

Report on SVN (HUE) CRISIS
SEPT 1963

EXCERPTS FROM A LETTER FROM HUE, SOUTH VIETNAM, WRITTEN BY A PROFESSOR IN EARLY SEPTEMBER, 1963 (for his safety he must remain anonymous):

August 15th - After his return from the U.S. in June, /Father Luan, Rector of the University of Hue/ was the only official who did not attend Archbishop Thuc's silver anniversary.....There was much tension in the city. In the afternoon at the Rectorate 30 students--boys and girls--came to see Father. One of them asked him: "While Catholics are persecuting Buddhists in a most savage way, why don't you dare as a Catholic intellectual speak up?" Father cried and said: "You are wrong, this is not persecution of Buddhists by Catholics. And I have done something you do not know." /Referring to protest personally to Diem./ The student, unsatisfied, said he would go and burn himself tomorrow morning at the Rectorate. I was dumbfounded on hearing this. Father asked the Dean Huan of the Law School to speak to him and to try to dissuade him from his attempt. Tension grew in the city.

August 16th - At 9:30 am eleven professors came to the Rectorate with the intention of resigning because, they said, the Government had not done anything to solve the Buddhist problem and the situation had so deteriorated that they could no longer teach....The city was under martial law. There wasn't a soul in sight. About 6:10 pm Prof. Nguyen quang Trinh, Secretary for Education, and Tran huu The, Ambassador to the Philippines and former education secretary, arrived from Saigon...Trinh said he had come in the President's name to dismiss Father....Four days before the Archbishop himself had to go to Saigon and to use all his power to force out this order of dismissal, and they three had flown back together only this afternoon in great triumph.

August 17th - The new Rector was due to assume his post this morning....A number of professors heard of the news and hurried to Father's house...Half an hour before the ceremony copies of students' decision to boycott school and of the professors' resignation appeared in town. At 9:00 Trinh came to the Rectorate. The ceremony took place at the faculty meeting-room. All professors and deans were there. Trinh read out the order of dismissal....After a brief speech by Father, Dean Quyen of the Medical School submitted his resignation. He was followed by deans of Law, Science, and Letters....The ceremony came to an end. Father left. There was weeping among the faculty members....At 3:00 pm students demonstrated in front of the Delegate's residence asking for the cancellation of the dismissal order.

August 19th - Slogans calling the students to boycott school were painted all over the university building. The arrived from Saigon. Students again demonstrated in front of the Rectorate....When The arrived, over 50 professors, led by Dr. Quyen, went into the Rector's office. Dr. Quyen handed in the letter of resignation with the signatures of 47 professors, then he read out a telegram Ambassador Tran van Chuong had sent to Father. Students loudly applauded. They sent in their spokesman with a letter asking The to resign. The took panic and slipped through the back door.

August 20th - Feelings went high in town. The teaching staff of Dong Khanh High School resigned. The faculty members of Quoc Hoc High School held meetings.

August 21st - About 3:00 am armed police attacked Tu-Dam pagoda. People inside the pagoda called for help through loudspeakers. Other loudspeakers from the

Archbishop's Palace were turned on at full blast, with songs, in an attempt to drown the pagoda's call for help. Gun fire was heard. Heart-rending cries for help, weeping, moaning could be heard for almost two hours. The population rushed to the rescue of the pagoda, but only to find that troops were taking command of various strategic corners and that they were forced back. Even those who lived near the pagoda could not be of any help because the pagoda was surrounded with troops. A great number of monks, nuns, young monk apprentices, students and other youths who were keeping watch inside the pagoda perished through bayonets, clubs and butts of guns. When morning came, all powers were in the hands of the army.... Fourteen at the University had been arrested between 3:00 and 4:00 am.

August 22nd - Sadness covered the University like a shroud. The administrative staff had cried on hearing of the savage attack on the pagoda, of the death of defenseless monks and of the brutal repression which followed.

August 23rd - The number of arrests exceeded 800.

* * *

The scums of the town are on the winning side and are acting like the new masters. The former followers of Ngo dinh Can [the President's brother/ who have not changed sides quick enough are being persecuted. Brother Can is stripped of all his former power [by Archbishop Thue/. His office was closed down two months ago...USOM aid to the University has been stopped. German professors will not come.

Dr. Quyen and others are still in prison...When the secret police came to Dong Khanh School to arrest the faculty members who had signed the anti-government manifesto, Mrs, Hy, the head of the school, accepted all responsibility, then tried to kill herself. But they stopped her and took her away. She was later carried to Saigon by the police. Her husband, deputy head of Quoc Hoc School, was also arrested. (They were both Buddhists..It is striking that all the people who have been stated as arrested in this letter are Buddhists.) The head of Bo-De School and all the teaching staff were arrested. (Bo-De is a private Buddhist school.)

Since August 21st the population has been living in deadly terror...My wife and children have been living in constant fright. We are closely watched by the police. I was led into solitary confinement and interrogated, but was released after a few days. Anger and resentment are at their height. The sufferings of the people here cannot be described. People are sick of it all, they have had enough, enough. .

I have more respect for the students..They have shown such spirit, such courage. They all knew too well they would be arrested, tortured, drafted, and some of them executed.

When they saw Hue on the verge of open rebellion, "Saigon" wanted Father to return to the University. But the power in Hue used its ecclesiastical prerogatives to force Father to write a statement to the effect that he would not go back.

The Government has forbidden the population to listen to news from foreign stations. Yet people still lock their doors and listen in secret, praying in fear and misery for some help from abroad.

Yours ever,

(NB;

It has since been rumored that Dr. Quyen was court martialed and sentenced to 25 years at hard labor. Quyen, one of the most respected men in Hue, had for years provided free medical service to Archbishop Thuc, Brother Can, and Pres. Diem's mother!)