the Standing Committee will be able to prepare policy plans. He obliquely chided the Government for being unprepared in that they have taken so long to approve the 18 Points. One wonders, however, what degree of practical policy guidance can issue forth from the Standing Committee of 10 members operating on their own in the royal capital, in virtual detachment from serious budgetary responsibilities. None the less, a leading neutral member of the NPCC's Committee on Economy and Finance spoke of the budgets of the two zones being merged by the NPCC in its next session.*

Thus, the ambitions of the NPCC under Souphanouvong's leadership exceed its legal mandate, and possibly its capabilities, but a royal solution may be found by transforming it into a substitute for the moribund National Assembly. This could be achieved, under the Constitution, by a "limited popular consultation" by the King, which is allowed in cases where an election is not possible. Such a substitute for an election might legally suffice to enlarge the NPCC to the size of the National Assembly (60 members), after which it would be allowed to assume true legislative powers pending general elections and revision of the constitution at some future time. The addition of nine new members from the Vientiane side (with nine from the PL side) would doubtless introduce a fresh political element which would put Souphanouvong's charisma to the test and possibly improve the deliberative qualities of the NPCC. Yet such a solution may have to wait upon the return of Souvanna, the essential balance wheel, to active political office.

* Interview, July 16, 1974, Vientiane.
Military and Police Forces and the CIA

During the six month delay in forming the PGNU, PL military forces began moving to the two neutralized cities, Vientiane and Luang Prabang. The Soviets airlifted the PL forces to Vientiane, and the Chinese provided the airlift to Luang Prabang. As these forces settled into the buildings allocated to them and began to take up their tasks, the PL leadership apparently achieved sufficient confidence to complete arrangements for the coalition government, and for their own arrival. Although it appears that all PL personnel for both police and military assignments were drawn from the PL military forces, each force retains a separate function, and they do not appear to be interchangeable.

Both the PL military and police forces have assumed their duties and folded into life in the cities without incident, and with apparent harmony. The police forces are assigned joint patrol duty with the Vientiane-side forces, though joint operations are more in evidence in Luang Prabang than in Vientiane. The tasks performed by these patrols are the normal security functions, the guarding of residences and offices of officials and foreign embassies (when necessary), but technical tasks such as the direction of traffic are retained by the professional police of the two cities.

The primary mission of the military forces is to defend the city against possible external attack or internal coup d'etat. The military patrol the exterior perimeter of the city, and each side has a responsibility for particular zones within the city. Both the PL soldiers and police live in large, centralized quarters such as a former hotel or a school, and are instructed not to mix freely with the population. During off-duty hours they appear to be confined to quarters. Under current
circumstances, the PL soldiers have less to keep them busy, in the form of work assignments, than the police. Some observers wonder if the boredom attached to little work, plus the isolation to which they are committed, will not erode the morale of these country boys, who have been taken from their families, their normal environment, and a greater freedom of movement. However, PL officials note that their soldiers, besides the tasks of patrol and security-maintenance, have ample sessions of training, exercise, study and clean-up, paint-up and plant-up tasks, getting the new PL buildings and gardens into shape. In addition, they have been assigned, from time to time, to propaganda duties within the two cities. PL leaders insist, too, that their soldiers are well-disciplined and uncorrupted, an observation which finds widespread agreement among the population of Vientiane and Luang Prabang. Presently, the population seems accustomed to the presence of the PL military and police forces, and accepts them as part of normal life.

The instrument established by the Protocol and subsequent agreements to oversee fulfillment of the Agreement is the Joint Commission for Implementation of the Agreement (JCIA). The JCIA consists of 14 members, 7 drawn from each side, with a total staff on each side not to exceed 100. Sot Phetrasy is the chief PL delegate while Phagma Soukan Vilaisarn is the chief Vientiane-side representative—all other PL are military, while the Vientiane side is mixed. Among the JCIA tasks are general direction of the joint police, implementation of other provisions for neutralization of the two cities, guaranteeing the exercise of democratic freedoms of the people, and generally supervising the cease-fire. The priorities established for the JCIA are, first, to complete its tasks in consolidating the cease-fire (including the establishment of the landmarks
delimiting the two zones); next, to verify the withdrawal of foreign troops; next, to deal with the return of military and civilian prisoners and the gathering of information regarding the missing-in-action; and finally, to oversee the implementation of the provisions regarding refugees.*

Although the work of the JCIA, by Western standards, seems slow—by July, 1974 only two of the 27 landmarks had been definitely agreed upon—there have been no severe altercations that seem to threaten a continued cooperation.

* Interview with PL representative on JCIA, July 18, 1974, Vientiane.
PL Decision-Making Process

A notable PL strength in the new coalition arrangement, particularly in contrast to their Vientiane-side competitors, is their unity. The Communist doctrine which guides the PL leadership emphasizes discipline and unity of action. The PL organization, strongly influenced by the North Vietnamese during its developing years, has followed the practice of democratic centralism and used the Communist instruments of criticism and self-criticism to guide their cadres. These practices presumably continue among the PL personnel posted in Vientiane and Luang Prabang. There is ample opportunity for the PL leadership to prepare a common front within the coalition government. Many live in the same villas in Vientiane and Luang Prabang and take their meals, it appears, in the central PL compound.

Although there is no clear-cut documentation, nor are there insiders’ memoirs describing the decision-making process of the PL, the following description seems a reasonable collage of the existing evidence. The People’s Party of Laos (Phak Pasason Lao, or PPL), the semi-secret Communist party of Laos, estimated in 1968 to have some 14,000 members, is the ruling instrument of the movement. Meetings of the PPL politburo (whose membership has never been publicly announced), presided over by Kaysone Phomvihan, reach policy positions on the basis of democratic centralism. Party decisions are binding upon Party members, who apply them with loyalty and discipline. PPL members, following the practice of other Communist systems—particularly that of North Vietnam—are distributed throughout the key organizations of the society, and have the duty to enforce party directives.
Although party directives provide the framework of PL policy, PBP leaders have a certain measure of autonomy in their functional fields. In view of the poor communication lines with the PL zone and particularly between PL headquarters in Sam Neua and the PL missions in Vientiane and Luang Prabang, this functional autonomy is of major importance in day-to-day operations. Experienced, disciplined high-level leaders can feel confident in making most decisions with relative independence, following, of course, the basic party guidelines. In cases of major decisions, there must be reference back to party headquarters in Sam Neua, which often explains the PL delay in reaching a decision in Vientiane. In a few cases, too, decisions taken by the PL leaders in Vientiane appear to have been countermanded by instructions from Sam Neua. This was apparently the case when the PL Cabinet members at first agreed to participate in the ceremony to open the National Assembly and then changed position and began a denunciation campaign against the opening.

It seems quite clear that the primary party leadership remains in Sam Neua. Kaysone Phomvihane appears to be the highest-ranking party member with Nouhak Phoungsavanh number two, followed by Prince Souphanouvong and Phoumi Vongvichit, although there is disagreement as to who takes precedence. Among other powerful leaders, the names most frequently listed are Phoune Sipraseuth, Khamtay Siphandone, and Singkapo Sikotchounamaly. Phoune's role in the current situation seems to be one of providing personal liaison between the PL headquarters in Sam Neua and the PL leaders in Vientiane and Luang Prabang. Although clearly a powerful figure in the party, Phoune has no official post in the coalition government. This leaves him free to travel, by plane, regularly between Sam Neua and Vientiane. Prior to the formation of the coalition government,
during his assignment as a key negotiator, transmissions of PL and Hanoi Radio showed that he stopped for consultation in Hanoi intermittently. Although it is not clear how meetings are organized in Vientiane, apparently Phoune, when in town, presides. Written guidelines and instruction from Sam Neua to the PL delegations in Vientiane and Luang Prabang are presumably delivered from time to time, but regular radio communication seems unlikely.

An issue of speculation is whether there are factions within the PL leadership. Prince Souphanouvong, in replying to a question on this subject, insisted "we are one bloc, totally unified."* Souphanouvong refused to discuss the role of the PPL within the PL decision-making process, stating that this subject was a PL internal affair. He insisted that the LPF, of which he is chairman, makes the decisions for the PL movement—a statement which masks the leading role of the PPL. There is the possibility of divergence between hard-liners and moderates. The leaders in Sam Neua may be more intransigent toward an accommodation with the right-wing elite of the Vientiane side, more suspicious of the evil intent of the Americans and the Thai, and more inclined to rely upon the support and guidance of the North Vietnamese than upon their counterparts in the coalition.

---

**PL Relationship with the North Vietnamese**

A critical question regarding PL policy toward reconciliation is the PL relationship to North Vietnam. To what extent is their decision-making dependent upon the DRV?

* Interview, July 23, 1974, Vientiane.
There is little doubt, despite the official denials of both PL and North Vietnamese spokesmen,* that North Vietnamese troops continue to be present in Laos. The bulk of the NVA in Laos are in the Ho Chi Minh Trail area of southern Laos. Vientiane-side military officials and U.S. military sources in Vientiane estimate NVA troops at 22,000 to 28,000.** Since the PL spokesmen deny the presence of these troops, one can only speculate about their attitude toward them. A certain ambivalence among many PL personnel is likely. With regard to North Vietnamese troops in the Ho Chi Minh Trail area, the PL recognize the North Vietnamese abiding interest in winning control in South Vietnam, and understand the importance of their military access routes. The PL have reason to wish the DRV success in their enterprise, and passage of North Vietnamese troops through Lao territory must seem a reasonable contribution. (For those who might be inclined to oppose this passage, they must realize that their option to refuse is hardly a realistic one.) North Vietnamese military posted outside the Trail (probably not more than 1,000 in July 1974) are seen by their PL allies as appropriate and necessary since they assure a critical North Vietnamese logistic and advisory support to the PL. In addition, NVA presence, with its implicit threat to the Vientiane forces and their allies, can be seen by the PL as a reassuring deterrent and political asset.

* In an interview at the North Vietnamese Embassy in Vientiane in July 1974, a North Vietnamese diplomat declared, "There are no North Vietnamese troops in Laos—-that is the official position of my country."

** More detailed Lao military estimates can be found in Xat Lao, July 17, 1974, reprinted in Vientiane News, July 21, 1974.
On the other hand, many PL leaders, as Lao nationalists, must feel some discomfort at NVA on their territory. There is a Lao tradition of suspicion of the Vietnamese, whose historic westward expansion has been regarded as a threat to Laos. NVA presence in Laos is a violation of the Agreement, and the necessity to deny the truth is distasteful to some PL leaders.* It is possible that some PL leaders, particularly those within the coalition government, would prefer a more rapid North Vietnamese departure than do their colleagues, especially those in Sam Neua. Nevertheless, while some may feel uneasy about the NVA presence, most would feel nervous if it were abruptly removed.

In their decisions on most issues, the PL leadership does not appear to be under heavy North Vietnamese influence. For the DRV, access to South Vietnam through Laos is of critical importance at this time. North Vietnamese control of the Ho Chi Minh Trail area satisfies this interest. Further, they wish assurance that territories on their frontiers in Laos will not be used to endanger their security. In particular, they are concerned that ethnic minorities in Laos, all of whom are also represented in the adjacent North Vietnamese regions, not be manipulated by aggressive elements to make trouble in North Vietnam. The present PL policy of closing their zone to outsiders alleviates this concern. As for the political progress of the Pathet Lao movement, which they would wish to promote, they have reason to be satisfied. Thus, North Vietnamese interests seem adequately served by the present situation in Laos, and they have shown support for the Agreement.

* Several foreign embassy sources reported that certain PL leaders, obviously wishing to protect their own credibility and integrity, while not admitting to North Vietnamese presence, will artfully dodge the question in order to show that they will not blatantly misinform their diplomatic colleagues.
On certain issues, there does seem evidence of strong North Vietnamese pressure. One of these was the PL proposal for Government recognition of the PRG in South Vietnam. Although the PL leaders, understandably, have sympathy for the liberation movement in South Vietnam, recognition of the PRG is of minor importance to Lao national interests, while to North Vietnam it is major. In pressing this point so zealously against determined opposition in the PGNU, the PL made themselves vulnerable to charges that they were agents of the North Vietnamese. The PL could not hope to make political gains in Laos with this issue--at best they could counterattack, by charging their adversaries with being lackeys of the Americans. In fact, this issue strained relations with their Vientiane-side counterparts, which they had been taking pains to cultivate, and even contributed to the Vientiane side's determination to develop a more united front (an effort still in doubt).

Another PL position which suggests strong North Vietnamese pressure is the active PL denunciation of U.S. presence in Thailand. The North Vietnamese know that U.S. bombers, fighters and observation aircraft are targeted principally against North Vietnam—in the U.S. calculation, they serve as a disincentive to another all-out North Vietnamese offensive against South Vietnam. While PL leaders can well share the North Vietnamese repugnance for American air bases in Thailand, they must recognize the importance of amicable relations with the Thai government, with whom Laos shares more than 1,000 miles of frontier and on whom it still depends for access to the sea. The PL's hammering of this issue in their radio propaganda and also in Vientiane reveals a sensitivity to North Vietnamese interests.
Refugee Resettlement

The final settlement of the estimated 750,000 persons in the Vientiane zone displaced by the war is a complicated issue for the PL. Their Five Point Peace Proposal of March 6, 1970, declared that the "pro-American forces must...resettle in their native places those people who have been forcibly removed from there," and pay compensation for damages. This language was not used in the final Agreement, where it is stipulated that "assistance shall be given to people who were forced to leave their native villages during the war to help them return there freely to earn their living according to their desire." However, during the negotiations, the PL spoke vividly of forced separation from ancestral homes and fields, forced enlistment of the youth into special forces, "concentration camps", and destruction of economic and social systems in the "liberated zone." These accusations reflect such operations as the U.S. airlifting of 15,000 residents out of the Plain of Jars in 1970 prior to its B-52 bombing, and the recruitment by the Central Intelligence Agency of thousands of mountain people into Special Guerrilla Units or the "Irregular Army."

The refugee rolls grew during the war as the Force Armee Royale (FAR) and CIA-supported forces were pushed westward, and tens of thousands of families, many of them military dependents, moved out with them. Many refugees moved to the Vientiane zone to avoid military operations and American bombing and also to get subsistence provided by U.S. agencies. The number depending upon U.S. subsistence in June 1974 was 171,744 and growing, as previous harvests in the resettlement areas ran out. This
was less than the peak load of 378,801 in October 1973, but the cost was nearly $15 million a year, almost a third of the American economic aid effort. (This aid is administered directly to the refugees by the U.S., despite dissatisfaction registered by the PL Vice Minister of the Interior. This is an arrangement uncommon in other U.S. aid programs, but it originated in U.S. recognition of scandalous local corruption some years ago.)

The refugees pose an economic problem to the PL as well as a political issue. They want to be sure of being able to use and resettle refugee families effectively if they choose to return home. Unlike the Government in Vientiane, the PL cannot look forward to large-scale American assistance in administering refugee resettlement. The Vientiane-side policy is not to discourage refugee return to the PL zone, and even to provide a one month's food supply and packet of tools if a family wishes to leave. Most refugees harbor some inclination to go back, if conditions are right. The PL reportedly have been providing three months subsistence at the receiving end but, like the Government, they want the movements across the line to be irrevocable. Reports are heard occasionally from Radio Sam Neua of families who manage to "break away" from the "concentration camps" in the Vientiane zone and return to their native villages where they are warmly welcomed with material assistance. However, according to American records, although more than 75,000 refugees have returned to their "home area" since the cease-fire, probably not more than one in eight of these re-entered the PL zone. Some refugees have sent family members to their former villages to undertake cultivation of their old land and to test the political water. Those few who have tried and returned usually complain that their former land was occupied by others, or that they were pressed into labor corvées. Rice is not as
plentiful in the PL zone and taxation and restrictions on private animal raising are considered onerous. Nonetheless, greater numbers of refugees are expected to depart for the PL areas after the November 1974 harvest.

The most agonizing disincentive for refugees who consider returning is the widespread stigmatization of families because of past association of a male member with the Special Guerrilla Units and the Irregular Army. Even the lowest ranking veterans of such units fear retribution from the PL. They are not likely to return home until their former patrons assure them that they should. This may require some formal agreements on amnesty in the PL zone. Such agreements would affect in particular the Meo survivors of General Vang Pao's Irregular Army. These people suffer the greatest land shortage, as well as susceptibility to disease. The fate of these once fiercely independent, freedom-seeking mountain people, to whom the U.S. government has incurred such a moral obligation, may turn on their precarious prospects of surviving economically where they are.

Present estimates indicate a surplus population of 105,000 in north-central Laos who cannot be supported by normal cultivation in the areas where they now find refuge. A generous PL program of re-acceptance in the next few years, as dependence on the Americans grows more difficult for both parties, might respond to Meo needs at the time. Acceptibility of such a program would depend upon the degree of economic autonomy the PL is willing to allow and the trust they could generate in a promise of no retribution. The political impact of such a movement could be impressive, either as a symbol of reconciliation or of political attraction in competition with the Vientiane side.

Even though the distribution of refugee population will heavily influence the outcome of national elections, these elections will probably
not be soon. Thus, the PL have time to watch rather than force the refugee question, so long as it does not embarrass them politically.

Free Circulation in the PL Zone

The Agreement notes that "both sides will promote normal relations between the two zones, setting up favorable conditions for people to travel, earn a living, visit one another, carry out economic, cultural and other exchanges and other activities in order to develop national concord and build national unity quickly." (Article X, Section B, of the Agreement.) The Protocol is strangely silent on this question. Despite the Agreement, the PL have been adamant in maintaining the seclusion of their zone. Foreign delegations, particularly from socialist and friendly Third World countries, have been formally received from time to time, even during the war period. Since the cease-fire, French, British and Australian diplomats have been invited to visit PL headquarters at Sam Neua, where they are cordially received for highly-structured, limited-observation tours. But requests to drop the barriers to travel to the PL zone are met with responses that the cease-fire must first be consolidated, landmarks sited and other pressing priorities dealt with, before the zone can be opened.

What is the explanation for the PL reluctance to open their zone? Perhaps the most important reason is their habitual suspicion of outsiders, developed over long years of struggle against both Lao and foreign enemies. As Prince Souphanouvong replied, in declining to discuss the semi-secret PPL, "We are accustomed to clandestine struggle" ("Nous sommes habitués à la lutte clandestine").* The stringent limitation of access to outsiders has been a common practice among revolutionary regimes which

* Interview, July 23, 1974, Vientiane.
felt besieged from without and within. For many years, the Russians, the
Chinese and the North Vietnamese, for example, permitted few and only
carefully-screened visitors to their country. Secondly, the PL zone is
populated by a myriad of minority peoples whose loyalty to a largely low­
land Lao political leadership in Sam Neua must be regarded, despite fre­
quent protestations to the contrary, as fragile. In addition, PL radio
broadcasts suggest that PL leaders are apprehensive that right-wing ele­
ments on the Vientiane side, serving the American imperialists, will
seize every opportunity to make mischief in the "liberated zone," with
Special Guerrilla Units still in existence under the FAR. Refugees may
return to the PL zone, it is true, but they must not turn back.

Perhaps a sense of discomfort about the primitive level of develop­
ment of their zone (compared to the more developed Mekong River plain con­
trolled by the Vientiane side) contributes to the PL refusal to open their
territory. PL leaders do not wish to invite comparisons by people on
either side, nor leave them with a freedom of choice at this stage. Even
prior to the war, the highland zone of Laos controlled by the PL was the
most backward in a country little developed generally. Its highland
minority peoples were the least literate, the least technically devel­
oped of the peoples of Laos. The long and destructive war, particularly
in the rain of American bombs, further retarded the development of this
area. Although there may be reasonable explanations for this backward­
ness, which is not the fault of the system imposed by the PL leaders, they
shun these comparisons. Freedom of access by outsiders tends to stimulate
the desire of insiders to travel, too. Permitting such freedom of move­
ment to inhabitants in a society so tightly controlled for so long would
violate the PL leaders' habits and instincts.
The presence of North Vietnamese troops in the PL zone is another important reason not to open their zone to free travel. Certainly in the Ho Chi Minh Trail area of southern Laos, where the North Vietnamese have substantially improved their road and logistic access to South Vietnam since the cease-fire in Laos, neither the PL nor the North Vietnamese could tolerate outsiders. North Vietnamese presence elsewhere in the PL zone appears relatively sparse, but reports of it would be evidence of violation of the Accords. For example, the PL were embarrassed by an interview of an NVA commander in the PL-controlled Pak Kading area by a Xat Lao journalist who posed as a visitor from Paksane inquiring about relatives. The NVA commander stated that North Vietnamese troops had been helping the Lao and Khmer people in their fight against the American imperialists and emphasized that they would not depart as long as there are U.S. troops in Laos and Thailand.* A counterpart to PL reluctance to open their zone may be North Vietnamese resistance to such a development, which would allow hostile elements to use adjacent Lao territory as a "springboard" for making trouble in North Vietnam.

Of course, travel could be eased in certain sectors, with strict prohibitions against access to the Ho Chi Minh Trail and other sensitive areas. This is the development that Lao optimists hope for. But they know that even this may be a slow process, for the PL leaders realize that opening one area leads to pressures for openness elsewhere, difficult to withstand once the barrier is broken.

---

Economic Viability of the PGNU

A major problem of coalition government, in which political struggle has precluded the most rational economic steps toward solution, is the stabilization of the currency. Despite the devaluation recommendation of the International Monetary Fund, which was considered reasonable by the United States and other donors to the Foreign Exchange Operations Fund (FEOF),* the PGNU decided, after a few days crisis in July 1974, to maintain the existing rate. The PL ministers had been willing to send Foreign Minister Phoumi Vongvichit to the U.S. Embassy seeking a larger U.S. contribution, but they were unwilling to risk an official devaluation and more sharply inflated prices which might be popularly attributed either to the increased burden put by the PL on the national budget or to their economic mismanagement. They were joined by their Vientiane-side colleagues in recognizing the unpopularity of such a move, resulting in the PGNU choice for a probable losing battle with inflation rather than an austere attempt at a cure.

Given the fundamental economic weakness of Laos, with a per capita income of $65 and more than half its national budget devoted to Army and Police, the instability of the kip is likely to threaten the coalition for many months to come. For the past 10 years the FEOF has operated to compensate for the extraordinary budget deficits run by the RLG as the war

* Contributions to FEOF for 1974:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Contribution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>$16.1 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.K.</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laos</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$27.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
mounted. It not only dampened the potential inflation caused by military expenditure, but also financed most of the country's supposedly essential imports. These imports included many luxury items, evident in a drive through Vientiane, and the wealth acquired by privileged local families is a genuine political scandal. In the first half of 1974, with government spending running up a deficit of about $1 million per month, rumors of the IMF's recommendation to devalue and the shock of Souvanna's illness caused a run on foreign currency which led the Finance Ministry to close the banks for several days in July. While the Government debated, the Vientiane press pointed out that increasing deficits included almost $1.4 million (out of a planned governmental budget of about $40 million) spent by the PGNU in refurbishing houses and providing vehicles for the new PL officials in Vientiane and Luang Prabang. They might have added that $10 million expenditure for rice imports to feed Vientiane has been necessitated by the closing of the overland connections between Vientiane and Pakse by PL military presence on the Mekong above Thakhek. The proper remedy, it was argued, was to obtain donations from the socialist countries, comparable to FEOF's assistance. Phoumi Vongvichit later branded stories of this sort as "tantamount to obstructing peace" and Pathet Lao Radio joined in denouncing the rumors of devaluation as a deliberate campaign to discredit the PGNU and the NPCC. The Bangkok Press, they said, fed upon rumors spread by U. S. AID; and the ultra-rightist and "big shot" businessmen helped create the conditions by hoarding goods and converting kip to dollars.

With no additional foreign currency forthcoming from the Socialist bloc, or FEOF, and with the PL unwilling to bear the onus for further inflation, the Government's decision had to be for stricter controls over foreign exchange and "essential imports." However, because of experienced
business manipulators and a porous river border with Thailand, these measures seem unlikely to hold the kip at its fixed value. Just as they had earlier, the PL came out once again for austerity, opposing a government pay increase and favoring the closing of bars and nightclubs at midnight. Their cabinet spokesmen called upon the nation to preserve the Agreement through increased productivity and self-reliance, and their radio explained the issue in terms of ending the economic dependency created by 20 years of U. S. imperialist intervention.

Unquestionably Laos must be led by its government toward self-sustaining growth, but this will require substantial assistance from abroad, as well as a campaign against the well-intrenched "insiders." The PL are trying to thread the needle by keeping the PGNU politically acceptable and financially afloat, with American aid, while assailing unscrupulous capitalists and neo-colonialists, and keeping their own zone economically apart. In Sam Neua, Nouhak Phoungsavan in proudly discussing the new 3-Year Plan for the reconstruction and development of the "liberated" zone in July 1974, pointed to its value as a model for "the zone under the control of the Vientiane side," and though he saw development of his zone as a potential benefit for the other, he made no mention of eventual merger.* The degree to which the PL may be ready to consider western foreign aid for their own zone has remained unclear, and their policy for the Vientiane zone calls for autonomy in choice and administration of aid projects. Thus the PL know better what they oppose in Vientiane and favor economically for the "liberated zone" than how, and whether, to begin consolidating the two.

* FBIS, July 24, 1974
VI THEORIES OF PL BEHAVIOR

How can one account for the post-war behavior of the PL in Vientiane and Luang Prabang? Three theories suggest themselves.

Thrust for Full Power

The assumptions of this theory are that the Pathet Lao are a well-organized cohesive, Marxist-Leninist, revolutionary movement whose aim is to seize power as soon as it is propitious. Seizure of power would be followed by the installation of a political system throughout Laos which would be modeled on the "liberated zone" which, in turn, has been strongly influenced by the North Vietnamese model. The PL are supported in this enterprise by the North Vietnamese, with whom they have long had an intimate, even dependent, relationship.

So far, according to this view, PL progress has been reassuring. Their aim has been to demolish or neutralize the principal institutions of their adversaries while shaping the new institutions to suit their objectives. Their achievements include the following:

1. Progress within the PGNU

Half the posts in the PGNU, as specified by the Agreement and Protocol, are held by PL ministers or secretaries of state. In addition, their vice-premier, Phoumi Vongvichit, has been named by Souvanna Phouma to serve as acting prime minister during Souvanna's convalescence in France. This appointment, coming on the heels of their recent return to the Lao national government, adds to the PL prestige, enhances their legitimacy and creates an aura of reliability and responsibility around their leadership.
2. Domination of the NPCC

Prince Souphanouvong has maneuvered masterfully to shape this institution into a body which, so far, has propounded views initiated only by the Pathet Lao. The Vientiane-side members, weak in leadership and cohesion, have fallen into step under Souphanouvong. Although the 18-point manifesto and declaration of "Democratic Freedoms" are only broad statements of principle, most of which are un-exceptionable in content to the Vientiane side, their tone is Pathet Lao-dominated. Furthermore, as Souphanouvong's stated position demonstrates, these principles provide a framework for specific policy proposals which he intends to introduce shortly within the NPCC, which, in turn, would serve as the catalyst for new policies of the PGNU.

3. Demolition of the National Assembly

The National Assembly was enfeebled by the calculated ambiguities negotiated by the PL for both the Agreement and the Protocol. Subsequent political maneuvers, undertaken as the opportunity arose, enabled the PL to give the National Assembly its coup de grace.

4. PL Police and Military Force

The PL have achieved, with the positioning of their police and military in the right-wing citadels of Vientiane and Luang Prabang, the capability to gather political and military intelligence not only to nullify possible coups by the FAR but to plan, if necessary, their own coup de main.

5. The Buddhist Church (Sanga)

Although the Pathet Lao claim to support and respect the position of Buddhism in Lao society (as they also claim with regard to the monarch), they aim to diminish the influence of the Sanga, and to profit politically
from manipulating it. They have selected the Ministry of Religion as one of their own, installing Maha Kou Souvanamethi as the Minister. They can be expected to use this ministry, with its influence in the wats throughout the country, to their political advantage.

6. **The Powerful Families**

An important source of opposition of the PL lies within the powerful families of the Vientiane side. The PL will attempt to erode, indeed demolish, the influence of these families. A prime target of denunciatory radio broadcasts from Sam Neua, for example, is the Sananikone clan, one of the most powerful on the right-wing side.

7. **The Army**

As one of the most potent institutions of the Vientiane side, the army is a target of the Pathet Lao. They wish to reduce its influence and effectiveness. The PL entry into the Ministry of Defense appears to be unproductive in this regard since the Minister of Defense, Sisouk na Champassak, has barred the PL Secretary of State from any active role in the Ministry. He refuses to supply information about the FAR, its strength or deployment, since the PL keep the same military information secret from the Vientiane side.

The PL are likely to attack the budget provisions of the military on the Vientiane side. They will demand a reduced national military budget on the grounds that the war has ended and such enormous defense expenditures at a time of severe economic need are unconscionable. There will be great resistance to this move, particularly among the right-wing elements of the Vientiane side who regard the army as important not only as a military, but also as a political force.
8. U.S. and Thai Support

Though U.S. and Thai support is not an "institution" in the same sense as the previous items, it is a vital element in the strength of the Vientiane side. It seems evident that the U.S. and Thai troops and advisors have been withdrawn within sixty days of the formation of the PGNU. A loss of confidence among right-wing elements has been a consequence of this withdrawal, made more significant by the perceived threat posed by the continuing NVA presence.

This theory—that the PL have a steady, implacable commitment toward the seizure of power—holds that in addition to the "revolution from above," (the destruction or neutralization of existing institutions and the domination of new ones), there is a corollary attempt at "revolution from below," the strategy of building a base for support among the Lao public.

The PL have undertaken a propaganda campaign within Luang Prabang and Vientiane, and their environs. They have sent out small teams of cadres, drawn from either NPCC councilors, JCIA personnel, or soldiers from military or police units. As described earlier, their ostensible task is to explain the 18 Points, but more fundamentally they try to build support for their ideas and the PL movement.

The PL start with certain political assets in dealing with the Lao public on the Vientiane side (as well as liabilities, which will not be discussed here). They have an image among segments of the population as a non-corrupt, dedicated movement committed to fundamental reform in the interest of the poor. Many on the Vientiane side are fed up with what they regard as gross corruption by the "phou yai" ("big people"). Further, they are tiring of the same old crowd in power. They have been
suffering under the strains of a long war, rising costs, and disruption of family and tradition. To many, therefore, the PL represent a hope for change, even projecting a romantic quality of Lao nationalists who have been fighting from the caves, under great adversity, to improve the life of the little people. The PL can thus be seen as moving from a position of strength, and getting stronger. One need not conclude that the PL will seize power within the months to come but, rather, will judge when internal and external conditions are appropriate.

Holding Action

Proponents of this theory believe that the PL are giving priority to the security and development of the "liberated" zone which, in their own judgment, is extremely undeveloped and weak. Located principally in the highlands, it is sparsely populated and economically backward; its population is principally highland minorities (Lao Theung), the least developed of the peoples of Laos, with few trained personnel competent enough to manage the tasks of development. U.S. bombing of their zone from 1964 to 1973 compounded their problems. Further, during their long and difficult struggle in the hills, the PL leaders developed a "cave mentality". They see their imperialist enemy, the U.S., manipulating agents on the Vientiane side, as well as in Thailand, to serve its nefarious political purposes. As the PL propaganda continually re-iterates, they see the U.S., through its CIA and reactionary cliques such as the San-sanikones and other right-wing puppets in Vientiane, plotting the destruction of the coalition government. Further, they see the ruling circles in Vientiane as decadent, scheming and malicious toward the Pathet Lao.
Given the assumption that they must concentrate upon building and securing their liberated zone, the PL leaders have decided to husband their limited number of trained and politically reliable people within their own areas. Only as they gain in strength in their zone can they venture into an active role within the Vientiane side's zone. Thus, the PL have sent, with only a few exceptions, their "second team" to Vientiane and Luang Prabang, while the first team remains in Sam Neua. Leadership for the entire Pathet Lao movement, which continues to reside in the Lao People's Party, operates from its base in Sam Neua where the two most important party leaders, Kaysone and Nouhak, reside. The PL leadership in Sam Neua, this theory holds, continues to rely very heavily upon North Vietnamese advice and assistance. Further, the North Vietnamese troops in the PL zone are extremely important as a reinforcement to the PL, as well as a lever for North Vietnamese influence.

This thesis interprets the PL as operating from a position of weakness. Although they have made certain political advances in Vientiane and Luang Prabang, as a result of the peace arrangements, they are not in a position to exploit them further. Indeed, the upper level of their cadres is so thin that they do not have enough skilled administrators to serve their needs within their own zone, much less consider undertaking full national responsibility at this time. They know their limitations and suffer from a sense of uncertainty, fearing that the other side may seize any opportunity to sabotage their hard-won development. This, plus embarrassment about their low level of development, explains their rigidity in preventing access to their zone.

Although giving first priority to their own zone, the PL may utilize their presence in the coalition to draw upon government resources
for their area. However, they will hesitate before accepting any foreign aid, which donor nations (U.S., Australia, Japan, for example) have been inquiring about, since outsiders' access to their zone would unravel many strands of their self-protective web.

Those proposing the "holding action" theory believe that it will take years for the PL zone to develop. Therefore, there will be no fundamental change in PL policy toward the Vientiane side in the near future. More likely, one can expect maintenance of the de facto partition, which is and will continue to be reinforced with help from North Vietnam, whose primary interest in access to South Vietnam and secure borders will make the PL reluctant to consider an integration of the two zones. On the other hand, a "holding action" presumes some future movement, and this would depend upon their experience with coalition and the development of skilled personnel for playing a larger role in national administration, once political conditions seemed ripe.

**Prelude to Merger**

This interpretation assumes that the Pathet Lao is essentially a nationalist movement, and that its leaders are neither doctrinaire nor strongly ideological. Prepared for pragmatic accommodation and compromise, they wish to move towards a genuine Lao nationalist solution, bringing in the full participation of all strata of Lao society. They are committed to fundamental reform, and are zealous to bring greater equality and justice to the society and to eliminate foreign domination. Once free electoral conditions can be guaranteed and wartime emotions cooled, they will agree to the democratic process called for by the Agreement, in the expectation of winning a majority in the National Assembly.
With this assumption, one can see the behavior of the Pathet Lao since the cease-fire as cautious but constructive. The PL ministers in the PGNU have made no moves to alter radically either policy or administration. They have continued to solicit aid from the capitalist countries; they have continued the economic planning work of their predecessors in the Ministry of Plan; foreign statements and policy pronouncements of the PL ministers and secretaries of state at Vientiane have been generally moderate. Even their fundamental policy document—the 18-point plan—propounded themes which, with a few exceptions, were acceptable across the Lao political spectrum.

This theory takes into account the fact that the PL ministers and secretaries of state in the PGNU are new at their posts. They must familiarize themselves with new problems, including a more technically complex, monetary economy, and they must adjust to new conditions of life in Vientiane and Luang Prabang. Further, in view of their hazardous and abortive experience with integration in 1957-58 and 1962-63, they are suspicious and hesitant. As the PL leaders gain confidence that their life in Vientiane and Luang Prabang is secure, and as they see evidence of cooperation from their former adversaries, they will grow more accommodating. As their personal observation persuades them that the Americans have withdrawn their military presence, and as they discover that, in fact, the Thai mercenary force has departed, their hostility on these fronts will diminish. (Propaganda charging continued American-Thai presence may continue from Sam Neua and Hanoi, but PL personnel in Vientiane and Luang Prabang will be less likely to believe it.) As the PL leaders increasingly realize their dependence on the outside world, including the capitalist nations (and particularly the U.S.), they will become more
pragmatic in their relations with such foreign powers. The intricate web of PL family ties with members of the Vientiane side also supports an accommodative approach.

This interpretation projects a positive psychological development among the Pathet Lao leaders as time passes. A "cave mentality", produced by their arduous experience in the war, has conditioned their past behavior. Given their trials, it is more surprising that they have been so unembittered rather than that they have shown suspicion and caution. However, as their sense of security and confidence in their counterparts on the Vientiane side grows, this siege mentality will erode. Indeed, some observers predict a process of "bourgeoisification" of the PL leaders. As they accustom themselves to the "good life" in Vientiane and Luang Prabang, they may relax their revolutionary zeal and mellow.

Prince Souvanna Phouma embraces this general theory, believing that most PL leaders are nationalists and that compromises must be made and risks taken to bring them back into the national family. Such an interpretation also allows for differences between those PL leaders in Vientiane and Luang Prabang on the one hand, and those in Sam Neua who are more Marxist-Leninist, dogmatic and suspicious. The process of time, according to some, will either split the "nationalist" PL leaders from the more intransigent "doctrinaire Communists" in Sam Neua, or create a process by which the Vientiane group will draw the Sam Neua group toward greater moderation.
The cease-fire has held firm throughout 1974, except for minor "meeting engagements" between Vientiane-side and PL forces. Although there are some, particularly among the right-wing, who are dissatisfied with political developments, no group within Laos prefers war to peace. The external powers, too, in both western and socialist camps, have supported the Agreement upon which the peace is built. Thus, prospects for a continuation of the peace are good.

A number of critical factors, internal and external to Laos, which have not been examined fully in these pages will be important in shaping the political future of Laos. Externally, North Vietnam and U.S. will continue to have an important influence--both probably have it within their power to prevent full reconciliation. Internally, much depends upon the manner in which the leadership of the Vientiane-side confront the challenge of the Pathet Lao. Contrasted with the cohesion and discipline of the Pathet Lao leadership, the Vientiane side has been fragmented and disorganized. Its success in acquiring greater unity and strength--still in doubt--will obviously be a prime consideration.

As for future Pathet Lao policy, the alternative theories offered to explain PL behavior may each have some element of truth for predicting the future. What revolutionary movement of such long standing would not seize the opportunity to take charge of the national destiny (as the first theory holds)? Yet they cannot be sure there would not again be outside intervention to prevent their consolidation of power, and they must be hesitant about their capability to rule the entire country, at this time. Thus, it can be argued, while awaiting more propitious future conditions
they can do much more to improve their capabilities and conditions of life in the "liberated" zone (as the second theory suggests), while continuing, even expanding, their influence within the coalition. Once they commit themselves to move slowly toward gaining control, however, they must share power, and certain processes (as postulated in the third theory) may moderate their Marxist revolutionary zeal.

It seems likely that some movement toward integration will proceed, if slowly. PL leaders will have greater difficulty, as peace persists, in defending the blockage of road traffic along the Mekong, or in prohibiting freer access elsewhere in their zone. The PL within the coalition government will confront problems within the national context, and they are likely to see value in extension of government services such as post and telegraph, roads, and public health on a nation-wide basis.

A certain stress between the perspectives of those leaders in Sam Neua, and those in Vientiane and Luang Prabang, reflecting the difference in their surroundings and experience, may emerge. Those in Sam Neua are more likely to resist integration and opt for developing the PL zone, while those in the coalition government will have a greater tendency to believe that merger in a majority position would be desirable. Either of these positions could become the sole commanding one. One group of leaders might argue for achieving PL ascendancy through integration while the other, more doctrinaire and parochial, might oppose reliance upon ultra-rightist and American good will. The outcome may well turn upon unpredictable events—the accidents of health, critical external developments, foreign intervention, personality clashes. However, a framework for national integration has now been constructed, and as long as the
prospects of winning a major, if not dominant, hand in governing Laos seem favorable to the PL, there is no good reason to alter their present course toward a merger of the two zones.