EDUCATION IN THE COMMUNIST ZONE OF LAOS

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December 1971
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EDUCATION IN THE COMMUNIST ZONE OF LAOS

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I. INTRODUCTION

In the early 1950s, the Lao revolutionary movement -- commonly termed the Pathet Lao \(^1\) -- established itself with Viet Minh assistance in the eastern border regions of the country. \(^2\) Ever since, the Lao

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\(^1\) Prince Souphanouvong, the titular leader of the Lao revolutionary movement, talking to Anna Louise Strong in April 1961, explained the origins of the term as follows: "The name was given us by the French in the Geneva Conference of 1954. We marked our documents 'Pathet Lao' or 'Land of Lao,' to distinguish them from the documents of Viet Nam and Cambodia. The French began calling us 'Pathet Lao.' We let the name stick" (Anna Louise Strong, Cash and Violence in Laos and Vietnam, New York, Mainstream Publishers, 1962, p. 50). The term first was applied only to the military forces of the Lao revolutionary movement (renamed in 1965 "Lao People's Liberation Army"). By extension, Pathet Lao came to stand in Western references for the totality of the movement itself as well as for its members. It should be noted, however, that this usage is not common among the Lao revolutionaries themselves. They refer to their mass organization as the Neo Lao Hak Sat (NLHS), which translates as Lao Patriotic Front, and to their semi-secret Communist Party as the Phak Pasason Lao or People's Party of Laos (PPL). For convenience' sake and because of the wide currency the term Pathet Lao has gained, we are using hereafter Pathet Lao to designate the Lao Communist system and its components, although strictly speaking such usage is inaccurate.

Communist leaders have been developing the military, political, and administrative instruments for effective control of their sector of Laos, which today comprises about two-thirds of the country and one-third of its estimated three million population.

In refashioning the political, social, and economic institutions of their zone, the Lao revolutionaries have been guided by their Marxist-Leninist convictions tempered by the requirements of an exceedingly backward economy, the demands of the protracted war effort, and the desire to leave open avenues for a reunification of the country by means other than outright military conquest. In the implementation of their domestic policies, the Lao Communists have been confronted therefore with the need for striking a balance between tradition and modernization, between the necessity of securing and retaining the support of broad strata of the population on one hand, and the will, on the other hand, to promote a fundamental revolution of Lao society.

How the Pathet Lao have coped with this problem can be illustrated by an examination of their educational policies and programs, a subject treated in some detail in the following pages. This focus suggests itself not only because of the relative abundance of available data, but because of the important role education could play in determining the future alignment of the divided country. In Laos, as elsewhere, education can serve as an effective tool for remoulding society along the lines desired by the leadership. It constitutes also the prime instrument of modernization. Spirit and content of the rapidly expanding educational system in Laos will strongly influence the manner in which the Lao people make their transition into a modern world and how they conceive of a good society. These realities are appreciated by Lao Communists and non-Communists alike in their contest for political control.
II. THE COLONIAL LEGACY AND THE PRESENT CONTEXT

Under the French colonial regime, Laos remained a backwater of the more advanced parts of Indochina. This was true also with regard to education. Like neighboring Thailand, Laos did have a traditional educational system centered around the wat (Buddhist pagoda). But the level of this education appears to have been considerably more modest than in Thailand, and large portions of Laos inhabited by non-Buddhist tribal peoples remained outside this traditional system of education. Whatever meager resources were made available for education by the French did not go to the wats, but benefited only the Lao elite and the Vietnamese residents of Laos who traditionally staffed the lower ranks of the bureaucracy under French officialdom and made up the bulk of the country's few, modestly sized urban centers. As to the tribal people who constituted half of the population, until after World War II,

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3We have a fine study of the evolution of traditional education in Thailand in David K. Wyatt, The Politics of Reform in Thailand -- Education in the Reign of King Chulalongkorn, New Haven and London, 1969. Unfortunately, nothing similar exists on the pre-colonial education system in Laos.

4Eric Pietrantoni in "La population du Laos en 1943 dans son milieu géographique," Bulletin de la société des Études Indochinoises, XXXII, No. 3 (1957), p. 230, furnishes data for 1943 on the population of the six major urban centers of Laos (Vientiane, Luang Prabang, Thakhek, Savannakhet, Pakse, Xieng Khouang) ranging in population from 23,200 (for Vientiane) to 2,100 (for Xieng Khouang). These figures are in themselves significant as they provide an indication of the very underdeveloped state of the country. In breaking down these population figures by ethnic group, Pietrantoni found that out of the total population of 51,150 for the six major urban centers, 30,700 were Vietnamese. Only about 30 percent of the population were of Lao origin, the remainder of about 10 percent being made up of Chinese and other non-Lao, non-Vietnamese ethnic groups. Hugh Toye, in his Laos -- Buffer State or Battleground (London and New York, 1968, p. 45), reports that in the whole decade of the 1930s only 52 Lao completed an education in the country's single secondary educational institution, the Lycée Pavie in Vientiane, as against 96 Vietnamese. The scarcity of Lao with any degree of education is also evident from the fact that even in the primary schools of colonial Laos, as late as 1945, two-thirds of the teachers and assistant teachers were reportedly of Vietnamese nationality. (Toye, ibid., quoting from a study by Somlith Pathammavong, "Compulsory Education in Laos," in Compulsory Education in Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam, Paris, 1955, p. 94.)
they remained virtually outside the educational process. Education in Laos outside the pagodas was also characterized by its close adherence to the French model, making no concessions whatsoever to local needs. Access to secondary education required a good understanding of the French language, thereby effectively barring all but members of the urban elite and the feudal aristocracy.

When Laos gained independence from France after the war, the new Lao government, launching efforts to broaden secular educational opportunities, was thus compelled to start virtually from scratch. Laos then had only a few native teachers, and no printed instructional materials in the Lao language were available to teach a population estimated to be 95 percent illiterate — the highest rate in all of Southeast Asia. When the Pathet Lao entered in earnest into contest with the Royal Lao Government (RLG) in the early 1950s, the regions they controlled were educationally even more deprived than the rest of Laos. The Communist zone was substantially less developed than the Mekong lowlands where the government's authority prevailed; a much larger

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5Thus, if there were few ethnic Lao graduates of the Lycée Pavie, as indicated above, there were reportedly none whatsoever from the ethnic minorities during the decade of the 1930s. This fact is significant also because the region where the Pathet Lao began their drive and where their power is centered has a much heavier percentage of tribal inhabitants than the strip of flat land along the Mekong River where the Royal Lao Government exercises control.

6On the occasion of an earlier visit to Laos, in the mid-1960s, the author noted that the situation had not changed radically even then. Pupils insufficiently qualified in the French language continued in practice to find advancement into secondary education virtually impossible. This situation must be kept in mind because of the contrast it forms with the Pathet Lao effort to do away with French in the education of the youth in the Communist zone.

It is not surprising therefore to find that in 1945, on the eve of Lao independence, only 15,000 Lao had ever attended primary school, and the majority of these for merely three or four years. If the educational pyramid built by the French colonial administration was narrow at its base, its summit was represented by a handful of men trained for professional work. Statistics indicate that fewer than one hundred Lao completed French-style secondary education in the decade before World War II. An even smaller number had received university education, available only abroad, during the several decades of colonial rule.
percentage of the population belonged to the tribal minorities, whose cultural and economic level was well below that of the ethnic Lao, resulting in an incredibly narrow base for any attempt to develop mass education; and the topography of their region rendered any development effort extremely difficult.

Every one of these factors which impede progress in the Communist zone of Laos remains operative to date. Moreover, in recent years, the Pathet Lao have had to face new obstacles. The government has been receiving substantial subsidies and technical assistance from the AID Mission of the United States in addition to continuing aid from France. It is true that the Communist administration in turn can count on support from its Vietnamese allies and from other Communist countries, but the material assistance these nations can — or are willing to — spare appears to be quite limited and in no way comparable to the resources the government is able to command. Beginning in 1965, and increasingly so in recent years, American air raids have severely disrupted all normal activity in the Communist zone. Educational policy in Communist Laos is therefore being implemented under the most adverse conditions.

If a Pathet Lao report refers to schools, therefore, we must not visualize the solid buildings and the amenities one expects in a more developed country. As interviews with former Pathet Lao indicate and foreign Communist eyewitnesses confirm, a school in the Communist sector is at best a makeshift structure, much of the time open to the winds. Especially since the intensification of American air raids in the late 1960s, instruction tends to be conducted in less vulnerable locations such as in caves or in the jungle. Often the holding of school is temporarily suspended because of the military situation, and in a number of cases instruction has been discontinued indefinitely for the same reason. Even such essentials as blackboards, pencils,

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7A Pathet Lao broadcast of May 22, 1969, claimed that since the start of U.S. bombing, some 1900 schools or classrooms had been destroyed.

8See, for example, the description by Jacques Decornoy in Far Eastern Economic Review, August 15, 1968.
and paper are by no means easy to come by in the more remote villages and hamlets of the Communist zone.

How primitive conditions remain in Communist Laos can also be visualized from a reading of travel accounts by individuals presumably sympathetic toward the Communist regime. An Austrian Communist writing in 1969, for example, noted that even one of the principal teacher training institutes had only a single blackboard, and the maps used for instruction were hand-colored rather than printed.\(^9\) Pathet Lao teachers and pupils are constantly compelled to improvise. Not surprisingly, therefore, the educational level and accomplishments differ from region to region and from village to village, varying with the availability of physical and human resources and the fluctuations of the fighting. It is important to keep these facts in mind as one evaluates reports coming out of the Communist zone.

On the other hand, the unfavorable conditions for the spread of education in Laos which, if not to the same degree, prevail both in the Communist and the non-Communist portions of the country, are to some extent offset by the thirst for education encountered, at least since the 1950s, among much of the country's population. This is evidenced by the large number of applicants for the rapidly growing school system operated by the government, forcing it to adopt a quota system for admissions.\(^10\) All evidence suggests that the desire for education is just as great in the Communist zone and that Communist efforts to provide some kind of rudimentary educational facilities meet with a strong and positive response among the population. Thus, in virtually every instance when the author talked to young men and women who had once been with the Pathet Lao, the promise of educational


\(^10\) Reports of the Education Section of USAID Laos, which works closely with the RLG, indicate that in the late 1960s, because of insufficient facilities, only about one-third of the school-age population was able to enroll. Despite statements frequently heard abroad that the Lao are not interested in access to education, existing facilities were clearly inadequate for the large number of young people wishing to benefit from instruction.
opportunity was an important factor in their decision to join the movement. For that matter, as long as higher education remains unavailable in Communist Laos, the invitation to study in North Vietnam or in other Communist countries constitutes a powerful incentive for young people to become active in the revolutionary movement.

11 For example, a young woman, at age 13, had been approached by a Pathet Lao cadre propagandist, who urged her parents to let her join the movement because of the educational opportunities it could offer to her, a simple village girl. Together with other friends from the same village, she went along, attracted by the promise of education. Several other former Pathet Lao confirmed that the hope of educational opportunity had been a determining factor in their joining the movement.
III. THE SPIRIT OF PATHET LAO EDUCATION

In the summer of 1969, Phoumi Vongvichit, Secretary General of the Lao Patriotic Front (Neo Lao Hak Sat, or NLHS), attended a conference of Pathet Lao educators. Addressing himself to this audience and beyond it to the population under Communist administration, he stressed the high priority that education was being assigned in the Communist zone:

It is necessary for the military and the civilians and for people in general to understand the importance of education. The time they spend in seeking knowledge is as important as that spent in performing their duties, as important as the food they eat.

In the same speech the Communist leader reminded his listeners that education had a vital role to play in promoting the cause of revolution:

Knowledge is a tool of our revolution. In carrying out the revolution without education and knowledge we are bound to face obstacles and difficulties and be unable to create peace and prosperity for the nation, even though we have the determination to fight and counter the enemy . . . education is the key which opens all doors to our revolution.

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12 This section is largely based on the author's analysis of Pathet Lao primers, which presumably reflect the values the leadership wishes to inculcate in the country's youth. A most interesting attempt to do a similar analysis for the Chinese Communist educational materials is the forthcoming The Genesis of a Model Citizen in Communist China by Charles P. Ridley, Paul H.B. Godwin, and Dennis J. Doolin. Unfortunately, no comparably thorough study is possible in the case of Laos because of the lack of equally complete sets of texts. Nevertheless, some conspicuous differences as well as similarities between the Chinese and Lao texts can be pointed out. The Lao primers lack the intense tone and the fanaticism of their Chinese counterparts. They also lack the extreme glorification of the country's leadership. Souphanouvong is revered, but not as a deity. The level of information and of sophistication in the Lao primers is not comparable to that in the Chinese texts. What appears quite similar, however, is the behavioral and social value system the two sets of readers seek to promote, especially their stress on social responsibility and collective behavior.


14 Ibid.
This close relationship between education and the desired revolutionary transformation of Lao society had already been pointed up on the occasion of the launching of a three-year educational development plan (to run from 1968 through 1970),\(^\text{15}\) when an official commentary broadcast on November 11, 1967, said this:

The new educational scheme will certainly arm our revolutionaries and personnel with science, politics, and culture. They will become wiser and more effective in the revolutionary tasks. At the same time, this system will produce more effective revolutionary personnel for our revolution in the future. In addition, it will encourage our people to step up their revolutionary efforts. . . . This means that schools are the center of revolutionary instruction as well as of culture and science. . . .

Education is designed to serve a dual mission: It must convey knowledge and skills while fomenting a revolutionary spirit in the pupil. Thus, a French visitor to the NLHS-administered areas in the summer of 1968 described his impressions in these words:

Politics, naturally, play an important role in their education, and young teachers work hard to instill the Pathet Lao's nationalist ideology into their pupils.\(^\text{16}\)

But, significantly, the Frenchman speaks of "nationalist" rather than of "revolutionary" ideology. While there can be no doubt about the revolutionary objectives of the Pathet Lao leadership and of its adherence to Marxist-Leninist beliefs,\(^\text{17}\) an analysis of their domestic

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\(^{15}\) The details of this plan, i.e., the statistical targets it set, are not known, as references to it in Communist literature and broadcasts have been of a general nature. We know, however, that it concerns itself with all major facets of educational development including the elimination of illiteracy, the increase in elementary school facilities, and quantitative and qualitative improvement of the teacher corps, the expansion of secondary education, and initial planning for higher education.


\(^{17}\) For some time it was not clear whether the Pathet Lao leadership deserved the label "Marxist-Leninist" in view of the gradualist nature of their domestic policies, the low ideological content of their public statements, and Prince Souphanouvong's insistence that he is not a Communist. There is now ample evidence, however, supporting the view
policies suggests that for the moment emphasis is on modernizing rather than on revolutionizing Lao society, on uniting the ethnically diverse population of their sector through appeals to nationalism rather than on distilling the purest revolutionary spirit.\textsuperscript{18} This is shown in the fact that the ideological content of the instructional materials, on the primary school level at least, is remarkably thin. There is no mention of Marx or Lenin (although heavy use is made of such terms as "imperialist" and "American imperialism").

Pathet Lao readers certainly do contain materials conveying ideological messages, but education, in the present stage of Pathet Lao domestic policy, aims primarily at preparing the ground for revolution by gradually developing in the youth of the country a new spirit and an appreciation for a new value system which emphasizes effort for socially useful ends. In line with this strategy, the Pathet Lao continue to respect tradition, avoiding, whenever possible, a frontal attack against it.\textsuperscript{19}

that the inner core of the Pathet Lao movement is indeed Marxist-Leninist, and that it considers itself and is recognized as such by other Communist parties, although the People's Party of Laos (PPL) to whom the Pathet Lao leaders belong is a small and quasi-secret organization whose name is not normally mentioned except in internal documents. (See the author's "Foreword" to Bernard B. Fall, "The Pathet Lao -- A 'Liberation' Party" in Robert A. Scalapino (ed.), The Communist Revolution in Asia, Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1969 (revised edition), pp. 185-187.)

\textsuperscript{18} In July 1965, the NLHS convened its first Congress on Education and on that occasion established an NLHS Teachers Association. One of its main purposes was defined as "the adaptation of education to the struggle against the American imperialists" (Voix du Laos, July 29, 1965). A Pathet Lao broadcast (June 7, 1967) referring to a central school set up in 1961 by the NLHS stated: "The school has trained the children to be progressive in every respect. But the prime objective is to train the children to be nationalists and hate the adversaries." This raises the interesting question of how this attempt to arouse nationalism can be accomplished without creating not only anti-American, but also anti-Vietnamese feelings. One cannot but wonder whether such a policy has the approval of the North Vietnamese.

\textsuperscript{19} Even though there is little reference to Buddhism in the Pathet Lao textbooks the author examined (and no mention at all of the popular and typically Lao religious celebrations), one finds no criticism of religion either. Many of the readings draw on the familiar stock of Aesopian fables and on other traditional materials also encountered in the texts now in use in the government-operated schools.
The ravages of war, the suffering of the Lao people resulting from it, and their courage in fighting the "American imperialists" -- these events form a leitmotiv in the reading materials prepared for the Pathet Lao youth. There are, for instance, cartoons depicting an American carrying a bomb and being chased by a Lao patriot or fired upon by a Lao soldier (holding an AK-47), stories about anti-American guerrillas, and accounts of young people volunteering for service against the national enemy. In this connection, much emphasis is placed on the need for military-civilian unity: The people at home support the freedom fighters while the soldiers, in turn, fight in defense of their homes and families against the foreign enemy. Discussion of the war is also used to spur on the civilian and military production drive -- farmers voluntarily contributing rice to the Lao People's Liberation Army fighting the Americans, and school children doing their share by fashioning bamboo stakes for use in booby traps. The harsh reality of life in wartime Laos is thus fully reflected in the instructional materials.

From a reading of the Pathet Lao texts, the pupil cannot help but draw the conclusion that the United States is the one real obstacle to the peaceful unification of the country and to the creation there of a progressive and democratic social order. The following translated excerpt from a reading exercise entitled "Our Country" typifies the way in which the U.S. role, the war, and the patriotic theme are linked together:

Laos is our country. It is a rich and beautiful country. There is fish in the river and rice in the field. In the forest there are large valuable trees. In the ground there are precious stones, silver and other minerals. The American imperialists want to take our national wealth and make slaves of us. We love our country. We love our native land. We

\[20\] In an arithmetic text, anti-American rallies in the Communist zone serve as subjects for exercises involving calculations with large numbers. One story in another reader runs thus: "The American thief has sneaked into our land. Girls and boys, old and young: anyone who has a gun use the gun; anyone who does not have a gun, use the crossbow or punje stick or sharp arrow! Shoot them so they all die!" In other stories, Americans are likened to wild, screaming beasts.
absolutely will not allow ourselves to be their slaves. We will preserve our native land. We will preserve our race and bravely fight for our land.

The spirit of nationalism -- perhaps it would be more accurate to call it an attempt to forge unity through focusing national consciousness on an external enemy -- is also reflected in the treatment of the language problem. As indicated earlier, French used to be the medium of instruction in all but the rather widespread wat schools of Laos. Point 9 of the Political Program of the NLHS, adopted in 1968, stipulates that the national language is to be the medium of instruction at all levels of education. Prince Souphanouvong, Chairman of the NLHS Central Committee and the movement's titular leader, in his political report to the Third NLHS Congress (1968), specifically stated that Lao will be the only language used in primary and secondary schools in the Communist zone and that this principle would also apply to institutions of higher learning to be created in the future. 21

Interviews confirm that this pledge has been carried out at least insofar as the elimination of the French language is concerned. 22 But information regarding the use of the Vietnamese language is contradictory. While the author found no indication that Vietnamese has replaced French in the NLHS elementary schools, information provided by recent refugees from Xieng Khouang Province suggests that some Vietnamese language instruction may now be taking place in the schools of the Communist zone. In secondary education, which is only now being developed and remains in a state of flux, the Vietnamese language appears to play an important role as a medium of instruction. On this more advanced level the Pathet Lao can probably not yet manage without

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21Pathet Lao broadcast of November 19, 1968. This pledge is difficult to reconcile with the fact that the NLHS has issued school texts in Meo, several of which are in the author's possession. Whether this is a temporary concession to an important minority group and whether instruction is carried on in two languages is not clear. Official statements do not touch on this issue.

22A recent essay by a Soviet linguist also stresses that all instruction in the "liberated areas of Laos is conducted in the Lao language." L. N. Morev, writing in Problemy isuchenia iazykovoi situatsii i iazykovoi vopros v stranakh Azii i severnoi Afriki, Moscow, 1970, p. 184.
resort to Vietnamese advice and personnel. Recent reports from Lao
refugees suggest in fact that the few middle schools now operative in
Communist Laos are partly staffed by Vietnamese and that Vietnamese
texts serve as models for the development of the necessary instructional
materials in the Lao language.

This raises the question of foreign influence in the Lao edu-
cational system, and particularly in determining educational policy.
Available evidence permits some conclusions at least with regard to
elementary education. Pathet Lao texts give praise to the Socialist
countries and their achievements, but contain little that could be
interpreted as glorification of foreign Communist leaders or subservience
to them. References to Vietnam are few and rather even-handed. Thus,
a story speaks of past Vietnamese invasions of Laos (and, of course,
also dwells on those by Thai armies). On the other hand, the aid given
to the NLHS by Vietnam in recent years is acknowledged with gratitude,
as is that provided by China and the USSR. There is no evidence that
the vocabulary taught on the elementary level is marked by Vietnamese
influence, as one might expect, considering the vital role played by
the Vietnamese in assisting and guiding the Communist political and
military cadre. Nor are the examples used in the texts apparently drawn
from Vietnamese models or patterned after them. Chinese and Soviet
influence is even less prominent.²³

The absence of pronounced foreign influence in the instructional
materials being used in Pathet Lao schools does not mean, however,
that in the realm of education the Lao Communists operate quite inde-
pendently and without reference to the policies of their North Viet-
namese allies and sponsors. It is known that advisers from the DRV
are found in key positions of the NLHS military, political, and ad-
dministrative structure, and that they wield decisive influence but
exercise it with tact and restraint.²⁴ These Vietnamese advisory

²³ A former teacher in the Communist zone whom the author inter-
viewed stated flatly: "There is not much taught about the Soviet
Union." References to Communist China are infrequent in the texts
the author had occasion to examine.

²⁴ For details on the North Vietnamese advisory set up in Laos, see
Paul F. Langer and Joseph J. Zasloff, op. cit.
functions extend also into the field of education. What is not clear is the extent to which the North Vietnamese use their dominant position in shaping NLHS education policy. Lacking specific information on this point and judging on the basis of our knowledge of the nature of the relationship between the Lao and Vietnamese Communists, one can only state that policies not palatable to the North Vietnamese could hardly be adopted by the Lao Communists.  

A conspicuous feature of education in Communist Laos is its consistent effort to relate instruction to practical tasks and develop in the pupil the concept of civic responsibility — a notion quite unfamiliar to the Lao. In the Communist educational system the pupil is constantly reminded of the fact that his responsibilities extend well beyond the narrow, traditional circle of his family and even of his village. He is taught the concept of a Lao nation, that he is an integral part of it, that he must love and respect members of other ethnic groups like brothers and sisters, and that the Vientiane government serves the interests only of the foreign imperialists and is betraying the people. It is explained to him that he must love and serve his country — and that there are many ways of doing so. He is asked to study hard — good students receive public recognition — he must prove himself by protecting and improving public property, by contributing to the welfare of his community, and by constantly having the public interest at heart. 

The pupil will ordinarily spend four hours daily studying. He is then required to engage in practical work benefiting the community while teaching him useful skills. Since the Communist sector of Laos

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25 Whatever relevant comments one finds in North Vietnamese publications reinforce the impression that Hanoi is satisfied with the educational policy of its Lao allies. For example, Nhan Dan (the official voice of the Vietnamese Communists) has said: "The new [NLHS] education policy has a national and progressive nature aiming to build progressiveness-minded persons who love their country and their work and hate the U.S. imperialist invaders. . . ." Nhan Dan, December 8, 1968 (English translation in JPRS 47,573 of March 4, 1969).

26 For example, when the NLHS held its Second Congress in Sam Neua in April 1964, it adopted an action program calling for students to "develop their ability to serve the Fatherland."
contains no urban centers (Sam Neua or Xieng Khouang may once have deserved this name, but these towns have been destroyed by air raids), schooling is geared to the needs of the rural areas. The pupil is taught agricultural techniques which he can put to immediate use. He is also mobilized to help bring in the harvest or to fill in holes in the roads. He may prepare firewood. Or else he may cut bamboo and fashion from it the simple walls traditionally used in the farmers' homes. Often, pupils will be organized for drives to collect scrap metal or gather paper. On other occasions, they are mobilized to practice what they have learned theoretically about the importance of sanitation: campaigns for the eradication of flies, grasshoppers, or caterpillars are a common feature in the pupils' schedule (reflecting perhaps the influence of Chinese practices). All this stands in contrast to life in the RLG schools.

In these as in other activities, educational policy aims at stimulating competition and at the same time teaches the individual the importance of discipline. Pupils will ordinarily be organized in groups, each with its leader, and encouraged to compete with other units. By rotating certain duties (such as the daily inspection of pupils for cleanliness), the school creates opportunities for the individual student to assume in turn responsibility for his group. Mutual criticism — a characteristic feature of life in the Communist zone of Laos — is encouraged from an early age. Learning is never presented as an end in itself, but only as an instrument for improving the condition of the country. As a primer for Grade 1 puts it: "I will concentrate on learning and then, when I grow up, I will become a worker who will build up the country."

This mission of building up the country is not limited to peaceful pursuits. Pupils, especially those in the equivalent of junior high school or above, combine their studies with contributions to the

27 A Radio Pathet Lao broadcast of June 25, 1970, reported that during the 1969-1970 school year, the elementary-school pupils in the Communist-held parts of Luang Prabang Province harvested more than 12 tons of rice and 816 tons of corn. They also were reported to have grown large quantities of vegetables, raised pigs and chickens, and built houses and made furniture.
war effort. They help dig trenches and traps, stand guard, make bamboo spikes and other simple weapons, lay mines and conduct propaganda among the adult population.\textsuperscript{28} Both with regard to the role of the individual in society and to the relations among various ethnic groups, the pupil is constantly reminded of the importance of cooperation and mutual aid. In Pathet Lao readers one finds frequent praise for mutual aid teams (a distinctive feature of the Pathet Lao village). Simple problems of arithmetic are designed to impress on the pupil that mutual aid serves the public interest and is more efficient than the individual effort.\textsuperscript{29} The same point is repeated over and over again in various ways, as in the use of the allegory of the weak trees which survived together in stormy weather whereas the giant tree braving the storm alone was uprooted and died.

The impact of this instruction should be particularly strong on those who will go beyond the usual two or three years of instruction and who in future years will rise to positions of command in the Communist power structure. Such children, if they come from a hamlet, as most of them do, will have to move to a larger community where junior high schools or more advanced educational facilities are available. There, they will live in dormitories, divorced from their home environment and its parochial influences. The effort to remould the outlook of the young should be all the more effective as the educational system seeks to instill pride in the role of youth as leaders of their country toward freedom, progress, and prosperity. Typical is the following passage in a reader: "We are young people newly rising and of clear thinking. We are intelligent and serious."

\textsuperscript{28} See, for example, the Hsuehua news report of January 8, 1971.

\textsuperscript{29} For example, a mathematics text for Grade 2 contains this problem: "Last year it took Uncle Deng 12 days, working alone, to do his harvesting. This year, with the help of the River Cooperation Unit, the harvest took only 8 days. How many days faster did Uncle Deng harvest this year than last?"
IV. ORGANIZATION AND STAFFING

In a country suffering as severely as does Laos from a lack of educated personnel, the success of any program will necessarily hinge on the extent to which the leadership is willing to provide impetus. Certainly, the Communist leaders of Laos are demonstrating their strong commitment to the cause of a "people's education." Not only do they constantly remind the population of the fact that education is a first prerequisite for the development of the country, but they prove through their active participation in educational campaigns the high priority they attach to them.

The pace-setter in this respect is the Neo Lao Hak Sat (NLHS) Chairman himself, Prince Souphanouvong, who frequently makes personal appearances at meetings to honor "the outstanding educational workers of the liberated zone." A well-educated man, fluent in several Asian and Western languages, Paris-trained in engineering, and animated by personal and national pride, Souphanouvong has consistently stressed the need for "improving the people's living conditions, spiritually and materially," through a drastic expansion of education. In his speeches and policy statements and through direct participation, the Prince has lent strong support to the drive to stamp out illiteracy, to spread education into the most remote mountain areas and tribal villages, and to produce what he calls "people's teachers," i.e., teachers who have close links with the people and are capable of demonstrating by their attitudes and behavior a spirit of patriotism and social service. Reportedly, Souphanouvong personally took a hand in the writing of new textbooks to replace those issued by the Royal Lao Government and has shown an interest in the improvement of teaching methods. He is also credited with the authorship of a Lao

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30. See, for example, his speech to NLHS officials on January 4, 1966.

31. See, for example, the report of the Austrian journalist Otto Janecek, "Laos -- the Forgotten War," in Volksstimme of August 23 and 24, 1969 (English translation in JPRS 48,943 of October 1, 1969).
text on the natural sciences\textsuperscript{32} and is the compiler of a 5000-word multi-
lingual technical glossary.\textsuperscript{33} As the titular head of the Pathet Lao
movement, as its most charismatic and nationally best-known personality,
he has consistently lent his considerable prestige to all kinds of
educational tasks. The same is true of other prominent NLHS leaders,
including the previously quoted NLHS Secretary General Phoumi Vongvichit,
who is known among other things as the author of the first substantial
grammar of the Lao language written by a Lao national.\textsuperscript{34} Other leading
figures in the Communist movement in Laos play a similarly active role.

A special section of the Central Committee of the NLHS is charged
with responsibility for education and training in the Communist zone.
This Education Section is headed by Outama Chounramany, a Central
Committee member and long a prominent figure in the movement.\textsuperscript{35} Outama
heads an educational hierarchy which reaches from the province educa-
tion officer to the district education officer, and below him the canton
education officer, who combines this responsibility with other related

\textsuperscript{32}Pathet Lao broadcast, November 20, 1964.

\textsuperscript{33}Peking NCNA report of March 12, 1965.

\textsuperscript{34}The author has been unable to examine a copy of this work, but
its existence is established, as it was reviewed in the January 1969
issue of the authoritative Soviet journal of Asian studies, Narody
Azii i Afriki.

\textsuperscript{35}Outama Chounramany is a member of the first family of the Mekong
River town of Thathek. He was an instructor in his youth. Outama was
born in or around 1920 and participated in the Lao Issara nationalist
independence movement. He followed the leaders of the movement into
exile in Thailand after World War II. From there he proceeded to North
Vietnam and re-entered Laos later on to serve as province chief of
Phong Saly under the Pathet Lao regime. In 1955 he reportedly returned
to North Vietnam to serve with Radio Hanoi. At the time of the reinte-
gration of the Pathet Lao into the government administration, Outama
was attached to the Ministry of Education. After the secession of the
NLHS from the National Union Government, he returned to the Communist
zone, where he was assigned responsibility for education. Outama is
known as a musician and as a composer of patriotic, anti-American songs.

For legal reasons connected with the Communists' continued ad-
herence to the concept of a tripartite government, Outama does not
claim the title of Minister of Education. In fact, however, he plays
that role in Communist Laos.
administrative tasks (such as public health). The schools under his jurisdiction normally are organized in groups of five to ten, headed by a group leader who represents the teaching staff in dealing with the canton or district education officer. The group leader also constitutes the link between the teaching staff, who may be dispersed throughout a wide and sparsely populated area. Once a month, he meets with the teachers under his jurisdiction to review their problems (such as the continuing shortage of teaching materials and inadequate physical facilities), listens to their suggestions, and later conveys these to the NLHS administrators. More often, it seems, he serves as the voice of authority, providing official guidance and explaining directives emanating from the administrative centers. This rather elaborate administrative system apparently is limited to those areas where the Communists have long been in firm control and where they have been able to develop over time an extensive organizational structure. In contested areas and, generally, where central authority does not reach easily (as in the remote mountain areas), the structure is simplified and there is more local autonomy.

In the hamlet, the village teacher is, in most instances, the only official personage and thus doubles as representative of the Communist authority. Available evidence suggests that the social status of the village school teacher is rather high.

The teachers have for some time been organized in the Lao Patriotic Teachers' Association, headed by Prince Souk Vongsak, a former cabinet member of the 1962 coalition government and, more recently, Prince Souphanouvong's personal envoy to the preliminary peace talks in Vientiane. The Association was created in large part to facilitate mobilization of teaching personnel for political as well as professional purposes.

In the first years after the creation of a separate Communist school system in the late 1950s, anyone with some knowledge of reading, writing, and arithmetic was considered a potential candidate for instructor status. A teacher training course of a month or two transformed him into a teacher qualified to instruct the first three elementary grades (about all that most Lao rural schools can offer even
today), which currently constitute the first cycle of primary education, the second being of two years' duration.\textsuperscript{36}

While at first the instructor was thus often barely ahead of some of his pupils, an effort has since been made by the Communists to upgrade the quality of teachers through the establishment of teacher training institutes. Such institutes have been created in each province, in addition to the more prestigious Central Normal School operating directly under the NLHS. According to a Chinese Communist source, the latter had trained 430 teachers by the summer of 1968.\textsuperscript{37} The NLHS authorities are now making an effort to compensate for the hastily conceived teacher training of the earlier years by professional and political in-service training of village teachers already in the system and by extending the period of training for new staff. The scale of these programs remains, however, quite inadequate to the needs of the rapidly expanding school system, which requires every year several hundred new instructors. In September 1969, for example, the 18-month teacher training course graduated only a total of 57 teachers -- a number obviously insufficient for a school population growing annually at the rate of about 10 percent (an estimated 7000 pupils in 1970 alone).

The Communists have been accusing the government of perpetuating the Lao tradition of discrimination against women by treating them "like furniture." From its inception, the Communist administration has sought to raise the status of women and to mobilize them for a variety of tasks, education in particular. Radio Pathet Lao reported on November 20, 1964, that during that same year a total of 120 teachers

\textsuperscript{36} Until recently these two cycles were of four and three years, respectively. They have been shortened by one year each in line with an "educational acceleration plan," no doubt because of the urgent need for manpower. The accelerated curriculum is expected to compress the same content without any loss of quality. It is a measure of the underdeveloped nature of the Pathet Lao zone, as reflected also in the school system, that the second cycle of what we would term elementary education (i.e., formerly grades 5 through 7) is often referred to in Laos as "secondary education."

\textsuperscript{37} \textit{Jen-min Jih-pao}, July 16, 1968.
were being trained, and that 9 of these were women. Since then, the Communist authorities have further expanded the role of women in education, so that by 1970 about half of the teachers in Xieng Khouang Province, for example, were estimated to be women (in stark contrast to the government-controlled areas, where women teachers remain a small minority).

The principle that education should combine practical and academic work, which we noted in discussing the school curriculum, is also reflected in the training of teachers. In addition to the usual subjects, such as language and national history and mathematics, the future teacher is trained in practical skills helpful in the development of the rural economy, e.g., agricultural techniques and simple crafts like carpentry. On top of his regular tasks, the teacher is expected to instruct the farmers in the use of better production methods. Since one of his important functions in the community is that of promoter of social and political revolution, it is not surprising that a large part of his training consists of political education, an activity in which the Communist leadership frequently participates.

Interviews with former teaching personnel indicate that a teacher in the Communist zone is expected to set an example in all respects, that he is to be an embodiment of a new value system and must lead an austere life. In fact, his modest salary and remuneration in kind leave him hardly any other choice. A teacher receives monthly subsistence pay of 500 kip plus a daily subsidy of 20 kip, that is, a total of 1,100 kip per month. (Although 500 kip are about one dollar at today's exchange, it is more meaningful for illustrative purposes to remember that the price of an egg in the zone in 1967 was about 12 kip.) More important than money, in what remains largely a cashless society, are the 18 kg of rice, 1 lb of salt, 5 packages of cigarettes, and 3 boxes of matches that a teacher receives every month. This modest remuneration reflects the extreme poverty of the country and the consequent low standard of living in the Communist zone. Also, the small sum of cash received as salary is at any rate not a very important consideration in the life of the schoolmaster, since only few goods can be purchased in the Communist village. While the exact
remuneration for high school teachers and the higher ranks of the educational hierarchy is not known, the differential is apparently not significant. Our information suggests that the Lao Communists, strong advocates of austerity and egalitarianism, insist on essentially similar treatment for higher and lower officials.
V. ADULT EDUCATION AND LITERACY DRIVE

About ten years ago, the Pathet Lao began to bring a modicum of education to the largely illiterate adult population of Laos. A special effort was made to reach the tribal communities in their remote mountain areas. These literacy programs have since been accelerated in line with the intensification of the Communist educational campaign, which was launched in the mid-1960s. In its impact on the population this may well be one of the most significant measures adopted by the Lao Communists. Its political importance is enhanced by the fact that, with the exception of a modest effort in the government's armed forces, nothing comparable is under way in the portion of the country ruled by the government.

The NLHS three-year plan for education set a target of total literacy by October 1970. This ambitious goal has admittedly not been reached, but that a major effort is being made is confirmed by eyewitness reports, by official documents, and by the appearance of special textbooks for adult education issued in substantial numbers. Soviet observers writing in 1970 assert that one-fifth of the population is currently enrolled in this literacy campaign. Even if these figures should be somewhat exaggerated, it is certain that this is an active program, not only within the Lao People's Liberation Army, but

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38 The Lao Communists estimated that in the core area, the Province of Sam Neua, the illiteracy rate a decade ago was about 95 percent. It was probably not much lower in other parts of rural Laos. A U.S. Government source puts the present rate at about 70 to 75 percent.

39 In an interview with a Bulgarian correspondent in February 1971 (Narodna Mladezh, March 10, 1971), Prince Souphanouvong stated that illiteracy had been "almost eliminated."

40 The author is in possession of such textbooks printed during the last few years. A simple mathematics text issued in 1967 has a printing of 20,000. Other books have appeared in 50,000 copies. (The total adult population of the Communist zone probably does not exceed half a million.)

also among the civilian population, at least in those areas which are not too seriously exposed to air raids and the disruptive effect of the fighting. Instruction for adults is currently taking place in many military units, in hospitals and workshops, and, of course, in the villages and hamlets of the Communist zone.

The adult education program and the literacy campaign conducted by the NLHS authorities are known as *pasa suksa*, meaning "people's education." The purpose of the program is twofold: It increases the number of those who can be mobilized for the economic and social development of the country; at the same time, it offers the Communist administration a convenient vehicle for carrying on propaganda and political education.

A young man interviewed in some depth, who had been a teacher in the Communist zone and had also participated in the "people's education" program, explained that, in contrast to regular schooling, this effort does not rely on formal instruction and does not set definite targets. Normally, there is no school building. Twice a week or more often, adults meet anywhere and quite informally to study. Children may be included in such study groups. Instruction is conducted ordinarily at night and concentrated in those months when the agricultural cycle allows the farmer more free time. This kind of arrangement applies to very small communities where as yet no school exists. In larger villages, where schools are in operation, people's education is limited to the adults.

The launching of an adult education program in a remote village proceeds in the following manner. First, there will be a decision at a higher administrative level that a program is to be initiated in a particular region or village where illiteracy is widespread. The district education officer will then be ordered to launch the program. He in turn will get in touch with the canton education officer or, if no such person is available, with the canton chief.\(^{42}\) The official

\(^{42}\) Only the central offices and the higher levels of the NLHS administration are fully staffed. Below that level, a single official may be charged with meeting all administrative responsibilities. The size of the local administrative staff will vary from place to place.
will contact the teacher nearest the place where the adult education program is to be started. The teachers, in turn, will convene an assembly of the villagers, including both men and women, of all ages. At this meeting, the teacher explains why it is important for everyone to be able to read and write. He will talk to the villagers about the value of education. (Our eyewitness said that the teacher would point out that education meant knowledge and that knowledge would free the Lao people from foreign, that is American, oppression.) Instruction is always linked to simple political lessons promoting the new value system of patriotism, mutual aid, and service to the country which the Pathet Lao seek to propagate.

Having thus set the scene, the teacher will ask the villagers who among them can read and write. In a small hamlet there may be only one or two persons who are even slightly literate. These men (outside the larger communities, women are rarely literate) will then be appointed as non-salaried instructors. They will teach their friends and other villagers, at first perhaps with the regular teacher's assistance. If those who claim to be able to read and write cannot do so very well, they will be given the necessary coaching by the teacher in order to prepare them for their task. Essentially, however, the system is one of self-help, relying on the initiative and contributions of the villagers themselves.

Once these informal instructors have been selected, they establish an appropriate schedule which takes into account the requirements of agricultural work and other local conditions. An immediate problem is how to make do with a minimum of outside material support. Often the

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43 The literacy rate of women is particularly low in Laos. A government survey undertaken in Savannakhet in 1967 found that 24.6 percent of the male population and 58 percent of the women were then analfabets. It must be kept in mind that conditions in the town of Savannakhet are substantially superior to those prevailing in the rural areas, as education is generally much more advanced in the towns and because 14.2 percent of the population consists of foreigners (mostly Vietnamese and Chinese) whose educational level is higher than that of the Lao. (Figures are from Renselement Démographique de la Ville de Savannakhet, a survey conducted in July 1967 by the Statistical Service of the Ministry of Plans and published in 1970.)
teacher is unable to provide a sufficient number of pencils and notebooks to go around among the adult pupils. In that case, the villagers must go to the nearest community where there is a cooperative store and purchase what is needed. Sometimes only the provincial capital can supply such items as paper and pencils, notebooks, and the like -- a reflection of the extreme scarcity of resources in the Communist zone. Even if the necessary items can be obtained locally, they do not come cheap. A 50-page notebook, for example, may cost the equivalent of a dozen eggs. Quite often, it seems, the villagers are forced (or prefer) to improvise, for example, by using charcoal on a painted board.

Instruction will begin with very simple reading and writing exercises. Occasionally, the regular teacher visits the village, talks to those conducting the adult instruction program, and inquires about their problems and the progress their pupils have made. He will then report to his superior, the district education officer. Our informant, in addition to his regular teaching duties, was expected to assume responsibility for two other villages where adult instruction was under way and which were some walking distance from his normal working place.

All accounts confirm that pasa sukha is a flexible and most informal system of instruction, relying on whatever resources happen to be available locally. When no adults can be found who could serve as teachers, the program may rely on children who have acquired a sufficient reading and writing knowledge in school. They are expected to help the adults and thus demonstrate their dedication to progress. The same informality reigns with regard to the scheduling. All instruction stops during the planting season and during other periods of intensive agricultural activity. Obviously, it is also suspended when air raids and the fighting make regular meetings dangerous. Normally, the adult education course is spread over ten months, not including periods when instruction is suspended. At the end of the course an examination is administered by a regular teacher, generally the supervisor of a group of schools. It consists of some dictation as well as of questions on subjects such as history, geography, and arithmetic. Those who pass the examination receive a certificate confirming that the particular individual has learned to read and write. The adult
pupil need not stop at this point, but may if he wishes go on to a special, more advanced class, if such is available.

Strictly speaking, there is no obligation for the adult to attend literacy classes. But the cadre (teacher or other NLHS official) will severely criticize the individual who, once enrolled in the program, fails in his examination and then is unwilling to continue. Social pressures are exerted in systematic fashion to achieve results when the thirst for knowledge proves insufficient to motivate the individual. None of this seems to apply to the same degree to the older adults. The Lao Communists concentrate their efforts and meager resources on winning over and reeducating the young adults. The older ones are apparently considered difficult to remake in their attitudes and social behavior, and not much is expected of them. Most training programs will therefore concentrate on those below 45 years of age (the dividing line in the Pathet Lao classification system), although older citizens are, of course, willingly accepted.

In theory, these programs are operating throughout Communist Laos. In practice, physical conditions are so unfavorable that this goal has not been attained. Quite apart from the obstacles created by the war, many small hamlets are hidden so deeply in the mountains that they are virtually inaccessible during the rainy season. This is especially true of the ethnic minority communities, where literacy often is non-existent and it is therefore difficult to get a self-sustaining program under way. Nevertheless, frequent Communist reports listing an increasing number of villages where the population has made major strides toward or has actually attained complete literacy are not mere propaganda. 44

44 For example, in the case of one of our informants, there were 35 adults in a particular village, of whom only 8 could read in 1963. By 1966 this number had grown to 18. While the statistics issued by the Communist authorities cannot be checked, it may be worth noting that the official North Vietnamese newspaper Nhân Dan on December 8, 1968, reported that by June of that year a total of 600,000 students had gone through the Lao people's education program. This figure would seem rather high considering that the total population of the zone probably does not exceed one million. More likely is a figure given by two Tass correspondents in Hanoi and rebroadcast on
Whenever interest flags, the authorities launch emulation campaigns or organize literacy-campaign shock brigades which bear down on a particular area. Such a case was mentioned by Pathet Lao radio on September 11, 1969, with regard to a certain district of Sam Neua Province, where close to 90 percent of about 100 illiterate adults had reportedly become literate after three months' instruction. The accomplishment was duly celebrated with a ceremony at which representatives of the NLHS Central Committee's Education Section were present.

Enthusiasm for the program is also stimulated by posters, placed on buildings and trees and along trails, carrying brief political slogans such as "Let us increase the rice crop!" or "Shoot down U.S. airplanes!" In Xieng Khouang Province, such placards were sometimes worn by men walking in single file in such a way that the sign on one man's back could be read by the one behind him -- making it unavoidable for the person walking along not to absorb some knowledge.

The adult education program is, of course, better developed in the more heavily populated areas. Jacques Decornoy, who visited the Communist zone of Laos for the French newspaper Le Monde, reported in its issue of July 3, 1968, about some of his experiences in Sam Neua. He tells of textile workers operating a simple spinnery, and describes how they were expected to attend professional, cultural, and political classes. On Saturday the machines would stop at noon and, after a short meal, the employees would gather their notebooks and pencils. The carpentry shop, the canteen, and other stores would be turned into

October 10, 1970, from Moscow. At the time, 60,000 adults were said to be attending evening schools. This figure roughly equals that for the young school population.

Pathet Lao Radio (on August 7, 1970) reported that in Tavenok Province, a mountainous area carved out of a portion of Southern Laos near the Ho Chi Minh Trail, 125 adult education classes attended by 2,500 people had been organized. The same report stated that, in Xieng Khouang Province (the Plain of Jars area), the corresponding figures were 257 and 2,455. Not surprisingly, the most active program is in Sam Neua Province, where Communist headquarters are situated and where the NLHS administration is most effective. A Hanoi broadcast of March 14, 1968, reported that 23,200 adults (corresponding to about 15 percent of the total population) from 584 hamlets were attending people's education classes and that during the preceding year these courses had taught 1,146 adults to read and write.
classrooms for the study of geometry, algebra, or geography. This same report tells about a conversation with the head of education in the liberated zone and about his dedication to an ideal of "progressive national education." It was made clear to the writer, as is also evident from the reading of textbooks and other pertinent Communist documentary sources, that the purpose of the adult schools, like that of the regular schools, is not only to raise the population's educational level but to aid in its political indoctrination. In this particular instance, the official confirmed that an important aspect of the mission of education in the Communist zone is "to help the people hate the Americans."
VI. ACCOMPLISHMENTS

To what extent have the Lao Communists been able to achieve their educational objectives? How does their performance compare with that of the Royal Lao Government with which they are competing not only militarily but politically?

A precise answer to these important questions is not possible at this time, for the data available from the Communist zone of Laos are insufficient to allow an exact assessment of the results of the Communist educational campaign. In fact, considering the difficult wartime conditions under which the Lao Communists are operating and the generally underdeveloped nature of their zone, it is unlikely that even Communist headquarters in Sam Neua would have precise figures on their achievements in education or any other field. A detailed comparison of the performance of the government with that of the Communists is not feasible for similar reasons. Moreover, conditions and objectives in the two areas are in some respects quite dissimilar. Nevertheless, sufficient information is available to permit a broad but meaningful quantitative assessment of the state of education in the NLHS zone, and to allow us to compare the level attained, at least in general terms, with the results achieved by the RLG.

The text of the NLHS educational three-year plan (officially known as the Plan for Educational Transformation and Development or as the Accelerated Development Plan in Education) has not been made public outside the Communist zone. However, from frequent references to the plan in Communist documents and broadcasts, we are able to list its major goals. This plan, conceived in 1967 and inaugurated the following year, is meant to improve and modify the educational system throughout the "liberated areas" so as to suit the "immediate and future needs of revolutionary tasks."46 Specifically, by October 1970,

46Pathet Lao Broadcast of November 11, 1967. In preparation for an intensification of the educational campaign as reflected in the current three-year plan, Prince Souphanouvong opened the First NLHS Congress on Education in Sam Neua Province on July 23, 1965.
the following targets were to have been reached: (1) People under 45 years and all military personnel should be able to read and write; (2) every district or village of more than 2500 population should have its elementary school, with an average of five teachers; (3) every province and every "important town" (a term not further defined) should have a secondary school; (4) some kind of an institution of higher learning should be established at central headquarters; (5) the Lao language would be used and disseminated in all communities, irrespective of their ethnic composition (in addition to texts making use of the particular ethnic group's language); (6) the educational process would be compressed (hence "accelerated development plan") so as to provide qualitatively equal or superior education through an elementary curriculum of four (instead of five) years and through two years of second-cycle (junior high school) education instead of the usual three years.

As described earlier, the adult education program of the Lao Communists is probably the most outstanding feature of their educational campaign. There can be no doubt that the authorities have made a special effort to eradicate illiteracy, which in the tribal areas was almost total as late as ten years ago. Directives requiring that every elementary school teacher instruct (outside his regular teaching responsibilities) at least five individuals in how to read and write, and the principle that every literate person should teach his illiterate comrades, have apparently been quite widely implemented. As a result the NLHS authorities could announce that some 15,000 adults in Sam Neua Province were attending part-time classes in 1968. If we accept as probably correct the Communist figure of 150,000 for the total population of the province, this would mean that some 10 percent of the adults were being instructed in reading and writing. According to the latest announced figures, a total of nearly 60,000 adults

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47 Broadcast of November 18, 1968.
48 Broadcasts of September 20 and October 26, 1968. For the same period, a figure of 17,000 was given for Xieng Khouang Province, and one of 12,000 for Savannakhet Province.
(representing about one-tenth of the adult population) were enrolled in 1969 throughout the Communist zone in their spare time to learn the rudiments of reading, writing, and arithmetic.\(^{49}\) Despite these impressive figures, it is clear that the goal to stamp out illiteracy by 1971 has not yet been achieved. Official Communist reports -- Lao, Chinese, and Soviet -- in late 1969 stated that illiteracy had become a thing of the past in a total of 317 hamlets and 20 villages\(^{50}\) in the free zone.\(^{51}\) A more recent report puts the number of villages with total literacy at 600.\(^{52}\) Although there are no reliable figures regarding the number of villages in the Communist zone -- the total for Laos is assumed to be about 10,000 (definitions vary, and part of the population is either nomadic or on the move because of the war) -- it is obvious that with a population of 700,000 to 1,000,000 people, some 600 villages represent only a fraction of the total. This is also confirmed by an official NLHLS statement that 1,913 individuals in Sam Neua Province became literate within the span of two years -- thus producing an average of 1,000 newly literate adults per year in the 150,000 total population. Nevertheless, interviews and other indicators suggest that

\(^{49}\) Pathet Lao broadcast of October 9, 1969. Subsequently, a Pathet Lao News Agency report stated on January 13, 1971, that one out of every eight adults in the liberated zone was taking general education courses (in addition to students attending various vocational and technical courses).

\(^{50}\) The distinction, in terms of population size, between "hamlet" and "villages" in the NLHLS classification is not clear. Often these terms appear to be used interchangeably.

\(^{51}\) See, for example, the KPL editorial broadcasts of July 25 and November 1, 1969. About 150 of these hamlets or villages were in Xieng Khouang Province and 90 in Sam Neua. According to Pathet Lao News Agency report of August 14, 1970, the number of villages in Sam Neua Province which had "for the most part" eradicated illiteracy had grown to 200 by then. Another report, this one by the Patriotic Neutralist Forces, stated on May 30, 1970, that 62 villages in Udomsay Province (the northern Communist-held portion of Luang Prabang Province) had eliminated illiteracy.

\(^{52}\) Radio Pathet Lao, January 11, 1971. The same report puts the total number of elementary schools at more than 2,000. A KPL statement in English, dated June 15, 1971, declared that, "Now, 795 hamlets have been recognized as having basically wiped out illiteracy."
the cumulative effect of the fight against illiteracy is transforming the Communist zone. An East German newspaperman stationed in Hanoi who visited the Communist sector in early 1969 (or late 1968) and was presumably given briefings on the situation there reported that, at the time of his visit, some 50 percent of the population between the ages of 15 and 45 were able to read.53 Since Sam Neua is the area which has been longest under Communist control, is the site of the NLHS administrative headquarters, and is closest to North Vietnam, other areas have presumably not yet reached the same level. (This is confirmed by the KPL English-language news agency release of May 2, 1971 to the effect that in the [very undeveloped] province of Phong Saly 80 percent of the civil servants were proficient in reading and writing, thus leaving even among this better-educated group 20 percent of illiterates.) As it is estimated that the population under RLG control is now about 20 to 25 percent literate (the lowest rate in Southeast Asia) and that about a third of the school-age population is in school,54 it is quite likely that at least in some areas the Communists have outperformed the RLG with regard to adult literacy. This would not be surprising, for the government has never launched an effort comparable to that of the adult education drive in the Communist zone, except for some literacy programs in the armed forces.

The Communists may have reached their goal to operate at least one school with five teachers in each major village of their zone. Official figures, frequently cited on the Pathet Lao radio as well as in foreign Communist literature, indicate that by early 1970 the total number of teachers was approaching 4000 (as against 1500 in late

53Gerhard Feldbauer, Neues Deutschland, January 18, 1969 (translated in JPRS 47,659 of March 17, 1969). This figure is probably based on a briefing by Outama Chouramany, who reported in November 1970 at a meeting in Sam Neua that 55 percent of the province population (presumably of those in the 15 to 45 age bracket which the Pathet Lao normally use as statistical base) had become literate.

54This represents substantial progress over conditions in 1954, when the literacy rate in Laos was estimated at 15 percent (Area Handbook on Laos, U.S. Government Printing Office, 1968, p. 108), and over 1956, when a UN survey team found that 17 percent of the school-age population were in school.
1967). In mid-1969 the target of the plan had reportedly been attained, more than a year ahead of schedule. Comparable figures for the government are about one-and-a-half times as large (5700), corresponding roughly to the ratio of the populations assumed to be under RLG and Communist control, respectively. Obviously, a quantitative comparison should be accompanied by a qualitative assessment of the Communist performance, but too little is known about the curriculum and content of teacher training to allow such an evaluation. Whatever evidence we have suggests that, from a purely academic point of view, the Pathet Lao teacher may not be as well qualified as his RLG counterpart. On the other hand, while the intensive political training he has received may not make him a better teacher, it is likely to have substantial influence on the outlook of young people growing up in the Communist zone.

It might be instructive to compare the rudimentary education system now functioning in the Communist region of Laos with its counterpart in the government-controlled zone. Doing so, we find that at first glance the educational pyramid appears better developed in the government areas -- where six years of elementary education (the so-called groupe scolaire) are the official standard rather than five or less, as now is the case in Communist Laos. But one should not forget that education under the RLG is available only to portions of the urban population and to a small percentage of the rural areas, where to this day the vast majority of all Lao live. In non-Communist Laos the three-year primary school is still the rule rather than the exception. In the more isolated communities only one year or two of elementary instruction may be available. Seen in this context, it seems fair to

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57 Surveys on Lao education undertaken by USAID in 1965 indicate that at that time only one out of ten pupils reached the sixth grade. This ratio has improved only modestly since.
conclude that the educational facilities in the Communist and non-
Communist rural zones of Laos remain about equally underdeveloped.

Another measure of Communist achievement in bringing education
to the population under its rule is the total number of pupils now
receiving elementary and secondary education. In 1945, Laos had a
total of 11,000 pupils. According to the latest figures released by
the Communist authorities, the total school enrollment in their areas
was about 63,000 during the 1968-1969 school year (as compared to
36,500 in late 1967) and close to 68,000 in January 1971 in more than
2,000 schools. The corresponding figure for the non-Communist areas
with roughly twice the population was then about 210,000. While on
neither side had the goal of complete compulsory education (stipulated
as the nation's objective by the Royal decree of 1951) been attained,
the Royal Lao Government's performance in this regard seems slightly
better than that of the Communists, if we consider the population ratio
of 1:2 involved. This failure of the Communists probably reflects the
disadvantageous physical conditions and the lack of material resources
of their sector as well as the effect of the war, which hits the Com-
munist zone much more severely. But it is interesting to note that
the relative rate of progress in expanding elementary school enrollment
appears to be about the same in the two parts of the divided country,
as both sides have been reporting an annual increase of about 10 percent
for the last several years. Thus, it would be fair to say that the
Communists started from a lower level and at this point have not been
able to catch up with their RLG rivals.

The Communist goal of establishing a secondary school in each
province and each "important town" has proved particularly difficult
to attain. Quite apart from the weakly developed primary school net-
work the Communists inherited, and on which secondary education must
build, their sector comprises no urban centers comparable to the Mekong

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58 KPL editorial (previously cited) of November 1, 1969; Phoumi
Vongvichit, op. cit., p. 163; Radio Pathet Lao, January 11, 1971; and
that the school enrollment had reached a level of 10 percent above
that foreseen in the 1970-1971 plan.
River towns. Until recently, not a single secondary school was in operation in Communist territory. The few individuals qualified to teach secondary school were already employed in the military and civilian administration, where they could not easily be spared. It was necessary therefore to build up the educational pyramid gradually, but the human resources for this were simply not available during the early and mid-1960s. Hence training beyond the elementary level had to rely at first entirely on schooling abroad, that is, in North Vietnam.\(^{59}\) Only recently have larger numbers of these students begun to return. Some of them, together with former elementary teachers selected for upgrading (the first such group graduated in 1967), now form the core of the developing Pathet Lao secondary school system. That these schools are still in their initial stage is clear from the fact that in 1968 the necessary textbooks were only being compiled. A European Communist reporter, after visiting the NLHS zone in 1969, summed up his impressions of the state of Pathet Lao education thus: "Education . . . for the time being hardly goes beyond the grade school level. . . ."\(^{60}\)

By 1969, official Pathet Lao sources were able to report the existence of 20 junior high schools (leading to Grade 6 or 7), operated as boarding schools, and, topping off the Lao Communist school system, two senior high schools, i.e., high schools in the familiar sense of the word: one in Sam Neua and the other in Xieng Khouang Province. More recent information indicates that a third senior high school has since been established. Total enrollment reportedly amounts to no more than a few hundred students. With regard to training beyond the elementary level, the youth in the government-controlled areas (which can draw on the French legacy and on French and American aid) therefore continues to enjoy better opportunities as several (7-year)
lycees and (4-year) colleges have been in operation for a number of years in the larger Mekong towns such as Vientiane, Pakse, and Luang Prabang. On the other hand, the Communists continue to make much wider use of study abroad -- almost exclusively in the DRV -- even on this relatively low level of education. At any rate, it is clear that the Lao Communists will have to depend on Vietnamese institutions for some time to come if they wish to increase rapidly their reservoir of qualified personnel for their military and civilian apparatus.

This applies even more to education on the technical and university levels. The three-year plan's call for the establishment of an institution of higher learning has so far not produced anything tangible. Although special schools providing simple training in medicine, agricultural engineering, and industrial crafts as well as in certain fields of importance to the military (like communications) are now functioning in Pathet Lao territory (at least partly staffed by Vietnamese), advanced academic training is not yet possible in Communist Laos (nor for that matter in Vientiane, although that city has several institutions that are on a near-college level).

Some 10 or 20 students are currently assigned to study in Eastern Europe, and an elite of probably fewer than 100 students (among them at least one of Prince Souphanouvong's sons) is being trained in Moscow. An indeterminate but probably small number of Lao students

61 The six public secondary schools of non-Communist Laos had a total enrollment of 3300 (including many French and Vietnamese) in 1966. Since then there has probably been a modest increase in the number of students.

62 This may soon no longer be true. Sithon Kommadam, vice-chairman of the NLHS Central Committee, reported in his year-end review, according to a KPL report of January 5, 1971, that a teacher training college would be opened in the 1971-1972 academic year. A similar institution is already operating in Vientiane with U.S. support.

63 A Pathet Lao news release of March 27, 1970, for example, reported that "many agricultural technical schools" had been expanded or newly built in lower Laos, but their total enrollment was given only as 300 and the number of their graduates as "nearly 200."

64 An article in Pravda of February 27, 1968 stated that young Lao were returning to the NLHS zone from study not only in Hanoi, but also from Berlin, Budapest and Moscow. Pravda of October 11, 1969 confirmed
The majority of the Communist zone's Lao youth in search of higher education continue to head for Hanoi. Recent graduates number at least in the hundreds. Thus, those among the author's Lao inter-
viewees who had had specialized training had received it in North Viet-
nam. The impact of the gradual return of these hundreds or possibly thousands of Lao students on the political, social, and economic sys-
tem of Communist Laos will no doubt be increasingly felt in the coming years.

The fifth goal of the education plan, the introduction of Lao as the language of instruction (replacing French), has apparently been fully implemented, to judge by the available evidence. At least this is true on the elementary school level. This has not been accomplished at the sacrifice of the local tongues, it seems. There are Pathet Lao texts written in the Meo language but using the Lao script, and written forms for other university languages are being developed. The principle apparently is to see to it that every person can read Lao, but that this is not done by suppressing the other tongues. (It should be noted that Catholic priests in the non-Communist areas of Laos also developed

the existence of an Association of Lao Students Studying in the Soviet Union, which issues statements from time to time. It appears to in-
clude also Lao students who originally came from government-controlled territory, as the Soviet Union maintains diplomatic relations with Vientiane. A Lao government official who visited the USSR in Sep-
tember 1968, told the Vientiane newspaper Xat Lao (October 31, 1968) that some 70 Lao students were at that time enrolled at Moscow's Lomonosov University. The Communist zone can also draw on some gradu-
ates of French universities who prefer the Pathet Lao ranks to working for the government. Their number is unknown.

65NCNA-Peking (English service) of May 7, 1970, reporting on an amateur art ensemble of the DRV performing in Peking on that day, referred in this connection to the presence of "Laotian specialists and students in Peking."

66Some returnees from Vietnam (for the most part young men originally from government-controlled territory) also infiltrate back into the non-Communist zone of Laos. (See, for example, the statement by the Governor of Champassak to correspondent John Finn in Far Eastern Economic Review, September 19, 1968.)
scripts for the Tai and Meo tribal languages during the 1960s.) A similar trend is operating in the school system of non-Communist Laos although there, long-entrenched French practices and traditions have slowed the replacement of the French language as a medium of instruction.

Finally, the three-year plan aims at telescoping the time needed for education while maintaining the level of attainment. Since Pathet Lao reports do not go into the detail of the accelerated curriculum changes which presumably have been in force since early 1968, no definite conclusion can be drawn with respect to the results of the new system. Whatever meager evidence is available suggests that the pace of Pathet Lao education may be more rapid than is the case in the government's school system. For example, Lao informants who helped the author analyze the Communist instructional materials generally agreed that these texts, although generally written in simpler and less courtly language, nevertheless make more demands on the student than those of the regular government system. There is certainly strong psychological pressure on the pupil to learn rapidly and well. If he cannot make the grade, his chances of succeeding to a good position in the Communist power structure diminish, while the likelihood of his being drafted for ordinary labor or military service increases correspondingly.\(^{67}\)

\(^{67}\)Little is known about the attrition rate in the Lao Communist schools, except for some scattered data. The Pathet Lao news media reported that in 1969, in the Communist areas of Savannakhet Province, 76 percent of the elementary school pupils passed their final examination as against 61 percent the previous year, but more information is needed to allow an interpretation of the significance of these figures.