

Columnist Calls Viet Elections 'Boring Act'

WASHINGTON (CPS)--My view of the September 3 elections, the way they organized, the circumstances under which they took place is that they were simply a boring act in the already too long tragi-comedy which is politics in South Vietnam since the U.S. intervention.

The elections were simply an act of legitimization of the old cast for the continuation of the escalating, atrocious war. But there are Americans who are taken in by the official line, reinforced by the report of the jet-mission of 22 Presidential observers conducted by former Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge.

To these people, I would like to forward some facts coming from Saigon. Unlike the Presidential advisers and envoys, the Vietnamese in Saigon speak Vietnamese, are Vietnamese, and write reasonably good English. They also live in Vietnam.

1. The South Vietnam National Assembly announced on September 13 that it could not proclaim at that moment the results of the presidential and vice presidential elections for it had not received all village and district reports for the purpose of cross-checking. The decision was made in the morning with the approval of 56 of the 80 deputies present.

First to speak in the session was Nguyen Thanh Vinh, President of the Special Committee (on the elections). He said many inaccuracies have been found in many of the reports.

Many other deputies also took the floor. Deputy Nguyen Hau Chung, reporting in the voting in Saigon, said there were an extra 4,728 ballots as compared to the number of people who voted on September 3. Another deputy, Dam Van Quy, reporting on the case of Gia Dinh, noticed that 1,133 ballots must be considered as lost as compared to the number of actual voters on balloting day.

According to an official of the Central Elections Council, "it will take at least 5,000 people to screen the minutes of the senatorial elections." The day before (September 12) in Vu Tien Huan, First President of the Court of Cassation (equivalent to Chief Justice of the Supreme Court) and chairman of the Central Elections Committee (CEC) told a Vietnam Press (official agency) correspondent that the "Council can only proclaim the results of the senatorial elections after careful checking of the minutes sent to the Committee from the provinces." The Chief Justice also complained that the results recorded in the minutes "often completely differ from figures sent to Saigon through the Post Offices." (Saigon Post, September 14).

2. About 1,000 students of the Faculty of Sciences of the University of Saigon yesterday

refrained from entering the examination room to protest what they call "fraudulent elections." Pham Van Binh, press officer for the Saigon Student Groups said that he had distributed a two-point resolution demanding the proclamation of the September 3 elections as fraudulent and anti-democratic.

Later in the day, Tran Thieu Luat, press officer of the Saigon Student Association blamed the Americans (President Johnson and others) for sending congratulatory messages to General Thieu and Ky before the official proclamations of the Presidential elections by the National Assembly. He then criticized American policy as backing only individuals and not the people of Vietnam.

According to both Binh and Luat, "American policy here only makes things more complicated. It won't help find a solution for the war." (Saigon Post and other Vietnamese papers, September 14, 1967)

3. Commenting on the results of the elections, the Saigon Post wrote: "Without a powerful and influential opposition which should represent an alternative government, the newly elected leaders may find it impossible to resist sycophants. The danger is real that flatterers could make him (General Thieu) think he is what the Vietnamese would call 'the center of the universe.' The need for an opposition, however, transcends this aspect. Wherever there is nothing to channel the many grievances of the people and especially in underdeveloped countries where patriotism is often synonymous with extremism, minor grievances may speedily turn or be converted into violent manifestations or public ire. This is all the more important if one should realize that the Vietcong successes so far can be traced partly to the lack of a popularly backed government and a popularly backed opposition which share a common principle of public service." (Saigon Post, September 12)

Commenting on the strong vote peace candidate Truong Dinh Dzu got in the elections, the same paper wrote: "The White dove which Dzu adorned all his posters and leaflets and his apparent willingness to embark on the road of peace negotiations -- even without Hanoi and the Vietcong agreement -- can be said to please a substantial segment of the Vietnamese population which does not hold the Comm-

unists responsible for the nation's present trials. The 70,000 votes he got in Saigon, for example, cannot be blamed on Vietcong presence. Vietnamese suspicion of anything foreign is another factor for Dzu's success.

Let it be known here that when the French first were interested in Vietnam, they were called by our forefathers 'the devils from the West.' American presence here, however beneficial it may be for this nation in the long range, is viewed with suspicions and with resentment. Dzu was the only candidate to forget mentioning the necessity of U.S. presence at the present juncture of the nation." (Saigon Post, September 14)

4. On September 18 (two weeks after the elections) a change in the lineup for South Vietnam's Senate pushed out one slate made largely of members of Cao Dai, Hoa Hao sects and replaced it with another slate dominated by the Catholics (General Thieu is a Catholic). The Catholics, who represent 10 percent of the population, control now half of the Senate.

5. There are now 25 out of 48 Senatorial slates which filed complaints with the National Assembly on the irregularities and fraudulent practices of the elections.

In an article from Saigon Richard Critchfield (Washington Star September 18) wrote:

"The Vietnamese government and the U.S. officials have been shocked by what they say is the growing bitterness, indifference, and fence-sitting of the Vietnamese."

These officials are shocked because they have lived away from people, in air-conditioned ivory towers. To me these feelings of bitterness and indifference are the only logical consequence of fraudulent, illegal elections.