

No Alternative Seen In Vietnam Elections

Elections in Vietnam are over, and activity in both that besieged war country and our own has reached a climax. Thieu was the only candidate for the Presidency, a situation which many Americans find intolerable. But let us look briefly at our alternatives:

1. Since Thieu was the only candidate, either he somehow forced everyone else out of the running or they got out for reasons of their own choosing.

If the former is the case, what was the U.S. to do? We had already tried the coup routine with Diem, and still have egg on our faces from it. Or the U.S. could have pressured to have another candidate enter the lists, in the interests of "democracy." But that would directly contradict our policy of disengagement, of returning the war and the country to the South Vietnamese; it is likely that pressure tactics would only prolong U.S. involvement, something no one seems anxious to do.

That left us with the only remaining alternative--acceptance of the fact that the Vietnamese should be allowed to govern themselves, irrespective

of whether America is happy with their electoral process.

2. But suppose the other candidates withdrew from the race for reasons other than those held up by my witch-hunting liberal friends? Suppose, just suppose, that Minh withdrew because he knew he was a minority candidate, and no matter how fair the election would be, there was no way he would win. Minh had his chance in 1963, when he led the coup against Diem, and tried unsuccessfully to fill the shoes of the murdered President. Remembering all this, knowing you are a loser and you have to get out anyway or make an awful fool of yourself, you might as well throw a little mud at the winner. (In America, we aren't so particular--we denounce not the man but the whole system. The principle, or lack of it, is the same.)

If this is the case, and it is entirely probable, then what could the U.S. have done? We could have as in number 1, insisted on another candidate, but again we would be guilty of interfering in the affairs of another nation while simultaneously claiming to be "winding down" our activities there.

So in either case, the U.S. had no logical course of action other than to have let the elections proceed as scheduled, and to hopefully stop clinging to the tedious notion that we must intercede to support those losers like Minh who have been our puppets. Thieu has sponsored a successful land reform program, and has thereby won the support of the large majority of the countryside. Let's leave well enough alone.

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