of the kip. Touted as a friend of Americans, the extent to which his friendship was based on financial self-interest, has often been debated. In addition to his Pakse home, he also maintained a residence in Vientiane with a staff of servants and a retinue of associates. He reportedly had substantial business interests in both Vientiane and Pakse and was on the board of directors of at least one Lao bank.

Katay died in December, 1959, at the age of fifty-five. When interviewed in the summer of 1959, he held the position of Minister of the Interior and of Cults. Despite reports of his wealth, his home in Vientiane was a relatively modest wooden structure with a separate two-story building used as an office. Our conversation was a bit formal at first, but once the initial barriers had been overcome, he was quite direct in his comments. He seemed disturbed by the activities of the Committee for the Defense of the National Interest.\(^1\) Katay considered the young people in the Committee lacking in experience in government and claimed that the Committee was actually being backed by the Americans, and that many of the members who were supposedly leading an anti-corruption campaign were actually making a fair amount of money for themselves.\(^2\) He cited a large private home being built by the then Foreign Minister, Khampan Panya, and the very nice home of another member of the Committee. He felt American aid should be given on a government-to-government basis rather than a person-to-person basis, and that the members of the CDIN were being favored in this respect. After my departure from Laos in September, 1959, Katay's newspaper issued some denunciations of the Americans to the effect that they had never paid the police on time and that under French control a much better situation had existed.

Katay felt that there was a lack of contact between government officials and villagers, and that effective government really ended at the Muong level. This was one reason why he thought more police were necessary to protect the rural population from the depredations of the Pathet Lao Communists. He cited one case of several villages located near Pakse which voted for the government and then were burned down by the Pathet Lao. In the course of his many trips to rural areas he observed that villages lacked adequate roads, this being true even for villages only fifteen kilometers from Vientiane. Some of the inhabitants of these villages had never even been to the capital. While visiting remote areas Katay said he liked to take villagers up in a plane just to show them

\(^1\) CDIN, a committee composed of young members of the Lao elite who launched a reform program. Although they claimed not to be a political party they stressed the fight against Communism, and a desire to eliminate former corrupt practices. In 1959 they succeeded in having a number of their people appointed to Ministerial offices and in 1960 formed a political party.

\(^2\) An American official made the interesting point that it is often difficult to determine the exact extent of corruption or sometimes even the intent of the individuals involved, due to the inadequate system of accounting for funds. He felt the Lao were not fanatics in their desire to get rich.
what modern civilization can be like (he was President of Air Laos). He also liked to show them how electric lights work.

In speaking of the monks, he said there are many poor boys who study in the pagoda schools in Vientiane because it is less expensive than studying in regular government schools where they have to buy books and supplies. In the way they are totally supported by the community. Monks often come to him looking for jobs when they have completed the pagoda school. The Pathet Lao have been able to make effective propaganda among the monks by promising them jobs (after they have obtained their education many wish to leave the priesthood). Many villages in the south lack monks, but those in Vientiane do not want to leave the city.¹

Now the new government policy is to decentralize control of the monks. With regard to Communist influence in the priesthood Katay mentioned the neutral Santiphab party and said that two of their six deputies are Mahas, that is, former monks who had attained a high rank in the priesthood. They are now influential among former students who remained as priests.

When asked about the problems of the non-Lao ethnic groups, Katay said that the chiefs among the Kha have a great deal of power, much more than the officials among the Lao. As evidence of this, he said there are very few cases involving the Kha which come before the Lao court. For the most part, he said, they do not wish to have schools, but that the situation had begun to change in certain areas such as those around Pakse. In contrast to what he imputed to be centralized leadership among the Kha,² he said the Meo do not get along with each other, citing the case of Toubi (Vice-President of the National Assembly) and his brother, who in 1959 was Procurator General. Toubi belongs to the Assembly of the Lao People, the party Katay organized by joining with the Prime Minister at that time, Phoui Sananikone; Toubi's brother then deliberately joined another party.

He felt that in Vientiane there was considerable sympathy for the Pathet Lao. In the last election some of the military and younger officials voted for the Pathet Lao because they did not believe the government leadership was strong enough. To strengthen the government, Katay thought it was necessary to diminish the role of monks in politics and, like Prince Boun Oum, emphasized the necessity of furthering government

¹ This is a characteristic they share with many government officials.

² Actually it appears that the Meo have a more strongly centralized government; it is difficult to generalize about the Kha, who are so diverse.
organization below the Muong level. He also claimed that some officials do not get out and travel.\footnote{This assertion is questionable since many Lao officials do travel. The amount of effective contact they have, is another matter, since much of their contact with the villagers is of a formal and ceremonial nature rather than one encouraging an effective two-way channel of communication.}

Katay emphasized the role of police and said that those who were not fitted for the task of administration should be eliminated. He expressed dissatisfaction with the American aid program, particularly the allotment that had been made for the Police: over one thousand salaries for new police had been requested, but only two hundred were granted. Although his enlarged request was made several months before our interview, he had not heard anything new on the subject. Commenting further on the American aid program he could not understand why the Americans did not build a Lycee like the French did. He mentioned there were eight hundred pupils who wanted to enter the sixth class of the Lycee, but there was room for only one-hundred-fifty. He had also asked some groups to establish a Christian religious school in Vientiane. He concluded by reiterating his claim that the Americans had favored some officials at the expense of others.
PRINCE SOUVANNA PHOUMA

Prince Souvanna Phouma was born in 1901 in Luang Prabang, the son of the Viceroy of the Kingdom of Luang Prabang. [He is a brother of the late Prince Phetsarath; Souphanouvong is their half-brother.] After studies at the University of Hanoi and in France, where he received a degree in engineering, he returned to Laos and married a Franco-Lao in 1933. He is one of the few Lao to have a college degree, a college education in the pre-war period appearing to have been reserved for the royal family, with a few exceptions.

During the 1930's he held several important positions in the Department of Public Works. In 1945 he was appointed Minister of Public Works but joined the Lao Issara and went into exile in Thailand in April, 1946. While there he earned his living as an engineer with the Thai Electric Company. With Katay, he was one of the founders of the Nationalist Party. In 1949 he signed the Franco-Lao Agreement granting a certain amount of independence to Laos. [Most Lao officials date their country's independence from the time of this agreement.] When he returned to Laos he joined the Phoumi Sannikone government as Minister of Public Works. In 1951 he went to San Francisco for the Japanese Peace Treaty Conference. He became Prime Minister in 1953, simultaneously holding the portfolios of Public Works, the Plan and Post Office. He remained Prime Minister until 1955 when he was replaced by Katay Don Sedorith, but continued to play an important role as Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of National Defense. In March, 1956, after a new Assembly had been elected Souvanna Phouma again became Prime Minister, also assuming the functions of Minister of Foreign Affairs, National Defense and Information. He continued as Prime Minister until September, 1958. In August, 1956, Souvanna started negotiations with Souphanouvong in an effort to solve the Pathet Lao problem. In November, 1957, the Pathet Lao signed a military and political agreement with the royal government which restored royal Lao government authority over the Provinces of Phong Saly and Sam Neua which had been held by the Pathet Lao since 1954. In 1959 Souvanna Phouma was the Lao Ambassador to France and Italy.

In 1960 he again became Prime Minister and attempted to reconcile the divergent forces of right and left. His attempt failed, and he fled to Cambodia -- but as one of the few recognized leaders in Laos, it appears likely that he will continue to play an important role in government affairs.

1 From "Briefing Notes on the Royal Kingdom of Laos" pp L2 - L3
PHOUI SANANIKONE

Phoui Sananikone is a member of one of the most prominent families in Laos, in a political, economic and social sense. His brothers have been active in both government and business affairs, and his family traces its descent from a mandarin of the Court of the King of Vientiane. This Kingdom was destroyed by a Siamese invasion early in the nineteenth century, and the King was taken to Thailand where he was subjected to various indignities and later died. Phoui's immediate ancestors served as administrators under the French, one of them being the administrator for Vientiane. Nevertheless, Phoui likes to claim origin as a commoner and despite his descent from the royal family of Vientiane does not bear any title. In building up his political following he has used his wealth to bolster his position, and has performed acts of good works for his constituents vaguely reminiscent of the noblesse oblige activities practised by the late Prince Phetsarath (although Phoui appears to lack the discernment and dedication of the latter). His activities in this sphere have included collection of old clothes for the villagers and donations to village wats.

Some of his political rivals have accused him of collaborating only with the elite in the villages, that is, the headmen and their associates, not reaching the people, and of being satisfied with only the formal responses of the villagers rather than going to the heart of their problems. Certain observations in the villages surrounding Vientiane tend to confirm these criticisms.

The following are details of Phoui's biography:

He was born in Vientiane in 1903. After completing his studies at Pavie College (nine grades) he entered the administration in 1923. A brilliant career followed. After his outstanding performance in the competitive examinations for Chao Muong, he soon was appointed Governor (Chao Khoueng) of the Province of Nam Tha and later reached the top of the administrative hierarchy with the rank of Chao Khoueng Special Class.

He was one of the leaders of the resistance against the Japanese

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1 His brother Ngen, a former Minister, served as a Deputy from Thakhek. Another brother, a merchant in Vientiane, was also in the construction business. A younger brother now lives in Bangkok and is in the silk business. He was formerly associated with the Lao Issara movement. A sister is in the weaving business in Vientiane, and is married to Khamsouk Keloungkhot, owner of one of the largest construction firms in Vientiane. Khamsouk's family, in turn, is related to that of Bong Souvannavong.

2 Titles appear to be held today mainly by descendants of the courts of Champassak and Luang Prabang.
in northern Laos. At the end of May, 1945, he was forced to leave the Kingdom with the French troops, fleeing to Burma. Then he went to China and finally reached Calcutta.

His political career began in January, 1947, when Prince Souvannarath formed the first government of an independent and united Laos. He held the rank of Minister of Education, Health, and Social Welfare in this cabinet. He was elected representative of Pakse at the first legislative election in August, 1947. He became President of the first Lao National Assembly in December of the same year.

He was re-elected President of the Assembly in 1948 and 1949, and gave up his office only after the King commissioned him to form a government. In this capacity, as Prime Minister, he headed the Lao delegation at the Conference of the Associated States of Indochina at Pau, France, in July 1950.

In August, 1951, he was elected a Deputy from the Province of Vientiane. After the resignation of his government in October of the same year, he took part, from November, 1951 to February, 1956, as vice Premier and as head of various Ministries in cabinets formed respectively by Prince Souvanna Phouma and Katay Don Sesorith. Meanwhile he had been re-elected as representative of Vientiane in the election of December, 1955.

He was President and founder of the Independent Party until its merger with the Nationalist Party of Katay to form the Rally of the Lao People. (RPL: Rassemblement du Peuple Lao.) He acted as Vice-President of this organization, which in 1959 was the majority party controlling thirty-six of the fifty-nine seats in the National Assembly. He holds numerous foreign decorations.

He left the political scene for eighteen months and returned in August, 1957, after a cabinet crisis of seventy days, as a Minister in the Souvanna Phouma cabinet. He became Prime Minister of Laos in September, 1958, and continued in that position until the end of 1959.
Prince Souphanouvong

Prince Souphanouvong was born in 1912 and is a half-brother of Prince Souvanna Phouma and Prince Phetsarath. After completing his secondary education in Hanoi, he went to France where he prepared for one of the most difficult engineering schools. In 1937 he received his degree as an engineer and returned the next year to Indochina where he held various posts in the Public Works Department. In 1954 he joined the Lao Issara Movement, and held the position of Minister of Foreign Affairs in the government in exile, formed in Bangkok. In March, 1946, Souphanouvong was wounded in battle against the French troops. While in exile he also served as Commander-in-Chief of the Lao Issara troops which were engaged in fighting the French in Laos. After Souphanouvong's efforts to strengthen the ties between the Lao Issara and Vietminh were repudiated by the Lao Issara government in Bangkok, he split with the other Lao Nationalists and organized an independent movement with close ties to the Vietminh. In 1950 he founded the Pathet Lao resistance movement which he has headed since then. In 1956 he started negotiations with his brother Souvanna Phouma, then Prime Minister, with a view to integrating the Pathet Lao into the Lao national community. After fifteen months of negotiation, the Pathet Lao agreed to turn over the two northern provinces of Phong Saly and Sam Neua to the royal government. One of the conditions for the settlement was the participation of two Pathet Lao Ministers in the royal government. In November, 1957, Souphanouvong entered the royal government as Minister for Plan and Urbanization, a position he held until Prime Minister Phoumi Sananikone formed his first cabinet in 1958.2

1 This Ministry was also responsible for negotiating the American aid program. Another Pathet Lao was Minister of Religion and Cults.

2 Briefing Notes on the Royal Kingdom of Laos p L-3
He is married to a Vietnamese, a fact often used against him by his Lao opponents. His children are reportedly being educated in North Vietnam and China. A Communist source provides some additional information on Souphanouvong:

In 1937, the time of the popular front in France, Souphanouvong worked on the docks of Bordeaux and LeHavre. Here he met a very different type of Frenchman compared to the colonialists he had known in Laos. He contacted progressive intellectuals and members of the French working class. He was strongly influenced by French revolutionary and humanist culture in such stark contrast to all he had observed of colonialist comportment. He studied the classics of the French revolution and was caught up in the spirit of the great days of the popular front. After France, he went to Vietnam and worked at his trade building many bridges and roads in many parts of the country. He saw life on the rubber plantations, at the railways, construction camps and mines, and was appalled by the misery and exploitation of the workers. He saw more clearly the savagery of the colonialists. When the Japanese invaded Indochina, Souphanouvong was in Vietnam. He contacted the revolutionary movement there and was impressed not only by their ardor and self-sacrificing spirit, but also by their organization, the practical way in which they were planning the eventual seizure of power. Once he met Ho Chi Minh and asked him for advice: "Seize power from the colonialists" was the reply.

He began organizing in a similar way. First of all he contacted young Lactians in Vietnam, then he returned to Laos and formed revolutionary groups, mostly from young intellectuals and other patriotic elements. It was he who prepared the ground and organized the seizure of power which started in August, 1945. He tried to interest all his brothers in the movement, but it was only Souvanna Phouma who responded, although Phetsarath gave his blessing from above.

I met Souphanouvong first at headquarters deep in the jungle, just as the battle of Dien Bien Phu was getting underway. His Pathet Lao forces were busy
blocking French attempts to push up through Laos to the rescue... He expresses himself with great vigor, and the impression of great strength of character is strengthened when he speaks. His speech is direct and clear as befits a technician and no time is lost with the superficial courtesies which one often encounters with even progressive figures from the feudal classes in Asia. Souphanouvong by his contacts with the people had identified himself completely with them, and it did not take much time among his troops and cadres, or among the villagers near his headquarters, to feel that he was respected and loved by the people. They saw in him a patriot who had shared their suffering for many years on end; not a Prince of the feudal hierarchy.

Although the doctrinaire nature of the above statements leads one to question their validity, there is no doubt of the broad popular appeal of Prince Souphanouvong. For example, in the election of 1958 he received 37,389 votes as the candidate from Vientiane Province, the largest number of votes received by any candidate in all of Laos, in either the election of 1955 or 1958. He has assiduously cultivated the friendship of the Buddhist clergy, spending a great deal of time visiting the pagodas and talking with the priests at length. He has told both the monks and village people of the great sufferings that he has experienced in waging war for the Pathet Lao, and has been able in this way to evoke a good deal of sympathy for his cause.

During much of 1959 he was under house arrest or confined to Vientiane. There was talk of bringing him and other Pathet Lao leaders to trial for treason. However, this step was never undertaken by the Lao government, and subsequently the Prince and several associates "escaped" custody.

He has resumed his position with the Pathet Lao, although the extent to which he exercises leadership is not known.

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1 In the summer of 1959 the Prince was quite capable of engaging in polite chit-chat at an American Embassy reception.
TIAO SOMSANITH

Tiao Somsanith, Minister of the Interior in the government formed in 1960 and subsequently Prime Minister until overthrown by the revolt of Captain Kong, he was at the time of this interview a Deputy from Nam Tha and also High Commissioner for the Provinces of Nam Tha and Phong Saly. As his title indicates he is a "highness", or Prince, although not a member of the royal family.

He was born in Luang Prabang in 1913. His wife is a sister of Prince Souphanouvong, and they have seven children. A first wife, a daughter of Prince Phetsarath, died. One of his sisters is the wife of the Lao Ambassador to London. One brother, an officer in the Army, is now stationed in Paris; another is a lieutenant in a tank squadron. He is a nephew of Prince Souvanna Phouma and of the late Prince Phetsarath, as well as having been the latter's son-in-law. He is also a cousin of Tiao Souk, former Minister of Public Works and Deputy from Luang Prabang.

Tiao Somsanith attended the Lycee in Vientiane and in 1935 graduated from the School of Law and Administration there, providing the equivalent of a high school education. During World War II he served as Mayor of Vientiane and also as Deputy Governor. He took part in the Lao Issara movement and in 1946 went to Thailand, returning to Laos in 1949. He was Minister of Justice and Public Health in the Phoumi Sananikone government from 1949 to 1952, and Governor of Nam Tha from 1952 to 1954. In 1954 he was appointed Director of the National Police. He also served as Secretary of State for the Interior in the Souvanna Phouma government in 1957. He has done some traveling abroad, usually on brief government missions.

His home is quite modest, built of wood with a large veranda, and located on the main road leading to the airfield. When I visited him, he entertained me on the porch and served beer. He introduced his wife, who came and sat with us for awhile, but since she spoke no French she soon left. (Most Lao elite are not hesitant about presenting their wives who, in most cases speak little, if any, French.)

We began our conversation by talking about the Committee for the Defense of the National Interest. Tiao Somsanith said they had a good program in theory, but that they were inclined to talk much and act little. Also, he felt some of their members were not quite honest. Then

1The latter position appears to have since been abolished.
we spoke of the non-Lao ethnic groups, who in the Province of Nam Tha are in the overwhelming majority. "It is absolutely essential for the Lao to get along with the minority groups. If they cannot, everything is lost. In Nam Tha, for every Lao village, there are fifteen non-Lao villages."

He had recently brought a Yao village chief to Vientiane to see the city. He lodged him at his home and provided him with western clothes. Several Lao officials have advocated doing this sort of thing on a large scale as a means of familiarizing the non-Lao groups with the country. Tiao Somphanith remarked that the Yao are now completely on the side of the government. He recently returned from a trip of several months through Nam Tha, in which he spoke to the people about their problems and brought along a mobile film unit, providing some of them with their first entertainment of this type. Schools have been set up in certain Yao and Kha Ko villages. At one Groupe Scolaire there were lodgings for Meo and Yao students, where they were able to get their own kind of food.

With regard to the Army and the police he felt that the situation in Laos is unlike that in Thailand. There are many cases in which they cooperate and use each other's equipment such as at the Tat Luang Fair. Concerning village needs, he felt health is the most important and other services are less significant. He said some of these services sleep and should be eliminated, but he refused to say which ones.

I asked him how Lao officials were able to afford expensive new cars on their salaries. He replied that he was paying for his car at the rate of 4,000 kip a month, over four years, under an arrangement that had been offered the Deputies by the government. Under the 1957 Souvanna Phouma government many officials stole and "got their hands dirty." He laughingly included himself since he was in the former government. Then, mentioning the name of a middle-rank government officer, he said that the official had a new Chevrolet and a Mercedes. I asked how he was able to pay for them on his salary, and Tiao Somphanith's reply strongly suggested that the colonel took graft although, with a broad smile, he said that he really did not know. (There appears to be a lot of hostility among Lao officials and Deputies, so that they do not hesitate to denounce one another to foreigners. When driving home from Tiao Somphanith's residence with a friend of his, a Deputy from Phong Saly and a member of the majority government party, we passed the new house being constructed for a cabinet minister, the Deputy remarked that one minister had stolen the money from his ministry to build the house.)

(Some Americans have claimed that Tiao Somphanith embezzled large sums while he was Chief of Police. However, no formal charges were ever made. In any case, his style of living does not appear overly ostentatious for Vientiane. It is possible that the American aid program
may have indirectly subsidized past and present political activities, since the salaries of many of these Deputies are not sufficient for them to carry on their political work, and even members of the elite often lack the substantial property holdings or industrial base from which independent wealth might be derived.

With regard to the next election (at that time scheduled for December, 1959) he said that there should be only one government candidate opposing the Pathet Lao candidate for this was the only way to win the elections. (A similar policy has been expressed by members of the CDIN.) He remarked that it was a good thing that Katay, Phoui and Bong were united, instead of working at cross purposes, and added that the Santiphab Party had actually originated because its current leader had a dispute with a member of Katay's family.

When questioned about the American aid program Tiao Somsanith expressed the belief that it would continue and that there was therefore no need to reconsider the foreign policy of Laos.

**BONG SOUVANNAVONG**

Since independence Bong Souvannavong has been an outstanding figure on the Lao scene. Something of a maverick in Lao politics, he headed his own party, the Lao National Union. Formerly he was sympathetically aligned with the Communists. Within the past few years he has radically changed his position and has become an outspoken anti-Communist. This does not seem to have moderated either his former criticism of the government or of the American aid program. He is reported to be one of the wealthiest business men in Laos, deriving his income from real estate investments and construction activities. Unlike many other government officials, no accusations were heard leveled against him for having profited under the old currency exchange rate. He is a member of the same Souvannavong family which is very prominent in Lao business and government affairs. This family traces its descent from a court official of the old Kingdom of Vientiane. One of his brothers is a Chao Muong, and another is a former Deputy and vice-president of the National Assembly.

He was born in Vientiane in 1906 and is married to Bounlay Keo Louangkhot. (It is possible that his wife is of the same family as one of the major Lao contractors who in turn is married to the sister of the former Prime Minister Phoui Sananikone. He is related to many other members of the Lao elite.) They have twelve living children, some of whom are studying abroad. Two sons have government scholarships in France and Japan. He himself has traveled in Europe and Asia and has spent some time in Japan. He is strongly sympathetic toward the latter country.
He graduated from the Ecole Superieure de Pedagogie at Hanoi in 1926 and the Centre d’Education Physique at Hue. Much of his civil service career has been spent as a teacher. He has also served in a supervisory capacity in the field of primary education. Specifically he has been a teacher at the Lycee Pavie in Vientiane and at various times director of schools in the Provinces of Pakse, Savannakhet, Luang Prabang and Sam Neua. In 1946 he served as Governor of Luang Prabang.

Bong has been active in the Lao Independence movement since its inception. In 1946 he was elected as a Deputy from Vientiane Province and subsequently served as President of the National Assembly from 1946 to 1947. From 1947 to 1949 he was Minister of Economic Affairs in the first royal constitutional government. In 1947 he formed the Lao National Union Party and has remained as its leader. He also has edited the party’s weekly paper, which currently has a circulation of approximately 5,000. He formerly served as President of the Committee for the Maintenance of a Policy of Peace and Neutrality (Khama Santiphab) and also director of the Santiphab paper. This group has since become a political party formally espousing a neutralist line. However, by 1959 as a strong anti-Communist, Bong had broken his former alliances and was very much opposed to their policy. He was Minister of Posts and Fine Arts in the Phoui Sananikone government.

Among other activities, he has been a Scout Commissioner and President of the Lao Scouts Organization. He acted as a promoter and president of the Lao Art and Sport Society in Savannakhet in 1932 and later headed this group in Vientiane and Luang Prabang. In addition he has been an officer of the Lao Literary Committee since its inception in 1951. He has received medals and awards from the Lao, French and Cambodian governments.

Bong is a thin, white-haired little man, appearing somewhat older than his fifty-four years. Unlike the homes of a number of other members of the Lao elite, his is a traditional rambling wooden house, the furnishings including, however, a number of upholstered chairs grouped around a coffee table, with family photographs on the walls. A striking note about his home was the fact that the wooden interior was painted a brilliant blue and green, which, although garish to some westerners, seem to be the preferred colors for Lao urban homes. (Some Thai tend to look on these decorations with disdain, since blue and green are supposedly the colors of houses of ill repute in Thailand.) On most of the occasions I visited him, I usually found him out on his broad veranda, sitting on a bamboo stool, talking with his children or political followers.

As with most Lao officials, our conversation was carried on in French. He asked me if I knew Lao, and I tried a little bit, but my linguistic ability was not sufficient to sustain conversations on complex matters. With some pride he brought out and showed me a book he had written on the Lao language a few years ago. He mentioned with
pleasure an American working with the Asia Foundation who had re-

tently spoken to him in fluent Lao.

I initiated discussion by asking him what he thought of the general
situation in Laos. He replied by asking me what the objectives of the
United States in Laos were, to which I answered that the United States
desired a democratic and independent Laos; he agreed and thought that the
aims were good but that the aid funds had been poorly used. Bong felt
that the most important thing was to win the hearts of the people
(this is one of his favorite phrases and although it would be hard to
be in disagreement with it, I found it difficult to pin him down to
specific details).

For every aspect of the American aid I mentioned, he has some-
negative comment. For example, with regard to education, he said
that not enough aid had been given. At one time, when he mentioned
that he had been offered the post of Education Minister, he indicated he
would like to implement a program for literacy throughout Laos in two
years or possibly in one. This could be done, he said, by using the methods
of the Pathet Lao, that is, no fancy buildings to be erected, but ordi-
nary village dwellings were to be used, and he implied that the villagers
would be used to teach each other. Concerning the rural aid program,
he spoke of the Americans helping with the construction of wats, indi-
cating that the Lao had managed to build pagodas before the Americans
arrived. "Tin roofs do not change peoples' hearts, one of the big items
in the rural assistance budget has been the provision of galvanized-tin
roofing, regarded as a mark of status among Lao villagers. The improve-
ment that it represents over thatch is certainly questionable since it
heats up in the summertime. In any case, it is certainly not better
than tile."

He felt strongly that the American projects were superficial. He
cited the case of Civic Action, a program of rural aid, subsequently
abandoned, in which the Army had participated, the agents being sup-
plied with goods to distribute, which were contributed by the Americans.
To carry out their activities, paid agents of the government went to
the villages, gave things away and then left. People did not really
know what the program was all about. He claimed the same was true
with films produced by the United States Information Service, which
were not clearly explained to the people. Certain individuals, such as
the Deputy Governor of Vientiane Province, tell the people that the
films are their personal property (this is done by many other Lao
politicians who show these new movies of Lao life in villages around
election time).

Bong maintained that Americans work only with selected elite,
perhaps one hundred top officials who cater to their ideas. This is
what puts their aid on a personal basis.
When I mentioned the Committee for the Defense of the National Interest he said they seemed to have a reform program but lacked experience and contact with village people (similar remarks were made by many of the older politicians). Bong continued, "They should clean their own house before looking into the mess of others. A local Mercedes-Benz dealer conducts a large volume of business but pays no taxes. He is a member of their Committee. Many people in that organization do not clearly understand its purposes. For example, I sent one of my men to see the editor of the Committee's paper, and was told that he, the editor, did not know the policies of the Committee since he was only a paid employee."

Agents of the CDIN worked against his own party in the countryside. He had brought up these matters at Cabinet meetings, but the Ministers denied that they had ever given such orders (at the time of the interview five Cabinet Ministers were members of the CDIN).

He felt the propaganda of the Committee was largely for the ears of Americans and designed to impress them.

Turning again to the village aid program, he said that when you aid one village you make several others wonder why they have not been helped. In contrast to the government's Civic Action agents, those of the Pathet Lao stayed in villages, and often in one place, where they worked continuously.

Like so many other politicians, Bong was fond of talking in generalities and when I attempted to ask him what was being done to eliminate corruption, for example, he replied that some people have been put in prison, but these were only the little ones. The big operators had not been touched. He added that many of the younger government officials act pro-Communist in that they feel the Pathet Lao definitely should not be kept under house surveillance.

We discussed a recent conference of youth leaders from all Laos, hosted by the CDIN and held under government auspices. Bong said the participants did not clearly understand what it was all about and that most of them were from the capital city; some were forced into participating and although they carried provincial banners in the parade, they were not necessarily from those areas. This too, was to impress the Americans and other foreigners, Bong maintained.

Bong commented on the American project of the construction of a diesel power plant in Vientiane. Its consumption of over a thousand barrels of fuel oil per month was an extravagant luxury for Vientiane and for Laos in general. "Who is going to be able to pay for this?" he asked.

In subsequent discussions we went over many of the same topics.
He repeated some of his general themes, but with new twists. For example, he contrasted his own way of working with the villagers with that of the Prime Minister Phoui Sananikone. When he went to the villages with the Prime Minister, the latter handed out money to the village chiefs for the local war. "You cannot win the peoples' hearts with money. Every villager must be a soldier. You cannot have an effective government with only a police force and an Army. The villagers should want to fight for their homes and protect them from the enemy."

Inspiring some of these comments was a recent shipment of several hundred heavy-duty American Army trucks. If the enemy lurked five meters from the road these trucks would be of very little use. They are actually capable of moving only short distances outside the capital during the monsoon season.

"The country's big needs are good roads, schools and medicine. I myself go to the villages every weekend and often sleep there. I try to work with as many people as possible, while the government works with only two or three people in each village. Villagers have been made less self-reliant because of government policy. In building wats, for example, they used to help themselves and not ask the government. Now they are always asking the government for something. The Lao people have become lazy. The Americans have made them beggars. The officials of the Lao government must imitate the methods of the Pathet Lao, and stay with the people, not just pass through the villages and go away. Counting the Army and the police, there are perhaps 50,000 out of three million people who are with the government, and there are even Pathet Lao agents in the police."

Regarding the matter of allocation of funds, Bong felt that the American government should take the initiative with the Lao. "The Americans like spectacles like the meetings of the Committee for the Defense of the National Interests. The Americans think this is a good organization, while the people say it is only an American organization and that the Americans bestow their favors on certain politicians such as those in the Rally of the Lao People"/this is the party of the late Katay, who made a similar remark about American favoritism, only directed at other officials and the Committee).

Following is an account of a trip made with Bong to visit some villages near Vientiane. It was made in August, 1959, in the middle of the monsoon season so our visits were limited to those villages adjoining the main road. We left his home early in the day in his Volks-wagon stationwagon, accompanied by his wife, his sister, a son who had

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During the 1961 civil war fighting, Army truck convoys of the Boun (Oum) government were ambushed on the Vientiane-Luang Prabang road, about twenty-five miles north of Vientiane. This Pathet Lao action was reported by the United Press to have occurred on Feb. 7, 1961.
returned for the summer from engineering studies in Japan, and a police­
man, two assistants connected with his party work and the chauffeur.
(High-ranking Lao officials seem to travel with a retinue, at least one
servant and an assistant. I cannot recall any of them going out alone.)
His wife and sister were dressed in simple village skirts and brought
their betel-chewing kits with them. The road we took was the main
route north toward Luang Prabang.

The first stop was some twenty-kilometers from Vientiane. Here a
procedure was enacted that was repeated countless times during the trip.
The entire retinue got out of the car, and his wife and sister went over
and squatted down with some of the village women and began chatting with
them, while Bong himself spoke to the men or contacted his agent and
left behind a stack of his newspapers. The effectiveness of this tech­
nique is open to question, but it seems he has traveled this route quite
often before. Certainly the villagers showed no surprise in seeing him.

After we left this village Bong said the government had distributed
arms to a neighboring village (presumably for the auto-defense forces).
After the villagers had received their arms they had taken to the woods
with their weapons. The government does not know what the true feelings
of the villagers are, he felt.

At most of our frequent stops we halted at the house of his agent.
There sometimes was a sign outside his house. In contrast to many other
touring Lao officials, only once did Bong speak to the villagers from
the car; instead, he got out to speak to them, as did his wife and sister.
(Contrary to the older Lao generation they had many more of the cul­
tural traits of the rural people than do those of the younger gener­
at which village is perhaps a trivial example, but it is hard to
imagine the wives of some of the younger officials squatting down with
the villagers and chewing betel with them.) As we traveled along the
road, Bong indicated his opinion as to which villages were pro-
government and which were with the Pathet Lao. He said that it is
possible for a pro-government village to have a few Pathet Lao symp­
pathizers but not vice-versa.

In one village the people remarked that he had not been there for
three months. On a brief trip like this it was hard to judge how ef­
fective his five-minute to half-hour visits were. Both he and his
associates usually got right down to discussing politics and Communism
with the villagers without the customary preliminaries which one has
come to associate with traditional politeness in Lao society. Perhaps
this is his own individual variation on the cultural pattern, or he may
feel that he knows the villagers sufficiently well so that he can speak
directly with them. Or, it may be the directness of a superior addressing
an inferior.

At one village we stopped to pick up one of his agents who had