

(Morgan Gandy)

SAIGON 11200 (UPIS) President Lyndon Johnson's pet projet of low-cost rural electrification for Vietnamese peasant villagers has encountered "delay after delay" here within the ^{tangled} ~~snarled~~ American bureaucratic red-tape and in-fighting.

As a result of the "deliberate" bureaucratic delays, one American official said villagers this week threw stones at him in An Giang Province where the Vietnamese rural folk had been promised cooperative electricity months ago-but had yet to receive it.

American and Vietnamese officials have waged a tooth-and-nail fight to push through the President's plan for low-cost cooperative rural electricity for more than a quarter million Vietnamese villagers and peasants in Tuyen Duc, Bien Hoa and An Giang provinces.

(more - MALLORY - BD)

One high-placed American official became so angered by the bureaucratic delays that he considered resigning--but didn't. Another considered writing to his home Congressman, "but these bureaucrats even have Congress under their thumb." The intra-mural American in-fighting once became so intense that American officials threatened each other with calling in Congressional investigations.

"The program had the support of all the high-level Washington officials and the high-level and low-level Saigon officials, both American and Vietnamese," the source explained. "But the middle-echelon career bureaucrats who ~~never~~ stay in Saigon and never see the countryside caused delay after delay." The source explained that the opposition to the President's plan mirrors the lengthy, bitter controversy within the United States about electric power ownership--the conflicting interests between public power (federal, state or city-owned), private power (such as Con Edison in New York), and cooperative ownership--the President's plan for Vietnam--in which private citizens collectively form and join a cooperative, for establishing ^{And} ~~this and~~ managing electricity distribution in rural areas.

second add—morgan gandy—saigon

x x x rural areas x x x .

This latter method has been used to electrify large chunks of rural America during the past three decades.

In 1935, President Johnson directly helped organize the PEDERNALES REPEAT PEDERNALES, Texas, rural electrification cooperative.

The LBJ ranch is supplied electricity from this cooperative.

A high-placed source detailed g the American red-tape in Saigon.

"The American bureaucracy here is a ^{DINOSAUR}~~dinosaur~~ with a little head and an outmoded lumbering body," one high-placed source explained. "Even with the approval of the President and a five-million dollar appropriation from Congress, the middle-level bureaucrats threw up block after block and then counter-block to stop the program. The bureaucrats ask thousands of questions--and it takes thousands of hours to answer the question,^{s/} then so we lost time day by day.

(more—MALLY—BD).

third add--morgan gandy--saigon

x x x day by day x x x .

"So you write a memo to explain the project and some bureaucratic hides it in his bottom desk drawer for a week and you have to go persuade him gently to pull it out," the source continued. "Then he refers it to another department for signatures or counter-signatures and you lose more time.

"The American agencies all have manual after manual defining the relationship of everyone to everyone else--so whenever someone wants to do something, there's always a rule to stop you," the source continued.

"One American bureaucrat pulled out the manual and pointed to the rule prohibiting me to do something. I said 'I don't care about the rules--I want to help win the war here.' The Saigon bureaucrat told me, 'I do care about the rules--and that's all I care about. My job is to watch the rules.'

(a recent management survey team has recommended the re-organization of the U.S. Agency for International Development (AID) in Saigon).

(MORE MALLO/-BD)

fourth add--morgan gandy--saigon

x x x in saigon). x x x

The program began in April, 1965, when President Johnson sent a six-man study group to Vietnam, to analyze the feasibility of low-cost cooperative power in the countryside and how the engineering should be handled.

"Forty six days later the President had annouced the projects and we were floored things were moving so fast," one source explained. "Then we got the five-million dollar Congressional appropriation ^{earmarked} ~~especially~~ for the three-province project in Vietnam and it really looked like things were flying high.

"All we had to do was to get our engineering equipment in here and we could begin construction in November. Then the President announced we'd begin construction in November and the Vietnamese villagers were also told that.

(More--Malloy--RD)

fifth add--morgan gandy--saigon

x x x told that x x x.

"But what we were too unsophisticated to realize was ~~this~~ ^{these} skilled, shrewd, vicious oppositionists, who with back-kniving, with asking questions blocked us for month after month. The 'outs' threw blocks and counter-blocks in front of us, tossing papers from department to department.

"Other things happened I wouldn't even dream of telling you," the source explained.

"I've been fighting for this program for nine months," the source explained, "And I've never had such a frustrating experience in my life. I'm used to smooth operations--but this American bureaucracy is just incredible. It's not the fault of the directors of agencies--it's the system, it's the instability and the emotionalism.

"We're still going to win this war, but we don't deserve win the way we're operating now."

(More--Malloy--BD)

sixth add--morgan gandy--saigon

x x x operating now x x x

An example of one of the delays in the program was the construction of a plant to manufacture and treat the wooden poles that would be used in the rural electrification along miles and miles of Vietnam's countryside ^(two hundred miles in) ~~(sixty miles in)~~ Tuyen Duc province, 155 miles northwest of Saigon, for example). The standard price of the cement poles generally used in Vietnam was one hundred thirty five unistates dollars per pole, "which is alright in the gold-plated French system of supplying power at a high price," the source explained. "But ~~it~~ was too expensive for the low-cost operations we wanted. So we found three hundred thousand ^{of} treatable pine trees in the highlands that could be used. We flew in an expert from Washington who said the timber was good and could be effectively treated against the weather and the insects, ^{of} So this plant for the pinetree poles would have dropped the cost from one hundred thirty five dollars per pole to fifteen or sixteen dollars per pole.

"But we had to fight the bureaucrats for seven months to get this plant," the source continued. "Even with the advice ^{of} ~~of~~ an expert one bureaucrat wanted us to scrap the whole idea and come up with another way to manufacture the poles.

(More--Malloy--ED)

seventh add--morgan gandy--saigon

x x x the poles x x x .

"We kept running into blocks and red-tape like this," the source continued. "Today we ~~are~~ in February we are exactly where we should have been in September with that pole plant. Our materials--transformers, nuts and bolts, are just now beginning to leave the United States for Vietnamese seaports.

"So, now it will be at least six months before we begin construction--which the President said would begin in November last year. Obviously, even he isn't an authority on his own project."

As a stop-gap measure about three hundred x electric light poles have been shipped to Vietnam from Taiwan.

"We call these 'off the hook poles'--to get the President off the hook he got himself on by saying we'd begin construction in November. These will be installed as a symbolic act for the Vietnamese people--but they still won't have the electric lines up."

One source joked that in Vietnam elephants could be used to plant the treated poles in the ground. Another source ~~exp~~ specifically ~~recom~~ recommended an elephant named 'Ong Nhu' (Mr. Nhu), which once belonged to Madame Ngo Dinh Nhu and was "nationalized" after the Diem regime fell.

"But we didn't think the President would approve of using any elephant in any form--including 'Ong Nhu'," ~~is~~ the source explained.

(Note to editors: informatively, other specials also working on ~~this~~ same pieces on rural electrification.)

Endit--Malloy--BD