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productive activities, a drastic change from Before when they depended on the local people for their keep.

The Lao however are too accustomed to fun to stop playing altogether. There is a *boone* (a fair for the support of a temple) at least once a week somewhere in the city which is always well attended. The major festivals which the government has tried to restrict are slowly coming back even if subdued compared to the old days. There is considerable drinking although overt drug taking has disappeared. Vientiane is still a sleepy, relaxed town where no-one moves too fast or works too hard no matter what the rules. Everyone goes out to the countryside to work but there is always a guitar along. Bars are closed but three "nightclubs" offering softdrinks and beer plus revolutionary songs accompanied by electric organs and guitars still operate. Things are expensive, but the markets are thronged with customers.

Beyond these superficial observations, we know little of conditions in Laos. The one glaring, undeniable truth evident to all the world are the more than 100,000 refugees in Thailand. While their reports of life in Laos cannot

government has chosen to go it alone which means resources are scarce indeed. Laos still has no industry; she still has no university; she has an inadequate communications system dependent on roads most of which are impassable in the monsoon. There has only been the most rudimentary attempts to exploit what resources she has such as timber and tin; the one tangible achievement is the Nam Ngum Dam which does earn foreign

however have traditionally migrated to Thailand in hard times, just as Thais have come here; the style of life is the same as are the language and the ethnic background of the people. It is hard, therefore, to judge the significance of their leaving, the major difference now being that they can't come back so easily.

The government seems to be rethinking its returnee policy.

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exchange by generating electricity for Thailand. Laos doesn't even have masses of cheap labor so characteristic of other Asian countries. No-one knows just how much money the government has or where it comes from, but salaries are low and often late, and development projects are largely dependent on bilateral or UN aid. Still a few things have been accomplished. The Lao claim to have 15,000 of the 21,000 primary schoolrooms needed by 1980-81 for universal enrollment. With French and German aid, they have built a feedmill and silo 24 km from Vientiane. They are emphasizing traditional herbal medicines in an attempt to cut costly drug

Previously they were completely negative fearing infiltration by insurgents, but since Kriangsak's visit in January when he promised to curb illicit border crossings from the Thai side, they have made it known that they will let people come back. Given the less than desirable camp conditions particularly for those with small hope of resettlement abroad, it will be interesting to see how many respond.

The other major reason for leaving is fear of political reprisal; one doubts that these people will take advantage of the thaw on returnees. Political persecution is the main criticism the US and the West has against the present government, but very few hard facts are available. There are camps throughout the country for people the government does not want to have at large though no one knows what goes on there. Some seem to be primarily economic, state farms manned by former police or soldiers, but others, particularly in the northeast of Laos, are reputed to be for re-education of officials of the former regime. The inhabitants are prisoners in that they are sent and kept in the camps against their will (we suppose); no one knows otherwise under what conditions they live. Some families have been allowed to join the inmates who are primarily men and it is said that some have been allowed to leave the camps for a few days to visit their families. Some have been released, but we have no idea of their whereabouts now. Refugees tell stories of feeling watched, of never being trusted, and this government does seem extremely sensitive to those who were close with French or American officials Before. To give the government its due, the

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perhaps be taken strictly at face value, nevertheless they have chosen to leave which in itself indicates that all is not well here.

Many have left for economic reasons and, as I indicated above, life in Vientiane is expensive particularly if one has become accustomed to western standards. The economy of the Old Regime was subsidized by the Foreign Exchange Operations Fund, to which the US was a major donor, at \$50 million a year; this paid for massive imports of all sorts of consumer items sold mostly in Vientiane for very low prices; people used to come from Bangkok to shop here. In addition the US contributed 100,000 tons of rice a year. The present

imports. They have attempted to organize agriculture into co-operative units to increase food production not only to self-sufficiency but to exportable excess. They have begun to build daycare centres throughout the country thus freeing women for productive work. Because most of the Government goals are aimed at the countryside, we foreigners have no way of judging progress. One likes to think the villagers are finally getting attention more beneficent than bombing but we have no proof. The refugees are primarily city people disturbed by a fall in their standard of living since the US pulled out, but some villagers close to the Mekong have gone too. Rural folk