He continued, "It is much more logical to aid the villages rather than the towns. In January, 1959, we began a program of village aid. Previously villagers had been neglected by the town dwellers. The city people were interested in making money through the dollar exchange, so the rural population turned to Communism. Then we gave them roofs, and now you can see tin roof's replacing thatch roofs. With regard to roads, we have made a proposal to start a program of road building. We want to have roads from the Cambodian border to Vientiane. Then the people would settle near the roads instead of along the river. If roads penetrate the countryside, we will be better able to exploit our resources, which have been previously discovered by the French. Roads, aid to the villagers, fundamental education, rural medicine: these are the four things with which to attack the Communists.

"We of the Committee for the Defense of the National Interest, have decided to eliminate the Communists. This is the reason we are in the government; otherwise we would not be here. Look at the seal of our Committee. It symbolizes our purposes. At the base is a knife representing defense, surrounded by a semi-circle of rice seed, standing for prosperity; then, in the center is the Buddhist wheel of life in the middle of which is a three-headed elephant, the seal of our country. Above are several bound volumes, representing the Constitution. Parallel to this, in the form of a tier is the six-sided umbrella representing the dynasty."

(Many people, both in and out of the government, have commented on the CNUE cynically, stating that its members seem to be concerned only with pushing their own interests. Since the summer of 1959, a number of them, including Sisouk, have been eliminated from ministerial posts. However, with the very limited educated personnel available, it is certain that they can still be found in subordinate positions, particularly since almost all members of the Committee are also civil servants.)

"Our national budget amounts to 1,200,000,000 kip.² This budget has the same value as that of the French Ministry for Foreign Affairs. We cannot do anything within its limitations. We have spoken to our friends the Americans, French, English and the representative of the Colombo Plan. We cannot build roads by ourselves. Each kilometer of road costs one million kip. If our whole budget were devoted only to road building, only 1,200 kilometers of roads could be constructed in a

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¹ This has already happened along the Luang Prabang road.
² The value in dollars is rather difficult to calculate. The free market rate prevailing in the summer of 1959 was 80 kip to the dollar, but the budget is larger than the fifteen million dollars this would indicate. It is possible that the figure represents the amount the Lao were able to raise through taxes, largely on imports and exports.
year. We need six to ten thousand kilometers of roads, so we would have
to devote our total budget for eight years exclusively to this program.
We have no means.

"If our friends cannot help us, we will not be able to do anything.
All we can do is hope and look at each other. We have no electricity.
We cannot be independent if we are not aided. The present aid level to
Laos is about thirty-six to forty million dollars a year. People cannot
pay taxes if we do not do anything for them. We have no engineers to
build roads. Give us the engineers to show us how. We could put 5000
boys to work on road projects."

When discussing how this project could be accomplished in view of
the limited financial resources and the fact that the American aid to
Laos might not be increased, as a partial answer I ventured the suggestion
that it might be possible to take some funds from the military, since
many people have said that the Army was too large. Official B replied
that this would be in accord with his view but that the level of the Army
was fixed by the Americans in the Program Evaluation Office (this is the
equivalent of an American Military Aid Mission in Laos). He strongly
implied that it was American money and the Lao had no say about it. This
directly contradicts the remarks of certain foreign observers who said
that at a Cabinet meeting at that period, the Lao government had decided
to ask the Program Evaluation Office for an increase in Army strength in
view of the trouble in the north.

"In any case," Official B said, "if a road were built, people would
be able to sell things and would then be able to pay taxes. For example,
at Pakse pineapples are now three to five kip each, while in Vientiane
they cost thirty to thirty-five kip apiece. Also, fifty thousand pounds
of potatoes go bad in Pak Song in the south because there is no trans-
portation. In other regions there is a spoilage of excess rice. "Roads
are the most important thing in any program trying to reach the village
people."

We turned next to a discussion of religious matters. He said,
"There are now about twelve thousand monks in Laos. We are a Buddhist
state. The monks have considerable influence in the villages. There
they are the teachers and doctors like the village priest in France,
but unlike France, here there is no conflict between the right and the
left factions. In Laos the Pathet Lao also seek influence among the
monks. Now, slowly the monks are beginning to understand the government
and its policy, but we are not able to go too fast. If we proceed too
rapidly we risk a contrary effect. The recent meetings of the provincial

\(^{1}\) Attempts have been made by the American aid mission to have Amer-
ican contractors train Lao at the same time they undertake road building.
This has also been the objective in the past but it has not always been
successfully implemented.
leaders of the priesthood was designed to develop the monks' discipline.

"Some foreign influences on the priesthood are not good. Many of the monks want to learn English, but this cannot be done in the pagoda itself. For young monks to go to foreign families to study English is not good. Formerly, after nine p.m. no monks would be seen on the streets. This is not true today. Now there is no discipline. There are Mahas in the Santiphab Party who have much influence and work closely with the Pathet Lao. To counter this trend, twice a month government officials are requested to go to Wat Sissaket to listen to sermons. About one hundred officials attend."

When Official B was asked about the development of Vientiane with its movies, pastry shops, beauty salons and other luxury establishments as compared to the countryside where there is a lack of educational and medical facilities and roads, he replied that all these things were normal in the development of a city. He said that investigators coming from the United States have written articles about Laos and have made certain incorrect references.

"For one thing," he said, "the cost of the aid program to Laos includes the salaries of American technicians and the cost of their servants and transportation. Many of these officials are connected with USOM affairs only, and the Lao government has never requested them."

When asked if he thought Laos could get along with fewer technicians Official B would not give a direct reply. He did bring up one evident point of pride and dwell on it at length—the fact that Americans paid their servants four to six thousand kip per month, while he could only afford to pay his servants about three thousand kip a month, implying a very high living standard for American technicians, even the lower ranking ones, as contrasted with that of the high Lao government officials.

In discussing the possibility of taxes for Laos Official B pointed out that government officials earn about fourteen thousand kip a month, or just about the salary of a common laborer (he used the term—cooie) in the United States. (Actually high ranking Lao government officials can receive up to twenty or twenty-five thousand kip per month.) There are only about one hundred families in Vientiane who could be considered prosperous. By taxing them one would not be able to raise much money. When the symbolic factor was mentioned he seemed to agree, but only in a lukewarm way. He also felt the villagers could not pay taxes since they lacked the means, but that once roads were built to the villages it would help solve this problem.
HIGH-RANKING OFFICIAL CONCERNED
WITH EDUCATION PROBLEMS
(Official C)

With regard to village development Official C felt that, "This should be directed through the schools since they have the personnel and the means to reach the villagers. They also have the experience. The efforts of the Rural Development Program are in competition with the Ministry of Education. There are also other programs, but officially I know nothing about them. (This was a specific reference to the Army Teams of Six. He also commented bitterly about the superficial training of their personnel.)

"There are now five organizations working in rural development: Education, Agriculture, Public Health, the Army and the Village Development Program. They are all in competition, and there is not enough money."

Like most civil service officials who are not in politics, he was rather hostile to the Committee for the Defense of the National Interest. He said they claim they are not a political party, but this is a joke, for their people are Ministers of Education, Foreign Affairs, Army, Finance and Social Affairs.

Then we turned to a discussion of the minority groups. "They are all Lao. Our problem is to Lao-itize them. The missionaries in Xieng Khouang who are using Lao texts to teach the people there, are working against the interests of the Lao government."

When it was mentioned that the Lao and the Kha did not know Lao when they entered school he replied, "The teachers should know these languages. As for the students, this is the same as Lao not knowing French when they reach the junior high school level. We do not discriminate against them. Priority should be given to developing schools for mountain peoples, but the Kha, for example, represent a problem because their villages are so scattered. We do not discriminate, but priority should be given to the establishment of schools in the larger villages."

HIGH OFFICIAL DEALING WITH RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS
(Official D)

An interesting point in connection with this interview is that on many matters he takes a view opposite that of many of his associates. A transcription of his remarks follows.¹

¹ Compare with viewpoints of Officials A & B and see footnotes on page 60 on activities of clergy in 1960-61.
Lao people by tradition respect monks deeply. Now we have a problem. There is a Communist bloc and a Free World bloc. The Lao government has chosen the Free World. We are near the frontier of Communist China and North Vietnam. There are elements of the other side within Laos, and they attempt to subvert the monks to achieve their goals. Therefore, the government has to watch the situation concerning the monks very closely.

We must be extremely careful. The monks are very young (in terms of political sophistication). On the average, they have had five years of schooling and at most, up to eight or ten years (in general Lao monks are not as well educated as those in Thailand).

There are some very old monks who have been forty years in the pagoda but have never participated in politics. In principle, the monks are forbidden to enter into political affairs. A present problem of the government is that attention must be paid to the anti-government elements within the priesthood. The monks in general are still not contaminated by politics. If some go over to the other side, it is because they do not understand the danger.

The Pathet Lao say that if the monks do not think there are enough pagodas, this is because the government is not pro-Buddhist, thus maneuvering the monks into the position of being anti-government. The government does not pay sufficient attention to the monks. The problem is very difficult: we have to deal with their ignorance in political matters as well as counteract the work of the well-organized Pathet Lao.

The priesthood is one of the best elements for working against the Communists, but it cannot participate directly like political groups. Do you know what Neo Lao Hak Sat means? It means 'the Lao who love their country'. These Neo Lao Hak Sat, or Pathet Lao as they were formerly known, work as nationalists not as Communists. They have never declared themselves Communists. Only one or two monks who are already Communists want a Communist regime because they feel it would advance their own careers. These are the monks who are consciously serving the Communists. If we have formal proof that monks serve the Pathet Lao against the government, we must punish them. We cannot wait until many are contaminated, for we cannot proclaim a collective punishment. We have begun to be vigilant.

Buddhist doctrine forbids politics, but things can be done discreetly. Because of the strong belief of the people in the monks, we must proceed with caution. We should have meetings where government officials and ministers speak directly to the monks (actually the strong French influences among many Lao elite seem to have affected them as far as anti-clerical attitudes are concerned. Some, particularly the younger elite who have been educated in France, are not at all religious. This situation has reached the point where the government has recently begun

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requiring officials to attend services once a month. This contrasts with the outward attitude of some Pathet Lao leaders, notably Prince Souphanouvong, who makes a great show of visiting the wats frequently and talking with the monks). Our enemies exploit the credulity of the monks. If some monks serve the Communists we can defrock them and punish them. One monk had a warrant issued for his arrest and fled to Thailand.

"There is a lack of discipline among the monks here in Laos. Rules should be enforced for the respect of the Buddhist faith. These regulations must be observed. There must be pure discipline to show the people that the monks are truly respectful of Buddhism. If there are some bad elements within the religious community, this must be corrected.

"The young monks are novices who are in the priesthood only to profit from the generosity of the Lao public: to live, to study in the pagoda and later to find a job outside. The novices do not think of becoming monks and living that way until death. They are able to study because they are fed and lodged in the pagoda at the expense of the population. They learn to read and write Lao and also study English and French. When they have completed their course they hope to seek a job, a small job in the government. They cannot, however, get an important position because the Pali school emphasizes Buddhist doctrine above all (and this presumably is not too useful in the government service although Laos is formally a Buddhist state).

"The Communists tried to sabotage the recent conference the government held for chief provincial monks. They tried to convince the Director of the Ministry of the Interior to allow 'professors' or lecturers for the conference, chosen by the pro-Pathet Lao group. About twenty-four monks who are pro-Communist were proposed for this work, including the former chief monk. The Minister of Religious Affairs understood and refused to permit them to attend the conference. The Communists also tried to delay the meeting. If this conference had been held here in Vientiane, we could not have obtained the good results which were achieved. Having it eighty kilometers away posed many difficulties in terms of transportation, and so many Ministers and other high-ranking officials were not able to attend.

"From time to time we should have conferences of monks directed by competent officials. The government can control the affairs of the monks, but it is a delicate situation. We must show respect for the monks, for if we are not tactful they can say 'We should not be treated like laymen'. I do not want to act as if I know more than the monks.

"Fortunately the Prime Minister (Phoum Sannakone) was able to attend our conference before its closing. In his discussion he was very respectful to the monks, but he advised them not to occupy themselves with politics because when monks participate in politics they risk the
decadence of their religion. This approach is very good; this lesson must be repeated very often. My point of view is that to redress the situation, it is necessary to make explanations to the monks.

"It is possible for them to be anti-Communist and at the same time preserve our tradition of non-participation of the priesthood in politics. Thus, it is forbidden for the monks to work against the government, so they must support its program. If you are against the government you can be punished.

"The Director of the Rural Development program (Civic Action) asked the Minister of Religious Affairs to enlist the monks' support in this project. There was a meeting with the former head of the monks, and he in turn had a conference with some thirty of his associates, to which the Minister was invited. The chief monk then posed the question, 'Is it not true that politics are involved in the Civic Action program?' (This was one of the programs backed by the American government, which provided the major funds for its support.) The Minister replied, 'No, you are not making politics, but you are supporting an activity of the government.' Then the head monk said that the monks wished to avoid such a situation. The Minister counseled them to meditate on this problem, and to bear in mind that it was the wish of the government. Finally the monks refused to participate, claiming it would mean they were engaging in politics. From my point of view if this example is repeated, the government must then say to the monks, 'If you are not for the government, you are against it. If you are against us, we are obligated to take action.'

"Whatever we do we must do carefully, because the population watches us. We must honor the good monks, and do this (smashing his fist hard against his hand) with the bad ones. This is very difficult, because some, including the chief monk, have relatives who are members of the Pathet Lao.'"

EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATOR
(Official E)

As an official of the Lao Ministry of Education, Official E spent over a year in the United States. Unlike most of his colleagues he now has quite a good command of English. He has had extensive dealings with Europeans and Americans. His wife has been a government employee and is a member of a prominent Lao family.

(An account of Official E's travels in the United States is included under the section on impressions of America.)

At the beginning of our meeting Official E brought up the subject of American reaction and especially the reactions in the American press, to the aid program in Laos. He specifically mentioned an article that
had appeared in the "Readers Digest" magazine. (This was a reprint of an article originally printed in the Wall Street Journal dealing with the deficiencies of the American aid program under the old 1 to 35 exchange rate.)

"The situation is in part the fault of the Lao, but the Americans have made errors too," he said, "They give the Lao the money or materials and then keep hands off. But later they feel free to criticize what happens." What he appeared to imply here was the lack of American participation in carrying out the programs themselves, which is also related to the way in which the Americans conceive of Lao independence. It is also true, of course, that although the Lao say they welcome greater American participation in the carrying out of the various programs, they are sometimes very obstructive toward American efforts directed at detailed cooperation. It does also seem that there is a matter of cultural communication involved, between the American officials particularly those in the aid mission on one hand and their Lao government counterparts on the other. A number of Americans are conscious of this situation and have a realization of some of the problems.

Official E's attitude toward the United States is by no means completely negative. He spoke with deep affection of his stay and of the various people he met who were very helpful to him. "I want to return to the United States to do graduate study. I have the equivalent of a Bachelor's Degree." On further questioning, it appeared that what he actually obtained was the first part of a baccalaurate from the Lycee, or the equivalent of a high school education in the United States.

When the writer tactfully suggested that perhaps he might want to take courses as a non-matriculated student, he replied that he wanted a degree, implying that it was an important prestige item in the Ministry. This is a real problem for middle-rank Lao officials attempting to go abroad to the United States and other countries for further education. Most of them occupy responsible positions in the bureaucracy but seldom have more than a high school education; it is with difficulty that they would fit into an educational situation on the graduate level, for which their administrative experience would appear to qualify them.

He also spoke at length of the Ministry's plan to recruit foreign teachers, Thai, Filipinos and Americans to fill out the staff of the college and the teachers' training school being built by the Americans; which he referred to as the University and which occupies a campus on the outskirts of Vientiane. The French are not able to supply a suffi-


2 Several Americans were subsequently recruited through a non-governmental organization.
cient number of teachers and very few Lao have the qualifications to teach at this level. Any Lao who has the equivalent of a high school diploma can obtain quite a good appointment in one of the Ministries and is not tempted to go into teaching. There are actually very few Lao now teaching in the Lycee. During the colonial period many of these positions were held by Vietnamese and when Official E was asked if there was any thought of recruiting people from South Vietnam now, he said he personally was against it. "The Vietnamese flatter the Lao, but then they try to stand on our heads. There were Vietnamese teachers in the Lao educational system five or six years ago, but they have all been eliminated now. I know that compared to the Vietnamese the Lao are lazy, but this is because of our climate and because we do not have to struggle to earn a living."

"As to the Thai, they have some of the ways of the Vietnamese and they take advantage of the Lao, but then, they are more easy-going and there is more of a common culture. The Lao people understand them better."

The discussion shifted to the role of the Ministry of Education in national life. "Education is very important for the future of Laos. I myself could have obtained a much better job since a close relative is a government Minister, but I preferred to stay with this Ministry because I feel that the work we are doing is important. Our Ministry however, is strongly discriminated against when it comes to the distribution of funds. USCOM turns over funds to the Lao National Bank. Sometimes other Ministries get their hands on the money first. It usually works out on a first come, first served basis, and in this way education is denied support. At times the pay of teachers is held up for weeks or months. An attempt is now being made to put funds for education into a blocked account to avoid these problems. (This blocked account procedure has also been mentioned by some American officials as a way of cutting down on embezzling.)

"In theory there is much sympathy for the requests of the Ministry of Education in the National Assembly, but when it comes to voting the money, the military and police take priority. Look at the Philippines and Thailand. These are nations which are much more developed than we are, and they spend a larger part of their budget on education than does Laos. We should attempt to follow their example.

"One of the big problems in education is recruiting personnel. Now it is very difficult to recruit people to serve in the secondary schools, since all qualified individuals look for better-paying jobs in the other Ministries." Official E continued, "Under the French, teachers were much better paid, so that in a qualitative sense their position has deteriorated since independence."
"Many villages have built schools and are awaiting teachers. In order to stretch our funds, I would like to suggest that villagers be asked to build a house and provide the teacher with food as well."
(This would seem to be one of the ways in which the Lao can at least make a beginning in having a self-supported educational system. American aid funds pay a substantial portion of the teachers' salaries and even provide school supplies such as books and pencils.)

After many apologies he invited me to his home. He said that the house (located next to his prosperous in-law's business) had been given to him by his wife's father. Nearby is the imposing French style villa another in-law, who works in the Ministry of Finance. He introduced me to his wife, who spoke some French. He apologized again for not having any beer and for the fact that he lacked a refrigerator. I was served lemon-flavored water, after being assured that the water was filtered and boiled and that he knew the customs of Americans in these matters.

When asked whether American officials with whom he had contact ever came to visit him socially, he said he saw them only on business and that some of them work much too hard, implying that this was to the detriment of their social contact with the Lao.

PROVINCIAL EDUCATION ADMINISTRATOR
(Official F)

Official F is an excellent example of the older generation of provincial civil servants who matured during the days of French colonial rule. He is a man in his mid-fifties, who, in common with most of the senior officials in his province (for example, the Chao Khoueng, the President of the Court of Appeals) was born locally. As a descendant of an official at the former royal court he bears the honorary title Tiao. He received approximately nine years of education, including a diploma from the Lycee Pavie, and then entered the school system.

Although a conscientious worker for the present government administration he is fond of recalling what he considers to have been the better position of teachers during the French administration. At that time, he claims, teachers were the best paid civil servants. Today the situation is reversed, and a young man will try to get a job with the Army, police, or Ministry of the Interior before considering a career as a school teacher, which now pays least. He also feels that it has been a negative development that the French language has been displaced in the curriculum of the elementary schools. It was originally taught beginning with the first grade but is now started in the fourth year. He said this creates difficulty for students who go on to study at the local collège (junior high school) where all classes are in French. He noted that one of the reasons many children fail to pass the examination for the primary school certificate is lack of knowledge of French. This
is especially true of the elementary schools located in the villages outside the provincial capital. There are about four hundred candidates each year for the sixth grade certificate, but of these only about one hundred pass. Some of those who do not pass go to the technical school in Vientiane, where they train to be carpenters, masons, electricians and mechanics.

Despite this veneration of certain aspects of the French system and French culture, Official F is also proud of his country. He cited what he believes to be the great unexploited mineral wealth of his province. He also felt that certain agricultural products could be produced in greater quantities if sufficient credit were available. One of the difficulties, he said, was that no adequate geological survey had ever been made of the area.

He also has a strong feeling about the status of his part of Laos, particularly his own province, vis-a-vis the other areas of Laos, and expressed the opinion that certain developments in his area have been neglected. He also said that most of the American aid has stayed in Vientiane, and cited the small budget he had in education versus the large demand for schools.

When I remarked that some of the points he mentioned seemed cogent, and should perhaps be discussed with some of the Ministers in Vientiane, he appeared momentarily horrified and reacted strongly, saying, "I am only a government official not a politician, and do not want to get involved in political affairs."

On the subject of teachers he felt that it would be desirable, on the secondary (collège) level, to replace the French teachers with Lao, but said it would not be possible until the salaries of collège teachers were raised. At present, any Lao who has the educational qualifications to teach at the collège is much more interested in serving in the Army or becoming an official.

Official F commented on the improvement in educational facilities despite limited funds, saying that there are now about thirty percent of the eligible children in school in his province, with an increase of over ten percent enrollment over the previous year.

The requirements for teaching primary school are rather minimal: one must have six years of schooling and three and a half months in a teachers' training school, but the very low starting salary of 3,400 kip does not attract many candidates. This is little better than the wages for a coolie, he explained.

In addition to his duties as Director of Education, Official F takes an active interest in the youth groups in his province. These groups aid in the construction of additional school buildings, the boys
doing the work and the girls preparing food.

Despite the many French influences in the school system, traditional values are still strong. School is closed each day with a Buddhist prayer. The Director himself, although strongly influenced by French culture is a devout Buddhist and goes very frequently to the wat. He is also present at the ceremonies connected with most of the major religious holidays.

In common with many of the older officials, he often goes away to meditate for a few days each year. Another characteristic they share is that of withdrawal from active participation in life after one reaches the mid-fifties. This is often an ideal rather than an actuality, since due to the great lack of trained officials Official F and many others have been requested to stay on past the usual retirement age. However, they do so somewhat begrudgingly, feeling that they have made their contribution, and now is their period for rest and contemplation. It would not be fair to say that they have become lazy, but rather that they do not view activity at this stage of life as a positive virtue.

LAO OFFICIAL OF THE OLDER GENERATION
OF LAO OFFICIALS
(Official G)

Official G, a man in his mid-fifties, was born near Thakhek. His family lived on the western side of the Mekong in what is now Thailand, where his father was assistant to the Chao Muong. His mother was the daughter of the district chief of the Lao region on both sides of the Mekong in this area, before the arrival of the French. Today many of his relatives are Thai nationals, one brother being mayor of a Thai town near Thakhek, and two brothers-in-law holding Thai government posts on the provincial level. A half-brother is a retired official in Thailand.

He himself has resided in Vientiane since 1925 and attended the college there. He was formerly a teacher and later editor of a political journal. From 1944 to 1945 he was a school principal and in 1945 was given an administrative post in the Education Ministry of his department (the Director was French; a Franco-Lao of French citizenship currently occupies the post). He also translated and adapted school books from French.

In 1946 he left with the Lao Issara, residing as a refugee in Bangkok and returning to Laos in November, 1949, resuming his position in the Ministry of Education. In 1951 he was appointed Director of Youth Affairs, and from 1956 to the present he has served as bureau chief in another ministry.
LAO OFFICIAL OF THE YOUNGER GENERATION
(Official H)

Official H, in his early thirties, was born in Luang Prabang, where his father was a Chao Muong. He studied for six years in the local groupe scolaire and spent six years at the Lycee Pavie in Vientiane. His studies were interrupted from 1945 to 1949, when he joined the Lao Issara in Thailand. He has had nine years of government experience, including six months in 1950 as private secretary to the Minister of the Interior. From 1951 to 1955 he was on the staff of the Lao Embassy in Phnom Penh as an accountant and later as secretary to the Ambassador. From 1955 to 1956 he was assistant in the United Nations Affairs section of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and from 1956 to 1959 he was Second Secretary in the London Embassy. From 1959 to the present he has been the Chef de Cabinet in the Information Ministry.

At present, he said, his twelve-thousand kip a month salary makes it very difficult for him to support his family. He lives in an old style house but owns a Mercedes-Benz which he said he bought from savings while living abroad. Only those officials who made money on the old exchange rate are able to have modern homes, he claimed.

During the course of our conversation he showed me a circular he had received from Boston University's Graduate School for International Affairs. He said he would very much like to attend, and asked for my opinion. It was hard to explain to such a person who obviously has had experience in international affairs and occupies a responsible position with his government that his limited high school education would create difficulties in undertaking such graduate training. Although the situation was explained in most tactful terms he immediately became discouraged. Providing advanced technical training to Lao officials with minimal formal education by western standards would seem to be a major problem to be faced in attempting to build up a corps of trained government servants in Laos.

OFFICIAL IN THE MINISTRY OF
SOCIAL AFFAIRS
(Official I)

Official I was born in Pakse and studied at the Lycee Pavie. After graduating he entered the School of Law and Administration in Vientiane. Recently he made a trip to France as a member of a parliamentary delegation. To date this has been his only trip outside of Laos. He explained that his bureau has provincial offices in Luang Prabang and Pakse and works closely with the Red Cross and the Lao Women's Association.

"Our budget this year is sixteen million kip while last year it was twenty million. It varies with the government income, and there is not
enough money to hire sufficient personnel. Our money is principally for fires and other disasters, and to aid refugees. The difference between our program and those of village aid is that we provide assistance, while they create new projects.

"From China alone in the past year (1958) approximately six thousand refugees have come into Laos, principally in Nan Tha and Phong Saly Provinces. This is the result of the Commune system. Most of these refugees are Lu people. In Sam Neua there have been some Vietnamese refugees, and they have been sent on to Saigon. Black Thai refugees are sent on to Xieng Khouang. There are also about 1,000 Black Thai in villages near Vientiane. We have provided some of these refugees with implements, money and in some cases, buffalo. Our budget is so small that we are not able to do too much.

"We have other activities in both the north and south. For example, in Sam Neua there is a shortage of salt. The Vietminh, as part of their propaganda campaign have set up salt depots along the frontier. The inhabitants come to the frontier and are able to receive up to five kilos of salt. These depots then give the Vietminh a chance to influence the population. To counter this, we now send salt to Sam Neua and sell it at the same price as do the Vietminh. But the air transport is very expensive. This is of course not the traditional route, for before the war Sam Neua was directly linked to Hanoi by road. We have also dropped salt in certain sections of Attopeu, where the district chief sells it to the people at a fixed price. Earlier we had given it free but we were not able to continue that practice. In addition, we have also sent rice to Sam Neua and distributed it among the mountain people. We did this particularly after a crop failure. As I said, it is much harder for us than the Vietnamese to bring supplies to Sam Neua, because they are closer to Hanoi.

"We have sent five Lao girls to study for six months in Thailand. They have returned and work for the Ministry of Social Welfare. As I told you, we are not able to recruit too many people for our Ministry because of lack of funds. The same holds true for the Rural Development Program and the Agriculture Ministry. Since we in Social Welfare subsist on the Lao national budget, we do not get appropriations unless there is government income from tax receipts.

"The situation with regard to the mountain people very much merits our attention, but it is difficult to do much since they do not have products to exchange with the valley people."

(This last statement directly contradicts some of the basic trade patterns of Laos. For example, opium is one product that a number of mountain people, such as the Meo, have traditionally exchanged for other commodities with the merchants in the valleys.)
OFFICIAL CONCERNED WITH RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS
(Official J)

Official J, now in his late sixties, has been a provincial official for many years. A former monk, he remains very devout and maintains close contacts with the priesthood. He has been influenced by French culture to a much lesser extent than have other Lao officials.

In discussing recent changes in Laos, he said, "Most of these changes have been material rather than spiritual. There are many new cars. The people do not know how to take care of them. These attitudes have affected even the monks who are more interested in repairs to the pagoda than in their Buddhist beliefs.

"Many of these changes have been brought about by American aid. The dollar aid of the Americans fell into the hands of three kinds of people: first, the politicians, then the officials and finally the merchants. Most of the latter are not Lao but are from Thailand or Hong Kong. Only about twenty percent of the aid reached the people. No government buildings were erected during this period, most of the government buildings dating from the time of the French. However, many private houses and stores were built by people who got rich from the dollar exchange. For example, an Army lieutenant with a very small salary was able to buy several cars and own a couple of houses. The villagers did not have an opportunity to enrich themselves because they were outside the circle and did not know the tricks about the exchange rates. (Many of the villagers did not appear to resent the corrupt practices as such, but rather were hostile because they did not have a chance to participate in them.) No roads or streets have been built in the last few years except the roads to the politicians' homes.

"American aid has caused a difference in social classes, because the people in town, the politicians, officials and traders became rich while the villagers remained poor. Sometimes the people lack things they need, but the government does not give them these things. That is why the Communists have attained influence and why they may gain power. The people are favorably inclined toward the Pathet Lao because the Pathet Lao did not get rich like those in the government. They were not engaged in corruption and they did not receive aid. Most of the Pathet Lao people are humble and polite, not like those in the government, who are very arrogant.

"The Lao people, however, do not like to talk about these things in public. They prefer to remain silent. They do not feel they can talk freely because the government is like a dictator.

"Most of the people in Vientiane are favorable to the Pathet Lao, who at present have few representatives in the parliament. They do not have enough votes to control the government. Most of the people, in-
cluding villagers, do not like American aid because they see that it benefits only the clever people in the government. Most people feel that they have not benefited from hospitals, schools, roads and public works. They do not realize that the Lao officials are the cause of these difficulties. For example, most of the police have become rich by allowing in Chinese immigrants from Hong Kong, many more having been permitted than were legally allowed under the quota.

"The people conclude that all the corruption, all the bad things, all the social conflict and luxurious life are due to two causes: American aid and the influence of the Thai people from the Northeast." ¹

"Formerly there was no stealing, cheating, drinking or quarreling. People could leave the gate of their home open at night. For the past few years, bad things have been happening. Thai from the Northeast on the other bank of the Mekong have been immigrating to Vientiane. I recommended some of them for jobs, but then they stole, and I lost face. Most of the samlaw drivers have come here from Thailand; very few are Lao. Although they earn a lot of money, they spend it on drinking and gambling. Most of the prostitutes have also come from Thailand. Some of the Thai young men from the lower class curl their hair and have duck-tail haircuts like the actors in Thai films. Material civilization has come into this country too quickly. The people who have a lot of money spend it on luxurious living; dancing, restaurants and new automobiles. In former times the Lao people could obtain land and build their own homes, but now they have to rent their houses and their land because there is a big demand for it on the part of politicians, officials and merchants. So the poor people have fewer opportunities."

The interviewee himself rents his home to an American official, presumably at a substantial profit. However, he complained of the difficulty of supporting his large family on his relatively meagre government salary. Many officials expressed fear at being quoted on hostile remarks they made about the government. This is not true for members of the elite, who seemed to have little, if any, reticence about making critical remarks concerning each other, but it is definitely so of officials of the second rank, such as the interviewee.

AGRICULTURE OFFICIAL
(Official K)

Official K, was born in 1918. He completed the Lycee Pavie in 1933, after which he studied in Hanoi from 1939 to 1942 and entered the agricultural service in 1943. From 1948 to 1950 he had additional training at an agricultural college in France.

¹ Official J’s parents and wife are from northeast Thailand.
"The following are the principal agricultural problems of Laos: First, there is the matter of producing enough rice and being able to transport it to market. For example, certain regions of Nam Tha produce a surplus of rice, but there is no transportation available to bring it to market. It is also important to encourage the cultivation of fruit trees. There are certain areas in Luang Prabang that have a good potentiality for raising oranges. It is necessary to encourage the cultivation of commercial crops such as coffee, which can be produced in the Bolovens in the south.

"I have suggested that the government forbid the import of rice during the harvest season and so encourage local production, even though now the rice which comes from Thailand is cheaper. But there are difficulties now, since we have a free market. I believe there should be controls as there are in Indonesia, Thailand and Formosa.

"My program is very modest, and I would like to proceed slowly and surely. Now there are too many services trying to do work in agriculture; for example, there is Civic Action and Rural Development. Our organization lacks funds and personnel. Our people lack experience and initiative. It is very difficult to do much work in my service. There is much good will, but we always have the problem of funds.

"They have accused me of stealing, and now I am in the process of preparing my defense. If they give my Service the means for continuing work I can do my job; if not, I am finished, and will become a merchant. The government itself will judge my actions. This is not something for the courts. There are people who think highly of me.

"My subordinates in the provinces have accused me of stealing money from a dam project in Sayaboury, but USAID, which is supporting the project, agrees on the cost. These officials are in reality jealous of my position. My father was a merchant and not in the government. I am not a member of one of the big families. They say official connections do not count, but they really do. You see, this is the way the Lao are."