

deepe

madame--1

march 4, 1965

SAIGON--Yes, Madame Ngo Dinh Nhu was probably right about the Buddhists.

But no one will ever know for sure.

When the lovely spitfire sister-in-law of ~~the~~ former President Ngo Dinh Diem labelled the militant Buddhist monks as "Reds in yellow robes," she caused an internal and international ~~fuf~~ furor.

And her attacks indirectly aided the monks--who were later to spark the overthrow of the Ngo regime ¹⁶ ~~15~~ months ago--by creating for them an ~~area~~ ^{by} already unpopular target they needed symbolically to attack. Her vitrolie remarks also effected to ~~sabotage~~ ^{Resulted in sabotage} the attempts to ~~comprim~~ ^{compromise} between the Buddhist militants and her brother-in-law the President.

(More)

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madame—2

Observers here believe no one will ever really know if the Buddhist politico-priests are "Reds in yellow robes." They would never carry a Communist Party card. Vietnamese politics are so obscure that a ranking Buddhist leader would never at this time be caught in a meeting with Communist cadres.

"And even if they are Communist agents," one ex-Communist explained, "they will selflessly sacrifice themselves and fade into oblivion once the Communists have taken over."

But anti-Communist elements in Vietnam instead view the Buddhist militants "as playing the game of the Communists" because of their past actions, their present ³91 policy and their ~~anarch~~ "anarchistic" tendencies which have ~~inf~~ shrivelled the effectiveness of every government since the fall of Diem. And without an effective competing government, Communist political subversion and organization have mushroomed in size and strength. From this viewpoint, the Buddhist militants have obviously aided the Viet Cong Communists.

In the past three weeks, the Buddhists have reached an important turning point. They have apparently entered a new ²phase.

These are the new developments since the February bombings of North Viet Nam:

deeps

madame--3

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one--Except for the Viet Cong Communists, the militant Buddhists organization is the most important power grouping in the Vietnam. Their potential power now appears to overh overshadow that of both the ~~unlike~~ country's government and armed forces, which ~~is~~ has become since the February 19th coup attempt more divided and less politically ~~unlike~~ oriented. Neither the armed forces nor the government appears prepared to resist the growing ~~stie~~ strength of the Buddhist militants.

two--
During the Diem regime, the militant Buddhists were ~~x~~ a clandestine, ~~unlike~~ semi-underground political dissident movement, which used religious persecution as their battlecry. Since the fall of Diem, however, they have become a political movement of protest, which successfully neutralized or spearheaded the toppling of each of the successive governments. Now, as of mid-February, they have become part of the government of Prime Minister Phan Huy Quat--and have acquired a sizeable chunk of that government.

three--at least momentarily, the Buddhists appear to have ended their period of protests against the government--since they have become part of that government. However, they ~~is~~ now have manufactured a new issue--peace. Their ~~appeals~~ current appeals for peace may in the future become protests for peace, which will again increase the Buddhist power over the masses.

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madame---4

four--for the past 15 months since the fall of Dien, the Buddhists have been a third government--operating between the Saigon government and the ~~Ministry of the Interior~~ political backbone of the Viet Cong guerrillas, the National Liberation Front for South Viet Nam. In a n important position paper, a leading monk said the militant Buddhist movement was against both the Communists and the anti-Communist Communists, which he described as the Catholics and the Americans. It was clear from their policy that their immediate enemy was the Saigon government--and not the Viet Cong.

Now, however, that they have become ~~part of the~~ a substantial part of the Saigon government, it would appear to be the time for them to declare war on the Communists.

But, they have not. Instead in mid-February they launched their peace offensive, which which places them in the position of rising above both the other states--the Saigon government and the Viet Cong.

It is reliably predicted that in the coming months, the Buddhists will move into the position of being the link--or "the hyphen" between between the Saigon government and the Viet Cong, thus paving the way for the coalition government which the Viet Cong have always wanted as part of their neutralization of the country.

(More)

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mada me--5

five--The Buddhist ~~cone~~ concept of peace is openly, if not deliberately, ambiguous. One ~~pr~~ Buddhist priest gives one ~~concept~~ concept to Western and local correspondents, only to have it denied, contradicted or clarified by another priest. More significant than the official statements given to the press is the sermons which the Buddhist priests are giving to the masses, which is their source of power. Frankly, no one really knows what ~~their~~ they say in their sermons. The foreign embassies, the prime minister's office, the secret police, the Catholics ~~and~~ the foreign press ~~are each~~ known to send a number of "reporters" to attend the Buddhist sermons. Each comes ~~back~~ back with a different version and a different emphasis. "Each hears what he wants," one journalist explained.

This Buddhist peace offensive is now the talk of Saigon. It is openly considered ~~now~~ that the Buddhists are pro-neutralists--that ~~their~~ their version of peace is closer to the Viet Cong's peace than it is to the peace of the free world ~~position~~. And while Saigonese now clearly see the true face of the Buddhists as being ~~present~~ neutralist, they see no cohesive anti-Communist element which is capable of stopping their ~~peace~~ offensive.

Since mid-February the clear trend has ~~become~~ developed to draw a sharper line between the ~~Saigon~~ military war and the political subversive war.

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madame—6

Since the February 19th coup and dismissal of Lt. Gen. Nguyen Khanh as Commander in Chief, the armed forces, which ^{HAD BEEN} ~~was~~ a supergovernment, has ^{now} ~~less~~ political power. The armed forces council since ~~the~~ the beginning of the ~~present offensive~~ Buddhist ~~pe~~ peace offensive have taken a tough anti-Communist stand against the armed Viet Cong guerrillas, but have virtually ~~ignored~~ ignored the subversive element. The newly-formed government of Prime Minister Pham Huy Quat has taken a tough stand against both the Viet Cong guerrilla and the Communist subversive. But the government has ~~deliberately chosen to ignore~~ deliberately chosen to ignore the Buddhists as ~~a~~ a partial subversive movement. During his first press conference, the Prime Minister ~~himself~~ interrupted one translation, took it upon himself to become the spokesman of the Buddhist position and carefully explained that the Buddhists were for "nationalistic" sort of peace. This "soft" stand on the Buddhist issue is one of the most important developments since the departure of Lt. Gen. Nguyen Khanh.

Since the fall of Diem, the rise of the militant Buddhist movement has been the most important ¹⁶ ~~single~~ ^{IMMEDIATELY} development in the turbulent 15 months of Vietnam's history. Following the toppling of Diem, the Buddhists held a mass conference in which they re-grouped their strength, unified their position and mapped out their future strategy. They had already launched a whispering campaign against ~~the~~ the ~~first~~ Prime Minister ~~of the~~ Nguyen Ngoc Tho of the first ~~militar~~ military junta.

deepe

mada me--7

However, before the Buddhist politico-priests could marshal their forces, Maj. Gen. Nguyen Khanh seized power as prime minister. Throughout the year, the armed power of the armed ~~was~~ forces skirted the ~~was~~ growing mass power of the pro-neutralist Buddhists. Throughout the year, ~~mostl~~ mostly in behind-scenes intrigue the two contenders for power were Lt. Gen. Nguyen Khanh and the Buddhist politico-priest who had spent 64 days in the American Embassy during Diem regime. named Thich Tri Quang. In August, Khanh and Tri Quang collided; the priest won momentarily as pro-Buddhist demonstrations toppled Khanh from the ~~President~~ Presidency. But Khanh, with brilliant maneuvering, quickly re-established himself as the strongman--until February 20 when pro-Buddhist generals allied themselves with pro-Catholic generals to vote for his dismissal.

Khanh then left Viet Nam. Now the strong man in Vietnam is ~~Backed up by~~ Thich Tri Quang and his subordinates.