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dec. 17, 1964

SAIGON--A sudden flipflop in the current tactics of the Communist-oriented militant Buddhist movement has produced the illusion it has lost what it wants most--the masses.

A common and widely held viewpoint of political analysts in Saigon ~~points~~ states that the Buddhist movement has not been able to capture the popular support and enthusiasm that it mustered to spark the overthrow of the Ngo Dinh Diem regime last November.

But other political observers argue that the Buddhists have the potential power to topple the current government of Tran Van Huong--but it has yet to issue an all-out appeal for public support.

According to this line of reasoning, the Buddhist movement ~~upon which the government~~ was the spearhead in the first drive to overthrow the Catholic President last year ~~which was the main support of the government~~ which they accomplished with <sup>Huong</sup> spectacular flaming suicide burnings of Buddhists monks and one Buddhist nun. The second stage of protest was handled by the students, politicians, intellectuals--and in the final stage by the armed forces who violently overthrew and assassinated Diem.



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### Summary

For the past year, however, the oppositionist movements against Khanh--and against Huong until last week--were spearheaded by the students, schoolboys and politicians. The Buddhist movement became a supporting element which stayed in the rear.

Last week-end, however, the Buddhists again reverted to the tactics used successfully under Dien--by launching a series of hunger strikes in protest against the Huong government. The militant Buddhist leaders again decided to spearhead the oppositionist attack. During the past year, the Buddhists have officially and loudly denied any direct, immediate link with the oppositionist movements--though they had been consistently implicated. Now, as in the later stages of the Dien battle against Dien, the Buddhist clergy have again entered actively into the political arena.

The Buddhists are now considered to be in the warming-up phase--and the potential power they wield over the masses has yet to be tested.

(More)



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In their fight for alleged religious freedom against the Diem regime, the Buddhists paved the way for a sweeping political dissident movement in the urban centers, including non-Buddhist elements, intellectuals, students, political party oppositionists--and even some Catholics.

It is argued that the Buddhist militants of this year ~~continued~~ ~~longer maintain this kind of wide range of~~ have lost this wide range of support. But from the Buddhist point of view, many of these elements have been willingly sacrificed in order to ~~swell~~ swell their ranks from other elements. The Buddhists movement appears to have lost the support of their ~~most~~ strongly anti-Communist elements--such as the northern refugee buddhists laity who have escaped from North Viet Nam and the Buddhist laity of the economically conservative class. While the Buddhist militants regularly announce anti-communist communiques for foreign consumption--such as their recent letter to President Lyndon B. Johnson--they regularly transmit pro-neutralist communiques for ~~internal~~ internal Vietnamese consumption.

During the past year, while losing some of the conservative anti-Communist rank-and-file, ~~they~~ <sup>MILITANT BUDDHIST LEADERS</sup> have continued to strengthen both ~~the~~ their vertical organization reaching from the national level to the villages and their horizontal organization <sup>N</sup> reach touching persons in all walks of life.



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While Huong--unlike Diem during the last days of his regime-- still has the high-ranking armed forces officers backing him--Huong does not have their wives. The ~~wives of~~ <sup>2</sup> Buddhist wives of even the strongest pro-Huong generals continually nag their husbands to be moderate more ~~patient~~ with the Buddhists, ~~nam~~ instead of cracking down on them, and to oppose Huong. The Buddhist ~~whisper~~ <sup>whisper</sup> whispering campaign ~~claims~~ claims to have ~~at~~ <sup>2</sup> at least 2,000 Armed Forces officers who are prepared to side with them instead of with the government in a showdown. While this claim ~~may~~ <sup>divisiveness of</sup> may be exaggerated, the emotional ~~pull~~ <sup>all</sup> the Buddhists within the Armed Forces is ~~of~~ <sup>is</sup> deep concern to the highest ranking Vietnamese officer.

Similarly, Buddhist chaplains now serving with ~~a~~ each service of the Armed Forces and three-man Buddhist committees--~~a~~ de facto political cell <sup>2</sup> within each company of the Army has sapped the ~~emotional~~ military more and more into the Buddhists' emotional dragnet.

Last week, a ~~Viet~~ <sup>2</sup> Buddhist communique written for ~~a~~ Vietnamese readers boasted of having seventy per cent of the police force on their side instead of that of the government <sup>2</sup> in the event of a showdown.

One Vietnamese housewife recalled that low-ranking government officials, in the precincts of Saigon--while continuing ~~their~~ <sup>his</sup> official duties--was ~~also~~ <sup>2</sup> also enthusiastically pushing the Buddhist propaganda line. These lower-ranking Buddhist government officials are known to have given the Buddhists <sup>organization</sup> valuable intelligence information about families living in each city block.



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Buddhist representatives for each block have been calling on housewives and families telling them to "be alert" for any call for Buddhist-sponsored demonstrations.

During the past year, the Buddhists have strengthened considerably their vertical organization running from the Saigon headquarters to the regional, provincial and village offices. Last year, for example, the Buddhist movement operated in its stronghold area of Central Viet Nam much like a secret society, as the monks continuously moved about for fear of arrest. Today, however, it is readily acknowledged that the militant Buddhist wing is strong enough in terms of organization and mass support "to do anything it wishes up there." It is virtually without opposition; and exhaustive attempts to help the victims of a recent flood in that area presumably galvanized their support even more.

In short, the vertical organization of the Buddhist movement appears to copy that of the Saigon government; the horizontal organization appears to copy that of the Communist-led National Front for the Liberation of South Viet Nam.



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Much as the Viet Cong political organization has created youth Leagues and Peasant Associations, the Buddhist movement, with headquarters in Saigon, has established a Buddhist Boy Scouts, Girls Scouts, associations for trade union workers, students--and even disabled war veterans.

In addition it has formed alliances with the political parties, all of whom are attempting to hitch onto the Buddhist support, with other religious groups--including factions of Catholics which are now badly disunited.-- Internationally, at Buddhist conferences the Vietnam's Buddhist movement has open relations with neutralist and independent Communist countries the anti-Communist Saigon refuses to recognize.

In its attempts to capture the support of the masses, the militant Buddhists are at least paralleling the Communist Viet Cong organization in the fight for the same masses. But while Saigon has been spinning with rumors of latest news as the Buddhists attack the anti-Communist government of Huong--there has not been a rumor, a whisper, a shred of evidence that the Buddhists are in conflict with the Viet Cong in their conquest for the masses.