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ACCOMMODATION AND COALITION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

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Rand Corporation
Santa Monica, California

January 1970

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ACCOMMODATION AND COALITION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

Gerald C. Hickey*

The RAND Corporation, Santa Monica, California

In South Vietnam the drama of history and the pivotal position of the area as a crossroads have combined to bring about one of the most complicated sociocultural mosaics in Asia. The great tradition of China is represented by the Vietnamese, who were sinicized during the thousand-year period of Chinese rule and who, since the tenth century, have carried this tradition from the Red River delta southward in their expansion along the coastal plain to the delta of the Mekong River. Chinese influence permeates all levels of Vietnamese society. Taoist-Confucianist beliefs and values shape the Vietnamese view of the cosmology, the Cult of the Ancestors is ubiquitous, and Mahayana Buddhism is widespread.

Indian influence is found among the Khmer and Cham minorities. The Cham, whose language is of the Malayo-Polynesian stock, are remnants of a once large population that formed the majority group in the Hindu Kingdom of Champa which existed in what is now central Vietnam until its final defeat and destruction by the Vietnamese in the

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fifteenth century. Cham population remains in the Phan Rang area of the southcentral coastal plain where they cling to many Brahmin traits, and in the southwestern corner of the Mekong River delta where later Islamic influence left its imprint. The Khmer, whose language is of the Mon Khmer stock, are scattered throughout the Mekong delta, and they are descendents of a population that once was part of the Khmer Empire, the most spectacular traces of which are the ruins of Angkor. They have close cultural affinities with the neighboring Cambodians, particularly in their adherence to Theravada Buddhism.

Other minorities include the upland ethnic groups which can be designated collectively as the Highlanders (the French designation, Montagnards, often is used). Although they have remained aloof from either the Indian or Chinese great traditions which molded the lowland civilizations, they have racial and linguistic ties to the Cham and Khmer as their languages belong either to the Malayo-Polynesian or Mon Khmer stocks. The Chinese, while they are an urban minority, wield great influence in financial activities, both national and local.

Western ways were brought to the area by the French when they established the colony of Cochinchina in the nineteenth century. Western influence has been particularly strong in the hybrid Vietnamese-French-Chinese commercial city of Saigon, which became the capital of South Vietnam in 1954. It was the struggle against the French that produced the Vietnamese revolutionary heroes of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and it was this nationalistic spirit that gave rise to organized political movements such as the Viet-Nam National People's Party (Viet-Nam Quoc Dan Dang, sometimes called the Vietnamese Kuomintang), the

Viet Minh, and the Dai Viet Party. It was inevitable that the Cao Daist and Hoa Hao religious movements would get involved in nationalistic politics prior to the Indochina War, and in the past decade political movements also have emerged among the Catholics and Buddhists as well as among the Highlanders, Cham, and Khmer. There also are indications of increased political activity in the Confederation of Vietnamese Labor, which includes labor unions and the Tenant Farmers' Association. Then there is the Viet Cong or National Liberation Front (NLF), the heir of the Viet Minh.

In recent years there has been a marked proliferation of sociopolitical movements in South Vietnam. At present there are reported to be 60 registered political parties and some 30 not registered.[1] Most of these, however, are only small groupings, and the number of significant parties is much smaller. Nonetheless, these figures, which do not include the political movements which have emerged among the religious and ethnic groups noted above, do indicate the complexity of the situation, and they also reflect the factionalism that has plagued the Vietnamese throughout their history.

Although factionalism continues, in recent years there have been two related processes taking place which, if they continue, could bring about a greater coalescence within and among the many groups and improve their relations

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[1]Final passage of the new Political Parties Bill, promulgated on June 19, 1969, sets more stringent requirements for validation, and will more than likely result in fudging of smaller parties, drastically reducing the number.

with the government. One is the process of accommodation between the government and most of the sociopolitical groups. The other is the process of inter-group accommodation, often occurring between or among quite diverse groups, resulting in political coalitions.

The first process began with the fall of the Diem government on November 1, 1963. and the willingness of the military junta to allow all of the sociopolitical groups which had been repressed by Diem to function openly. Succeeding governments continued this process in varying ways. All groups participated in the 1966 Constitutional Assembly elections and in the 1967 Presidential and National Assembly elections. More explicit accommodations were made with individual groups such as the Hoa Hao, the Highlanders, and the Buddhists of Thich Tam Chau's faction (accommodation between Premier Khanh and Thich Tri Quang turned to conflict with the Ky government).

The second process -- that of inter-group accommodation -- has been taking place since the beginning of 1968. Interestingly enough, during the past 25 years there has been a pattern of inter-group accommodation to form political coalitions in times of relative uncertainty. Such coalitions appeared in August, 1945, just after the Japanese surrendered when the Nationalist groups and Viet Minh scrambled for power before the French returned, and in 1947 with the formation of Le Van Hoach's Fragile United National Front. Then in 1953 when it was clear the Indochina War was ending there was the Congress of National Unity and Peace, and in 1955 the alliance among the Cao Daists, Hoa Hao, and Binh Xuyen to oppose Diem. The beginning of 1968 saw the Tet Offensive followed by President

Johnson's March 31 speech in which he declared he would not be a candidate for president and called for a partial halt in the bombing of North Vietnam thus opening the way for the Paris Peace Talks. Early in July, the People's Alliance for Social Revolution, a coalition of several groups, was formed, and in October, another coalition, the Progressive Nationalist Movement, appeared, and in May, 1969, President Thieu launched the National Social Democratic Front, a coalition of political, religious, and ethnic group leaders.

In arriving at a solution to the war that will be satisfactory to both sides, the National Liberation Front (NLF), also called the Viet Cong, will have to be given a significant role in the postwar political structure. It appears that this will be done through elections, and the NLF will be a formidable contender. At the same time, the U.S. and its allies will insist on some kind of guarantee that a political balance be maintained. This will involve discussion of such things as changes in the present constitution, the format for holding elections, and international control schemes. In the elections and in maintaining political balance, much depends on popular support. The government has placed a great deal of emphasis on gaining this support through a wide range of programs such as the Revolutionary Development Program, the Village Development Program, and Land Reform. In the struggle between the government and the NLF, however, most of the population have not identified with either side. They have learned through experience that noninvolvement is the best means of survival.

Considerable popular support can be gained through the major sociopolitical groups. These political, religious, and ethnic parties and movements do have organizations, and they do have following among the urban and/or rural segments of the population. They vary, however, in the effectiveness of their leadership and in strength of organization. Some, for example, are dominated by political personalities who are more concerned with interpersonal squabbling than with leading, while others have dedicated leaders respected by their followers. Some groups also have strong religious or ethnic appeal, but they lack good organization and/or internal unity. Still, these sociopolitical groups have the advantage of offering alternative channels to the government or NLF for expression of individual and group wants and desires. Finally, it should be remembered that the coming political competition will not be an exclusive contest between the NLF and the government; all of the sociopolitical groups will be participants.

Most of these groups are not pro-NLF, but neither are they committed to the government; they represent nationalist interests, and they are against domination by the communists or the U.S. Through accommodation with them, however, the government stands to gain more support from their leaders, and in doing so, more support from the members of these groups. In the present situation, political power is in the hands of the military, and accommodation with the sociopolitical groups, most of which are led by civilians, will involve concession of some power to these leaders in order to gain their support. While each group has specific things it wants of the government, it would be safe to say that all of the groups

want positions of real authority in the high levels of the government for their leaders. In effect, they want to share in the political power.

Most of them also want authority and prerogatives in the local areas where they predominate. The aforementioned arrangement between the government and the Hoa Hao was a good example of this kind of accommodation. The details of it have never been made known, but the Hoa Hao were granted considerable control over district and province administrations where they are concentrated. In return, Hoa Hao leaders supported the government, and the Hoa Hao areas have been among the most secure in South Vietnam. It should be borne in mind, however, that the ordinary Hoa Hao villager still is not loyal to the government -- he supports his own leaders and, through accommodation, the leaders have come to cooperate with the government.

Part of the government's accommodation to the socio-political groups would be to encourage them to coalesce their leadership and rally popular support among their followers. One approach would be for the government to advocate amalgamation of some existing groups within political, religious, and ethnic boundaries; for example there are several parties among the Catholics, and if they unified they would form one Catholic political front with a consolidated following. The same is true of some splintered political parties and groups such as the Hoa Hao which has several major political factions. Then less well-organized groups could be encouraged to form themselves into viable political organizations with whom the government could make further accommodations. The Cao Daists, for example, have some political leaders, but no effective organizations

through which support can be mustered among the different Cao Daist sects. Political movements among the Highlanders, Cham, and Khmer are in an incipient stage of development, but they do have some dedicated and effective leaders.

This has not been the approach of the Thieu government. As noted previously, popular support is being sought through social and economic programs, and political support through a drawing together of groups and factions into a mixed, pro-government coalition. This and the other coalitions that have been forming do have the potential of developing into strong political entities but, even with Thieu's coalition, for this to happen will necessitate accommodation. Leaders in these coalitions will want more power and prerogatives in order that they might play meaningful roles in the political arena. It is essential in creating any kind of political balance in the coming political competition.

The interim coalition government proposed by the NLF is unacceptable to the Thieu administration, and the Thieu administration is unacceptable to the NLF. A compromise could be effected through this process of accommodation. In giving the leaders of the sociopolitical groups a greater role in the central government, the balance of power will shift, and the result will be a new coalition of military and civilian leaders. This will have to be a real sharing of power in order to create a situation amenable to NLF participation in working out a political settlement. It goes without saying that at the same time there will have to be military accommodations with a cease-fire and a vastly reduced presence of U.S.,

North Vietnamese, and Third Country military forces and related civilian personnel (engaged in such things as pacification programs). The final political accommodation will involve giving the NLF a share of power in the central government and authority over areas where it has predominated. This sharing of power may involve naming NLF leaders to cabinet posts, but more than likely the composition of the postwar government will be determined by elections. These will have to be organized and conducted by an election commission composed of representatives of the government, the sociopolitical groups, and the NLF. This commission would have to have complete authority in organizing and implementing the elections. It would, in effect, function as an interim government during the election period.

Major Sociopolitical Groups

One factor which has contributed to the sociopolitical complexity is the regionalism that has persisted throughout the history of Vietnam. Regionalism was perhaps an inevitable development given the strong village orientation of Vietnamese society and the historical nam tien or "advance to the south" which took place over a thousand-year period and carried the Vietnamese population from the Red River delta, along the physically segmented coastal plain into the delta of the Mekong River. Significantly, many of the historical conflicts among the Vietnamese were inter-regional, and regional divisions formed the basis for French control in establishing the protectorates of Tonkin and Annam in northern and central Vietnam and the colony of Cochinchina in the south.

Strong regional sentiments also have been a source of some disruption and strife in recent Vietnamese history. The hundreds of thousands of northern Vietnamese who came south following the Geneva Agreements of 1954 have only partially integrated themselves into southern society. As one Vietnamese observer put it, "They (the northerners) continue to be a nation within a nation." This has resulted in a northerner-southerner dichotomy that cuts across social and political lines from the street vendor to the highest echelons of the central government. Regionalism also was an important element in the violent events of early 1966 when the "Struggle Forces" of central Vietnam assumed control of Hue and Danang in defiance of Saigon. The central Vietnamese, proud of their imperial past when the emperors resided in Hue, resent being ruled by a government seated in Saigon.

Ngo Dinh Diem's National Revolutionary Movement, which became the predominant party with the start of his regime in 1955, had its staunchest support in the Hue area, and in spite of the fact that it became so strong during his administration, it never really took root in the south. After the Diem government fell, the party disbanded, leaving scarcely any traces outside of central Vietnam. The affiliated Can Lao Nhan Vi Cach Mang Dang ("Revolutionary Workers' Personalist Party"), better known as the Can Lao, was the vehicle for political control with a branch in the south led by Ngo Dinh Nhu and another in the center headed by Ngo Dinh Can, both brothers of Diem. In many respects the Can Lao functioned very much like a secret society; its members were carefully selected, and they were organized into cells. Most occupied key positions

in the administration above district level, and many were in command positions in the military. With the downfall of Diem, the Can Lao lost its power, and many of its members were jailed by the ruling military junta. Since then, most of them have been released, and many have returned to responsible positions in the government. Some have affiliated with two Catholic political parties, the Greater Solidarity Force and the Nhan Xa Party.

One of the surviving older nationalist parties is the Viet Nam Quoc Dan Dang, known as the Kuomintang Nationalist Party or, more frequently, as the VNQDD. Founded in 1927 in Hanoi, the VNQDD in South Vietnam splintered into twelve factions, but at the present time there are two major factions, and two lesser ones. The major factions of the VNQDD distinguish themselves by modifiers, both of which mean "unified" in English. The group led by Nguyen Dinh Luong, Chu Tu Ky, and Le Hung has particularly strong following in Quang Tin, Quang Ngai, and Quang Nam provinces of central Vietnam and also among northerners. The other faction, which formed officially in May, 1969, is led by Vu Hong Khanh, Nguyen Hoa Hiep, and Tran Van Tuyen, and it has strong support among northerners and southerners. This faction joined Thieu's National Social Democratic Front, which also was organized in May, 1969. The leader of one of the lesser factions is Le Ngoc Chan, currently ambassador to London, and the other is led by Tran Hoang, with followers concentrated in central Vietnam.

The Dai Viet Quoc Dan Dang ("Greater Vietnam Nationalist Party") was formed in 1942 by Truong Tu Anh and Dang Vu Lac, and it became one of the leading nationalist

parties. It also suffered internal fissioning, however, and at the present time there are three active branches in South Vietnam. In 1965 the Dai Viet Cach Mang, usually called the Revolutionary Dai Viet Party, was formed, and it is led by Ha Thuc Ky. It has considerable following in the central provinces of Quang Tri and Thua Thien, particularly in the city of Hue. The Tan Dai Viet, known more frequently as the Southern Dai Viet because of its strong following in the south, particularly in the Saigon area, is led by Dr. Nguyen Ton Hoan, who served as Deputy Premier under Nguyen Khanh. Following a conflict with Khanh, Hoan left Vietnam and has not returned, so Le Van Hiep leads the party in Vietnam. The position of the Southern Dai Viets has improved during the Thieu administration, and Nguyen Ngoc Huy, a party leader and professor at the National Institute of Administration, is a member of the South Vietnam delegation at the Paris Peace Talks. Among the refugees who came south were members of the Northern Dai Viet Party, but it is a small political group more or less restricted to professionals and intellectuals.

Cao Daism and Hoa Hao are indigenous religious movements that became entangled in nationalist politics, and in many ways their histories tell us a great deal about the political currents in what is now South Vietnam since the 1930's. Cao Daism began in the mid-1920's as a new religion that would encompass all of the great religions of the world in preparation for the "third amnesty of God." The first Cao Daist center was in Tay Ninh, west of Saigon near the Cambodian border, but the sect spread rapidly throughout Cochinchina. Differences among members of the

hierarchy led to fragmentation, and the result was 11 identifiable branches, 8 of which survive today. After 1935, when Pham Cong Tac became leader of the Tay Ninh sect, Cao Daism became identified as a pro-nationalist movement, and in 1941 the French authorities acted against it by exiling Pham Cong Tac and other leaders.

The Hoa Hao sect had its beginning in 1939 when a young man named Huynh Phu So, who believed himself to be the reincarnation of Phat Thay Tay An, founder of the Buu Son Ky Huong sect which flourished in the western provinces in the mid-nineteenth century, attracted attention in the same region with his "miraculous cures." He also preached a "new Buddhism," and as his reputation spread, the French authorities began to regard him with suspicion. First they forbad him to preach, and then they took him into custody. From the end of 1942 until early 1945 he remained in Saigon, first under the surveillance of the French and then the protection of the Japanese. After the Japanese assumed direct control of Indochina in March, 1945, Huynh Phu So engaged in politics openly for the first time. He participated in the Association for Vietnamese Independence, sponsored by the Japanese, and he founded the Vietnam United Buddhist Association. Neither movement was successful, and within months they dissolved. He then organized his followers into a religious movement called the Phat Giao Hoa Hao or Hoa Hao Buddhism, named for his natal village in Chau Doc Province.

Within weeks after the Japanese surrender early in August, 1945, nationalist forces in Cochinchina organized the Front for National Unification in an attempt to gain control in Saigon. It included delegations from the Cao

Daist and Hoa Hao movements, members of the Vietnam National Independence Party, the Vanguard Youth, the Public Servants' Federation, the Restoration Party, as well as some prominent intellectuals and a group of Trotskyites associated with the newspaper La Lutte. Then on August 22, the Viet Minh announced the formation of the Committee of the South. Shortly afterward, these two organizations formed an alliance, but when the Viet Minh began to dominate it the Cao Daists and Hoa Hao disengaged, and the Front for National Unification dissolved in July, 1946, leaving the nationalists the choice of supporting the French or the Viet Minh.

The various branches of Cao Daism went separate ways. In 1946 the French and the Tay Ninh sect opened negotiations; the leaders were brought back from exile, and in January, 1947, a military convention was signed. The French would train and arm a Cao Daist military force in return for the support of the Tay Ninh sect. As the Indochina war became worse, some of the Cao Daist sects in the eastern Mekong River delta assumed an anti-French position. Leaders of the Tien Thien and the Ban Chinh Dao sects were jailed by the French. In 1951 Cao Daist military leader, Trinh Minh The, organized his "third force," and Cao Trieu Phat led another movement called the Eleven Unified Cao Daist Sects in support of the Viet Minh.

In September, 1946, Huynh Phu So established his own political movement, the Vietnam Social Democratic Party, known as the Dan Xa. Relations between the Viet Minh and the Hoa Hao worsened, and in April, 1947, So made an arrangement to meet Buu Vinh, a Viet Minh commander in Long Xuyen Province, to mediate some local difficulties between

the Hoa Hao and Viet Minh. When he entered the command post he was ambushed, and some witnesses later reported he was hacked to death. Many Hoa Hao adherents believe he is still alive, and they await his return, but the events generated deep bitterness and anti-Viet Minh sentiment among the Hoa Hao (this sentiment has been extended to the NLF). Leadership of the movement fell to his deputies, Nguyen Giac Ngo, Tran Van Soai, Lam Thanh Nguyen, and Le Quang Vinh, better known as Ba Cut. On May 18, 1947, these leaders signed a military agreement with the French, and each was given his own well-defined territory to control. Like the agreement with the Tay Ninh Cao Daists, the French would arm and pay Hoa Hao troops in return for Hoa Hao support.[2]

Early in 1947 a United National Front was organized in Cochinchina following the organization by Vietnamese nationalists of a United National Front in Nanking. Both organizations were pro-Bao Dai, and the southern Front included Cao Daists, Hoa Hao, some VNQDD, members of various Buddhist sects, and small political party leaders. Late in 1947 this organization was absorbed into the National Union, founded by Cao Daist leader Le Van Hoach, a strong supporter of Bao Dai, who had just been ousted as head of the Republic of Cochinchina. In addition to the above groups, the National Union had some Dai Viets and Catholic leaders, one of them Ngo Dinh Diem. Internal dissensions brought about the dissolution of this movement late in 1948.

By 1953 it was clear the war could not last much

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[2]Fall, Viet-Nam Witness, pp. 144-46, 152-54.

longer; in France there was political confusion, strikes, and general outcry to end the war. In September, a group of Vietnamese nationalists convened a Congress of National Unity and Peace in Cholon. Among the organizers were Ngo Dinh Nhu, younger brother of Ngo Dinh Diem, Madame Huynh Cong Bo, mother of Huynh Phu So, and Cao Daist leader Pham Cong Tac. In reaction to the strong stand for independence taken by this gathering, Emperor Bao Dai called a congress of his own. Of the 200 seats, political parties were given 15 seats, Cao Daists 17, Hoa Hao and Catholics each received 15 seats, the Binh Xuyen (an organized band of river pirates who in 1948 supported the Nguyen Van Xuan government and by 1953 had gained control of vice, gambling, and the police force in Saigon, with French sanction) 9, the Buddhists 5, and the Highlanders 5.[3]

Following the Geneva Agreements in 1954, newly named Premier Ngo Dinh Diem faced a situation where he lacked the support of the army, the Binh Xuyen ruled Saigon, and the Cao Daists and Hoa Hao controlled large parts of the western provinces. Early in 1955, Diem bought the support of Cao Daist military leaders Trinh Minh Te and Nguyen Thanh Phuong and Hoa Hao leader Tran Van Soai. When he moved against the Binh Xuyen by closing the Grand Monde, their large gambling casino, the Binh Xuyen, Cao Daists, and Hoa Hao formed the United Front of All Nationalist Forces, and they appealed to Emperor Bao Dai to remove Diem. Diem stood fast and fighting between his forces and the

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[3]Nguyen Phut Tan, A Modern History of Viet-Nam, pp. 601-02.

Binh Xuyen army took place in the Saigon-Cholon area during March and April. Immobilized by the loss of their generals, the Cao Daists and Hoa Hao did not respond to the Binh Xuyen plea for aid, and Diem's forces, under Duong Van Minh, one of the four generals who was to depose him in 1963, crushed the Binh Xuyen army.

The Cao Daists elected not to resist, and in 1956 Pham Cong Tac was exiled to Phnom Penh where he died in 1959. The Tay Ninh sect was divested of its lands, and its army was disbanded. Diem's forces pursued the Hoa Hao units into the western provinces. On June 18, Soai fled to Cambodia, and Ba Cut retreated into the marshlands with his troops, only to be captured in 1956 and sentenced to be guillotined by a civil court. Some Hoa Hao units, however, continued to resist; in 1962 some units under the command of Truong Kim Cu were caught between forces of the Army of the Republic of Vietnam and Viet Cong, and he surrendered to the government.

During the Diem era the political activities of the Hoa Hao and Cao Daists practically ceased. The Cao Daists groups of the eastern delta who had opposed the French were allowed to function openly. Their leaders were returned from exile, and they reestablished their Holy Sees, reconstructing their cathedrals. Following the fall of the Diem regime, both the Hoa Hao and Cao Daists generally fared better; some cabinet posts were given them, and more local officials were appointed from their ranks. Both movements, however, suffered internal splintering, particularly among their leaders.

In the Tay Ninh sect two blocs of leaders emerged. One was led by Cao Hoai Sang, General Nguyen Van Than,

General Van Thanh Cao, and Duong Quang Dang, and the other by General Nguyen Thanh Phuong, who figured in the 1955 events and subsequently was the running mate of Nguyen Dinh Quat in the 1961 elections, and Le Van Tat. The first attempt at organizing a formal political party took place on October 20, 1968, in Saigon when 230 sect members met under the auspices of the Cao Dai Capital Propagation Section. It was announced that this section would henceforth function as a political party, and it would seek permission to publish a newspaper. The Advisory Board included Phan Khac Suu, former Chief of State, and an affiliate of the Tien Thien sect in the eastern delta, Le Van Hoach, who founded the National Union in 1947, Nguyen Ngoc An, former Minister of Information, and Colonel Nguyen Thanh Danh, publisher of the newspaper Thoi Dai. On November 25, 1969, the formation of a Cao Dai political movement called the Social Republican Party, under former General Duong Quang Dang, was announced.

The internal splintering that occurred in the Hoa Hao movement following the disappearance of Huynh Phu So has continued. A reorganization of the hierarchy was effected by December 1964, with a new Executive Committee and Luong Trong Tuong was named chairman. Among the other leaders elected to high positions were Nguyen Ngoc To and Huynh Van Nhiem. A new constitution was approved by the government. Conflict soon developed between Tuong and To when the latter was named Minister of Agriculture in the Pham Huy Quat government, but it was resolved without causing any serious split. Relations with the government improved considerably after Nguyen Cao Ky became Premier, and in May 1966, Tuong and other civilian and military leaders formed the Hoa Hao Buddhist Defense Force with the encouragement of Nguyen Huu Co, Minister of Defense. During this period many province officials in the western region

were from the Hoa Hao, and An Giang became the most secure province in South Vietnam.

Another conflict developed between Tuong and Colonel Tran Van Tuoi, and in May, 1967, Premier Ky visited Madame Huynh Cong Bo, mother of Huynh Phu So and much revered by sect members, to bring her a gift of ginseng, and he sought her intercession to attain some unity. She was an effective arbitrator, but on June 2, she died, and continued internal fragmentation was a major factor in the Hoa Hao's lack of success in the 1967 elections. Early in 1968, another hierarchical split took place between Tuong and Huynh Van Nhiem, and it has continued until the present time.

There also has been a history of conflict in the political wing of the Hoa Hao. In the mid-1950's, Phan Ba Cam bolted the Social Democratic Party, led by Trinh Quoc Khanh. Early in 1966 they agreed to join forces and form the United Vietnam Social Democratic Party, although Khanh continued to distinguish his group by the designation Chu Thap ("Cross") and Cam's group used the name Ba Sao ("Three Stars"). In the 1967 Senatorial race, Cam led the Revolution slate which polled a large number of votes, but in the final hour it was edged out. More recently these two factions diverged. In July, 1968, Cam launched the Vietnam People's Force, which included some Dai Viet Duy Dan, a small party not related to the other Dai Viet parties, and some former VNQDD. It was declared to be in opposition to the newly formed People's Alliance for Social Revolution (which will be discussed later). Then in April, 1969, Khanh led his group into President Thieu's new National Social Democratic Front, putting Cam and Khanh in opposing political coalitions.

Not apart from the political arena are the other major religious groups found in Vietnam. The majority of northern refugees were Catholic (Catholicism was more widespread in the north than in any other part of Vietnam), and this plus the years of Catholic Ngo Dinh Diem's rule gave the Catholics a greater role in politics than they hitherto enjoyed. No one Catholic political party resulted but rather several movements and some individual activists. The most prominent movement is the Greater Solidarity Force under the leadership of Senator Nguyen Gia Hien, a northerner with strong backing among the Catholic refugees. Another is the Nhan Xa Party, headed by Truong Cong Cuu, Le Trong Quat, and Pham Duy Lan, all relatively well-to-do members of the business community. This party has considerable following in central Vietnam and Saigon, particularly among former Diem supporters. In May, 1969, the Greater Solidarity Force and the Nhan Xa leaders affiliated their movements with Thieu's National Social Democratic Front. Lesser political groups are the People's Union, a southern Catholic party led by Huynh Kim Nen, the Jesuit-sponsored Catholic Citizens' Community, and the Christian Democratic Party.

The most prominent of the individual Catholic politicians is Father Hoang Quynh, a northerner who was active against the French in the heavily Catholic Phat Diem area of North Vietnam. Three Catholic newspapers add their voices to the political colloquim. These are Father Nguyen Quang Lam's Xay Dung ("Construction"), Father Tran Du's Hoa Binh ("Peace") and Thang Tien ("Forward"), a weekly published by Catholic laymen. Although the political views of these movements and individuals vary, the

Catholics act in unison on occasion; for example in the 1967 elections the Catholic turnout was very high, and their candidates took 29 of the 60 Upper House seats. While such response can be attributed in part to the political leaders, it was due more to the clergy advising their flocks to vote for Catholic candidates.

Since the early 1960's, Buddhism has experienced an increased involvement in politics. The Buddhist Studies Association of South Vietnam was formed in 1951 and its headquarters located in the Xa Loi pagoda when it was completed in 1961. The Association included southern leaders, a group of northern refugee monks, among them Thich Tam Chau, and some from Hue, the most notable being Thich Tri Quang and Thich Thien Minh. The Xa Loi pagoda became the focal point in the events that led to the downfall of the Diem regime on November 1, 1963. After the coup d'etat in January, 1964, which brought Nguyen Khanh to power, the Buddhist leaders organized the Unified Buddhist Church with monks occupying most of the high positions. Thich Tri Quang was Secretary General of the Clerical Council, responsible for faith and doctrine, while Thich Tam Chau became Director of the Vien Hoa Dao, known as the Dharma Institute, charged with secular affairs. The Khanh government gave them land on which they constructed the Dharma Institute, and it also increased considerably the number of Buddhist chaplains for the military.

In August, 1964, Khanh promulgated a charter that would have given him sweeping powers, and it precipitated open conflicts between Buddhists and Catholics in Hue, Danang, and Saigon. In October, Khanh stepped down, turning the government to Phan Khac Suu and Tran Van Huong.

Chief of State and Prime Minister respectively. Continued agitation brought this government down, and in central Vietnam where Thich Tri Quang's influence was strongest, anti-government activities were directed against the Quat and Ky administrations. During this period there was a growing split between the Thich Tam Chau group with its headquarters at the Dharma Institute and the Thich Tri Quang faction centered at the An Quang pagoda in Saigon. Early in 1966, the "Struggle Forces," made up of central Vietnamese who wanted autonomy and including a large number of Thich Tri Quang followers, seized the cities of Hue and Danang. Ky responded by dispatching troops, and both cities were recaptured.

With this confrontation, the influence of the Thich Tri Quang group began to wane. The gap between this faction and that of Thich Tam Chau widened when, in October, 1967, the Ky government granted Tam Chau the official Buddhist charter. Since that time, both factions have remained relatively aloof from overt political activities. On January 13, 1969, Tri Quang issued his "three no's" -- no voicing of opinions, no political activities, and no demonstrations. Shortly thereafter, however, the An Quang Pagoda sponsored the formation of the Vietnamese Buddhist Journalists' Association. Relations between the An Quang group and the government took a turn for the worse in February when Thich Thien Minh was arrested for "harboring rebels and possessing weapons and communist subversive literature." Subsequently he was tried by a Military Court and sentenced to 10 years imprisonment, but on the occasion of Buddha's birthday late in May, President Thieu reduced the jail term to three years, and on October 31, 1969, Minh was finally released.

Organized political movements are something relatively new for the Highlanders, Khmer, and Cham. Among the Highlanders, although there is considerable ethnolinguistic variation, there has arisen since 1958 an identifiable leadership drawn from the major ethnic groups. By and large they are affiliated with two factions; the FULRO (acronym for the French designation, Front Unifie de Lutte des Races Opprimees ["United Fighting Front of the Oppressed Races"]), which is a dissident movement that had been involved in armed uprisings against the government in 1964 and 1965, and those leaders who have identified with the government and have assumed positions in the Ministry for Ethnic Minorities' Development in Saigon and in highland provinces. This differentiation, however, does not imply a split, for in many respects these leaders are of one movement. The two factions have maintained close communications, they share the same spirit of what might be called "Highland Nationalism," and they have on a number of occasions expressed common needs and desires which they would like to have the government satisfy. Only very recently has there been any indication of fissioning, and this is within the FULRO movement.

With the formation of the Republic of South Vietnam in 1955, the Vietnamese for the first time assumed administrative responsibility for all of the southern highlands; it had been a Crown Domain, directly under Emperor Bao Dai, and even Vietnamese migration into the area had been severely restricted. Ngo Dinh Diem's unofficial policy was to assimilate the Highlanders into the Vietnamese cultural sphere. This resulted in decrees and practices designed to impose on the Highlanders the social institutions and

cultural traits of the Vietnamese. From the government's point of view, this was to be a civilizing process, but to the Highlanders it was an attempt to destroy their traditional way of life and their cultural identity. Moreover, the government ignored the Highlanders' claims to land in its Land Development Program, which sought to resettle lowland Vietnamese by giving them land in the highlands, and in the Highland Resettlement Plan, under which Highlanders were forced off their ancestral land and moved into "reservations."

Early in 1958, as a result of these measures, a group of highland leaders formed the Bajaraka Movement, a designation which combines the key letters in Bahnar, Jarai, Rhade, and Koho, the ethnic groups from which they came. Later the same year they called for a general strike in Ban Me Thuot, and a five-hour demonstration resulted. Seven of the leaders were arrested, among them, Y Bham Enuol, who later was to become leader of the FULRO movement and Paul Nur, presently the Minister for Ethnic Minorities. In February, 1964, Y Bham Enuol, the last of the leaders to be released, was appointed Deputy Province Chief for Highlander Affairs in Darlac. Dissidence was in the air again, and FULRO sources report that in September, Y Dhe Adrong, a Rhade civil servant, met with representatives of the Struggle Front of the Khmer of Lower Cambodia and the Front for the Liberation of Champa (both of which are discussed below) to plot a revolt involving five Special Forces Camps. When the revolt began, Y Bham Enuol joined them, and out of this emerged the FULRO movement, which, although at first it referred to an amalgamation of the old Bajaraka movement with the above-mentioned Cham and

Khmer organizations, it became identified as a Highlander dissident group. The revolt was put down, and FULRO established its headquarters near the old French Camp Le Rolland across the border in Cambodia.

FULRO expanded successfully. It built its own army of several thousand troops, some of whom were organized in units and others in local militia, and it commanded considerable following among troops in the various military programs organized by the Vietnamese and Americans. In addition, FULRO gained active support among many Highlander civil servants, students, and villagers in sections of Kontum, Pleiku, Phu Bon, Darlac, Quang Duc, Lam Dong, and Tuyen Duc provinces. The government opened formal negotiations with FULRO in August, 1965, and a FULRO delegation led by Y Dhe Adrong took up residence in Ban Me Thuot. Relations were disrupted by a second FULRO revolt in December carried out by younger, more militant members, indicating some split between them and the older leaders who favored negotiation. FULRO-government relations were reestablished in May, 1966.

Through a series of notes and during these meetings with government representatives, FULRO leaders made known their grievances and "aspirations." They wanted greater participation in political affairs. Explicitly, they asked for a highland leader to be placed high in the central government. They also suggested having a body of representatives from all highland ethnic groups meet periodically in Ban Me Thuot to discuss the needs of the population, and they requested that more of the administration in the highlands be placed in the hands of the indigenous people. They asked that measures be taken to resolve the

land claims of the Highlanders. On the premise that only Highlanders could pacify the highlands, they proposed formation of a highland army or "military force" under the command of indigenous officers, who would receive guidance from Vietnamese and foreign military advisors. Finally, they wanted a highland flag to be flown under the national flag.

Little progress was made until August, 1968, when government representatives met with a FULRO delegation led by Y Bham and some members of the Cham and Khmer movements. The government delegation made it clear it would deal only with the Highlanders, so a meeting between Y Bham and a FULRO delegation and Prime Minister Tran Van Huong was arranged and held in Saigon. After these discussions Y Bham returned to consult with his staff at the Cambodian headquarters while his deputies Y Dhe Adrong and Y Bling Buon Krong Pang continued discussions with Minister Paul Nur and the Prime Minister's staff. Since they had Y Bham's approval to negotiate, Y Dhe and Y Bling and the government representatives signed an agreement on December 19, 1968. It concerned a flag for the Highlanders, an important role for Y Bham, an increased number of Highlander administrators, and integration of FULRO military units into the Regional Forces.

Just before his departure to sign the agreements, a force of FULRO dissidents, some of whom were active in the 1965 revolt, accompanied by a group of Cambodian-Cham, including a few officers of the Royal Khmer Army, captured Y Bham's headquarters. Y Bham and his family were sent to Phnom Penh, and since then they have remained in Cambodia as have the FULRO dissidents. Even without Y Bham's

signature, however, the government considered the agreements valid, and on February 1, 1969, President Thieu and high government officials presided over a ceremony in Ban Me Thout welcoming the FULRO leaders and 700 troops back into the fold. Political activities of the non-FULRO leaders have not been carried out through any formal movement or organization. Following the September, 1964, revolt, the government organized a congress of Highland leaders in Pleiku, and they were invited to express their needs and desires. These did not differ greatly from what the FULRO leaders expressed. Essentially they wanted some guarantees that the government would respect their right to retain their cultural identity. They also asked for greater participation in the political life of the nation with representation in Saigon and more direct control over the administration of the highlands. They also outlined explicit social and economic programs, emphasizing particularly the right of Highlanders to hold clear title to land.

At this meeting it was announced that the Bureau for Highland Affairs, established earlier that year, was to become a Directorate with Colonel Touprong Ya Ba, a Highlander, as Director. Early in 1966, the Directorate became a Special Commission for Highland Affairs with Paul Nur, one of the leaders jailed in 1958, as Commissioner. During the Ky administration the Highlander Law Courts were reestablished in some provinces, more Highlanders were appointed to provincial and district level posts, and more scholarships were provided for secondary schools. On August 29, 1967, General Thieu, then Chairman of the National Directory, signed a kind of "bill of rights" for the Highlanders concerning a number of programs. It

explicitly stated that land titles would be granted, and it made provision for a Council for Ethnic Minorities (also provided for in the new constitution) which now is waiting final passage by the President. Finally, with the formation of the new government in November, 1967, the High Commission became the Ministry for Ethnic Minorities' Development.

Significantly, research on Highland leadership has revealed that many of the most active of the FULRO and non-FULRO leaders are related through blood or marriage. Among the Highlanders, as among the Vietnamese, kin ties provide the basis for very strong interpersonal relationships, and kin groups are to be reckoned with at any level or in any segment of the society. In the case of the Highland leaders, two kin groupings can be distinguished. One is relatively small, but it includes some leaders active in the Ministry and in the Tuyen Duc provincial administration, as well as the present Province Chief of Pleiku. Most of the leaders included are Chru, a small ethnic group that has produced an inordinately large number of political activists.

A much larger kin network stretches from Kontum south to Lam Dong Province, and its membership includes leaders from the Sedang, Bahnar, Jarai, Rhade, and Sre ethnic groups. Some of the lineages within the network can be traced to renowned Highlander chiefs of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and some of the first civil servants recruited from among the Highlanders by the French. Included in this kin network are Paul Nur, Minister for Ethnic Minorities' Development, Toplui K'briu, Deputy Director of the Normal School at Ban Me Thuot and first Highlander to

receive an American bachelor's degree, a number of Highlander administrators, highly placed staff members of the ministry, and some active FULRO leaders. At the August 1968 government-FULRO meeting, five of the fourteen participant Highlanders were of this kin network.

Recently a new political movement has been launched among the Highlanders, and while it is dominated by former FULRO members, it includes a wide range of other leaders as well. On February 11, 1969, a delegation of former FULRO leaders met with President Thieu to discuss implementation of the agreements that had been made the previous December. In keeping with the agreements, they declared that they intended to form a political party to replace FULRO, and it would be called The Movement for Unity of the Southern Highland Ethnic Minorities. Subsequently they completed organization of the new party in conjunction with staff from the Ministry for Ethnic Minorities' Development and members of the National Assembly and the guidance of Nguyen Van Huong, Secretary General at the Presidency. By the end of March, approval for the new party was sought from the Ministry of the Interior, and on April 22, the formal dedication ceremony was held at Ban Me Thuot. The chairman is Y Bling Buon Krong Pang, a Rhade and former FULRO leader, and membership includes a number of those active in Highlander affairs. In May this movement became part of the People's Alliance for Social Revolution, and soon afterwards the Alliance joined President Thieu's National Social Democratic Front.

The origins of the Front for the Liberation of Champa are not clear but there are indications that it began to form around the same time as the Bajaraka movement, the

forerunner of FULRO in the late 1950's, and it involved Cham from the south central plain as well as Cham from Cambodia (Cham in Cambodia are descendants of those who fled the Cham-Vietnamese wars which ended in Cham defeat in the fifteenth century). As pointed out above, this front was part of the 1964 dissident movement involving the Khmer and Highlanders, and since that time it has functioned as a related but separate organization under the leadership of Ponagar, a pseudony aken from the name of a Cham goddess. Representatives . he Front for the Liberation of Champa have been present at most FULRO meetings, and their signatures often appeared on FULRO documents, indicating considerable contact between the two movements. Unlike FULRO, the Front has never entered into direct negotiations with the government nor has it made its aspirations known.

The Cham population in the Chau Doc area are entirely Muslim, and their religious leader is Hakim Omar Aly, who lived in Mecca for a number of years. Recently there have been reports of a new political movement among the Chau Doc Cham led by Ton Ai Lieng, a follower of Senator Tran Van Don. Within the past 15 years, two sociopolitical movements have arisen among the Khmer in South Vietnam. Following the 1954 Geneva Agreements, Son Ngoc Thanh, an activist in the struggle against the French, left Cambodia for South Vietnam after Prince Norodom Sihanouk became Head of State. Son considered the Prince to be a French collaborator, and he formed the Khmer Serei movement with the aim of overthrowing the Cambodian government. Recruitment for the Khmer Serei has been conducted in Cambodia and South Vietnam, and it has mounted guerrilla

operations on the Cambodian side of the border. The activities of this movement have been a source of conflict between the two governments.

The origins of the Front de Lutte des Khmers du Kampuchea Krom ("Struggle Front of the Khmer of Lower Cambodia"), usually referred to as the KKK, are similar to those of the Dao Lanh cult in the 1880's and the Hoa Hao sect. The founders of all three movements were mystics who spent considerable time amidst the monks, hermits, healers, and sorcerers who for centuries have made their abode in the Seven Mountains in Chau Doc Province near the Cambodian border. Both Pu Kombo, the Khmer who formed the Dao Lanh sect, and Huynh Phu So, founder of Hoa Hao, lived as ascetics and studied acupuncture and forms of magic at the Pagoda of the Burning Hillside.[4] During the late 1950's in the same locale, a Khmer monk named Samouk Seng began the movement that was to develop into the KKK. Initially it was known as the Can Sen So ("White Turbans") movement, named for the white scarves inscribed with cabalistic symbols to protect the wearer, which the members favored. Although the Can Sen So was small, the Cambodian government apparently saw it as a potential counterforce to the Khmer Serei, so it lent support to the movement.

In 1961, when Chau Dara, another Khmer monk of the Seven Mountains area, assumed leadership, he improved the internal structure of the Can Sen So, and recruitment among the Khmer in South Vietnam increased considerably.

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[4] Duncanson, Government and Revolution in Vietnam, pp. 120-22.

The name was changed to its present designation, and Chau Dara demanded better treatment and greater rights for the Khmer, and at one point he also demanded that "Lower Cambodia," i.e. Bac Lieu, Chuong Thien, Chau Doc, Kien Giang, An Giang, An Xuyen, Ba Xuyen, and Phong Dinh provinces, be returned to "Upper Cambodia," which is Cambodia. As the movement grew, it built an armed force that was estimated to number around 1,500 men, and it also published two weekly newspapers. In November, 1963, Chau Dara was captured by government forces, and this loss of an effective leader plus defections weakened the KKK considerably in 1965 and 1966. Also, by 1966 Cambodian support for the movement diminished greatly.

As indicated previously, often the FULRO communications made reference to the Khmer Krom ("Lower Cambodians"), and there also were claims of affiliation with the KKK by some FULRO leaders. There were, however, no strong manifestations of any formal association until the FULRO meetings with government officials at Ban Me Thuot in August, 1968. One of the FULRO delegation was a KKK lieutenant colonel, and he submitted a set of demands which resembled closely those of FULRO. These included a meeting of government officials and KKK leaders in Ha Tien or Chau Doc, a Saigon agency for the Khmer similar to the Ministry for Ethnic Minorities' Development, and establishment of a representative body of Khmer Krom in Ha Tien to function as a liaison between the Saigon agency and local populations. As indicated previously, the government delegation refused to discuss anything but the FULRO demands, so the KKK request was withdrawn and has not been resubmitted.

Although the Chinese never have formed any kind of

political movement or party, their retention of strong ethnolinguistic groupings and their important economic role have rendered them a significant force in the urban milieu. The bang, or congregations, are the organizations through which most Chinese have kept their ethnolinguistic affiliations and channeled their economic activities. In 1813, Emperor Gia Long formally recognized the congregations, and eventually five types emerged. The Canton congregations are comprised mostly of Chinese originating in northwestern Kwangtung Province and the delta of the West River. Another linguistic group from Kwangtung Province forms the Teochiu (or Chaochow) congregations. Those with natal or ancestral ties to Fukien Province belong to the Fukien (often referred to as the Hokkien) congregations while Chinese with similar ties to Hainan Island are grouped in the Hainan congregations. The Hakka congregations are dominated by Hakka speakers from Kwangtung Province, but they also include a mixture of other Chinese who do not belong to the other congregations.

Under the French administration these congregations enjoyed considerable autonomy. While the French authorities selected the congregation chiefs, these leaders were responsible for administering the wide range of congregation activities, including collecting taxes from members, arbitrating disputes, and operating congregation temples, hospitals, schools, orphanages, and other welfare services. The situation began to change considerably in September, 1956, when, in a move obviously aimed at pressuring the Chinese into adopting Vietnamese citizenship, President Diem issued a decree banning all foreigners from 11 professions, all of which were largely in the hands of the Chinese.

In the crisis that ensued it was the Joint Chinese Association of Congregations, consisting of five Cholon and five Saigon congregations, that dealt with the government.

The Chinese acceded, taking Vietnamese citizenship and the government relented on some of its measures designed to Vietnamize completely the Chinese. Then on June 10, 1960, Diem promulgated an ordinance giving the government ownership of all congregation properties and dissolving the congregations' administrations. A Committee on Management of Chinese Congregation Properties for Saigon-Cholon was formed as a unit in the municipal administration with the mayor as chairman. Unofficially, the former congregation leaders continued to meet and manage the Chinese community, and the congregation institutions were permitted to manage their own routine affairs. The Chinese community continued to provide financial support, although on a reduced scale.

On June 16, 1967, at a Cholon reception in his honor, Premier Nguyen Cao Ky referred to the possibility of returning congregation properties to the Chinese, and this was repeated during the election campaign. Following the election, the government requested the Chinese community to form Mutual Aid Associations which would have functions similar to those of the congregations. By mid-1969, some of these associations had been organized, but little else has been done.

The Confederation of Vietnamese Labor, usually called the CVT, initials for the French designation, was formed in 1954 with the amalgamation of the five labor federations. The largest and most influential is the Tenant

Farmers' Federation (TFF) which was organized in 1953, and by 1957 had a membership of 330,000. President Diem, however, feared its growing popularity and power, so in 1959 he launched the Central Farmers' Association in an effort to suppress the TFF. Membership in the TFF plummeted to 40,000 within a short period. In 1966 the TFF was reorganized and by 1968 membership had increased to 135,000. The Fishermen's Federation was organized in 1963, and has 65,000 members, but the Plantation Workers' Federation, which began in 1954 and attained a membership of 28,000 by 1960, has only 16,000 at present, a reflection of reduced plantation activities due to the war. Organized in 1954, the Transportation Workers' Federation has 65,000 registered members, although only 21,000 regularly pay dues. The Textile Workers' Federation was formed in 1956 and has 2,900 listed as paying dues. The CVT also includes a number of labor unions, the largest of which is the Petroleum Workers' Union with 1,700 members, and the smallest is the 60-member Swallow Nest Gatherers' Union (swallow nest soup is a Chinese delicacy). At the present time the total membership in the CVT is reported to be 500,000.[5]

The President and General Chairman of the CVT is Tran Quoc Buu, and other hierarchical positions are occupied by the leaders of the federations and unions. Although CVT regulations prevent the organization from engaging in political activities, Buu himself has been involved in politics. Early in 1968 he joined with some of the Hoa Hao followers of Luong Trong Tuong to form the Worker-Farmer Party, and in July it joined the People's Alliance for Social Revolution organized by Nguyen Van Huong. In May, 1969, this

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[5] A Brief Report on Trade Unions in Vietnam, pp. 1-8.

political coalition joined President Thieu's National Social Democratic Front.

Unique among the sociopolitical groups is the movement that refers to itself as the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam (NLF) but which is also known as the Viet Cong (a shortened version of Vietnam Cong San or "Vietnamese Communists"), a term coined by the South Vietnamese government to differentiate it from the Viet Minh. At the present time these terms have come to be used interchangeably. The movement was built on Viet Minh cadre left in South Vietnam after the Geneva Accords in 1954, and their goal was the take-over of the south and reunification with North Vietnam. By 1959 the movement visibly was being sustained by a flow of regroupees -- those who went north after Geneva to receive further training, after which they were infiltrated back into the south -- and armed force became one Viet Cong form of political action. Since 1965, the flow of regroupees has been replaced by North Vietnamese Army units.

In December, 1960, the NLF made its formal appearance. Its hierarchy consists of a Central Committee of 64 members, theoretically elected by a congress of delegates chosen from the district level. The Presidium or Politboro is selected from the Central Committee, and it is composed of a Chairman, Nguyen Huu Tho, a Secretary-General and five Vice-Chairmen, three of whom are Vietnamese while one is Khmer and one is a Highlander, Y Bih Aleo, a Rhade. In January, 1962, the existence of the People's Revolutionary Party (PRP) was officially recognized, and it is this body which directs the activities of the NLF. The PRP is the southern branch of the North Vietnamese Labor Party, and

it receives direction from Hanoi through the Central Office for South Vietnam (COSVN). The NLF and the Liberation Army, in effect, are branches of the PRP, and the whole structure extends from the national level to the villages. Attempts to mobilize segments of the population are carried out through liberation associations which function locally. The most important of these are the Farmers' Liberation Association, the Women's Liberation Association, the Worker's Liberation Association, the Student Liberation Association, and Youth Liberation Association. In addition, the NLF has two political parties, the Radical Socialist Party and the Democratic Party. They also have special interest groups, among which are the Patriotic and Democratic Journalists Association for professionals, the Hoa Hao Morality Improvement Association, and the Highland Autonomy Movement to appeal to the Highland ethnic minorities. A more recently launched program is aimed at organizing People's Liberation (or Revolutionary) Councils at the village level.

The government and its allies are trying to crush the NLF military effort and establish government control over the whole country through the pacification efforts. Essentially this means replacing NLF presence where it exists by government presence. This raises the question of what is the NLF presence. For the purposes of this discussion the best way to discuss it is in terms of polar extremes. At one extreme are the places where the NLF has had control for a long period of time -- since the beginning of the Viet Minh movement -- with brief if any intermittent control by the French or the government. At the other extreme are areas where NLF presence has been fleeting,

characterized by such things as incursions by armed bands that remain for a very brief period.

In these places where the Viet Minh-NLF have long held sway, their influence has permeated deeply and affected most aspects of the society. In these areas it is common for the NLF to organize many of the economic activities -- rice marketing, land reform, and taxation. Most important, however, is that their influence has penetrated the attitude-value system. The net result of these innovations is that, after a long period they have developed localized NLF societies.

Some of the areas where there have been Viet Minh-NLF enclaves for at least 20 years can be pointed out as they are the areas where the Viet Minh left cadres following the 1954 Geneva Agreements. Those of us who traveled extensively in rural Vietnam in 1956-57 had some of these areas described to us as being "under Viet Minh control," and we were cautioned to avoid them. This included portions of the swampy Ca Mau peninsula, large areas of the Plain of Reeds, large parts of what is now called War Zone D northwest of Saigon and highland areas in some of the coastal provinces, particularly in Binh Dinh, Quang Ngai, Quang Tin, Quang Nam, and Thua Thien. There also were enclaves in northern Kontum province.

From my own experience I can give two examples of penetrating Viet Minh-NLF influence in two widely different areas, one occupied by Vietnamese peasants in Cu Chi district, Hau Nghia Province, and the other by the Katu, a highland ethnic group in central Vietnam.

During a brief visit to Vietnam in 1962, a colleague and I visited some villages in Cu Chi district in what is

now Hau Nghia province. This area has been regarded as "the birthplace of the Viet Minh movement in the south," and the French described it as pourri, a place saturated with Viet Minh. The area was considered insecure, and with rented automobile, no arms nor any escort, we entered some villages and talked with farmers and their families about social and economic problems. Expressions characteristically used in NLF propaganda were part of their ordinary conversation; for example instead of referring to the central government, some used the expression "Diem-My" ("Diem-American," which in the propaganda usually was followed by either "clique" or "gang"). Although unsolicited, some pointed out that there were families that have had three generations of males in the Viet Minh (they, like many people in the rural areas, never use the designations Viet Cong or NLF). Then some villagers expressed open admiration for the NLF cadre because of their dedicated leaders, brave spirit, and willingness to bear hardships. None of these things were said defiantly, but rather casually in the course of conversation over tea. Clearly NLF influence, like the numerous tunnels in the villages, extended widely and burrowed deep.

The Katu of central Vietnam are considered one of the most backward of the highland ethnic groups. Referred to by one French writer as "Les Chasseurs du Sang" ("The Blood Hunters") because of their ritual killing of human victims to obtain blood for sacrificial offerings to their spirits, the Katu were never brought under effective French control. All who have had contact with them describe the Katu as illiterate in Vietnamese, the national language, and without a written language of their own.

Throughout the Indochina War, they were under the control of the Viet Minh, and the central government has yet to bring the Katu area within its administrative network. When I visited some remote Katu villages (three days up river by sampan and then a long walk into the mountains) in 1957 with an American missionary who had made some contact with the Katu, we encountered considerable hostility. The chief of the first village visited refused to permit us to remain overnight because "the Viet Minh would be angry if we let Frenchmen (they thought all white men were French) stay in the village." He pointed out that his brother and his son-in-law were Viet Minh, "living in the forest." Then, although he complained bitterly of a food shortage, he refused to accept any of our rice for fear of incurring Viet Minh displeasure. We were able to remain for a period in the next village, and it was apparent that the only outside organization with which these people had contact was the Viet-Minh-NLF.

The effect of this long-term contact was brought out even more strikingly in 1964 when one of the researchers of the Summer Institute of Linguistics and I were interviewing a Katu boy of about 16 years of age who had been wounded during a skirmish between NLF and government troops. He was a "High Katu," a designation for those living at higher elevations in an area near the Laotian border even more remote than the area visited in 1957. The linguist had been conducting research on the Katu language with the aim of devising an alphabet, and the boy was the first High Katu she had been able to find. We were discussing some aspects of Katu kinship and agriculture when he surprised us by describing how they farm

terraced paddy fields. This is a relatively sophisticated method of farming not found among the Katu located closer to the coastal plain where they have had long contact with the Vietnamese who employ terraces in their paddy farming. When we inquired whether his people had always used this technique or someone had taught them, he just smiled and looked away.

Later in discussing the function of the men's house in his village, he astonished us by taking the pen and writing a sentence in Katu which read, "Where is my older brother and my older sister?" His handwriting was relatively clear, and he used the same diacritical marks as the Vietnamese to indicate vowel differences. He beamed and noted that I had written similar terms for "older brother" and "older sister" the day before. It turned out that he had a complete alphabet which the linguist felt was very well done. When we asked where he learned to write, he just smiled and looked away. Clearly these innovations were introduced by Vietnamese, and the only Vietnamese who have been in the High Katu area for any length of time during the past 25 years were members of the Viet Minh and the NLF.

At the other polar extreme are those areas where NLF presence is fleeting and without any meaningful effect on the local society. Innumerable examples of this brief presence can be cited. In between these polar extremes, the NLF presence varies considerably. There are, for example, some areas where the government, for all intents and purposes, has control but where there are active NLF cadres. Some urban areas would be the best examples of this.

Pacification must be geared to these variations in NLF presence. To bring terraced paddy fields successfully to swidden-shifting agriculturists is no mean achievement, and devising an alphabet requires long and patient research. Both necessitate long and close contact with the society concerned, and such things indicate that the Viet Minh-NLF imprint on the High Katu is something deep and lasting. This is also the case with the Cu Chi peasants. Replacing the NLF presence by government presence goes far beyond "rooting out the infrastructure," for it involves basic changes in many aspects of these local societies, particularly the attitude-value system. This is an exceedingly difficult thing to do in less than 20 years, if indeed it can be done at all.

As one moves away from that polar extreme, the likelihood of replacing the NLF presence increases. In the above cited instance of NLF cadres in urban areas, for example, the government police have been singularly successful at breaking terrorist rings in Saigon. In many villages, when effective security has been achieved the not-well-installed NLF presence has dissipated. Finally, at the other extreme the government need only to keep armed NLF bands out and increase services and programs designed to meet the people's needs in order to reinforce government presence.

On April 20-21, 1968, a new movement called the Alliance of National Democratic and Peace Forces held its first congress in a rubber plantation near Mimot, Cambodia. Since the beginning of 1968 there had been "Alliances for Democracy and Peace" formed in Hue, Danang, Nhatrang,

Dalat, and Saigon, and this congress marked the merging of these into a national alliance. The 10 members of the Alliance Central Committee were urban, upper-class, French-educated people, all of whom had affiliation with some religious organization. The chairman was Trinh Dinh Thao, a southern radical who had served as Minister of the Interior in the 1945 Tran Trong Kim government, and in 1965 he had been arrested for participating in a Buddhist demonstration. Other prominent members of the committee included Lam Van Tet, also a southern radical, with Cao Daist connections who had been a member of the Council of Notables, organized by the junta that deposed Diem in 1963, and a member of the All Religions Citizens' Front that was established in 1964 to bring about interfaith harmony. Other committee members were Thich Don Hau, a militant monk from Hue who was active in the 1966 "Struggle Movement," and Ton That Duong Ky, a history professor who in 1965 was sent across the Ben Hai River into North Vietnam for advocating "false peace."

This new movement claimed to be a neutral "third force" that could function as mediator between the NLF and the U.S. (the government was not mentioned), and it made its appeal to the urban, professional and intellectual groups. On July 21, 1968, the government tried the 10 committee members <u>in absentia</u>, found them guilty of treason and confiscated their property. On June 10, 1969, the Liberation Radio announced the formation of a Provisional Revolutionary Government as the result of a fusion of the NLF and the Alliance of National, Democratic and Peace Forces. Huynh Tan Phat was named chairman of this movement and Mrs. Nguyen Thi Binh, one of the NLF delegation

in Paris, was Foreign Minister. Alliance leaders Trinh Dinh Thao and Lam Van Tet were among the advisors to the movement.

Concerning political party membership, religious affiliation, or ethnic identity, only unofficial figures, some of which are considered conservative, are available, but they do give some indication of the population segments either actually or potentially affected by the activities of these sociopolitical groups. Currently the total population of South Vietnam is estimated to be close to 17,000,000. At the time of the 1966 Constitutional Assembly elections, there were estimated to be some 500,000 members of the VNQDD and 200,000 Dai Viets, most of these Revolutionary Dai Viets. Catholics keep relatively good records, and they are reported to number 1,250,000. Less reliable are the figures of 1,500,000 for the Hoa Hao and 750,000 for the Cao Daists. The latter figure more than likely is too low, and some Cao Daist leaders claim a membership of at least 3,000,000 for all eight sects. Unfortunately any figures on Buddhist affiliation, even for those organizations already noted, are nonexistent. Very often it is reported that 80 per cent of the Vietnamese population is Buddhist, but this clearly is too high if one considers active adherence (the Cult of the Ancestors, which is not related to Buddhism but which can also be practiced by Buddhists, is the most predominant religious institution among the Vietnamese). I agree with the estimate of some knowledgeable Vietnamese that between 30 and 40 per cent of the population would be active Buddhists.

There are estimated to be at least 1,000,000 Chinese, 500,000 Khmer and 50,000 Cham. The Vietnamese government reports 642,855 Highlanders, but figures compiled in the Highlands by me in collaboration with the Summer Institute of Linguistics researchers, some missionaries, and some local officials total close to 1,000,000. The Confederation of Vietnamese Workers claims 500,000 members. Excluding the Buddhists and taking the lower figures for the Cao Daists and the Highlanders, the total for all would be 6,392,000 or 37.8 per cent of the total population. But if the higher figures for the Cao Daists and Highlanders are used, and the Buddhists are reckoned at approximately 35 per cent or around 5,000,000, then the group total jumps to 14,000,000 or 82.3 per cent of the total population.

Accommodation and Coalition

In English the word accommodation embodies the concepts of adjustment, adaptation, and reconciliation of differences. It contains the notion of two or more parties coming to a mutually satisfactory arrangement wherein the participants make some concessions for which they know they will receive something they desire. It is a process of give-and-take, a quid pro quo. The closest term in Vietnamese is thoa hiep which means "agreement," and it is used to describe something like the Geneva Agreements of 1954. There are related expressions which refer to the process leading to such an agreement; mac ca is "to bargain," dong nhuong bo is "mutual concession," and dong loi is "mutual benefit." The same concept is captured in the popular Vietnamese

saying, "A man proffers a chicken, a woman proffers a cruet of wine." The meaning is that the man is apt to relish the wine more than the chicken and a women the chicken more than the wine, so the best bargain is for them to share a chicken and wine meal.

In Vietnamese society, accommodation is an integral part of social relations; it plays an important role in the game of life and everyone knows the rules. Marriage, for example, traditionally is a contract between two families which results from a bargaining process. Family background, relative wealth, physical characteristics, and abilities are carefully weighed while love has little or nothing to do with it. In the market nothing is purchased without some bargaining; a current rage among the upper class Saigonese is the sieu thi, a kind of supermarket with self-service and attractive fixed prices, but a common complaint from the servants who do most of the shopping is that they miss the bargaining.

Following the establishment of two Vietnams in 1954, the government that emerged were autocratic so there was no accommodation to sociopolitical groups in either area. In North Vietnam the communists succeeded in establishing a totalitarian regime which did not allow any individual expression or opposition of any type. In external politics, however, the North Vietnamese have demonstrated an admirable ability to accommodate to both China and Russia. The new government in South Vietnam was organized along republican lines, but basically, Diem believed that the Vietnamese had to be ruled by an iron hand so the republican institutions were bogus; the elections were rigged, the assembly did Diem's bidding, and the constitution was ignored.

As Diem grew more dictatorial, there was increased simmering resentment among the suppressed sociopolitical groups, alienation with the Americans, and sharper criticism from the foreign press. It was the open opposition of the Buddhists which led to the events that culminated in the November, 1963 coup d'etat.

Since 1963 power has rested with the military, but accommodations with most of the sociopolitical groups have been taking place in a variety of ways. First there was a general accommodation in the government allowing all of the groups to function openly, and representatives of some larger groups were named to cabinet positions. Then all of the groups were free to participate in the 1966 Constitutional Assembly elections. Of the 117 seats, 104 were filled by ethnic Vietnamese, six were occupied by southern Highlanders (two of whom were active FULRO members), four were Khmer and one Cham. Unofficially there were estimated to have been 34 Buddhists, 35 Catholics, five Cao Daists, and ten Hoa Hao elected. Although political party affiliation was not declared, among the assemblymen there were Southern Dai Viets, Revolutionary Dai Viets, and VNQDD.

The Constitutional Assembly functioned as the first real open forum for political, religious, and ethnic representatives in South Vietnam. It was the first opportunity many, if not most, of them had to make contact with one another, and they formed interesting blocs. The Democratic Alliance Bloc included 50 delegates, among them a number of Hoa Hao, Cao Daists, VNQDD, and some Catholics. The Greater People's Bloc with 20 members was led by Dai Viets, and the Southern Renaissance Bloc was comprised of 12

young southerners, supporters of Tran Van Huong, and the remaining delegates were considered independents. Out of the political activity attendant to the election and formation of the assembly, a new political party, the Southern Renaissance Party (which the above-noted bloc represents) grew. Its founders saw the need to unify the diverse political elements in South Vietnam, and by June, 1969, the party claimed 10,000 followers in 20 provinces.

In the September, 1967, elections for the Upper House or Senate, Catholics succeeded in taking 29 of the 60 seats. There were reported to be 15 Buddhists, two Hoa Hao, three Cao Daists, and one Highlander who identified himself as an Animist. Two of the six ten-candidate slates elected had explicit political associations; the Greater Solidarity Slate was led by northern Catholic leader Nguyen Gia Hien and the Paddy Sheaf Slate was composed of Revolutionary Dai Viets.

Elections for the 137 member Lower House early in October produced a more representative body. As far as religious affiliation was concerned, there were approximately 65 Buddhists, 35 Catholics, 13 Hoa Hao, four Cao Daists, two Protestants, and one Muslim. From among the minorities there were five Chinese, six southern Highlanders, two northern refugee Highlanders, two Cham, and six Khmer. Political leanings, as far as they could be determined, were varied. Most of the Catholics were involved in Catholic political groups, and ten were identified as members of the Greater Solidarity Force. Around ten representatives were associated with the Revolutionary Dai Viets, and an estimated ten were members of VNQDD factions. Twenty-one of the elected were affiliated with

Senator Tran Van Don's Farmer-Worker-Soldier bloc, and ten were of Tran Van Huong's Southern Renaissance Movement. There were four members of the Confederation of Vietnamese Labor.

By and large the National Assembly, like the Constitutional Assembly, has provided an arena for political expression, but in a real sense it has not been a center for political activities. The pattern of forming blocs was repeated in the National Assembly, but as one observer of the process noted, none of these has developed into a political movement or party. In the Upper House the slates provided an initial basis for groupings, but most blocs resulted either from individual friendships or the encouragement of those high in the government as a means of gaining leverage in the assembly. As such, most of the blocs have been in a constant state of flux, and in recent months the inter-group accommodations that have been producing new political coalitions have had a definite effect on the alignments within the National Assembly.

As of September, 1969, there were three formal blocs in the Upper House. The 23-member Social Democratic Bloc was formed in February, 1969, and is led by Dr. Dang Van Sung, publisher of the influential newspaper Chin Luan. It includes political leaders Tran Van Lam, who on September 1 was named Minister of Foreign Affairs in the new cabinet, and Nguyen Gia Hien, head of the Greater Solidarity Force, and most of the twelve Catholics in this bloc are of this party. Seven other members are Buddhist and one is a Cao Daist. Some of the members also are former Can Lao. Generally this bloc takes a pro-government stand on issues. The Republican Bloc is

led by former general Tran Van Don and has 18 members, including a group of Revolutionary Dai Viets under Nguyen Van Ngai. This bloc is moving in the direction of an alliance of sorts with the Social Democratic Bloc and several blocs in the Lower House to form a pro-government majority. Least important is the Independent Bloc, led by Nguyen Huy Thieu, who, like most of the 16 members, is Catholic.

In the Lower House there are general tendencies for the military to group together, for Catholics to be pro-government and Buddhists to be in opposition, and for the older and younger members to differ on most issues. The Independence Bloc has 17 members, and most of them are Catholics of the Greater Solidarity Force or Revolutionary Dai Viets. The Democratic Progressive Bloc has 47 members of mixed affiliation. Pro-government in its stand, this bloc includes members of the Nhan Xa Cach Mang, Greater Solidarity Forces, some Hoa Hao, and all of the Highlander and Cham representatives. In June 1969, the People's Bloc, composed of 17 members, most of them militant Buddhists and followers of the Southern Renaissance Movement, dissolved when a bloc member made remarks to the press that other members found to be objectionable so they resigned and membership fell below the required number of 14.

Since 1963 there also have been specific accommodations between the government and some sociopolitical groups. It was indicated previously that in 1966 Premier Ky had considerable contact with Hoa Hao leaders, and although it never has been made explicit what kind of agreement resulted, the Hoa Hao were given greater authority in the provinces where they predominate (during this time

there were as many as six Hoa Hao province chiefs in the western region). The fact that these areas have since been the most secure in South Vietnam indicates the extent to which the Hoa Hao have cooperated with the government. The accommodation that has taken place between the leaders among the Highlanders and the succession of governments since 1963 already was noted. By 1960, due to anti-government sentiment which had been successfully exploited by the Viet Cong (Radio Hanoi aided by broadcasts beamed to the southern highlands in four languages weekly), Viet Cong influence among the Highlanders had gained tremendously. With the appearance of FULRO in 1964, the situation altered; in many areas where the Viet Cong propaganda agents and guerrillas functioned at the village level "like fish swimming in the water," they were replaced by FULRO. In making considerable progress in resolving the FULRO dissidence, therefore, the government has been steadily gaining more support among the Highlanders.

There is a good chance that had these specific accommodations continued there would have been among the Hoa Hao and Highlanders a coalescence of leadership. To begin with, among the Hoa Hao there are common religious bonds and among the Highlanders a common ethnic identity, both of which are sources of a unity underlying political differences. Governmental concessions wherein the leaders gain more prerogatives and authority over territory and population as well as more important roles in the central government would be incentives for hierarchical cohesion. They know that a unified leadership can deal more effectively with the government, and a unified leadership also can rally greater support among the followers. Finally, these

leaders know full well that they must draw together in preparation for any future political competition with the NLF.

Similar specific accommodations could have been effected with other sociopolitical groups. This is not to say that the accommodation with each group would be the same; their leaders surely want greater authority and more prerogatives, but the wants and desires of the groups in general vary. Nonetheless, the process might well have had the effect of generating unity within those groups with splintered leadership such as the Cao Daists, Catholics, and the VNQDD, and of strengthening the leadership of such relatively well-organized groups such as the Revolutionary Dai Viets and the Southern Dai Viets. For groups such as the Khmer, Cham, or the CVT, the government could have encouraged their building viable political organizations that could assume meaningful roles both locally and nationally and proceeded to make accommodations with them as they developed.

These accommodations would have clarified the aims of the government and the sociopolitical groups and from this would spring a mutual trust and a greater solidarity, all of which will be essential in maintaining political balance in the competititon with the NLF.

This process of accommodation between the government and specific sociopolitical groups has only occurred in a limited way with both the Hoa Hao and Highlanders, and it never has become a definite policy of any of the post-Diem governments. Vietnamese observers point out that since power has rested with the military, there was no need to look to the civilian groups for support. Furthermore,

there was the spectre of the Buddhist assertion of power between 1963 and 1966. More recently the need for broadening this base of power has not been lost on President Thieu but his approach has not been one of accommodating to specific sociopolitical groups. In order to understand the path Thieu has elected to follow, it is necessary to examine the second process of accommodation that has been taking place, i.e. accommodations occurring between and among many of the sociopolitical groups, resulting in new political coalitions.

The year 1968 brought to South Vietnam a period of uncertainty that has continued until the present. First of all there was the psychological shock of the Tet Offensive, and then in March, President Johnson's speech in which he announced he would not run as a presidential candidate and called for a partial halt in the bombing of North Vietnam. Shortly thereafter the Paris Peace Talks began. On February 18, while the Tet Offensive fighting still raged in places like Hue, a movement called the National Salvation Front was launched at a large gathering of representatives of many of the sociopolitical groups held in a Saigon movie house. The organizing committee included Senator Tran Van Don, Nguyen Xuan Oanh, former Acting Prime Minister, and Dang Duc Khoi, close associate of Nguyen Cao Ky. The advisory Board included former Chief of State Phan Khac Suu, Tran Van Huong, who was soon to be named Prime Minister, Tran Quoc Buu, President of the Confederation of Vietnamese Workers, VNQDD leader Tran Van Tuyen, and former generals Pham Van Dong, Mai Huu Xuan, Le Van Nghiem, and Tran Tu Oai. Revolutionary Dai Viet leader Ha Thuc Ky was in attendance. A second

meeting was held on March 10, and although 1,500 attended, Phan Khac Suu, Tran Van Huong, and Ha Thuc Ky were not present. Senator Don was elected Chairman of the Central Committee, and the remainder of the committee was composed of former generals and supporters of Ky.

In late March the formation of another political movement was announced. This was the Free Democratic Force, founded by Ngo Ung Tai, scholar and revolutionary, Tran Van An, former Minister of Information, and Nguyen Van Huong, Secretary General at the Presidency. Membership included some Cao Daists, Hoa Hao and Northern Dai Viets. Although President Thieu had no official connection with this movement, it was known that he intended forming a political party, and this was generally viewed as the start of it.

On June 29, President Thieu addressed a congress of 200 representatives of sociopolitical groups, and he urged them "to unite and cooperate" in order to form a strong nationalist political system that would be able to cope with the communists in the post-war political struggle. On July 2, the formation of the People's Alliance for Social Revolution, organized by Nguyen Van Huong and sanctioned by President Thieu, was announced. It included the newly formed Free Democratic Force, remaining elements of the National Salvation Front, and the Worker-Farmer Party led by labor leader Tran Quoc Buu. Two days later, the already-mentioned Vietnam People's Force, organized by Hoa Hao political leader Phan Ba Cam, was launched as an "opposition movement." It included some Dai Viet Duy Dan and former VNQDD.

In October the Progressive Nationalist Movement was organized (it received official recognition in April, 1969). Nguyen Van Bong, Rector of the National Institute of Administration (NIA) was head of the movement, and among the other founders were Nguyen Ngoc Huy, a Southern Dai Viet leader, also professor at the NIA and a member of the South Vietnam delegation to the Paris Peace Talks, Tran Van Chieu, who had been the running mate of Truong Dinh Dzu, and VNQDD leader Nguyen Tuong Ba. Among the groups that joined this political coalition were the Movement for National Unity, which includes followers of Huynh Kim Nen, leader of the southern Catholic People's Union, and some of the Southern Renaissance group, most of whom are young southerners, all supporters of Tran Van Huong. Also included were a Cao Daist group led by Nguyen Thanh Phuong, who, as pointed out previously, was one military leader in the 1955 confrontation with Diem, and a Hoa Hao faction headed by Truong Kim Cu, a former Hoa Hao military leader who, it was noted previously, led his troops in dissidence until his sur[illegible]er in [illegible]. In addition there were some unaffiliated members of the National Assembly and NIA students.

During this period there was considerable speculation about other possible coalitions. In the closing months of 1968 there were reports of informal seminars being held in Saigon, in which members of the An Quang Pagoda group and followers of Father Hoang Quynh participated. On January 19, 1969, Father Quynh organized the People's Congress in Saigon for the purpose of discussing ways of coping with the communists in the post-war period. All of [illegible] sociopolitical groups were invited, and some 4,000

participants were expected, but only 250 attended. Most of the larger groups did not send representatives. Some An Quang Pagoda leaders were present, but they claimed they were there as individuals rather than as representatives.

On April 7, 1969, President Thieu addressed a joint session of the National Assembly calling for an end to communist aggression and reunification of Vietnam through a "democratic process." He agreed to accept into the "friendly fold" all of those who would give up their communist affiliation. In addition, he proposed a "political merger" of those who agree with him, and he called on those who do not agree to organize an opposition. In effect, this would bring about the bipartisan political system provided for in the constitution. The active organizer of this new merger was Nguyen Van Huong, Secretary General at the Presidency and founder of the People's Alliance for Social Revolution. About this time, the National Salvation Front, which had been part of this alliance, disengaged, leaving the Free Democratic Force which Huong had helped organize and the Worker-Farmer Party of Tran Quoc Buu. Huong invited these two groups to join the new merger, and he also invited the Hoa Hao Social Democratic Party of Trinh Quoc Khanh, the Revolutionary Dai Viets, the Greater Solidarity Force (GSF) of Catholic leader Nguyen Gia Hien, the Nhan Xa Cach Mang Party of another Catholic leader, Truong Cong Cuu, the VNQDD faction headed by Nguyen Dinh Luong, and the newly formed Movement for Unity of the Southern Highlands Ethnic Minorities led by former FULRO leader Y Bling Buon Krong Pang.

Several meetings were held, and most of these groups were represented, and, at one meeting, representatives of additional, small sociopolitical groups were invited. Early in May the Revolutionary Dai Viets, Social Democratic Party, Nhan Xa Cach Mang, and the Greater Solidarity Force banded together and protested to President Thieu about the dominant role of Huong in forming the new political coalition. They would prefer dealing with the President himself. They also objected to the inclusion of the small sociopolitical movements. On May 8, Thieu announced that he would accept the chairmanship of this new movement which would be called the National Social Democratic Front. Since Thieu and Huong were instrumental in forming the Movement for Unity of the Southern Highlands Ethnic Minorities, they managed to include it by affiliating it with the People's Alliance for Social Revolution just before that coalition joined the Front. Also at this point the VNQDD factions led by Vu Hong Khanh and Nguyen Hoa Hiep fused and affiliated with the Front. On May 25, some 2,000 delegates from all over South Vietnam gathered in Saigon for the first meeting of the new political coalition. Six leaders of the six sociopolitical groups represented endorsed the Front's charter. President Thieu as Chairman addressed the gathering, pointing out that this new party was not intended to be a political monopoly. He again invited those who would not join to form an organized opposition for the "struggle against communism."

It already was pointed out that this pattern of forming inter-group coalitions occurred in the past during times of uncertainty. Its repetition in 1968 reflects to some extent political leaders' response to the uncertain

situation, but it also indicates that Thieu elected to broaden his political base through forming a coalition of groups and factions with similar political leanings rather than to work out accommodations with specific sociopolitical groups.

What the effect on these new political coalitions will be depends to a great extent on the government's willingness to make accommodations with them. There is the possibility that they will develop into political entities stronger than any now in existence. Although they are composed of groups and factions whose religious, political, and in some cases ethnic roots are diverse, the fact that they have common political leanings should do much to bring about cohesion among the leaders. Then, too, the fact that they have drawn together is an indication that they are willing to make accommodations with one another and to act in unison to some degree. On the other hand, in forming these coalitions there is the possibility of deepening the divisions that exist in some of the participating groups such as the Hoa Hao, Catholics, and the VNQDD. Should this occur, the coalitions will be doing more harm than good.

Even though Thieu is leader of one coalition, the participants in it and those in other coalitions will expect the government to make definite accommodations with them in order to gain their support and cooperation. All of the groups have specific things they want; for example the leaders among the Highlanders have looked to the government for such basic economic programs as granting clear title to lands they have traditionally farmed while the An Quang Pagoda group among the Buddhists will want

the matter of their claim to a government charter resolved. Then, also, many of the groups will want more authority and prerogatives over population and territories where they predominate, such as was done in the 1966 accommodation between the Ky government and the Hoa Hao. Finally, all of these groups will want a greater share in the political power which currently is concentrated in the military.

Unfortunately, a trend in this direction was not indicated by the cabinet changes of September 1, 1969. Prime Minister Tran Van Huong was replaced by General Tran Thien Khiem, putting the three highest political positions in the hands of the military. General Khiem also retained his position as Minister of the Interior, and most of the other cabinet posts went to technicians and supporters of Thieu. The only leaders of any of the sociopolitical groups discussed who received places in the cabinet were Ngo Khac Tinh and Le Trong Quat, both of the Catholic Nhan Xa Party. They were named Minister and Deputy Minister of Information respectively.

Although this discussion has focused on organized sociopolitical groups, some accommodations also will have to be made with other social groups to gain their support in the coming competition. A few can be pointed out. The business community has power and influence, but other than individual participation, it has remained aloof from any direct participation in politics. This is understandable in the case of the Chinese, since having any kind of political movement would make them more vulnerable, but working out some satisfactory arrangement with the Chinese congregations concerning their functions and control of their properties undoubtedly would result in a more favorable

attitude toward the government. Also important are landlords who live in villages. Not only are they influential but they serve a variety of useful functions in village society, such as serving on the council in normal times, introducing innovations in farming methods (they are the only ones who can afford the risk), and contributing to local welfare. One thing the government can do to gain greater support from these landlords is to avoid excessive land reform measures.

At the same time, a great responsibility falls upon the leaders of the various sociopolitical groups to rally popular support among the group members. This is particularly true for those groups in the various coalitions; for example, with Trinh Quoc Khanh's Hoa Hao faction (which withdrew from the Front on October 23, 1969) in Thieu's coalition and Phan Ba Cam's group outside, how much support can either faction muster among the 1,500,000 Hoa Hao faithful? It also is a necessity for more recently formed parties. Y Bling Buon Pang Krong, chairman of the movement for Unity of the Southern Highland Ethnic Minorities, will have to travel extensively through the highlands to become identified as a leader among these rural, relatively isolated people. There always is the danger that this process of inter-group accommodation, which involves arrangements made among group leaders, can become a game of Saigon politics where the players forget that on the day of the election it is the will of the people that counts.

In addition to strengthening the groups and the new coalitions as well as generating more cooperation and solidarity among the sociopolitical groups and the government, this accommodation also represents an initial phase

in accommodation with the NLF. It will have the effect of altering the balance of power, resulting in a military-civilian coalition. It will, however, have to be a real, and not just a token, sharing of political power in order to have the NLF view it as a new political arrangement amenable to working out a political settlement, particularly if it involves elections. The NLF leaders' demand for a coalition interim government to replace the Thieu administration, and its rejection of Thieu's July 11 proposal for a mixed election commission sprung from fear that the present government, through its military-police-administration apparatus, could control the elections. There are grounds for this fear; in the 1966 and 1967 elections, the NLF pressured people not to vote while the government pressured them to vote, and the turnout was impressive -- 80.8 per cent in 1966 and 83 per cent in the 1967 Presidential elections.

The NLF on its part will have to abandon its claim to being the only legitimate government in South Vietnam. It appears more and more that the final political settlement will involve a nationwide election to determine the composition of the post-war government. There will be much discussion about format and the question of control. President Thieu proposed a mixed election commission, and with the new political situation created through accommodations, this solution should be more attractive to the NLF. This commission could be composed of leaders from the government, the sociopolitical groups, and the NLF. It would have to have complete authority to organize and supervise the elections. There could, for example, be combined surveillance teams made up of representatives

of the NLF, government, and the sociopolitical groups. The commission and surveillance teams would have control of voting among the military, and the teams would be the sole presence at the polls. On the day of the election, the police, civil servants, and military would only approach the polls as voters. There also might be teams of non-Vietnamese observers, but this would have to be worked out by the commission.

As with some of the other sociopolitical groups, accommodation with the NLF would involve giving it a good deal of control over local areas where they have predominated, such as the aforementioned Cu Chi district and the Katu country. None of these are extensive areas, and in any event, the NLF has shown admirable efficiency in coping with administrative and economic problems. Then there will have to be some specific arrangements such as integrating some of the NLF military units into the Armed Forces of the Republic of Vietnam in somewhat the same way Hoa Hao units were incorporated after 1955. Some NLF forces also could be organized as Regional Forces.

It remains to be seen whether these accommodations will take place. The decision to make them rests with relatively small groups of people on both sides. They know that accommodation and coalition offer a compromise course wherein both parties sacrifice something for the goal of ending the war and building the Vietnamese nation in a peaceful and independent setting. To expect them to put aside personal and group ambitions for the good of the society is, perhaps, unrealistic. One way or the other the time has come for them to make the decision. If they are willing to compromise, the war will end, but

if, for whatever reasons, they are unwilling to do so, the war, like a dismal low-pressure monsoon rain, will go on and on.

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