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Saigon--The Buddhist movement--which sparked the overthrow of the Ngo Dinh Diem regime last November--is again on the political warpath.

Instead of the spectacular bonze-burnings, hunger strikes and mass demonstrations used last year, the Buddhists are now using more subtle approaches which erode the strength of the American-backed government of General Nguyen Khanh. While the political objective of the Buddhist crisis last year was to topple the Diem government--which Buddhist leaders publically admitted after the November 1 coup--now the effect, though perhaps not the objective of Buddhist political activity is to undermine the ~~strength of~~ the Khanh government.

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A flag-raising incident on Buddha's birthday last year precipitated the world-renown Buddhist crisis. This year ~~Buddha~~ Buddha's birthday next Tuesday will mark the peak of Buddhist festivities and prayer sessions. ~~Buddhism~~ Mult-colored Buddhist flags and brightly-lit lanterns dance from the windows of open-air shops and austere huts throughout Saigon as Buddhists "express their joy and enthusiasm," according to Buddhist priests.

"The Buddhists have adopted a wait-and-see attitude," one a uthoritative American source said. (Informatively Lodge). "They are not completely behind this government."

As the Buddhists attempt to consolidate their quick rise to power, the Catholic position has also hardened, which has caused a continual subsurface simmering of religious tensions. "And you know the Communists exploit any of our weaknesses and disunity," one high-ranking government source explained. (Informatively General Khanh). In their future struggle, the Buddhists may shift from ~~an anti-government line~~ to an anti-Catholic line. "The religious question is a serious one," the government official ~~explains~~ continued. "But we believe the religious leaders know if the Communists win the war, there will be no religion left. In any society, there will always be petty quarrels. The government is trying to ~~x~~ prevent petty quarrels from becoming explosive crisis."

According to highly informed sources, (U.S.I.S officials in Hue, American Embassy Buddhist-watcher)/informatively) the principal objective of the Buddhist movement at this time is to expand its strength and solidify its position of power. It is building and staffing primary and secondary Buddhist schools and higher-level institutes, encouraging and educating

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younger monks, planning and collecting funds for larger pagodas and establishing its grass roots support among the urban and rural population.

According to a Buddhist spokesman, Thich Duc ~~Thi~~ Nghiep, the Buddhists are sending mobile teams into the Vietnamese villages propagating the faith and telling the population to be "good citizens." He explained, however, it is ~~not~~ difficult for the teams, totalling fifty men, to take a direct anti-Communist line or to tell the villagers about the atheistic conditions in ~~the~~ North Viet Nam, for fear the pro-Communist guerrillas will kill them.

Internationally, the Buddhists have more prestige throughout Asia than the Vietnamese government, for it maintains religious affiliations with neutralist nations—like Cambodia and Ceylon—which the government does not recognize.

The Buddhist movement will obviously oppose any government that blocks this expansionism—as they did with Ngo <sup>Minh</sup> Diem, who refused to compromise with them. The Khanh government has been extremely conciliatory with them, giving them land of for pagodas, allowing them to use government equipment and military personnel to build a Buddhist memorial on the Saigon riverfront. Such privileges granted to the Catholics by the Diem government outraged the Buddhists.

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If, however, the Khanh government is useful to the Buddhists, why are they taking an anti-government stand? Reliable observers believe the anti-government line is a means of increasing the Buddhist membership and strength. Buddhists can rekindle the anti-Diem ~~in~~ emotions of the population by accusing the Khanh government—or the "remnants of ~~the~~ Diem regime in the Khanh government"—of being as oppressive against them as Diem was.

At the center of the Buddhist ~~in~~ state is the Venerable Thich Tri Quang, who plotted the strategic moves of last year's crisis from the belltower of Xa Loi pagoda. He is a small, frail ~~be~~ bonze with hypnotic hands and intense captivating eyes. His official title in the national movement is secretary (and hence strongman) of the Institute of Buddhist Clergy. His source of power, however, is his immense control of Buddhism in the northern two-thirds of Viet Nam, ~~with~~ with his headquarters in the holy city of Hue, a center of Buddhist learning and <sup>7</sup>the most militant Buddhist followers in the country.

The shaven-headed monk is as ~~central~~ controversial as he is adroit. The Diem regime accused him of being a Communist and this charge is still circulated by some factions. ~~B~~ However, during the final stages of the Buddhist affair, he escaped jail by posing as a Buddhist nun and was granted political asylum in the American Embassy, where his vegetarian meals were served in the third floor airconditioned conference room.

American officials here note that "he has never ~~made~~ made any strong anti-Communist statements and this disturbs some people." Even some fellow Buddhist priests and ~~laymen~~ lay leaders consider him "headstrong and

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However, his position is being strengthened by the return of his associates from overseas. One of these, chubby-faced Thich Minh Chau returned from twelve years of study in India. Some reliable sources say that he "is so well known as a Communist ~~neighter neig~~ neither Diem nor the first military junta would allow him to return to Viet Nam."

In an interview last week, Thich Tri Quang charged that "buddhists in is six northern provinces are suffering as much now as they did under the Diem regime." He had earlier made detailed statements of Buddhist slayings in Central Viet Nam in a newspaper article written earlier this Month.

Despite the strength and power of the Central Viet Nam faction, the Buddhist movement is not completely monolithic. The current writings in Vietnamese-language newspapers play up the split between the Hue-faction of Tri Quang and the 60 refugee-priests from Hanoi, who constitute a religion in exile. While the Hanoi-born priests expound a pro-government, anti-Communist line, reliable Vietnamese observers believe the split is a hoax intended to capture support from the Americans and favors from the government. Two of these ~~pre~~ priests are known to have asked American Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge for several million dollars for pagoda-building, but the request was rejected.

The ~~walth~~ wealthy ~~is~~ Southern wing of the movement, drawing support and money from the rice-rich Mekong Delta area, is much less militant or ~~and~~ organized.

Like all political forces in Viet Nam, the Buddhists are adroit at copying Communist tactics. One generation of Vietnamese of all political hues have seen these tactics prove successful; even President Diem's brother and

politcal brain, thought one could beat the Communists by using better Communist tactics. These tactics fall into three categories: the legal and direct; the semi-legal and the ill-

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<sup>EXAMPLE</sup>  
An ~~example~~ of the Buddhist use of the legal, direct methods was the Tin Sang (Morning News) newspaper, which the government closed for its ~~many~~ numerous anti-government articles. Once the government closed the paper, however, the Buddhists could expound on the oppression of the government and the ~~many~~ martyrdom of the staff—which ~~it~~ has now gone on a rotating hunger strike. These are the whipped up issues which the Communist attempt to perpetuate <sup>for</sup> ~~to~~ <sup>arousing</sup> ~~to arouse~~ the population.

Then the Buddhists shifted into the illegal tactics of ~~distributing~~ in An Quang pagoda mimeographing and distributing by hand ~~the same newsheet~~ a newsheet of the same name, which takes an extreme antigovernment and anti-American stand.

Reliable sources refuse to speculate on Buddhist illegal, underground ~~and~~ activities of ~~the Buddhists~~, if any.

The Buddhists also generate emotionalism by these tactics: a handful of "sick" Buddhist nuns, injured in anti-Diem riots, demanded and got government medical care—an incident which Americans here label "completely phony;" constant agitation for the trials and execution of Diem's brother, Can, and his aides; circulating leaflets calling for the release of the four generals of the first military junta whom Khanh arrested during the second coup, While the arrest of these four generals is a major embarrassment to Khanh, the Buddhists also did not ~~support~~ completely support these four while they were in power.

As the Buddhist movement develops into a major religious--and political--force during the coming years, everyone is asking--but no one is guessing--whether the leadership will make an anti-Communist stand, a neutralist stand or a Communist stand. It will become one of the most important questions for