

Scholastic Opinions

By **RUSSELL M. COTTRELL**
President — LST

The recent presidential election in South Vietnam has, to the chagrin of many doubting doves, given reason and purpose to a seemingly futile conflict.

General Thieu and Marshall Ky, the victors, were elected through an essentially free and democratic process that helped satisfy the prerequisites of a sovereign government: legitimacy and popular support. Free elections, are a phenomena that has yet to occur in the South's hellicose neighbor, North Vietnam.

The environment of South Vietnam could not be more unfavorable to these elections. Omnipresent war and terrorism, abject poverty, and illiteracy, the prime enemies of democracy, were momentarily vanquished to elect a president.

Although the election was probably not without irregularities, in some qualities it surpassed traditional U. S. elections. Of the electorate, an astronomical 83 per cent actually voted. The record-breaking 1964 American Presidential election produced only 62 per cent of all those qualified to vote.

The President's Commission sent to observe the election was unanimously laudatory of its fairness. Mayor Joseph M. Barr of Pittsburgh, a member of the Commission said, "There's less harassment of the voters than there is at the polls in the United States, and they have better identification with their voting cards than we do." Senator Robert Kennedy had the temerity to call the election "a fraud", even before it was over.

Some U. S. pundits are dismayed by the fact that Thieu and Ky are generals and they control the military, which apparently controls the country. It is overlooked that nine U. S.

Presidents were generals including our first. Also, the U. S. President is Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces. This and other emergency powers has made the U. S. President a general with peremptory power during time of war.

The National Directory of South Vietnam has lasted two

years after a concatenation of eight transitory governments beginning with the fall of Diem in 1963. Thus the present regime has fulfilled the sine qua non of all fledgling nations, stability.

In 1860 Lincoln received only 40 per cent of the popular vote in an election with only three other candidates running. Wilson narrowly topped Theodore Roosevelt in 1912 with only 42 per cent of the vote. Therefore, a close look at our own political history, which is not unsullied, will often neutralize much of the captious criticism aimed at these new and struggling nations.