able to remain. They came—whole families of seven or eight, ranging from toothless infants to toothless grandparents—bringing their meagre belongings and a few "luxuries," such as cages of ducklings, to settle down again along the My Chanh River, threading through once lush but now barren or overgrown fields, which had been neglected for more than a year and would have to be completely replowed and replanted. The trucks deposited the people near where their bombed-out houses used to stand, and, until wood and tin roofing bought by the government with American funds could be dispatched, in a week or so, to build new houses, twelve or fifteen families were living together in large, hot tents. Despite having to start all over again, the refugees were happy to be back on their native soil, which, bombed and cratered as it may be, is one of the few enduring things of value in Vietnam today. The Vietnamese people's instinct for survival remains their most admirable and their most astonishing trait, and these people, if only they could be left alone, I felt, would somehow make do.

WHILE the Communists continue their clandestine political operations, the government continues its pompous, clumsy, and inefficient moves to organize the Democracy Party, headed by President Thieu and run by the province and district chiefs. The Saigon regime now claims to have set up Party chapters in all but two or

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three of the forty-four provincial capitals, in all the autonomous cities, in three-quarters of the villages, and in half the hamlets. But by imposing the Party from the top down, instead of starting in the hamlets and working from the bottom up to create some real political belief and trust, the government has, in effect, imposed a huge wet blanket on the population and stifled all legitimate discussion and opposition.

President Thieu, on being asked recently by an American official what he liked most about his job, answered, "My power." Then, asked what most inspired him, he answered, "I inspire myself." This sense of self-righteousness permeates the administration, which is dominated by a handful of men around Thieu, and will undoubtedly do more to cause its ultimate collapse than any other single factor—except possibly its corruption, which is so deep-seated that, in clinical terms, South Vietnam can be described as being in the tertiary stage of social paresis. The Democracy Party even seems to mock itself historically, for its flag, a red star against a yellow background, is the same as that of the Communist-run Vanguard Youth, back in the mid-forties—to which Thieu himself, in a brief flirtation with the old Vietminh, once belonged. Essentially, what the charade of this "party's" creation amounts to is an effort to force and frighten the people into signing their names to Party rolls and thus insure that whenever there is a vote for some sort of assembly or for the reelection of Thieu as President, they will meekly go along with the government's wishes.

Working in conjunction with an amorphous organization known as the Popular Front for the Preservation of Peace and Self-Determination, the Democracy Party is a coercive instrument, set up several months ago by the summoning to Saigon first of generals, then of province chiefs, and, finally, of as many village chiefs as could be persuaded to come. Each attending village chief was given a million piastres to finance preparations for the election and promised another million later with which to launch the Party organizational campaign. (Arguments immediately started among the village heads, who hoped to avoid being reassigned to insecure villages.) Important functionaries and national leaders, including the presidents of the four major universities, were forced to join the Party as "advisers," and local officials who were reluctant at first were

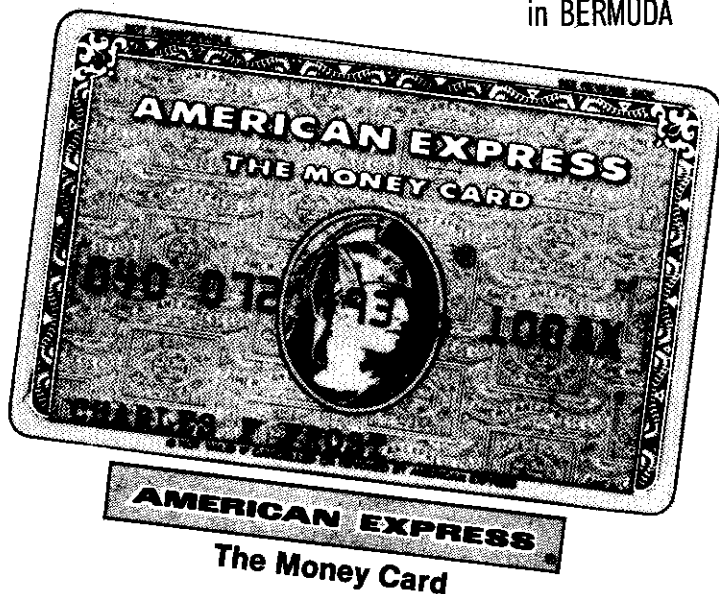
"invited" two or three times—until the message got through that unless they joined, their careers might be in jeopardy. I talked to one unenthusiastic Party director during my trip north—a pleasant academician, who was dutifully organizing his Party chapter by professional groups (teachers, workers, doctors, and so on), and who openly admitted that his job was "to make people accept and sustain the policy of Presidential control of local government."

I also spoke with a number of leaders of what little functioning opposition, puppet or real, exists, in Hué, Danang, and Saigon. Two presumably harmless opposition parties have received government approval—the Freedom Party and the Social Democratic Alliance. The first is all but stillborn, and the second, headed by the labor leader Tran Quoc Buu, is beset by internal conflicts and government-created obstacles. Buu, formerly a supporter of Thieu, has become disillusioned, and says he may not go ahead with his attempt to legalize his party but just keep it afloat as a potential mass front to contend with the Communists when the real political struggle is joined. Buu's Alliance, based in Saigon, is composed of half a dozen splinter parties—mostly old-line nationalist ones—which spend much of their time fighting with each other or within their own ranks. In Danang and Hué, a similar grouping, calling itself Combined Action, is facing similar problems. The religious elements—the Buddhists, those Catholics who are not aligned with Thieu, and the Hoa Hao and Cao Dai sects—are more fragmented and ineffective than ever. "The Democracy Party itself will remain strong only as long as Thieu lasts," one of the Danang leaders told me. "When he's gone, it, too, will collapse." A Vietnamese friend of mine in

Saigon says the Democracy Party is simply meant "to deceive Nixon and the Americans," adding, "It doesn't deceive the Vietnamese. Thieu is not as strong as he was when the Americans were still here." Another Vietnamese, whom I have known for ten years, told me, "The Party is an amalgam of various confused ideas inherited by Thieu from the late President Ngo Dinh Diem, with no clear-cut point of view. If it's an instrument, it's a blunt one." This man, like so many other friends of mine who have been active or semi-active politically for many years, has recently felt so frustrated and angered by Thieu's crude tactics



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that he has given up politics to go into business. Another says, "The more dictatorial measures Thieu adopts, and the more 'victories' the Democracy Party wins, the more isolated Thieu will become. In the long run, the only ones who will benefit from that are the Communists."

Before I left Hué, I revisited Thich Tu Dam, a Buddhist cultural leader with whom I spoke last year, in his small, delightful pagoda in a lush garden by a canal on the outskirts of the city. Of all the bonzes I have met in Vietnam, none has impressed me more than Tu Dam, whose broad view of the future of Vietnam remains philosophically optimistic. "Since the cease-fire, there has been less fighting, and people find it increasingly hard to accept the idea of war," he said. "A victory or defeat is so utterly futile. The older generation of North Vietnamese may want to go on fighting until its members achieve their lifelong goals, but they must sooner or later share power with younger men, who, now that the French and the Americans are gone, may not be so intent on prosecuting what the older leaders describe as 'the struggle for national salvation.' Moreover, times have changed internationally, and the Russians and the Chinese—the older brothers of the North Vietnamese—are changing their policies, too. Look at Mao Tse-tung—how different he is from five years ago. Are not the two Koreas and the two Germanys talking to each other? Sooner or later, all these changes will provoke an attitude of conciliation in Vietnam as well. Enthusiasm for war and a sense of hatred cannot continue forever in the South, any more than they can in the North. Here the old anti-Communist slogans are obsolete, just as the old anti-imperialist ones are. There is another factor as well—our attitude toward foreigners. After the destruction of Quang Tri, the South Vietnamese began to understand that the Americans did not love us for ourselves—that they were using South Vietnam to defend or further their own cause. By the same token, when the harbors of North Vietnam were mined and the country was bombed again, and the Russians and Chinese did not even break off talks with the United States, the North Vietnamese began to understand that perhaps their big brothers were more interested in pleasing the United States than in helping them. I do not know when a true spirit of conciliation will take hold, but it must come. The time must also come when new leaders appear among us who will be listened to, because they will

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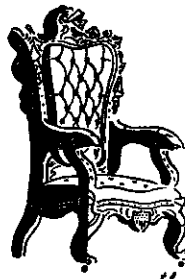
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long absence was caused by factional differences within the Phak Pasason Patavat Lao—the People's Revolutionary Party of Laos—which had just surfaced publicly after having always been a covert organization. A more likely reason was the uncertain situation in Cambodia. Now, after Sihanouk's visit there, and with the reorganization of the Phnom Penh regime presaging talks with the Khmer insurgents, the Lao Communists apparently feel that they can move ahead to complete an agreement of their own with the Vientiane government. Foreign diplomats in Vientiane believe that, unless new snags appear, a provisional government can be formed in June or July—though it took fourteen months to form the last coalition regime, back in 1964. The dividing up of the Cabinet seats, while it may lead to disputes, is regarded as susceptible to compromise; Souvanna will remain as Prime Minister, and among the ministers and deputy ministers there will be roughly equal representation of Communists, neutralists, members of the present government, and right-wingers. Souvanna, a true neutralist, insists on carrying out both the letter and the spirit of what the agreement describes as "the independence, sovereignty, unity, and territorial integrity of Laos." He envisages a unitary state, with the two zones gradually eroding, to evolve into one. The Lao Communists want political and military matters to be settled simultaneously. They want the two zones firmly defined, and are seeking to create buffer areas between them and to establish a series of control points, to be monitored by the joint military commission and the I.C.C. In effect, they want a sort of demilitarized zone created between north and south, which, by connecting the various control points, will formalize the grant to the Communists of more territory—about eighty per cent of the country—than they were given under the 1962 agreement. They want this partly because they fear that once all the North Vietnamese troops still in Laos—there are about seventy thousand of them—withdraw, at least as far as the Ho Chi Minh Trail area (Souvanna, though he might protest that this is not far enough, will have no choice but to accept it), the numerically far inferior Pathet Lao forces, some twenty-five thousand in all, would have trouble defending themselves against the forty-five thousand government regulars and twenty-five thousand irregulars.



The members of the I.C.C.—especially the Canadians—see little hope for their future usefulness after their long, dismal experience here so far. At best, they see themselves as supervising the withdrawal from Laos of seventeen thousand Thai irregulars, sent here under American auspices, and the withdrawal eastward of those North Vietnamese—about twenty thousand—who have been fighting in behalf of the Pathet Lao. The American effort in Laos, directed chiefly by the Central Intelligence Agency and employing principally irregular Lao forces, will come to an end within sixty days after the new government is set up, and the total number of Americans still engaged in various pursuits in the country will be reduced from thirteen hundred to about six hundred, mostly economic and social-aid and foreign-service personnel, except for perhaps thirty military attachés.

Souvanna has the King's full support in his approach to a settlement, but still faces trouble from right-wing politicians, who, for all their opposition to making a deal with the Communists, are, ironically, closer to them than to Souvanna on the matter of wanting a firm line drawn between the two zones. The rightists will seek to dominate the chief Ministries, such as Defense and Interior, and will put up a hard fight to retain control of the National Assembly. The fact remains, however, that the Laos agreement favors the Communists much more than that for Vietnam. They will have obtained a full coalition government in the heavily populated areas and will exercise complete control in their own large area, in parts of which they have been resettling peasants loyal to them for the past two or three years.

The maintenance of peace in Laos will necessarily depend, as it did after the 1962 agreements, on the major powers. Some diplomats recommend that a new multi-nation conference be held on both Laos and Cambodia, but whether or not this comes about, what the United States, Russia, and China choose to do will determine the success or failure of the new agreement. The Americans will, of course, continue to support Souvanna Phouma in his effort to create as much of a unified neutral nation as possible and to get the North Vietnamese to withdraw most, if not all, of their forces. The Russians are fully behind the Laotian Communists, who, for their part, look to the Soviet Union as their ideological big brother. When

be close to the people and really represent them. There will be a new competition—economic, cultural, and political—but it will be a healthy one, not one carried on with guns. The best thing that you Americans can do now is help reconstruct our country and repair the damage that has been done. You must no longer seek to divide us, and you must help the North Vietnamese as well. Only then can we achieve a progressive peace through conciliation."

I THOUGHT of what Thich Tu Dam had said when I visited Laos, my last stop on this Indo-China trip. In contrast to the other countries of Indo-China, Laos at this time is looking forward to a total political and military agreement among its conflicting elements. An Agreement on the Restoration of Peace and Reconciliation in Laos was signed in Vientiane on February 21st by representatives of the Vientiane government of Prime Minister Souvanna Phouma and the so-called Patriotic Forces of the Communists. Accepting the fact that there are "two zones and two separate administrations," the agreement calls for the creation of a new Provisional Government of National Union, composed of equal numbers of people from the two sides, and a Joint National Political Council, whose principal task will be to set up elections for a new National Assembly. Both Luang Prabang, the royal capital of King Savang Vatthana, and Vientiane, the administrative capital, are to be neutralized. A joint military commission, supported by the old International Control Commission—composed of representatives from Canada, India, and Poland, and set up under the Geneva Agreement of 1962 on Laos—is to supervise the administration of the military provisions of the new accords, and to enforce cessation of all military activity and the withdrawal of all foreign military forces within sixty days after the establishment of the provisional government.

There was little political progress in Vientiane for two months after the agreement was signed, because Phoumi Vongvichit, the chief Communist negotiator, had left Vientiane for Samneua, the Communist capital, in the northeastern part of the country, on February 23rd, when American bombers attacked Pathet Lao and North Vietnamese troops at Pak Song, in the south, because the Communists had allegedly violated the new agreement. On April 26th, when I was in Vientiane, Phoumi finally returned. Reports had been circulated that his

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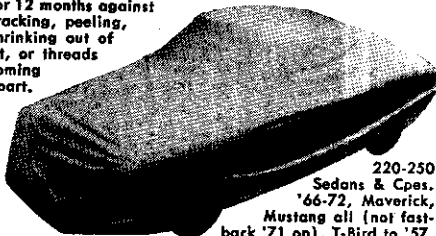
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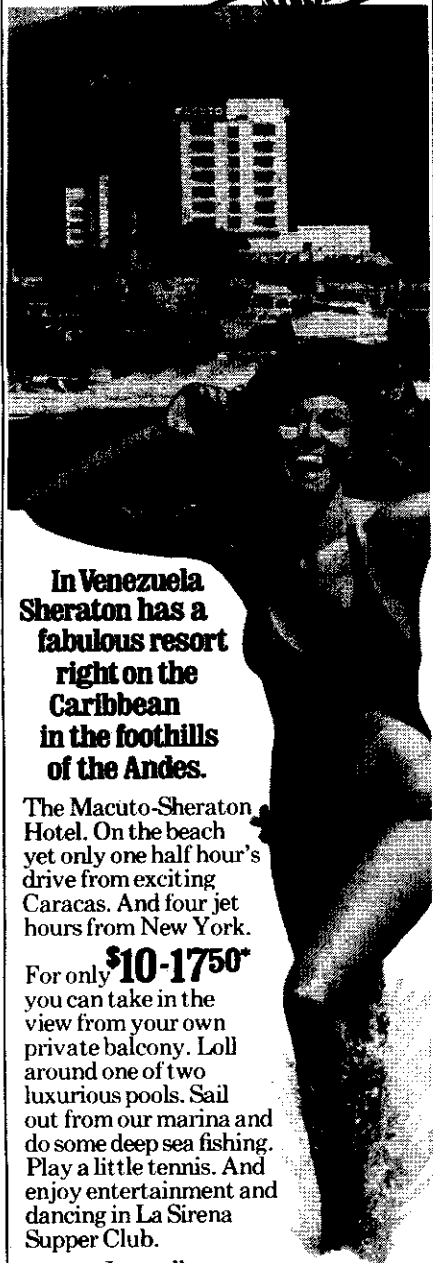
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the Lao Communist Party surfaced, for example, messages were sent to Leonid Brezhnev and to the Central Committee of the Laodong Party in North Vietnam but not to the Chinese—who have now formally recognized Souvanna as Prime Minister for the first time and who are playing their own game, as usual. They are still building or extending three new roads in northeastern Laos—two toward points close to the Thai border and one toward a point close to the Burma border. Their principal purpose seems to be not so much to pose a threat to Thailand and Burma as to assure the security of their own borders and to make certain that no one—most notably the Russians or the Americans—tries to influence the hill tribesmen in the northeastern area of Laos.

Peace in Indo-China will have to be indivisible if it is to be sustained. Whether the central area dominated by the North Vietnamese which I have envisioned becomes a reality and whether Hanoi strenuously pursues the unification of the two parts of Vietnam are questions that are secondary to the basic problem of halting, or at least limiting, hostilities. In my opinion, the immediate outlook is not encouraging, especially in Vietnam; Cambodia and Laos can more readily live with coalition governments—provided they are permitted to handle their own affairs, without North Vietnamese interference. The degree of North Vietnamese involvement in those two countries, and in South Vietnam as well, will depend on how much military support the Russians and the Chinese continue to give Hanoi. Both Communist powers, and particularly the Russians, seriously need long-term American technological aid and short-term American material aid. If they can be persuaded by Kissinger and Nixon, or by whoever continues what promises to be a prolonged dialogue, extending over the years, that their own paramount interests supersede the further military support of the revolution in Indo-China, then there may be a chance of limiting or stopping the fratricidal wars that have racked this peninsula for so long.

—ROBERT SHAPLEN

12:20 p.m. Officer Patrick Sullivan said he had been informed that two men were sitting in a tree at the Farms railroad parking lot. Detectives George Webb and Roland Campbell investigated, said two people indeed were sitting in a tree, and suggested there was nothing really wrong with that at all.—*Wellesley (Mass.) Townsman.*

After all, it's spring.



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