

Political Level, 1965

With me is Dr. Wesley Fishel, professor of political science here at Michigan State University, former director of the Michigan State University mission to South Vietnam, and former adviser to the United States State Department, a very recent visitor to south Vietnam, in fact, Dr. Fishel you were there when the latest Buddhist uprisings began, were you not?

Well, I left at the time when they began. I was there just before they began and during the events that led up to them.

What were the events that led up to it? How did this begin?

Roughly, early in March the leadership in Saigon, namely the government headed by General ~~Minh Chow Key~~ <sup>Ng. Cao Ky</sup> and General ~~Minh~~ <sup>Ng. Van Thieu</sup> ~~Tou To~~, decided that the time had come for them to clip the wings of General ~~Nugyen Chanh Tho~~ <sup>Nguyen Khanh Thieu</sup>, the commander of I corps (or the first corps as it is perhaps more correctly known,) in ~~Da Nang~~ <sup>Da Nang</sup>, the central Vietnamese provinces. And at that point they called General ~~Tho~~ down to a meeting of the Military Revolutionary Council in Saigon and proceeded to divest him of control of the first corps, and suggest<sup>ed</sup> to him that his health deserved a vacation abroad. The events that followed, I think, are quite well known to all of us. In essence, what happened was that General ~~Tho~~ returned to central Vietnam, to quiet his followers, who quite naturally, and I might add, probably automatically on receipt of this news of his having been deposed, rose in righteous wrath, and began parading through the streets of ~~Quay~~ <sup>Quay</sup> and ~~Da Nang~~ showing their support for him and their contempt for the government of Generals ~~Key~~ <sup>Thieu</sup> and ~~Minh~~ in Saigon. Then ultimately there were other groups that joined this manifestation of support for ~~Tee~~ <sup>Tee</sup>, which

turned into support for the Buddhist movement, which of course was allied with General Tee and has led to the events of the last few days.

And it has know ~~XXXXXXXX~~ become actually a movement of the Buddhists more than the Tee supporters, hasn't it?

Well, It's hard to know where one begins and the other leaves off.

Who is leading the movement?

The movement at the moment is being led on the Buddhist side by two principal ~~bonzes~~<sup>bonzes</sup> or monks, the venerable Tom Chow and the venerable ~~Teak Chom~~<sup>Tri Quang</sup>, the Vietnamese word is Teak which we translate as venerable, it really I suppose more accurately would be reverend or most reverend, ~~Tom Chow and Teak Chom~~ Tom Chow is probably the more intelligent of the two. His following is largely in perhaps Saigon and the South. Teak Chom is ~~probably~~<sup>beyond</sup> the craftier in fact ~~without~~ a doubt ~~XX~~ not just perhaps, he's beyond a doubt the craftier of the two, the more Machiavelian type and his following is largely ~~from~~<sup>in</sup> the central Veitnamese provinces and his headquarters from time to time in Quay and Da Nang. They had an activist leader, ~~a lay leader~~<sup>Guang</sup>, named Ho ~~Young~~<sup>Young</sup>, who seems to be the field organizer for the movement that these two monks head, or the movements that they head. Strictly speaking their isn't a single Buddhist movement their are several fractions of which these two are the leading ones and I think it's an error for us to speak of the Buddhists as if they were a single movement.

What about their intentions, are they unified in that? All we've heard thus far is that they want elections to form a national government.

I think what the Buddhists want, or what the Buddhist leaders want, is a Buddhist state. Not necessarily a theocracy with let's say a Vietnamese Bishop Macaries type at the head, but a state in which the Buddhists would call the <sup>tunes</sup> ~~terms~~, they would ~~set~~ the policies, they would determine who would be the titular leaders of the state and generally they would swing their weight around and run things or have things run as they want them ran. At the same time, I don't think that Teak Chee Quom, the Venerable Chee Quom or Tick Tom Show is eager to hold the position of responsibility for which he could be called <sup>to</sup> ~~for~~ account at some future date. They would rather stay behind the scenes and manipulate at which I might add they seem to be quite expert.

You have observed the Vietnamese politics over a period of some time now, How do you evaluate the capabilities of this movement? Can it succeed?

This depends on so many factors that I'd be reluctant to predict today anymore than I am willing to predict at any other time you know. There are for example, the Catholics <sup>from</sup> ~~of~~ whom we have yet to hear, there have been rumblings from them for the past few days but they have been very cagely sitting on the sidelines, organizing their forces, and preparing to take whatever measures are necessary if the Buddhists seem to be getting what they want. The Catholics are as we all know a minority in South Vietnam, but they are an active, well organized, and aggressive minority. They can do a lot of damage to the Buddhists if they set out ~~do~~ to do so, and the Buddhists are aware of this. They can create all kinds of havoc if they wish. They can call their men out into the streets, just as the Buddhists can and perhaps

with even more devastating effect because by and large I think the Catholics are much better organized and better disciplined than the Buddhists are. There is also the Communist which is yet to be heard from openly. As you've probably noticed, the Communists have been very careful to let the Buddhists, military, and they hope I am sure the Catholics, work this thing out to the satisfaction of the Communists. They are quite sure that whoever wins it is likely to redound ultimately to communist advantage. Well I must say I don't agree with this judgment. I don't think it need work out this way although certainly there is a distinct possibility that the Communist judgment may be right. In addition, we haven't heard from the students in the sense of the student organizations, even though there have been high school students in the streets and there will be other student groups to be heard from in the near future. We have<sup>have</sup> vent heard from the unions which had been remarkably quiet in this recent period, as if their leadership were trying to decide which way to jump in the re-balancing of forces that's going to take place. We haven't heard from the civil servants, we haven't heard from the military in general, we've heard only from a few generals in the hierarchy, and I think that as of the present time one can generalize only by saying that the position of General Key has been measurably weakened, and that if there is likely to be a scapegoat in the present affair, General Key would seem to be odds on favored for that rather dubious honor.

Who are the potential leaders that might come from this movement? I'm speaking of the Buddhist movement, the uprising here, if the Key government is overthrown, who is likely to

I don't think there is likely to be a civilian government replacing the Key government if that is what you are suggesting, of course the Buddhists have insisted that what they want is early elections, an early constitution and a return to civilian rule. I think this is an almost universal desire on the part of Vietnamese, Buddhist Catholic, or whatever, but it is unlikely to occur in the very near future if for no other reason than that the military still dispose of the bulk of police power force in South Vietnam, and ~~that~~ they are not likely to relinquish it under terms which are going to be unsatisfactory to them and the terms proposed by the Buddhists certainly are exactly that. If the Buddhists were to have their way, If they were to be given what they've asked for in the last couple of weeks, they would have <sup>a</sup> state which would be directed by, run by for the sake of the Buddhist population in South Vietnam. And even though this is the largest single organized segment of the population, it is not really a majority, and it certainly doesn't speak for all segments of the population, and they have offered not the slightest concession to any other group in the population. I could add I suppose that in addition to the Buddhists and the Catholics and the various functional groups that I mentioned such as the students, and the unions, and the civil servants there are other religious groups in Vietnam. The Hoa Hoi and the Cao Dai which are groups of roughly a million people each in South Vietnam, for whom the Buddhists cannot claim to speak and who have their own grievances to be accounted for or to by the military leadership. and we have yet to hear from them.

Thank you very much.

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