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SAIGON--Vietnam's National Buddhist Pagoda, although no longer national, again maintains the calm, austere appearance of a pagoda instead of the raucous political meeting place that it was for months earlier this year.

A giant-sized, multi-colored Buddhist flag, flipping from an elaborate steel flagpole erected by the Vietnamese Army's Engineering Corps, is the most conspicuous display of motion where once schoolboys and hoodlums pelted Vietnamese Marines with rocks and ~~gas~~ tear gas grenade grenades and where spectacular suicides by fire startled the world.

Where thousands once congregated in an neon-lighted carnival atmosphere for Saturday evening anti-government, anti-American "sermons," the National Pagoda--called Quoc Tu--has recently scheduled non-political "variety shows" by Buddhist youth, an extraordinarily tame change.

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The Buddhist representatives and chaplains, which earlier this ~~year~~ incited government soldiers and units to fight each other, rather than combatting the Viet Communist Viet Cong are now ^{ME + Communist} being selectively weeded out of the Vietnamese armed forces; ^{Soldiers - Comm. HZES} 500 Buddhist representatives at the company level have been ^{disbanded} ~~dismissed~~; 30 Buddhist chaplains at the battalion and regimental level have been pruned out ~~and~~ --and more are to follow.

What is the reason for this shift towards tamedness for a religious--and more significantly a political movement--which has sparked the overthrow of three Vietnamese governments in the past three years and which ignited enough anti-Americanism earlier this year to force divisions of American combat forces to be confined to their billets?

In the wake of the Buddhist ~~political~~ defeat by the government of Prime Minister Nguyen Cao Ky earlier this year, political observers here note three important causes for the change.

First the national ~~political~~ religious leadership of the ~~Pagoda~~ curve-roofed Pagoda is split at the top. Second, "the Communist elements which had infiltrated into the movement at its peak of anti-Americanism have already fled and formed other clandestine, ~~and~~ subversive organizations," one Saigon politician explained. Third, a potential realignment of other Buddhist factions, once outside the scope of the Pagoda, is considered to be shaping up.

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Some political sources say "the Buddhist movement is now almost finished--and it's a good thing, or else the Communists would have seized control of the Buddhists and of Vietnam." Others believe the Buddhists are simply re-organizing and re-grouping, much as they did after ~~their~~ ~~spontaneous~~ their first victory, the fall of President Ngo Dinh Diem in 1963--and then they ~~went on to wreck~~ ^{Politically} other successive governments. Others argue, that while the religious arguments and appeals of Vietnamese Buddhism have been ~~tarnished~~, the same politico-priests will and are ~~clandestinely~~ continuing their anti-government campaigns, but are now using the emotional appeal of regionalism instead of ~~real~~ religion.

"You must never forget that the Buddhist-inspired uprisings against the Ky government and the Americans are ~~but~~ ^{YEM R} were but a dress rehearsal for what they can do in the future--probably before the American election in 1968," one Saigon politician warned.

On the surface, the Buddhist leadership as a whole has lost ~~prec~~ considerable ~~prestige~~ among some elements of their religious following; some of the faml families of Buddhist priests who burned themselves alive for the Buddhist cause now taunt the leaders with cries of: "You enjoy life and fight each other--why did my relative die for you?"

But, below the surface, in whispered tones, some of the anti-Communist Buddhist layment concede they themselves have only become more bitterly anti-American and anti-government, arguing that "this is our greatest moment of despair. For the anti-government sentiments of the population, instead of being canalized by the Buddhists, will ^{How} ~~not~~ be magnetized by the Communists."

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In the midst of this ^{momentary} ~~at least temporary~~ political vacuum, ^{the} will be ^{urban} ~~Buddhist masses~~, particularly in the urban areas, swing ~~to~~ ^{to} ~~the~~ ^{the} ~~their~~ support toward the American-supported government of Prime Minister Ky? Or will they fall into the Communist fold, particularly in the discontented cities where the Viet Cong subversive organization is considered to be expanding?

Upon these questions ^{Part 3} ~~the~~ hinges the future ~~internal~~ political fate of Vietnam.