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Editorials

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AT A TIME when the government of South Vietnam is fighting for its life against increasingly bold Communist guerrilla armies, students and Buddhists stage demonstrations demanding more "freedom."

This is one of the depressing aspects of the struggle to which the United States is daily committing more money and lives.

The students are protesting recent restrictions by General Nguyen Khanh's government on civil liberties, as a war emergency measure. The Buddhists are protesting "oppression" of members of their faith by the government—although no evidence of persecution has been offered.

It is a fair assumption that Communist agents have a hand in both organized protests, to weaken public support for Khanh's recently reshuffled government and divert its attention from the campaign against the Viet Cong guerrillas.

THE VERY FACT that Khanh permitted the demonstrations to take place and instructed police to handle the demonstrators gently—even though some of them broke into and wrecked the offices of a national radio station — suggests that his government can hardly be called despotic.

But the demonstrations raise anew the question how seriously the people of South Vietnam take the war. Do they understand what the fighting is about? Do they know that if the Communists win there will be no individual freedom at all, no right of protest, and no hope for better living conditions?

Some who are close to the situation don't think the Vietnamese



GENERAL KHANH  
"They Don't Understand"

feel very strongly about the struggle.

Former Staff Sgt. Victor Smith, Jr., of Memphis, just back from six months' service in Vietnam, said it was frustrating to the Americans to try to train people "who couldn't care less."

"The peasants don't know what they're fighting for," he said. "They just don't understand. We're trying to make them understand, but we do not seem to be succeeding."

Another pessimistic report came from Willard Mathias, an official of the Central Intelligence Agency, who said in an analysis prepared for Washington authorities (and leaked to a newspaper) that "there remains serious doubt that the victory can be won." The war, he said, is "more of a political contest than a military operation" and the present government has "not yet demonstrated the leadership and inspiration necessary."

The Viet Cong seem to have leadership and inspiration enough. They lead a harsh existence, living off the country and skulking through the jungles; they lack air protection and much modern equipment, yet time and time again they emerge from the shadows to catch the South Vietnamese by surprise and inflict heavy losses upon them.

Whether the guerrillas' success is due to Marxist religious zeal or

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