

SECRET-NOFORN

Page 11 of 18
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at the cost of the population under their control. Press editorials have attacked local officials for extorting money from peasants, using torture to wring false confessions from innocent people and conducting themselves in such a manner as to reflect adversely on the prestige of the national government. In addition rumors continue to circulate among the population concerning the alleged nefarious activities of and favoritism shown to members of the Can Lao party. While officials have been largely unable to identify and put out of commission Viet Cong undercover cadres among the population, they have often arrested people on the basis of rumors or of denunciations by people who harbor only personal grudges. Police powers justified on the basis of the needs of internal security have reportedly been misused to extort money not only from the peasants but from land owners, merchants and professional people in the towns. This misuse of police powers and the kind of broad scale arrests on suspicion are weakening the support of the population for the regime. On the other hand, the application of swift, summary justice (such as the Special Military Tribunals were created to hand out) designed to protect the population against the Viet Cong threat, if carefully administered and "advertised" as such, can do much to restore a feeling of security;* (c) While the GVN has made an effort to meet the economic and social needs of the rural populations through community development, the construction of schools, hospitals, roads, etc., these projects appear to have enjoyed only a measure of success in creating support for the government and, in fact, in many instances have resulted in resentment. Basically, the problem appears to be that such projects have been imposed on the people without adequate psychological preparation in terms of the benefits to be gained. Since most of these projects call for sacrifice on the part of the population (in the form of allegedly "volunteer" labor in the case of construction, time away from jobs or school in the case of rural youth groups, leaving homes and lands in the case of regrouping isolated peasants), they are bound to be opposed unless they represent a partnership effort for mutual benefit on the part of the population and the government. (See subsequent section on "GVN Reactions" for indications of Diem's current awareness of this problem).

The situation may be summed up in the fact that the government has tended to treat the population with suspicion or to coerce it and has been rewarded with an attitude of apathy or resentment.

* Ensuing section on "GVN Reactions" shows Diem now aware of incompetence and abuse of power by many officials.

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