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Election--page 1

(This is the first of a x series on the significance of the Communist-held elections at the rice-roots level of South Vietnam).

17
SAIGON, SEPTEMBER 15--In Gia Dinh, that soggy-donut province surrounding this edgy capital, the Communists are holding night-time elections in ~~the rural~~ rural villages some ten or fifteen miles from the American Embassy and Vietnamese Presidential Palace.

Vietnamese government sources report the election process is ~~taken~~ taking a clandestine form. A Communist cadre calls at ~~z~~ each village house during the government-imposed curfew hours and presents the Communist-approved slate of candidates. Then, under the nose of the ~~z~~ greatest concentration of Allied conventional military power in Vietnam, and under the barrels of overwhelmingly superior Allied firepower, the Communist cadre asks the villagers in the house to vote for the candidates of their choice by writing the ~~corresponding~~ corresponding number, but not the ~~candidate's~~ candidates' names, on a slip of paper. The self-made ballot is then placed in an ~~envelope~~ envelope and the flaps are glued down. The Communist cadre shoves the primitive ballot into his shirt pocket--instead of ~~a~~ centralized ballot box--and slips away into the night.

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Deepe

Election--page 2

Communist radio broadcasts also describe the election process in no less dramatic terms. The Liberation Front radio broadcast on September 5 referred to the election near Danang and in Quang Nam province, where the ~~high~~ huge American Marine commitment is headquartered. The broadcast said:

"Under the boiling spirit of the offensive and uprising...the people in the liberated areas and particularly in some areas under the American control, ~~the~~ people participated in the election of the ~~Free~~ People's Liberation Councils and Committees. The turnout was 95 per cent of the eligible voters in the villages. In a number of villages where the enemy is conducting mopping-up operations, the people still managed to show up at the proper time for voting. At Vill village T within two hours after the enemy withdrew, the people went to vote and finished the election. In village L the people were holding the election, when the American bandit bandits arrived. The people went to the village gate to carry the political struggle and to stop them from coming into the village. They succeeded; the Americans were turned back and the election continued. In some villages, our militia encircled the puppet (Vietnamese government) outpost, harrassed and pinned down the troops inside, while the people went to the election. "

--MORE

Deepe

Election--page 3

The overwhelming ramifications of the newly-elected People's Liberation Councils were considered profound enough for Washington to dispatch a White House staff officer here for an on-the-spot field assessment. The American officialdom here has also ordered a special country-wide reporting on them by their provincial offices; the Vietnamese government is known to be keeping a watchful eye on them.

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Deepe

Election--page 4

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The sum-and-substance significance of the People's Liberation Councils is they are victory committees. They represent not only the determination of, but also the vehicle for, the Communists to fight the war until victory--unless the Allies agree to their peace terms. The heart of victory for the Communists is the destruction of the elected, constitutional government in Saigon. The y Communists now seem entrenched in this committment, for the formation of the People's Liberation Councils are the first official, albeit minna miniature governments they are establishing in the countryside as an explicit alternative to--and substitute for--the current Saigon government.

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Deepe

Elections--page 6

The ~~bloss~~ blossoming of these People's Liberation Councils in the countryside does not harden the Communists official peace position--they simply ~~implement~~ at the village level the rigidity of the Communists previously stated declarations. For some time, the Communists have continually denounced the validity and legitimacy of the Saigon government constitutional government; but, the ~~Peo~~ People's Liberation Councils represent the first time the Communists deliberately sought to set up their own official, quasi-legal, elected ~~govern~~ rival to the Saigon government. In this sense, the councils are a political point of no return for the Communists--they can not turn back and renounce their own elections and they have made it virtually impossible to accept ~~the~~ to integrate into Saigon's constitutional framework, ~~as the Allies' peace position demands.~~

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Deepe

Elections--page 57

At the peace table, once the current official talks in Paris hurdle the question of the American bombing of the North, then the fundamental issue becomes the future government in South Vietnam. At this time, the Allied peace position and the Communist peace position on this issue seem irreconcilable--and beyond compromise. Either the Communists or the Allies must cp capitulate from their current positions-- or else fighting continues on the battlefield. The Allied position here is simply that the constitutional government in Saigon must remain the sole, legal government--but it will make substantial concessions to integrate individual Communists back into its framework. The Communist position calls for the destruction of this constitutional goverment; after it is destroyed, then the Communists will form a "coalition" government with those leftisits w leftists who helped to topple the current government. If there is to be peace, either the Allies or the Communists must capitullate i capitulate--and the elections of the Liberation Councils indicate that it is not the Communists who will yield. yield. If a peace settlement for the South is to be arrived at, it will be the Allies who will have to change positions and "dump" the whole constitutional framework they are currently fighting for. If the Allies do flipflop in their pso position, then the Communists will not only influence, if not dominate, the central government, but will also control large chunks of the countryside through their People's Liberation Councils. If the Allies do no change policy, then the Communists are geared towards protracted war--and they believe the People's Liberation Councils are the vehicle for them to win it.

Deepe

Election—page 8

The great question here is whether the new American Administration in January will continue to support and fight for the current Saigon regime, or whether it will "dump" the government that the Johnson Administration insisted on having elected. Uncertainty and doubts on this question are being raised here ~~x~~ as the American Presidential election campaign progresses. The official American Embassy view, widely ~~propaga~~ ~~propagated~~ propagated here, is that ~~on~~ the American commitment to the Saigon government will continue—no matter which Presidential candidate is elected. But, ~~the~~ most Vietnamese nationalists, including President Nguyen Van Thieu, know very ~~well~~ well the American Embassy here is not the spokesman for Candidates Nixon, Humphrey and Wallace. And, as one Western diplomat recently commented, "Hubert Humphrey just exploded a nuclear bomb on the South Vietnamese government and body politic by saying American troops might be withdrawn from Vietnam by the end of '68 or early ~~19~~ '69."

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Deepe

Election--page 8

Some American and Vietnamese government officials believe the elections of the People's Liberation Councils indicate the Communists are preparing to capitulate to the Allied peace demands at the conference table, but are attempting to control the countryside as ~~they attempt~~ to seize power within the Saigon government's constitutional framework.

"These Liberation Councils are being set up just to pull the wool over your eyes," one Vietnamese Cabinet Minister told a Western journalist.

"They hope you go out in a helicopter and see the red flags flying over every village, indicating they have the support of the people. Well, it's not going to happen that way--the ~~Vietnam~~ Vietnamese government is going to move in ~~their~~ own village officialdom fast the minute a ~~ceasef~~ ceasefire is ~~ordered~~ agreed to at the conference table."

However, specialists who have studied ~~the~~ Communist documents in depth agree that the newly-elected councils symbolize the ~~Communist~~ Communist determination to press on to victory on the battlefield, ~~it~~ and to overthrow ~~the~~ Saigon's constitutional government by violence--unless the Allies themselves do them this favor during the peace talks.

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