Life's Many Sides

THE INCONSISTENT VIETNAMESE

By TON THAT THIEN

To govern the Vietnamese is the most difficult job in the world. I do not know whether the various governments in power-past as well as present-realise it. But that is a fact, and this fact has become more evident than ever in the recent trials.

First, take the case of Ta-Vinh. When Premier Ky announced several months ago that he would be tough with the «gian-thuong» (speculators and all that), that he would get them shot in the market place etc.., many people nodded approvingly. And so Premier Ky spread his legal net out and sent his men around stalking for a few «gian thuong» and getting heads rolling.

Then people began to shudder when the Special Court was created and began business. Ta-Vinh, who had fallen into the net spread by Premier Ky, was tried and condemned to death. But many people had second thoughts about it all. This did not save Ta-Vinh, because the Vietnamese usually react slowly to events, except in a number of special occurences.

Second, take the case of Dang-Cao-Sach, the official of the Treasury in Dalat, who also fell iuto the net spread by Premier Ky. Of course Sach was in the wrong. When you spend money which not yours, you are in the wrong. So much is obvious. Sach was also tried by the Special Court and eondemned to death. His petition for pardon was rejected, and by the time these lines appear, he may be no more.

But what have people in the streets, and in the homes, been saying? The general reaction is in favour of pardoning him. Not that people do not think that he should pay back the money he had so freely spent. The government should seize his property, people would agree. But taking his life? There people begin to have second thoughts. The buddhist which slumbers in the depths of the e ach Vietnamese would slowly wake up and wag him hard, and peo ple feel sympathy for the culprit.

If you are the head of the Government, that would pose a terrible problem of conscience. Here is a man who, by not only one: but several laws, deserves his fate. When the Government made public its intention of punishing dishonest officials, people cheered. But now that X, Y, has been caught, convicted, and condemned. people feel differently. The millions—which come partly from their taxes are momentarily forgotten. All they see is a father, and a husband being taken away for good from his own family. And people would probably cheer the government if Sach is pardoned.

Well, you may say that the Vietnamese do not know what they really want! They want an end to corruption and embezzlement etc... but they want no head to fall for a few million of piastres! Try and govern such a people And yet, they clamour all the time for justice. Why are they not satisfied? Try to find out the answer. That would be most interesting.

Letters to the Editor

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