

World Furor Over Execution

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SAIGON.

The case of Ta Vinh, the Chinese business man who was executed Monday for war-profiteering, began as a simple economic trial and now has evolved into a controversial issue here and abroad.

His pre-dawn public execution by firing squad in Saigon has poured fuel on an already simmering internal situation. Ta Vinh's Chinese wife is known to have asked the Militant Buddhist Organization for financial support—and possible political revenge. The organization—widely thought to contain pro-neutralists and pro-Communists—has engineered the downfall of previous governments, and could do the same with this one.

At the international level, the issues became more snarled.

U. S. WARNING

Officials of the American Embassy—speaking privately and unofficially—are known to have warned South Vietnamese government officials that they could expect a political black-eye in the American and European press—and one that would harm the “new society” image adopted at the Honolulu conference last month.

One diplomatic flap was caused by the fear that Peking would exploit the execution of a Chinese business man and thus gain support of the hundreds of thousands of overseas Chinese, while the Taiwan government would tacitly and silently be left backing the Saigon regime. It could be considered a great irony that Peking might come out in support of a “corrupt capitalist.”

When Ta Vinh's trial began, Chinese business men in Saigon's twin-city of Cholon favored the Saigon government. As the trial progressed, however, more and more Chinese resented the way the case was handled.

Two other Chinese business men got six-year prison terms for economic speculation and hoarding.

ANTI-CHINESE

The Chinese considered these trails as being anti-Chinese instead of anti-corruption. They complained that while Chinese business men were corrupt, the bribes went into the pockets of Vietnamese government employees, specifically at the Ministry of Economy, where bribes up and down the administrative ladder were necessary to get required paper work for import and export licensing.

The government hastily countered these arguments, however, when only hours after the Ta Vinh execution, a Vietnamese public servant confessed, was convicted and was given a death sentence for



Premier Ky

embezzling the equivalent of \$70,000 in public funds.

If this Vietnamese public servant is executed, Premier Ky undoubtedly will gain enormous support within the country. First, the Vietnamese are tired of the overwhelming waves of corruption. Second, it will give Gen. Ky an appearance of governing in opposition to American Embassy advice, which could strengthen his prestige.

A week earlier, the Economy Minister was replaced by a young, energetic banking expert who is widely reputed by the business community here to be both honest and capable.

DISCONTENT

The extent of corruption, nepotism and bureaucratic inefficiency—plus the fact that the reins of economic power are in the hands of a privileged few with vested interests—has consistently been the root of discontent among the low-class and lower-middle class elements of the population.

The corruption is commonly believed by almost all Vietnamese to be operating at a peak level. Premier Ky faces even more complicated economic problems than his numerous predecessors—for the American build-up of troops, coupled with increased Viet Cong sabotage of roads, canals and rivers—has produced inflation that is potentially as dangerous to the country as Viet Cong troops.

Chinese business men throughout Southeast Asia operate an enormous economic network, in which smuggling, black marketing and “high finance” are interwoven with “high politics” and espionage—including some for the Chinese Communists.

In the face of these economic problems, which are the essence of Saigon's political problem, the case of Ta Vinh means that the government of Prime Minister Ky must govern—or else, like its predecessors, it will fall.