

Ladies and Gentlemen :

On behalf of the SUU FOR PRESIDENT NATIONAL COMMITTEE of which I have the honour of being chairman, we heartily welcome members of both the Vietnamese and foreign press corps. The object of to-day's press conference is to present to you the Committee's achievements since its inception, and, at the same time, to call your attention to some major election irregularities in Vietnam, since the possibility of rigged elections has been a matter of serious concern not only to the people of Vietnam but also to the FREE WORLD.

It is our opinion that, at this dark hour of history, no citizen of Vietnam can remain indifferent vis à vis the forthcoming presidential and senatorial elections. For the outcome of these elections would have far reaching effects on the future of Vietnam. It is for this reason that the SUU FOR PRESIDENT NATIONAL COMMITTEE has been established. As already mentioned in our Manifesto, the Committee has been created and financed by private citizens and gives its entire support to the SUU-DAN ticket. The Committee is an independent organization and is not being placed under the election machinery of the SUU-DAN slate.

The Committee swung into action the day the campaign began. Within a brief three-week period it has established offices in provinces and cities throughout the nation. Fully aware of the importance that the free world countries attach to the elections in Vietnam, the Committee has also set up representative offices in several capitals of the FREE WORLD. Members of the Committee include citizens of all faiths and from all walks of life, civilians as well as members of the Armed Forces.

In the present circumstances, the Committee regrets it is unable to disclose all of its membership, for many of its members are in official positions in central and regional governments, and in the Armed Forces.

It is the duty of the Committee's cadres to impress on the voters the importance of the September 3 elections, the

.....

necessity of free elections and the urgency of selecting the most qualified persons for high offices. The Cadres use legal means only. Most of them are volunteers and have received no remuneration; many of them have in fact used their own money. After a three-week period of uninterrupted activities, the Committee's achievements have been above and beyond expectations. Political as well as religious organizations, together with several senatorial tickets have unreservedly approved the Committee's goal and subsequently have given the Committee their support. These splendid achievements are principally the result of the tireless personal efforts of every campaign worker. But they have been helped by the assistance and good will of the press corps. Pressure, in various forms, has not deterred the press corps from telling the truth to Vietnam and the world. The Committee gratefully and solemnly acknowledges this invaluable assistance.

Ladies and Gentlemen :

In supporting Mr. SUU, we do not simply support an individual but unreservedly stand for a solution : National Reconciliation and Union. At the same time, we uphold a principle, that of directly participating in the common task of democracy building. Above all, the Committee stands for free elections. Rigging practice must be prevented at all costs. Drawing on records of past elections, the Committee feels that it is important to present to the public the preliminary results of its studies on election rigging practices.

I. Rigging practices in pre-election days : secret orders and intimidation.

The government has immense and powerful means to rig elections. These have often been used in the past. Employees loyal to the central authorities used to be assigned to key positions, such as province chiefs, district chiefs, security chiefs and garrison commanders and were instructed to prepare to rig the elections. Men from the National Security Service shadowed and investigated opposition campaign workers. These

abuses are not merely historical, however. They are occurring today. Campaign workers have been subjected to physical threat. Many government employees, calling themselves "nationalist sympathizers" have been grouped into teams and trained to organize support at the polling booths for the government ticket. The intention is to use their government position to influence voters. Worse, they have been scattered through the rural electorates to win votes, if need be, by pressure and threat.

II. Rigging practices on election day.

a) Secret orders have been given to these Teams to concentrate their efforts on the illiterate section of the populace, which makes up the majority of voters.

In the past, the central government issued orders to local, village and hamlet officials to threaten or arrest those who would not vote for its candidates. Government emblems were exhibited in the polling booths to the exclusion of others. The process may be explained in the following manner. Government employees, military men and village people were required to cast their votes for the government-supported tickets, and then return the unused ballots to higher authorities, or to the hamlet representatives. This practice violated the secrecy of the ballot and was used as a means for exercising patronage or penalty. By demanding the return of unused ballots, government officials could check on the loyalty of the voters to the government.

b) Ghost ballot.

With Vietnam at war, and denied security, the proportion of voters casting their ballots in remote areas in the past was usually from 15 to 30 per cent at the most, and a maximum of 60 per cent in the urban areas. Rigging practices were carried out as follows : district, village and hamlet chiefs were ordered to clip the corner off unclaimed or unused ballots and to stuff the ballot box in favor of the government ticket.

c) Changing Ballot Boxes.

In polling booths where government candidates were not doing well - and it is easy to tell simply by looking at the discards in the disposal box - the following was a typical ballot rigging trick. The government agent would ask the local military commander to explode a hand grenade or fire a few shots in a place near the voting booth to scare the voters away. Those responsible for the voting booth would stop the voting on security grounds. The government agent would then draft a report and carry away the ballot box to his own headquarters. In this situation of contrived insecurity, the representatives of the opposing tickets could only protest in vain. Once the ballot box was safely carried away, it could be stuffed at the pleasure of the government. The Vietcong were always officially blamed.

d) Fighting units casting their ballots more than once.

Military men were given two or three voting cards, one based on their family declaration, the other supplied by their unit. Orders were then given for the men to cast their ballot twice, three times in two or more different localities.

e) Purposely misreading names on the ballots and false listing candidates' names.

In remote areas where candidates had insufficient representatives to watch their interests, scrutators were ordered to misread the names on the ballots and to cut down the number of ballots for those who had the most votes and to increase the votes for government candidates. This was easy to do at night. The scrutator simply read the name of candidate X, although the ballot had been cast for Y. Another method was to misrecord the votes. Thus, a thousand votes cast for Y would be added to X's total.

f) Deliberate mutilation of ballot cast for opposition candidate.

Ballot mutilation was a frequent practice. This was carried out by election officials when they opened the ballots. Any added mark, whether by pencil or thumbnail, was enough to have the ballot declared invalid.

g) Delay the opening of ballot boxes to stuff them at night.

In heavily populated localities, officials opened a small number of boxes on election day. The rest were taken away and kept overnight, when they were stuffed with false votes.

h) Placement of voting booths inside military compounds.
booths

In rural areas many voting /were placed, ostensibly for reasons of security, within military compounds, which were heavily guarded. Fear of men with guns kept the voters away and permitted corrupt officials at night to stuff the ballot boxes as they pleased.

i) False reporting of elections results from villages and hamlets.

This was the simplest, most widespread and effective practice. As soon as counting ended, the official report was drafted and the ballots destroyed in order to make recounting impossible. The reports were forwarded to the district election office. There, if the votes for the government candidates were regarded as insufficient, government officials would prepare a new, fictitious report for the Ministry of the Interior. Village and hamlet chiefs were forced to sign these reports under threat. If they refused to sign, their signatures were forged. They could object at their peril.

Conclusion

As we have seen, elections have been rigged in Vietnam in many ways, especially in remote and insecure localities known as "red infiltrated areas". In urban areas, rigging was difficult because the opposition was generally well organized and the elections were under the scrutiny of observers assigned by the candidates to watch the vote count and by foreigners.

Because of the blatant ballot rigging, government supported candidates always trailed far behind opposition candidates in urban areas. On the other hand, they gained their majority in "red infiltrated areas" because of the election rigging.

The present government has declared itself for an honest and clean election. The opposition candidates question the sincerity of the government. To all of us who are concerned about the future of this nation, the election on September 3 must be a clean and honest one. Yet, there is mounting evidence that the government does not plan for an honest election. It would be alarming and scandalous for the nation, and for the Free World, if the government tickets were to trail in secure areas while winning an overwhelming majority in "red infiltrated areas". If the government ticket is supported in this election by the majority of the people in insecure and "red infiltrated areas", why is it that these areas still remain insecure and under communist control ?

There are two possible reasons. It could mean that the government ticket is supported by the majority of people in "red infiltrated areas" and that the people here are neither communists nor under the influence of the communists, that these are really safe areas, that victory is just around the corner, that there is no need now for allied troops, for more losses among our armed forces and rural reconstruction cadres. Or, it could mean, that the government cynically and unscrupulously has taken advantage of its own failure to provide security in the countryside to rig the election. Let's all watch the result of the election and pay particular attention to the voting in the rural areas.

Ladies and Gentlemen :

I wish to thank you all. On behalf of the SUU FOR PRESIDENT NATIONAL COMMITTEE, we solemnly declare the closing of the campaign period at noon on September 2nd, 1967, according to the election law. Our Committee will maintain a small staff to follow up the election result.

NGUYEN-XUAN-OANH

Chairman

SUU FOR PRESIDENT NATIONAL COMMITTEE