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conference--1

march 11, 1965

SAIGON--The United Buddhist Church--lead by politico-priests who have ~~sparked~~ ever sparked overthrow of the three Vietnamese governments--are preparing this week-end for a major policy conference with delegates from throughout this war-weary nation.

Political observers ~~are known to be ready to~~ are known to be ready to watch the three-day conference to determine if the ~~B~~ politically important Buddhist movement makes any key policy decisions on the issue of peace.

Some of the Buddhist priests, who are suspected of ~~being~~ being pro-neutralists, have issued nebulous religious statements on the question of bringing peace to the country. ~~But~~ these priests have influence over ~~the~~ some pro-Buddhist elements which gives them considerable ~~political importance~~ importance as a political force ~~in~~ within and outside the Saigon government.

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conference--2

~~During the~~

At the time of the recent arrivals of Korean soldiers and American Marines, a whispering campaign was launched among the Saigon population that the Buddhists would peacefully protest against the introduction of ~~more~~ foreign soldiers, ²who would intensify ²and enlarge the anti-Communist war in their country.

Hundreds of delegates are expected to attend the conference, though the exact number of ¹⁵unavailable. The brief ^{inauguration}~~introductory~~ ceremony ^{File to} opens Saturday night, Saigon time, and full-day sessions ~~will~~ be held Sunday and Monday.

Delega tes ²who have been invited to attend include Buddhist priests, numbers, laymen, representatives from the provinces and districts in the countryside, representatives of Buddhist-~~sponsored~~ sponsored or allied associations, such as Buddhist youth organizations, women organizations, charity services. Some political party leaders are expected to be invited.

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Reliable sources said invitations had ^{A/S} been sent to the ~~six~~ heads of the six departments of the United Buddhist Church, delegates ~~from~~ of the Church from the provinces and Saigon, the Buddhist university, ~~he~~ the Buddhist chaplains corps in the American-backed Vietnamese armed forces and representatives of Buddhist associations.

Acc² According to documents distributed to the incoming delegates, the business sessions of the conference would be devoted to reports of past activities ~~it~~ of the United Buddhist Church, and all its related agencies and associations, revision of the charter, "~~consolidation~~" "consolidation of leadership," to "discuss the present situation and the line of ~~x~~ activities of the Church," and to draft the budget.

The rather vague wording of "consolidation of leadership" raised the question to observers here whether there would be a shift in the key leadership positions.

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buddhists—~~3~~

The conference—a similar one was held ~~at~~ thirteen months ago—comes at a time when the Buddhists have presented five demands to the month-old ^{American-backed} government of Prime Minister Pham Huy Qua t. These demands call for ~~re-instituting~~ release of students and Buddhist priests arrested by the previous prime minister—Tran Van Huong who regarded the Buddhists as "playing the Communist game." Other demands include permission for ^{GOVERNMENT} Buddhist civil servants ^{WHO CONSIDER THEMSELVES BUD} ~~back~~ in the government to ^{destruction of} form and organize and join Buddhist associations; to destroy the police files of Buddhist students, monks and youth who had been arrested; ^{RE} ~~reopen~~ opening some newspapers closed by the previous government; and re-instating Thich (Venerable) Ho Giac as deputy chief of ² chapai chaplains in the Vietnamese Armed Forces. Many of the ³ ~~high~~-e highest-ranking Vietnamese officers regard Thich Ho Giac as "pro-Communist." ^{GOVERNMENT HAS YET TO TAKE A SPECIFIC STAND ON THE FIVE DEMANDS,}

The demand to allow government civil servants join and form a Buddhist association within the government is considered to ^{PERMIT} allow the formation of a "quasi-political cell" within the government's administrative apparatus. The Buddhist movement has ³ already been granted the permission to have 60 Buddhist chaplains in the armed forces—and an additional 60 are being trained—and to have three-man Buddhist groups within each army battalion.

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The conference is considered politically significant to for the ² following reasons: to give the Buddhist politico-priests a rather exact estimate of their strength among the masses throughout the country, to determine their organization strength as well as ^{quality} their low-level Buddhist leadership in the provinces, and to ^{measure} ~~take a pulse~~ of the mood of the Buddhists about the current political situation in the Saigon and in Vietnam.

In behind-the-scene ² caucus caucuses, key Buddhist priests and lay leaders are expected to form their over-all political program regarding the issue of peace, their attitude to the American military support to Vietnam, and their position regarding the government of Pham Huy Quat.

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buddhist⁶⁵

the Buddhist leaders have also called for reports from all Buddhist associations, agencies and ⁷pagodas, at all levels of their ²impre impressive hierarchy--from the hamlets to the villages, the districts, the provinces and then to the central level.

Political observers are amazed at the efficiency of the Buddhist organization. ²They hav The Buddhist leaders have sent a "model form" for their reports--asking detailed ~~questions~~ ²which low-level leaders are to answer. These reports, which were sent to Saigon by March 5th, are expected to give the Buddhist leaders a sweeping ~~political~~ ²barometer of the political mood of the country.

"This model form for their reporting is very, very scientific," one Vietnamese political leader explained. "It's als almost the same way the Communists organize things."

An example of the "model form" ²for reporting throughout the country ~~is~~ concerns the section about ~~organix~~ ²organizations: who are the members of the executive committee and what ~~sects~~ ²Buddhist sects do they represent, when was the organization established, "what is the spirit ²of the (or mood) of the members--is it positive or not and what are the ca uses of this--how often the organization meets--how often members review the situation, the ²relatiship relationship between the lower-level members of the organization and the leader.

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Another area of ~~inter~~³ interest in the "model form" included reports at all-levels of the "Special Commissioner for Youth"—important in view of past ~~sudden~~³ ~~student~~^{youth} demonstrations in Saigon and the provinces. Their reports are asked to include: The general situation of Buddhist youth, how many members, what ~~activities~~³ Buddhist activities they ~~x~~ participate in, what is their "~~spirit~~³ "spirit or mood", what is the situation with the Buddhist Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts.

The "model form" also asks for reports from all-levels about "the ~~permo~~³ performance" of the Buddhist movement: What is the mood of the Buddhist believers, what is the spirit of the masses after each campaign (of ~~the~~³ sparking overthrow of three ~~successive~~³ governments)—does their spirit go higher after each campaign or does it go lower and what is the intensity of that spirit, how the non-Buddhist population ~~feels~~³ react to the Buddhists campaigns, what is their ~~attitude~~³ ~~concerning~~^{by Non-Buddhists} "the national situation", what is the attitude of political parties and government officials to the Buddhist movement after each campaign, what is the attitude of other religions, ~~the attitude~~^{And} of the ~~x~~ Communists towards the Buddhists, and the security situation in the provinces.

Dear Mr. Rosenfeld:

I'm enclosing a rather drab ~~I~~ news article--not analysis--on the upcoming Buddhist conference. The conference begins ~~at~~ Saturday, March 13, in the evening--which is Sunday morning New York time. The conference will be undramatic and probably not worthy of much spot news coverage--but it will be very, very significant in the future. I've tried to include some specific examples of the "model form" document of the Buddhists used in gathering reports from the provinces--I think ~~me~~ no other correspondents have this and they may give the readers some idea of the immense scope and depth of their organization.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature, likely "S. P. E.", written in dark ink. The signature is stylized with a large, looping initial 'S' and a trailing flourish.