

# **Kicking the Vietnam Syndrome in Cambodia**

**Collected writings  
1975 - 2010**

*Michael Vickery*

**NB:** This book contains both published and contemporaneously written unpublished (but sometimes widely distributed) materials, as well as additional articles and commentary prepared especially for this collection.

On occasion, text deleted because of physical or political limitations has been restored; this is clearly marked in brackets, as are any new comments, clarifications, and footnote references. Minor changes in punctuation and layout, such as section or paragraph breaks, have not been marked. Some long pieces that were originally written as single works, but were published as separate articles, have been reconstituted as noted.

In general the texts follow chronological order, but sometimes, for instance, on some of the writing on William Shawcross, I have grouped them by subject. Footnotes and new comments added to original texts are enclosed in square brackets [ ]. Many of the selections were written in the 1970s-1990s, as is reflected in the language, sometimes even the syntax and the details; and unless necessary for comprehension I have not tried to rewrite in accordance with the situation in 2010.

The text is followed by a complete, I believe, bibliography of work cited, not the lazy man's so-called 'bibliographic essay' which now clutters some American historical work on Southeast Asia and which makes search for sources unnecessarily difficult.

Many thanks to my friend and colleague Doug Cooper for his assistance in preparing this collection. Responsibility for any remaining errors is, of course, my own.

Michael Vickery  
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*Michael Vickery*

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## Introduction

After the US had unleashed its Pearl Harbor equivalent on Iraq in 1991, and celebrating what seemed a glorious victory in the Persian Gulf War, George Bush [I], the then President of the US, jumped up and down in glee, screaming “We’ve kicked the Vietnam syndrome”.<sup>1</sup> This was regime-speak for the supposed end of US fear to intervene in the internal affairs of other countries, especially weak ones, if it was seen to be of advantage to US regime interests.

The real Vietnam syndrome, however, was visceral hatred of the small enemy who, to secure independence, fought the US to a standstill. This hatred inspired the US to exert all efforts short of further military intervention to block Viet Nam’s recovery from the war. This included undermining the recovery of Cambodia which, both for the French in their failed war of reconquest (1946-54) and later for the US, was a secure rear base from which to stab Viet Nam in the back, but which after 1979 had become a close ally of Viet Nam.

Perhaps the US insistence to construct their new Phnom Penh embassy, a real ‘Green Zone,’ in the city center, and one of the largest US embassies in Asia, obliterating an attractive French colonial recreational area, indicates a desire to maintain the same role for Cambodia now.

The US campaign against Viet Nam and Cambodia, in contrast to similar campaigns in Nicaragua and Cuba, was accepted by nearly the totality of US journalism. If it was possible to occasionally find a critical editorial about Nicaragua in the *Washington Post*, everyone, including some surprising cases toward the leftward end of the political spectrum, such as it is in the US, fell into line on Viet Nam and Cambodia.

Probably for no other controversial area of the world did the press, from large mainstream organs to what had once been classified as moderate left, cooperate so obsequiously with regime propaganda, not only in limiting their own output to support for it, but refusing to publish criticism. It seemed that the arrogant and successful defiance of the US by a small Asian state inspired patriotic,

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<sup>1</sup> The date was 1 March 1991. I have cited this from H. Bruce Franklin, “The Last Chapter?” Adapted from H. Bruce Franklin, *M.I.A. or mythmaking in America* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1993, pp. 177-197, 237-242, republished in *Vietnam and America*, edited by Marvin E. Gettleman, Jane Franklin, Marilyn B. Young, and H. Bruce Franklin, New York, Grove Press, 1995, pp. 500-515.

Obviously I wrote this years ago. The actions of the first George Bush now seem like playful skirmishing compared to the aggressions of Bush junior. In what follows I continue to write ‘Vietnam’ when the term is used as an adjective, as in ‘Vietnam syndrome’, or in quotations, although otherwise writing ‘Viet Nam’, the official name for the country. Note that ‘Viet Nam’ and ‘Thailand’ are anachronistic when used for times before the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and are here strictly conventional as areal designations for non-specialist readers. ‘Cambodia’ is not so anachronistic, for in its native form, *kambuja/Kampuchea*, it was in use at least since the 9<sup>th</sup> century.

even racial, horror, not only in traditional warmongers, but also in persons who had otherwise seemed free of such psychic aberrations.<sup>2</sup>

That propaganda has had continuing influence in Cambodian affairs. When the United Nations Transitional Authority for Cambodia (UNTAC) went to Cambodia in 1992 and 1993 to organize an election it brought in hordes of sincere young people from western countries, most of whom, having been exposed to years of the anti-Vietnamese, anti-Phnom Penh, press in their own countries, arrived with a missionary prejudice against the existing Cambodian government, and a conviction that the duty of UNTAC was to replace that government by its rivals.

Since the end of UNTAC some of them have gone on to form the newest generation of Cambodia pundits in the West, where they continue with their zealotry. Others stayed in Cambodia as ‘human rights’, i.e. anti-Cambodian Peoples Party (CPP), activists, and as the new generation of journalists, and they have been joined by later newcomers whose prejudices reflect the same background of biased reporting throughout the 1980s and 1990s to the present.<sup>3</sup>

Moreover, during these last few years when official US relations with Viet Nam have been improving, albeit much too slowly, and when, finally, as some of the old warmongers have called for a revision of US policy on Cuba, that other hate object, the intensity of anti-Cambodian emotion connected to the traditional anti-Viet Nam hysteria has increased, both within the milieu inside Cambodia which I noted above, and among a certain coterie in the US.<sup>4</sup>

There is a difference, however, in that the official State Department policy on Cambodia since 1993, which must have at least silent backing higher up in the executive branch, has been for collaboration with the Cambodian government, but they are at times out-shouted by the extremists, who, although without official backing in the US, have had strong support in the media, in a reactionary coterie of politicians (Congressman Dana Rohrabacher, Senator Mitch McConnell), and, very important in Cambodia, in the activity of the International Republican Institute and broadcasts of the Voice of America.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Now we see the same spineless behavior of the mainstream press with respect to Iraq. See: Moyer’s documentary at: <http://www.pbs.org/moyers/journal/btw/watch.html>

<sup>3</sup> For some examples see my *Cambodia: A Political Survey* (Phnom Penh, Funan Press, 2007), and below. The Cambodian People’s Party, which governed before the 1993 election, took second place in that election although remaining the real holder of power, which was consolidated by its victory in the 1998 election.

<sup>4</sup> The old warmongers included Henry Kissinger and George Shultz who in the mid-1990s were calling “for a bipartisan commission to review Cuba policy”, Julia E. Sweig, in *The Nation*, New York, May 1, 2007.

<sup>5</sup> For more on the International Republican Institute see *Cambodia: A Political Survey*, and Chapter 8: the ‘coup’ and beyond, below

They are all kicking their own Vietnam syndromes in Cambodia, the weakest object. Minefields are not the only coward's war there.<sup>6</sup>

The writings in this collection are my journalistic efforts to combat those tendencies after 1979, and to kick the real Vietnam syndrome. Thus the expression in the title has a double meaning. Some of the pieces here were not published when written, and those which were published were either in obscure journals, or in a restricted regional press (Bangkok, Phnom Penh, Australia, with one in the Guardian Weekly [UK]), which, except for the last, would not have reached a public outside those places, and were not seen where most needed.

On the positive side, the purpose of this writing was to explain what was happening in Cambodia after the end of 'Democratic Kampuchea' (Pol Pot's 'Khmer Rouge'), to defend the new People's Republic of Kampuchea, after 1989 the State of Cambodia, against unjust accusations in the Western, mainly American, press, and to take that press to task for spinelessly turning themselves into propagandists for the official US line, as happened again after 11 September 2001.<sup>7</sup>

My efforts were entirely marginal, as can be seen now when writers who gained fame writing anti-Viet Nam war, even anti-US, literature have switched to proclaiming that the war was justified, and when Cambodia specialist officials of UNTAC, having attacked similar analyses from the left, argue that the purpose of UNTAC and the 1993 election was not to secure democracy, but to get rid of a regime which was intolerable to some of the Great Powers, first of all the US.<sup>8</sup> Among the trendy post-something categories, we should include the 'post-anti-Viet Nam war' phenomenon, a type of Vietnam syndrome which this publication is intended to kick.

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<sup>6</sup> See "Landmines in Cambodia: The Coward's War", issued by Human Rights Watch (Asia Division) and Physicians for Human Rights, September 1991.

<sup>7</sup> These journalistic writings thus amplify and continue the purpose of my books, *Cambodia 1975-1982* (first published by South End Press, Boston, 1984, second edition, Silkworm Books, Chiang Mai, 1999), *Kampuchea, Politics, Economics, and Society*, London, Frances Pinter (Publishers), 1986, and *Cambodia: a Political Survey*, Phnom Penh, Funan Press, 2007.

<sup>8</sup> Below are treatments of some of those writers, of whom the most egregious jacket-switchers are William Shawcross (see below, "Tragedy in Cambodia"), Ed Friedman (writings cited below in "Violence in Democratic Kampuchea: Some Problems of Explanation"), and Stephen Heder ("Shawcross book Highlights post-UNTAC blues", a review of William Shawcross, *Cambodia's New Deal*, in *Phnom Penh Post* (hereafter PPP) 4/4, 24 Feb-9 March 1995, p. 19. David Ashley, "The end justifies the means?", PPP 4/11, 2-15 June, 1995, p. 6, is an example of the second type.



## Chapter 1: an introduction to Cambodia

### The creation of modern Cambodia

Among all of the countries of Southeast Asia which came under western colonial control, it was only in Cambodia that imperialism failed to perform what Marx in an early analysis accepted as its historic task – to smash the existing ‘feudal’ system and thereby open the way to the development of more progressive capitalism.<sup>9</sup>

In the other states of Southeast Asia the old structures were in varying degrees replaced by one or another type of European system based on capitalism, and now most of these states have taken off, as Marx supposed, on their own capitalist paths, and moreover show varying degrees of capitalist crisis.

The same process prevailed in Thailand in spite of its formal independence. In this respect Burma and Viet Nam seemed for some time to lag behind the others, but perhaps deliberately in order to test innovations, and in the end they may be the most successful. Certainly now, in 2009, there can be no doubt that Viet Nam has been successful.<sup>10</sup>

This process of smashing a pre-modern structure to embark on a path mimicking the West has only now, since 1991, begun in Cambodia, at a time and in a way which may prove disastrous. Under the French Protectorate not only

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<sup>9</sup> ‘Feudal’ is in inverted commas because the term is inaccurate for Southeast Asia. I shall comment on this below. Later Marx’s views changed. As Sunti Kumar Ghosh, “Marx on India”, *Monthly Review* Jan 1984, pp. 40, ff., wrote, in the 1840s-50s Marx and Engels hoped free trade and the world market would ensure capitalism everywhere; but as facts on colonialism accumulated, their “enthusiasm for capitalism as a transforming instrument cooled” (see H.B. Davis, *Towards a Marxist Theory of Nationalism*, New York, 1978).

Their early view is in articles on India in 1852 in the *New York Daily Tribune*, where they said British rule is an “unconscious tool of history”, and would rid India of the muck of ages, shatter oriental despotism, and lay “material foundations of Western society in Asia”. They believed the ruin and devastation of colonial rule was a necessary price for “the only social revolution ever heard of in Asia”; In the third volume of *Capital* there is no more talk of the Asiatic Mode of Production, but of “pre-capitalistic, national modes of production” (333); and Marx’s view of the benefits of colonialism changed. See also, Theodore Shanin, “Late Marx and the Russian ‘Periphery of Capitalism’”, *Monthly Review*, June 1983, pp. 10-24.

<sup>10</sup> It should not be forgotten that Burma was in advance of the rest of Southeast Asia, including independent Thailand, in the development of formal democratic and parliamentary procedures, and was more advanced in modern education, with a school system that still produces more competent English speakers than that of Thailand, where, a few years ago it was announced that Thailand would import Information Technology people from Burma (*Bangkok Post*, ‘Database’, 30 July 2003, “Thailand to tap Burma for IT skills”).

were the royalty and the special type of bureaucracy supporting it not destroyed, they were solidified and protected under a benevolent, for them, French umbrella. Domestic opposition to the king, whether from royal pretenders or the lower orders, was successfully suppressed, and Cambodian kings, from Norodom (r. 1864-1904) to his great-grandson Sihanouk (r. 1941-1955, 1993-2005), sat more solidly on their thrones than at any time since Angkor.

No capitalist bourgeoisie, either local or French, developed, for French economic interests lay elsewhere, and merchants were mostly foreign, thus outside political life, and, like the Cambodian elite, interested in accumulation for consumption, not investment for production. The great majority of Khmer were poor peasants. In mid-19th century, when western colonialism and capitalism began to impinge on Cambodia, Cambodians had no more memory of their great past than the Greeks had of theirs as they struggled for independence.<sup>11</sup>

Nor were the Cambodians even fighting for independence. They were near the bottom of an ancient Asian international system in which, contrary to the modern, equality of states, even nominally, was unknown, and each polity was situated in a hierarchy, with China at the apex. Cambodia was ranked below both Thailand and Viet Nam, but above, for example, the Jarai who had for centuries maintained a traditional diplomatic relationship with the Cambodian court, and probably with the court in Viet Nam, and earlier Champa, as well.<sup>12</sup>

Within this structure ‘independence’ did not mean what it does in the modern world – indeed there may have been no such concept. This was particularly true for those polities near the bottom of the international hierarchy, such as Cambodia. At least the words for ‘independence’ in Southeast Asian languages are all modern creations, and traditional histories stress, not independence or its loss, but the types and degrees of dependence or obligations to other polities, which were formed, altered, broken, or renewed as power relationships changed.<sup>13</sup>

There had been a time when the territory now forming central Thailand, the core of the Kingdom of Ayutthaya, after 1782 centered in Bangkok, was ethnically Khmer and Mon, and probably under Angkor hegemony. No precise date for the reversal of that hegemony may be established, but the older

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<sup>11</sup> Tom Nairn, *The Break-Up of Britain*, pp. 105-6, quoting D. Dakin, *The Greek Struggle for Independence 1821-1833*, “Those who spoke the Greek language ... had no notion of classical Greece ... The classical ruins were quite unintelligible to early modern Greeks [who] ... called themselves Romans”.

<sup>12</sup> See Charles Meyer, “Les mystérieuses relations entre les rois du Cambodge et les ‘Po’tào’ des Jarai”, *Études cambodgiennes*, No. 4, Octobre-Décembre 1965, pp. 14-26. I have not found records of similar Jarai-Viet Nam contact.

<sup>13</sup> By ‘traditional histories’ I mean chronicles written before European contact, not modern history compilations dealing with ancient times.

relationship continued, terminologically, on the Thai side well into the new society.

The site of Angkor, throughout the chronicles of Ayutthaya and Bangkok, is called ‘Nakhon (*nagara*) Luang’, ‘the capital’ *par excellence*, a terminological relic of a time when it had really been such, preserved long into a time after it had become a collection of nearly deserted and forgotten temples under the authority of a minor governor dependent on Ayutthaya and then on Bangkok.

It may be inferred that the reversal of hegemony was not a sharp break, but very gradual and never apparent to those involved, for Ayutthaya probably began as a Khmer center and was still Khmer when Angkor was abandoned as their political center by the elite within Cambodia in mid-15th century.<sup>14</sup>

On the other side, an old Cambodian chronicle outside the canonical tradition, and probably more accurate, portrays an early 17th-century Cambodian king as manifesting from a position of strength a condescending attitude to the Vietnamese Nguyễn ruler at what is a crucial moment in traditional Cambodian historiography which portrays the events as marking Viet Nam’s first occupation of Cambodian territory around 1620.

This first record of relations between them portrays the Nguyễn King of Hué, when about to go to war with the rival Trịnh rulers in the north, requesting war elephants from the Cambodian king, and offering a daughter in return.<sup>15</sup> The tone of this Cambodian chronicle suggests that not only did they not feel threatened, but considered the Vietnamese royalty as lower in rank.

In another reversal of fortunes and hegemony, without any evocation of ‘independence’, Prince Nguyễn Anh, the future Gia Long, the first king of the restored Nguyễn dynasty in Viet Nam, having been chased from his country by rebels, placed himself under the protection of King Rama I (r. 1782-1809) of Bangkok, and then after reconquering Viet Nam sent tribute signifying

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<sup>14</sup> For the elements of this argument, which has not yet been fully published, see Michael Vickery, “The 2/k.125 Fragment, a Lost Chronicle of Ayutthaya”, *Journal of the Siam Society* LXV, 1 (January 1977), 1-80; Chris Baker, “Ayutthaya Rising: From the Land or From the Sea”, *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 34/1 (2003), pp. 41-62; Yoneo Ishii, “A reinterpretation of Thai history with special reference to the pre-modern period”. Paper presented at the 8<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Thai Studies at Nakhon Phanom, January 2002.

<sup>15</sup> See Michael Vickery, “Cambodia After Angkor, The Chronicular Evidence for the Fourteenth to Sixteenth Centuries”, Ph.D. Thesis, Yale, 1977, pp. 200-217; Mak Phoeun, *Histoire du Cambodge de la fin du XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle au début du XVIII<sup>e</sup>*, where it is clear that the first Vietnamese military intervention in Cambodia was in 1658, and the first occupation of territory in the 1690s; Vickery, review of Mak Phoeun, in *Bulletin de l’École Française d’Extrême-Orient (BEFO)* Tome 83 (1996), pp. 405-15; and Vickery, “‘1620’ A Cautionary Tale”, forthcoming in Felicitation volume for John Whitmore. The chronicle fragment which I am citing places the event in 1613, perhaps not quite accurate. At least the event was in that decade.

acknowledgement of hegemony until his death in 1820. This was discontinued by his successor, Minh Mang.

By the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century Cambodia had fallen into a position of double dependency, in which it remained long enough that by the time the French arrived there was probably no conception among its ruling class of any other possibility.

During the time of competing hegemonies between Thailand and Viet Nam, which unavoidably involved Cambodia as battlefield and object of dispute, Cambodian rulers opted for the hegemony of one or another of their neighbors according to positions of relative strength, and possibly ideological preferences. At least, it is mistaken to project contemporary prejudices into the past and assert that Viet Nam was always the greater danger and the more foreign.

It is bad history, as seen in Mabbett and Chandler, to treat King Chan (r. 1806-34) and his faction, who sought support from Viet Nam, as less patriotic or less competent than those who preferred Thai patronage. To do so is to project modern chauvinism onto that time. A historian of the period must accept a priori that some Cambodians were pro-Vietnamese, some pro-Thai, for legitimate reasons of personal or class interest, or even patriotism as they saw it, and not transpose 20th-century prejudices and preconceptions.<sup>16</sup>

The pro-Vietnamese faction of Cambodian royalty lost in the last Thai-Vietnamese arrangement before the French, in 1846-48, which put Sihanouk's Thai-educated and protected great-great-grandfather Ang Duang on the throne as a formally joint vassal of Thailand and Viet Nam.

Since then Cambodian tradition has been recounted and written by the descendents of the pro-Thai faction, of whom some, following the tradition of Ang Duang, were proud of their Thai education and fluent linguistic competence at least as late as the 1940s.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> As in Ian Mabbett and David Chandler, *The Khmers*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1995, p. 229, "the unfortunate choice made by ... King Chan (r. 1806-34) to resist Siam by seeking the countervailing patronage of Vietnam". This is also a defect in David P. Chandler, "Songs at the Edge of the Forest", in David K. Wyatt and Alexander Woodside, eds., *Moral Order and the Question of Change: Essays on Southeast Asian Thought*, Yale Southeast Asia Studies, 1982. See also comment in Evans and Rowley, *Red Brotherhood at War* (first edition), London, Verso, 1984; (second edition), London, Verso, 1990, pp. 2-7, with the especially trenchant reference, p. 2, to Elizabeth Becker, who had lifted her remarks from David Chandler, *A History of Cambodia*, p. 127. All references to this work, unless otherwise noted, are to the third edition, Boulder, Westview Press, 2000. All citations from Evans and Rowley, unless explicitly referred to the first, are to their second edition.

<sup>17</sup> These were persons of the generation of Sihanouk's grandparents, whom the American Thai linguist, William J. Gedney, met on a trip to Cambodia at that time (personal information from Gedney). Before becoming king, Ang Duang spent many years in Bangkok for education and as protégé of King Mongkut. For a general history of this period see Chandler, *A History*; and Philippe Devillers, [sections on Indochina], in *L'Asie du sud-est II, L'Histoire du XXe Siècle*, Paris, Éditions Sirey, 1971.



Thus the danger from Viet Nam exclusively has been emphasized by all regimes in independent Cambodia, except the PRK/SOC from 1979 to 1993, and this emphasis has been continued by a reactionary opposition faction eager to overthrow the CPP and Hun Sen with the accusation that they are Vietnamese agents.<sup>18</sup>

To what extent are the chauvinists correct? Is Vietnamese expansion an inevitable threat? And is Cambodia not equally threatened by Thailand, a subject rarely evoked by either academics or media, and emphatically, if inadequately, denied by Thailand's chief military-political propagandist, General Charan Kullavanija, then Secretary-General of the Thai National Security Council.<sup>19</sup>

In his *A History of Cambodia* David Chandler wrote that the border between Cambodia and Viet Nam is one of the greatest cultural divides of Southeast Asia.<sup>20</sup> This was 'borrowed' by Elizabeth Becker who added that "it marks the frontiers of Asia's two great cultures, China and India ... the Cambodians would represent the artistic Latin culture, the Vietnamese the industrious northern temperament".<sup>21</sup> Like most such idealistic metaphor-bashing, this is largely nonsense.

There is, however, a real materialistic divide, but it is not based on the cultures and personalities of present inhabitants; and the eventual expansion of the Vietnamese-to-be out of their Red River valley homeland between the 10th and the 18th centuries is an undoubted part of the historical record. In this process they moved down over the narrow central plains, until then occupied by the Cham, whom they absorbed and gradually transformed into Vietnamese.

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<sup>18</sup> See Evans and Rowley, pp. 35-57. The acronyms are for 'People's Republic of Kampuchea' (1979-1989), and 'State of Cambodia' (1989-1993). The latest (since April 2006) accusation by this opposition is that Hun Sen and the CPP are illegitimately giving up territory to Viet Nam through border demarcation treaties. For detail see Vickery, *Cambodia A Political Survey*, Phnom Penh, 2007, pp. 183-192. Because of the anti-Viet Nam stance this faction has enjoyed much western support.

<sup>19</sup> General Charan, *Bangkok Post*, 25 June 1992, p. 5. See also Evans and Rowley, pp. 6-7.

<sup>20</sup> Chandler, *A History* (first edition), Boulder, Westview Press, 1983, p.127, "the two peoples lived on different sides of a deep cultural divide, perhaps the most sharply defined of those in effect in nineteenth-century Southeast Asia" a view which Chandler, in answer to an objection from me, said then that he no longer held. However, this statement was maintained on the same page in the second and third editions of his *History*, published in 1992 and 2000, p. 153 in the fourth, and in the Khmer translation of his book, p.137.

<sup>21</sup> Elizabeth Becker, *When the War Was Over*, first edition, New York, Simon and Schuster 1986, p. 337; second edition, New York, Public Affairs, p. 329, where there is no credit to Chandler. Further citations from Becker's book, unless otherwise noted, are from the second edition. Unacknowledged borrowing from scholars is one of Becker's notable defects (below, note 358). See also Philip Short, *Pol Pot*, London, John Murray, 2004, p. 41, typically without reference to predecessors.

The process was not steady, and the *nam tiến* (progress southward) is a myth. There were frequent retreats from Cham attacks. The process is better explained by reference to objective geographical-economic conditions, and the reversal of fortunes against the Cham, who were at first aggressors, was not clear for over three hundred years.<sup>22</sup>

Viet Nam, considered within its modern boundaries, consists of two large plains in the north and south joined by an extremely narrow strip of flat land squeezed between mountains and sea, with a few small spots of fertile lowlands at river mouths along the coast.

A reasonable hypothesis about the prehistory of the region is that when societal development had progressed beyond prehistoric village level, the occupants of the narrow central coast were forced to depend on, or seek control of, one or both of the large plains in the north and south. Conversely, the societies of the large plains, in reaction against pressure from the central coast peoples, sought to dominate them.

These inevitable processes are amply documented, although too often obscured by French-colonial, and anti-Vietnamese post-colonial, treatments which emphasize the ethnic difference, and depict the process as unilateral Vietnamese aggression. In fact periods of warfare alternated with times of peace and cooperation, and in the late 14th century Cham aggression overran most of northern Viet Nam and nearly captured its capital.<sup>23</sup>

Until the 17th century Viet Nam was of less immediate significance for Cambodia than developments in what is now Thailand, since Champa was still a buffer between Viet Nam and Cambodia, and the Cham conflict with Viet Nam was not a menace to Cambodia, while Cambodia and Thailand were in direct and equal competition for favored status on the international sea-trade route to China.<sup>24</sup>

Indirectly, Vietnamese pressure on Champa may have been of benefit to Cambodia which, since the 9<sup>th</sup> century, had been in sporadic conflict with

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<sup>22</sup> Michael Vickery, "Champa Revised", 2005, long version available as ARI WPS No. 37 at the following URL: [http://www.ari.nus.edu.sg/docs/wps/wps05\\_037.pdf](http://www.ari.nus.edu.sg/docs/wps/wps05_037.pdf); "Histoire du Champa", *Tresors de l'Art du Vietnam La Sculpture du Champa*, Paris, Musée Guimet, 2005, pp. 23-35; and on *nam tiến* note 58 below.

<sup>23</sup> These were the campaigns of the Cham leader Che [a Cham princely title] Bong Nga [a name known only from Vietnamese records]. See Georges Maspero, *Le royaume de Champa*, pp. 203-220; and Vickery, "Champa Revised". See also John K. Whitmore, University of Michigan, "The Last Great King of Classical Southeast Asia: 'Che Bong Nga' and Fourteenth Century Champa", to be published in a volume of papers from the 2004 Champa conference in Singapore.

<sup>24</sup> Vickery, "Champa Revised", Yoneo Ishii, ed., *The Junk Trade from Southeast Asia, Translations from the Tôsen Fusetsu-gaki, 1674-1723*, pp. 153-193, showing that in the 17<sup>th</sup> century Cambodia in certain periods even outstripped Ayutthaya in trade with Japan; Chris Baker, "Ayutthaya Rising: From the Land or From the Sea".

Champa over control of the rivers and ports of the Champa coast, now central Viet Nam.

Cham interest and influence in Cambodia is manifest in the Spanish and Portuguese reports from Cambodia in the 1590s and in the circumstance that a Cambodian king, no doubt seeing the benefit to Cambodia of integration into the Moslem-dominated Southeast Asian maritime network, in 1642 embraced Islam, to which the Cham in Cambodia had in majority converted during the previous 200 years.

That was the mainland high-water mark of the rapid expansion of Islam in Southeast Asia, and its repulsion, with the return of Cambodian royalty to Buddhism in 1658, coincided, although no causality may be deduced, with the beginning of Cambodia's decline as a Southeast Asian power.<sup>25</sup>

It is important to recognize that tension, rivalry, and conflict between the Cambodian central plain and the southeastern coast have been constants throughout recorded history from Funan (2nd-6th centuries), when the rival groups may both have been Khmer, or related Mon-Khmer, through the Angkor period (9th-14th centuries) when the contesting groups were Khmer and Cham, to modern times when the Cham have been assimilated to and replaced by Vietnamese.

Until mid-17th century Cambodia competed as an equal with its neighbors both east and west. Thereafter Ayutthaya's more cohesive political-administrative structure and its larger hinterland supplying desirable products resulted in greater wealth and state power, while Cambodia gradually, weakened from the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century by factional rivalry among its elite, became an economic backwater.<sup>26</sup>

As the Vietnamese step-by-step completed their domination of Champa, they occupied areas which made tension between them and Cambodia inevitable; and by the 1690s (not the 1620s) the Saigon area, an ancient Khmer zone, was in their hands, with the potential to dominate Cambodia's foreign commerce. It is important to note, however, that the first Vietnamese intervention within

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<sup>25</sup> On the Iberians in Cambodia in the 16<sup>th</sup> century see Bernard P Groslier, *Angkor et le cambodge au XVIIe siecle*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1958; Pierre-Yves Manguin, "L'Introduction de l'Islam au Campā", *BEFEO*, LXVI, 1979, pp. 255-287.

The majority of Cham in Viet Nam in the Phan Tiet-Phan Rang area have not converted to Islam. Chandler, in his *A History*, has ignored the political-economic importance of the reign of Cambodia's Moslem king, passing it off with the traditional explanation that he had fallen in love with a Malay girl. See Carol Kersten, "Cambodia's Muslim King: Khmer and Dutch Sources on the Conversion of Reameathipadei (1642-58)", *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, February 2006. I wish to apologize for my letter (TLS, 14 December 1984, p. 1447) denying the importance of Prof. R.B. Smith's criticism of Chandler's neglect of this subject.

<sup>26</sup> Cambodia's decline in the 18<sup>th</sup> century still lacks adequate scholarly treatment.

Cambodia, in 1658, had been at the invitation of a Cambodian royal faction, requesting help against the Cham, and to oust the Islamic king.

When the Cham danger had disappeared, the tendency to rely on outside help in internal power struggles continued, and during the end of the 18th and first half of the 19th centuries, Cambodian royalty, following traditional economic-political fault lines, were split into pro-Thai and pro-Vietnamese factions and the country was prey to invading armies supporting the Cambodian agents of Bangkok or Hué.<sup>27</sup>

We must not ignore, as conventional wisdom does, that to Cambodia's west a similar process was underway. Just as the Cham were being absorbed into Viet Nam, the Mon and Khmer of central Thailand were being absorbed and transformed by the Thai, and expansion against neighbors was as much a part of Thai development as of Vietnamese. A map showing stages of Vietnamese expansionism against Champa, Cambodia and Laos is *de rigueur* in textbooks of Southeast Asian history and popular journalistic treatments, and this expansion of one country against its neighbors in Southeast Asia is presented as something uniquely Vietnamese.

Rarely, if ever, does one see a similar map illustrating Thai expansionism, during roughly the same time and against some of the same victims, Mon and Khmer, who, like the Cham and Khmer of Southern Viet Nam, have been reduced in the first instance (Mon) to an insignificant minority, and in the second to a somewhat larger, potentially more troublesome, minority, without recognized cultural or linguistic rights and conscious of its invidious position.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> For the first Vietnamese intervention see Mak Phoeun and Po Dharma, "La première intervention militaire vietnamienne au Cambodge (1658-1659)", *BEFEO* LXIII (1984), pp. 285-318. For subsequent involvement of Thai and Vietnamese in Cambodia see Chandler, *A History*.

<sup>28</sup> Cited from my "Notes on the Political Economy of the People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK)", *Journal of Contemporary Asia (JCA)*, Vol. 20, No. 4 (1990), pp. 435-436. Ethnic minority rights are guaranteed by the Vietnamese constitution, but unmentioned in the Thai; and primary education in minority languages is even less conceivable in Thailand than among the Cham and Khmer of Vietnam. I must emphasize that my purpose here is not to single out Thailand for blame, for in these matters Thailand's conduct has been well within standard international norms. The purpose is to call attention to the way in which Viet Nam's positions have been viewed through the blinkers of colonialist and imperialist prejudices, and, on the part of academics, intellectually dishonest analyses.

An example of such a map of Vietnam is in Nayan Chanda, *Brother Enemy, The War After the War*, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Publishers, San Diego, New York, London, 1986, p. 50. Part of the problem, at least among journalists, is that the gradual encroachment by Thai into areas of Mon and Khmer population is not recognized in standard Thai history. Too many western historians of Thailand have given it too little emphasis, an example being the currently popular version, David K. Wyatt, *Thailand: A Short History*, Chiang Mai, Silksworm Books, 1991, which is hardly more than an English

This made it very easy for France to secure its foothold. The Cambodians calculated that dependency under France would be less onerous than under their neighbors, of whom Thailand at the time, the 1860s, was their major concern.<sup>29</sup>

The Cambodians took the Protectorate seriously, expecting protection against their neighbors, and within the country protection for the ruling family against its rivals. Indeed, the latter was the greatest threat. King Norodom, Ang Duang's son, with whom France signed the so-called Protectorate treaty in 1863, had in 1861 nearly been dethroned by a more popular younger brother, Sivotha, and had to flee to Bangkok for protection from one of Sivotha's assaults.<sup>30</sup>

This incident provides an example of hegemonistic maneuvering by Bangkok, which prefigured their support for unpopular *contras*, such as the Khmer Rouge, 'Khmer Serei', KPNLF, and FUNCINPEC, after 1979.

In the record of a meeting of Thai royalty and ministers of state in 1861 to decide which of two contending Cambodian princes, Norodom or Sivotha, should get Thai support to become the new Cambodian king, the tenor of the discussion was that "Prince Norodom is the eldest son, but the people do not like him, he is unstable ... his younger brother is steadfast, the people like and respect him very much ... if we make the younger brother king, he will not feel gratitude toward us, because he will consider that he was made king because he was popular ... if we make Prince Norodom king, he will be very grateful, because no one respects him ... and His Majesty [King Mongkut] agreed".<sup>31</sup>

So, Norodom like Sihanouk in 1991 returned to Cambodia with an impressive Thai escort; French support after 1863 removed the danger of Sivotha, the Thai were forced to give up their privileged position in 1867, and Cambodia went on into the 20th century as a Protectorate within French Indochina.

version of a Thai school textbook. For a succinct corrective see Evans and Rowley, pp. 6-7.

<sup>29</sup> The French foisted the canard that the protectorate agreement protected Cambodia from Viet Nam; but since most of southern Viet Nam had already been conquered by the French, there was no longer any danger to Cambodia from that quarter. Moreover, the French argued that after conquering southern Viet Nam in 1862-1867 they had inherited suzerainty over Cambodia from Viet Nam, a suzerainty which they magnanimously converted to a mere protectorate in their 1863 treaty of "Friendship and Commerce" with Cambodia.

In the original French the preamble of the treaty said that one of its purposes was to "régler ... les conditions auxquelles S.M. l'Empereur des Français consent à transformer ses droits de suzeraineté sur le royaume du Cambodge en un protectorat" (Georges Taboulet, *La geste française en Indochine*, Tome II, p. 624 ).

<sup>30</sup> Alain Forest, *Le Cambodge et la colonisation française, histoire d'une colonisation sans heurts* [sic!] (1897-1920), p. 6.

<sup>31</sup> *Royal Ratanakosin Chronicle*, Fourth Reign [King Mongkut], Royal Library Edition [in Thai], "Röang möang khamer [Cambodian affairs] (continued)", pp. 597-598.

The status of 'protectorate' rather than 'colony' must be understood. It meant that unlike Southern Viet Nam, Cochinchina, *de jure*, and all of Viet Nam *de facto*, a thoroughly French administration from capital to village was not set up.

The old Cambodian state structure was left in place, the prestige of king, royal family, and aristocracy was preserved, with in fact much greater security from internal disturbances, provincial administration under governors from dominant local families was maintained, and in their usual activities most Cambodian villagers rarely had to deal with a Frenchman.

French control was maintained by a parallel structure of a *Résident Supérieur* in Phnom Penh subordinate to the Governor-General in Hanoi, and *Résidents* at provincial level, who gave 'advice' to their Cambodian counterparts. Cambodia was not a very important component of French Indochina, and except for the very heavy taxation, worse than in Viet Nam or Laos, French rule did not greatly impinge on the life of ordinary people.<sup>32</sup>

After 1945, during a period of only 30 years, Cambodia attempted to move out of a backwater of Asiatic 'feudalism' through a bourgeois revolution followed immediately by a socialist revolution, without the classes which formed elsewhere to carry out either of those revolutions, indeed with a society whose structure was appropriate only to its own Mode of Production.<sup>33</sup>

In contrast to Viet Nam, Burma, or Indonesia, colonialism had not carried out its progressive task of destroying the old society and setting foundations for capitalism, let alone socialism.<sup>34</sup> A royalty already foundering and decadent was preserved in aspic in palaces which it could not have afforded on its own; the small number of newly educated, instead of becoming progressive proto-bourgeois, were coopted, or if hopeless rebels were exiled, and the mass of the population, peasants, remained under the hegemony of a complex of ideas in

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<sup>32</sup> For details of the taxation, see *Chandler, A History*, fourth edition, Westview Press, 2008 pp. 187-8, 191-2.

<sup>33</sup> Instead of 'feudalism' I would prefer to say 'Asiatic Mode of Production', but fear it would evoke controversies irrelevant to, and distracting from, the present discussion. The crucial difference from feudalism is that in the relevant Asiatic societies private property in land was absent or very weak, and the conditions for formation of an urban bourgeoisie of the European type were lacking.

For positive treatments of 'Asiatic Mode of Production' as an explanatory category see Rudolf Bahro, *The Alternative in Eastern Europe*, London, Verso Edition, 1981; and George Konrad and Ivan Szelényi, *The Intellectuals on the Road to Class Power*, New York, Harcourt Brace & Company, 1979. Reactionaries take note that these authors were 1970s dissidents from respectively the German Democratic Republic (East Germany) and communist Hungary whose works were hailed, at least as long as they were not understood, by western anti-communists.

<sup>34</sup> Note that Marx and Engels agreed with the most right-wing imperialists that capitalism was a progressive stage, and that colonialism would usher in this progressive stage in Asia and Africa.

which the function of king was inextricably mixed with religion and the ceremonies necessary for social well-being.<sup>35</sup>

As in other colonial countries, little was done to inculcate the best values of the West. Although the French babbled on about their *mission civilisatrice*, and the British, under protest, went through motions of establishing some democratic forms, what Asians saw of modern western society was simply a new, and foreign, ruling class, as rapacious economically and as exclusive socially as the old. In front of the fine rhetoric were brutal officials, secret police, imprisonment without trial, partisan justice, and political pay-offs.<sup>36</sup>

If these negative features have been prominent in newly independent former colonies, and in formally independent Thailand, under heavy British imperial influence, it is not just 'traditional' society reasserting itself, but also imitation of the West as seen in its practice in Cambodia, Viet Nam, Burma, etc.

In fact, Cambodia, because of the peculiar nature of its Protectorate, may have been imbued with the worst possible mixture of the negative features of both types of society. Whereas in Burma, where colonialism had carried out what the young Marx considered its progressive role, by 1908 new barristers were returning from education in England, while in protected royalist Cambodia there was no high school until 1935.<sup>37</sup>

When the Pacific War ended in 1945 the royalty, like their counterparts in Malaya and East Sumatra, wanted nothing more than return of the protecting power. Like those other royals, they had neighbors where royal charisma had long been forgotten, replaced by strong movements for independence.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Thus the 'stop in the mind' which I evoked in *Cambodia A Political Survey*, pp. 63, 102, 117, 195.

<sup>36</sup> For an elegant description of the situation in Cambodia see *Chandler, A History*, fourth edition, pp. 187-194, in particular his treatment of the trial for the killing of the French Résident Bardez, pp. 192-193.

<sup>37</sup> On Burma and the disparity with Cambodia see Ben Kiernan, *How Pol Pot Came to Power* (second edition), New Haven, Yale University Press, 2004, p. 19.

It should also be noted that the anti-sodomy law under which an anti-regime Malay politician has been harassed in recent years, has nothing to do with supposed Islamic detestation of homosexuality (casual buggery among 'heterosexuals' is rather common in Malaysia, and when not a political issue is ignored by the authorities), but is a British colonial relic, as is the law for indefinitely renewable two-year political incarceration without trial. The same British colonial laws have also been preserved in non-Muslim Singapore, and for the same reasons-they were seen useful for new regimes who wanted independence, but not the greater democracy which accompanied imperial breakdown in the Mother country. Insistence on a historical treatment and on the brutality of colonial conquest is Thant Myint-U, *The River of Lost Footsteps A Personal History of Burma*, New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2006.

<sup>38</sup> See Ariffin Omar, *Bangsa Melayu, Malay Conceptions of Democracy and Community 1945-1950*, Southeast Asian Historical Monographs, Oxford University Press, 1993.

Like the early Malay nationalist movements who desired inclusion in a Great Indonesia, there were Cambodian anti-royalist nationalist intellectuals who, while not advocating absorption of Cambodia by Viet Nam, saw Viet Nam as a more developed and progressive nation, and its language as a better vehicle for modern education than Khmer.

If by that time there was no longer royalty with equal fluency and interest in Vietnamese to counterbalance the Thai culture of the Norodom, that interest had been taken over by members of a rising class who would play a role in elite politics for the next 40 years.<sup>39</sup> Among those intellectuals was one tendency whose goal was multi-party democracy and capitalism, although they probably would have rejected the latter term, and a more radical group who admired socialism.

Unlike the situation in western Europe at a comparable period of its history, neither of these intellectual tendencies represented organic intellectuals of already formed classes. There was no industrial bourgeoisie trying to take political power, nor *a fortiori*, was there a proletariat needing guidance forward into socialism.<sup>40</sup>

The new class which naturally rose out of a dissolving Asiatic Mode of Production under the impact of colonial capitalism was a petty bourgeoisie. They existed in embryo in the interstices of the old society between the ruling class of royalty and aristocrat-bureaucrats and peasantry as petty traders, monastery-educated poor men trying to climb socially as independent intellectuals, or as private clerks in the personal retinue of the elite (in old Ayutthaya-Krung Thep the *tnāy*).<sup>41</sup>

Their chance as a class came when the traditional bureaucracies were opened to all comers on the basis of education and talent, either after destruction of the old regimes by colonial powers, or, as in independent Thailand, when administrative modernization was seen as necessary to preserve independence,

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<sup>39</sup> See sources in notes 72-73, below.

<sup>40</sup> See George Konrad and Ivan Szelényi, in general, and pp. 85-86; Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, remarks on “the relationship of the political and literary representatives of a class to the class that they represent”, pp. 461-462 in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, edited by Robert C. Tucker, New York, W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1972, and pp. 281-282 in Karl Marx et Friedrich Engels, *Oevres choisies*, Tome I, Moscou, Éditions du Progrès, 1955.

<sup>41</sup> Examples in Thailand of rising lower-class intellectuals were Thianwan/Tianwan and K.S.R. Kulap, both of whom spent time in prison for their writing. For Tianwan see Sulak Sivaraksa, “The Crisis of Siamese Identity”, in Craig J. Reynolds, ed., *National Identity and its Defenders, Thailand 1939-1989*, pp. 45, 57; and on Kulap see Craig Reynolds, “The case of K.S.R. Kulap: A Challenge to Royal Historical Writing in Late Nineteenth Century Thailand”, *Journal of the Siam Society* 61/2 (July 1973), pp. 63-90.



and, incidentally, to enable the royalty to overthrow the hegemony which the bureaucratic aristocrats had held since early in the nineteenth century.<sup>42</sup>

The new petty bourgeoisie then develops within the new bureaucracy, the traditional locus of power, but they are blocked from becoming a ruling class like the old bureaucracy, for that slot is occupied by the colonial power, or in Thailand after 1870 by the royalty. Neither can the new petty bourgeoisie become a true entrepreneurial bourgeoisie, because that slot, if not occupied by *colons*, is maintained, as in Thailand, by a local foreign element originating in the agents of the state who managed trade under the old regimes (in Southeast Asia mostly Chinese).

The new petty bourgeoisie is envious of the entrepreneurial bourgeoisie, as in Europe, but is unable to compete with them, and seeks administrative redressment of complaints through seizure of political control, as occurred in Thailand in 1932. This is made easier because entrepreneurs are a different ethnic group who cannot compete in the political arena, and class conflict is disguised as ethnic rivalry, even for outside observers and western social scientists.<sup>43</sup>

In this situation the emerging bourgeoisie, because of its foreign origin, cannot win power via democracy, as in Europe, and must seek strategic alliances with colonial powers, or with royalty (Thailand), or with the new petty bourgeoisie. Cambodia's Khieu Samphan with his 1959 dissertation was offering himself as an intellectual for the emerging capitalist class, but was rejected, if only because the entrepreneurial bourgeoisie was not yet constituted as a class in Cambodia, and its individuals preferred to make their own deals with Sihanouk.

As I noted briefly in *Cambodia 1975-1982*, Samphan's conception of potential Cambodian development owed less to Marx than to the German 'national economist' Friedrich List (born 1789), whose prescriptions for development very closely resemble the statist policies followed by such modern successes as the Republic of Korea.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> See Michael Vickery, "Thai Regional Elites and the Reforms of King Chulalongkorn", *Journal of Asian Studies* XXIX, 4 (August 1970), 863-881.

<sup>43</sup> I deliberately refrain here from drawing an obvious comparison with Central Europe in the 1930s, not because I think it is irrelevant, or uncomfortable, but in order to avoid a long discussion which is not relevant to the purpose of this book.

<sup>44</sup> Khieu Samphan, "L'Économie du Cambodge et ses problèmes d'industrialisation", Paris 1959, published in English translation by Laura Summers as "Cambodia's economy and Industrial Development", Data Paper Number 111, Southeast Asia Program, Department of Asian Studies, Cornell University, March 1979; Vickery, *Cambodia 1975-1982*, p. 267. For an interesting comment on the relevance of List, but without mention of Khieu Samphan, see Aidan Foster-Carter, "Friedrich List lives", *Inside Asia*, September-October 1985, pp. 33-34. See also below, and note the misunderstanding of Khieu Samphan by Shawcross, text with n. 470, below.

The excesses of Democratic Kampuchea were not only peasant revenge against the city, as I emphasized in *Cambodia 1975-1982*, but revenge by petty-bourgeois intellectuals against capitalists and those who had rejected them in the old society.

In Cambodia, after 1945, the new intellectuals tried at first to take power through the electoral process under the postwar democratic constitution, and they enjoyed initial, but diminishing, success in the elections of 1947, 1948, and 1951. Their weakness was that they did not represent any class; the only radical demand they had, and the only intellectual justification for their existence, independence, could easily be taken over by their rivals. Republicanism, which some of them secretly desired, was not an option under the prevailing ideological hegemony, and, again, in the absence of a developing capitalist class in whose interest it might have been.

Just ‘democracy’, going to the polls every few years, meant little to the Cambodian populace, as became clear after independence was achieved. After their total defeat in 1955, bourgeois-oriented intellectuals in search of power had no choice, if they remained in Cambodia, but to seek a bureaucratic career, except for the few in the free professions, or with independent, inherited wealth. That is, they remained as a growing petty bourgeoisie.<sup>45</sup>

The socialist intellectuals, who in terms of family background were often indistinguishable from those with bourgeois leanings, faced similar difficulties. There was only a miniscule proletariat, and the only demand which could attract the peasantry, with whom, in the absence of a proletariat, they tried to identify, was again independence with an end to heavy French taxation.

When that was achieved in 1953-54 in a way which permitted Sihanouk to claim credit, the Cambodian radical left also collapsed. If its leaders who remained within the country did not just embark on bureaucratic careers, as many did, thus joining their more conservative comrades, but maintained radical lines within mainstream political culture, they were constrained in what they could say, and not only because of police harassment.

Since, at least until the late 1960s, there was no sufficiently large rebellious class whose demands they could articulate, they were forced to proclaim loyalty to Sihanouk while trying to push him leftward on particular issues. Thus, they proclaimed fervent support for his diplomatic openings to the socialist countries, and his denunciations of the US.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> An example of a group with elite education, inherited wealth and potential privileged entry into state service are the Thiounn (pron. /chuon/) brothers, Mum, Thioeun, and Prasith, who became, and remained until the end, fervent Democratic Kampuchea/Khmer Rouge activists.

<sup>46</sup> A good example is Hou Yuon ហ៊ូយ៉ុងហាក់វណ៌ (*The Cooperative Question*), Phnom Penh 1964, dedication, citing, sarcastically, Sihanouk’s expressed regret (in Peking) that he had not been born as an ordinary citizen, and the following introductory chapter. Hou

On domestic issues, their opposition to corruption and oppression of the peasantry had less success, and eventually forced their withdrawal to guerrilla warfare.

Sihanouk managed to outmaneuver those rivals. By skillful manipulation of French interests he succeeded in getting formal independence for himself, and favorable treatment at the 1954 Geneva Conference.<sup>47</sup> Only in Malaya, among Southeast Asian countries, did the communist movement in the 1950s and 1960s fare as badly as in Cambodia. Different from Malaya was that the defeated left were Khmer, not mainly a group which could be portrayed by the ruling classes (British and Malay elite) as foreign, like the Malayan Chinese.

From the 1955 election until his deposition in 1970 Sihanouk ruled as a despot, supported by a traditional elite whose 1950s generation had begun their bureaucratic careers as loyal servants of the Protectorate, and some of whose fathers, grandfathers and more distant forebears had served in similar positions under pre-Protectorate Cambodian kings.

Few of them had been partisans of independence until it was seen as inevitable, and they never lost the traditional Cambodian elite mentality that Cambodia needed a strong protecting power. Their ideal was a Cambodia in which they would have independence to exploit the country for their own comfort, with an outside protecting power to fend off assaults from other foreign powers and to intervene if domestic opposition to the status quo became too threatening.

Cambodia was thus an ideal field of action for the United States trying to supplant the traditional colonial powers, at first for control of valuable resources, then in general for hegemony in the 'Cold War', and finally as a strategic rear area from which to conduct war operations in Viet Nam. Amusingly, the US thought at first that they could rely on Sihanouk as a suitable right-wing princeling, and they probably could have, if they had not been too obtuse to distinguish his occasionally leftist rhetoric from his solidly reactionary domestic policies.

This lack of subtlety resulted in the exclusion of the US from Cambodia during 1965 to 1969, when good relations with Sihanouk resumed briefly to be interrupted by the coup of March 1970. American bungling aside, the changes in Sihanouk's attitude towards the US were closely related to events in Viet Nam.

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Yuon was opposed to the extreme policies which later characterized Democratic Kampuchea. Craig Etcheson's treatment of him as a Maoist and the most radical of the 'Khmer Rouge' intellectuals is mistaken (Craig Etcheson, *The Rise and Demise of Democratic Kampuchea*, Boulder, Westview Press and London, Frances Pinter (Publishers), 1984, pp. 29, 51, 144, 170-171, 20).

<sup>47</sup> See Jean Lacouture et Philippe Devillers, *La fin d'une guerre*, Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 1960.

When American-Cambodian relations soured in the early 1960s it appeared that in Viet Nam the revolutionary forces were winning. In 1969 Sihanouk may have thought this was no longer true.

Although convincing evidence of US responsibility for the 1970 coup has not been discovered, it certainly opened hitherto un hoped-for possibilities for US influence. After all, Lon Nol had nowhere else to turn, and had the war ended differently in Cambodia, not an impossible hope until 1972, the US, with French influence eradicated, would have enjoyed a position of hegemony, which they were only twenty years later, after the 1992-93 UNTAC operation, in a position to contemplate, but against competition from Japan, China and the newer capitalist states of East and Southeast Asia.

As further introduction to the position taken in this book, and as a summary of Cambodia from 1945 to 1992 in the light of that position, I reproduce selections from an article which, although journalistic in style, was published in an academic journal.

### The Cold War and Cambodia (1992)<sup>48</sup>

When Harry Truman declared Cold War on the Soviet Union in 1946 he probably didn't know where Cambodia was; and had he known, it would not have seemed a place to worry about in the international confrontation for which he was planning.<sup>49</sup>

Whatever might happen to French control over Indochina, and there were significant elements in the US government who did not wish it to continue, the alacrity with which the Cambodian ruling class had welcomed French return in 1945 indicated that they would not willingly join a Communist Bloc.<sup>50</sup>

At the same time most of the US government probably still hoped that a safely capitalist China would remain as a guardian of international righteousness in Southeast Asia. The Soviet Union, it seems, took little interest in an

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<sup>48</sup> *Journal of Oriental Studies*, Centre of Asian Studies, University of Hong Kong, Volume XXX, Numbers 1 and 2 (1992), Special Issue, *The Cold War and Beyond in Asia*, pp. 87-118, from a paper presented at the 12th Conference of Historians of Asia, June 1991, Hong Kong. Ellipses indicate cuts from the original text, which with respect to events treats the situation from 1992. There is some updating of detail to 2007, indicated with brackets.

<sup>49</sup> On Truman's responsibility see Carl Marzani, "On Interring Communism and Exalting Capitalism", *Monthly Review*, Vol. 41 (January 1990), Special Supplement, pp. 1-32, pp. 11, 14.

<sup>50</sup> See below, pg. 26.

independent Indochina, and expected that a Communist France would carry its Indochinese colonies safely into the socialist camp.<sup>51</sup>

Up to 1970 the only interest in looking at ‘the Cold War and Cambodia’ is from the Cambodian side, to see how Cambodia tried to manipulate the Cold War in its own interest, and to avoid impingement of international Cold War politics on domestic affairs. After 1970 it became clear that Cambodia had been unsuccessful in manipulation and avoidance, and the country became a casualty of the Cold War exploding into a hot one.

By 1970 Cambodia had become for an American hot-war president a key element in his strategy. Richard Nixon characterized his April 1970 invasion of Cambodia as “the Nixon Doctrine in its purest form”.<sup>52</sup> As late as 1991 the Cambodian situation, both internally and with respect to international maneuvers involving the country, suggested that there had been no change at all in the Cold War, in particular on the US side.

And now, in 1992, the US still continues Cold War policies toward Cambodia as part of the ongoing vendetta against Viet Nam. We might profitably look at what the long-lasting US-sponsored violence in Cambodia can tell us about a US regime doctrine, perhaps only implicit.

I use the term ‘Cold War’ to mean the US policy of rolling back communism and preserving the US domestic status quo (the two are intimately linked) by all means short of direct large-scale armed conflict with major communist powers. It is clear now that the other side of the Cold War, the progress of Communism, was less a concerted effort than responses to local conditions, repression by narrowly-based elites, usually linked to colonialist or foreign imperialist powers. Since the United States has always supported such elites, potential democratic movements had nowhere to turn except to ‘communism’.

I realize that there is still reasonable disagreement over precisely when, and by whose actions, the Cold War began. Given the reluctance of the George Bush [I] regime to acknowledge the Soviet decision that the Cold War no longer warranted the effort, the Bush refusal to switch to domestic policies of social investment suddenly made feasible by the Soviet peace decision (the linkage evoked above), and the manipulation of the Iraq affair to crank up Cold War tensions again and assert more boldly US pretensions to world hegemony, the burden of proof is now solidly with anyone who wishes to argue American benevolence with respect to Cold War origins. [Although this was written in

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<sup>51</sup> Gary R. Hess, *The United States’ Emergence as a Southeast Asian Power, 1940-1950*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1987, p. 312. The French Communist Party supported the French government in Algeria.

<sup>52</sup> Recorded in Noam Chomsky, “The Wider War”, in *For Reasons of State*, New York, Pantheon, 1973, p. 192, citing a press conference of 12 November 1971, and *US State Department Bulletin*, 6 December 1971, p. 646.

1992, its relevance is even greater in 2007 when the maneuvers of the first Bush regime appear in retrospect as almost leftist.]

Was the Cold War never more than a ploy in America's search for a New World Order, the central lesson of which for weaker nations is, as Noam Chomsky says, "We are the masters, and you shine our shoes"?<sup>53</sup>

The Cold War, viewed from Indochina, meant something quite different from what it was considered to be in the West. Probably few Cambodians or Vietnamese ever held, or even took seriously, the Western capitalist view that the Cold War meant holding back aggressive Communism by non-military means, nor would most of them have seen it as a struggle between two vastly different ideologies about how society should be organized. Or if they did, the meaning for them of this struggle would have been quite different from the significance of the Cold War as understood by either Soviets or Americans. On the eve of the 1954 Geneva conference American analysts recognized this when they wrote that in Cambodia:

The Viet Minh is unpopular ... because its members are Vietnamese ... ; but in times of crisis their [Cambodian] political leadership is often unpredictable ... there has been a widespread tendency ... to regard the war against the Viet Minh as being 'someone else's business'. In addition ... there are rival cliques presently contending for political power.<sup>54</sup>

For politically conscious Indochinese the Cold War, even if the term was not yet coined, really began with the German defeat of France in 1940, "a great day", as Simone Weil wrote, "for the people of Indochina".<sup>55</sup> Their 'Cold War' meant first playing off the Japanese against the French government of Indochina, then operating among the victorious Allied powers to secure independence, gain advantages over domestic opponents, and settle irredentist questions in the most satisfactory manner.

In this Cold War it was not the international Communist side which was viewed as a threat, even by royalists with domestic capitalist support and internal leftist opposition, such as Sihanouk. Until 1950, the Chinese Nationalists, via local Chinese communities, may have been viewed as more threatening than the communists, especially in view of the US-supported ex-Kuomintang incursions into Burma and Thailand.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Noam Chomsky, "The weak shall inherit nothing", *Guardian Weekly*, 7 April 1991, p. 8.

<sup>54</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States 1952-1954*, Volume XVI, "The Geneva Conference", p. 1026, "Memorandum by Chester L. Cooper and Joseph A. Yager of the United States Delegation to the Special Adviser (Heath).

<sup>55</sup> Quoted from David Rieff, "Telling Foreign Truths", *Harper's Magazine*, November 1990, p. 15.

<sup>56</sup> Bertil Lintner, *Burma in Revolt*, Chiang Mai, Silkworm Books, 1999, pp. 110-140

After 1949 the most dangerous major power, whether for Vietnamese communists or Cambodian royalists, was the US, and the real issue in the Cold War for Sihanouk who dominated his country's politics from 1945 to 1970, and again [1992-1994] tried to play a power-broker role, was, and still is, how to manipulate rival blocs to influence his struggle with domestic opponents, both of the left and right.

The Indochinese little Cold War, like the US-Soviet larger one, has some of its roots in the objective historical background. Indeed it might be argued that the big Cold War is only a special case of traditional *realpolitik*, the continuance of aggressive pursuit of state goals by means short of war, and that the ideological differences which have been emphasized are mere *epiphenomena*. This has been particularly clear since the Soviet Union opted out of the Cold War, and released its client states, with the result that the US regime has rushed into armed aggression which the US would not have dared undertake a few years earlier when there was risk of Soviet opposition.

Probably few now concerned with the Cold War take note that two of the most astute 19th-century observers of international relations, Alexis de Tocqueville, writing in the 1830s, and the first George Kennan, in the 1890s, predicted that the great struggle of the 20th century would be between the United States and the Russian Empire – thus all questions of ideology aside.<sup>57</sup>

For Marx as well, the Cold War would have been nothing more than a period in an objectively determined conflict, between a capitalism following its own logic, and growing socialism. Indeed the antics of the two Bush regimes, after a couple of years of hasty celebration of the death of Marxism, have demonstrated Marxism's continuing utility.

While there can be no doubt that Marx was mistaken about some details, the US has demonstrated that Lenin was fairly right about imperialism, as were Stalin, Mao, Sukarno and all the other communist and leftist national leaders of the 1950s and 1960s about the dangers of US aggression. Thus the supposed end of the Cold War is a mirage, and does not presage an era of peace among the great powers. Indeed current events suggest the next phase of the struggle may be even more violent. [This paragraph, first written in 1992, seems even more apt now in 2007-9.]

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<sup>57</sup> Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* [Vol. 1], New York, Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1948, p. 434, "There are at the present time two great nations in the world, which started from different points, but which seem to tend towards the same end. I allude to the Russians and the Americans ... Their starting point is different and their courses are not the same; yet each of them seems marked out by the will of heaven to sway the destinies of half the earth". George Kennan, not to be confused with the more famous 20th-century diplomat-scholar George F. Kennan, traveled widely in Russia and wrote *Siberia and the Exile System*, New York and London, 1891.

Unlike the US-Russian rivalry which was predicted long before Communism was an issue, a Thai-Vietnamese rivalry with Cambodia in the middle probably would not have been predicted by anyone before the countries concerned found themselves in hot warfare in the 1830s, even though the long converging *Drang nach Suden* of both peoples should have made such an outcome rather clear.<sup>58</sup>

It was Burma, not Viet Nam, which Bangkok rulers regarded as the 'hereditary enemy', although the Thai king Rama III, on his deathbed in 1851, considered that the Burmese and Vietnamese problems had been settled, and that his successors should be more concerned about the advancing Europeans.<sup>59</sup>

The conception of a deep cultural divide between Sinitic Viet Nam and Indic Buddhist Cambodia and Thailand has become a major explanatory device, or shibboleth, of 20th-century historiography, but it seems not to have separated early 19th-century locals as much as late 20th-century westerners.<sup>60</sup>

When the future Vietnamese Emperor Gia Long had to flee from the Tây Sơn rebels he went to Bangkok in 1784, was taken in by King Rama I in whose armies he served in battles against Indic Buddhist Burma, and to whom he gave a sister. In thanks he recognized Bangkok as his suzerain until he had destroyed the Tây Sơn and declared himself emperor in 1802, and he accepted symbolic inferior status until the death of Rama I in 1809.<sup>61</sup> In those days, whatever the Indic Buddhist heritage of the Thai, the Sinitic aspects of Vietnamese culture and government would not have been foreign to the rulers of Bangkok.

Chinese influence was very strong there too. Both Taksin (1767-1782) and Rama I (1782-1809) were half Chinese; the former is on record as speaking not only Chinese but Vietnamese as well, they had Chinese official titles which were used in their official correspondence with the Chinese court, and until the end of the reign of Rama III (1824-1851) Chinese cultural influence dominated in

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<sup>58</sup> As noted above, the parallel *Drang nach Suden* is still generally unrecognized in western scholarship, which focuses only on Vietnamese expansion, and attributes general benevolence to Thai policies toward Indochina, no doubt because of the rose-colored lenses which imperialist and colonialist attitudes have implanted in the eyes of all concerned. Of course the 'southward push', *nam tiến* in writings about Vietnam, was never a steady process, and has been exaggerated with respect to Vietnam, but almost totally ignored in the historiography of Thailand. For a valuable revision of *nam tiến* see Keith Taylor, "Surface Orientations in Vietnam: Beyond Histories of Nation and Region", *The Journal of Asian Studies* 57, no. 4 (November 1998), p. 951 "I do not believe that such an event [*nam tiến*] ever took place".

<sup>59</sup> *Brah rāj bañśāvatār kruñ ratanakosin* [Royal Ratanakosin Chronicle], Rājākāl dī 3 (Third Reign), [Bangkok, National Library Edition, 1962], p. 366.

<sup>60</sup> See note 20, above and related text.

<sup>61</sup> *Brah rāj bañśāvatār kruñ ratanakosin* [Royal Ratanakosin Chronicle], Rājākāl dī 1 (First Reign), Bangkok, National Library Edition, 1962, pp. 46-7, 70-1, 129-33, 143-6, 156-7, 159, 176-7, 189-90, 219, 226, 240, 245-7, 258-9.



educated circles in a manner similar to that of English in the 20th century.<sup>62</sup> If Rama I did not also speak Vietnamese, he may have communicated with Gia Long in some form of Chinese. Gia Long and Rama I would have understood one another's administrations and ranking systems without difficulty.<sup>63</sup>

In Cambodia, throughout the wars of the early 19th century there were Cambodian factions depending on Vietnamese support against others who counted on Thai intervention. Those wars ended with victory for the Thai-oriented faction, but joint vassalage under both neighbors, and the disappearance from history of a pro-Vietnamese faction among Cambodian royalty.<sup>64</sup>

Thus the potential for hot or cold wars among Viet Nam, Cambodia and Thailand might not have been viewed by pre-modern participants as based on cultural or ideological divides, but as depending on issues of *realpolitik*; and it certainly does not appear that Cambodians of the time considered that there was an immutable Vietnamese intention to swallow Cambodia.<sup>65</sup>

French conquest and protectorates put an end to conflict among Vietnamese, Cambodians and Thai, and to direct relations between Indochinese and Thai ruling groups; and when direct relations resumed after independence in the 1950s, each had long lost the habit of dealing with Asian neighbors, had assimilated the foreign policy attitudes of one or another colonial power, France in Indochina, England in Thailand, and they no longer spoke their neighbors' languages.

The apparent 'deep cultural divide' which has mesmerized superficial modern historians is less because of ancient Hindu/Buddhist or Indian/Chinese

<sup>62</sup> King Taksin is recorded as addressing Vietnamese officials in Vietnamese ("braḥ rāj borihār doy bhāsā ñuon") in *Braḥ Rāj bañśāvatār chabab braḥ rāj hatthalekhā* ('The Royal Autograph Chronicle'), Bangkok, 1977, p. 640. For the Chinese titles of Taksin and Rama I see G. William Skinner, *Chinese Society in Thailand*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1957, pp. 20-28.

<sup>63</sup> Michael Vickery, Review of Robert B. Jones, "Thai titles and Ranks Including a Translation of Traditions of Royal Lineage by King Chulalongkorn", in *Journal of the Siam Society*, Volume 62, Part 1 (January 1974), pp. 158-173; see p. 171, reference to A. Laborde, "Les titres et grades héréditaires à la Cour d'Annam", which shows a system of royal family ranks, including declining descent, resembling very closely the Thai system. See also Michael Vickery, "The Constitution of Ayutthaya", in *Thai Law: Buddhist Law, Essays on the Legal History of Thailand, Laos and Burma*, edited by Andrew Huxley, Bangkok: White Orchid Press, 1996, pp. 133-210.

<sup>64</sup> For basic details, but refusal to recognize the equivalence of pro-Thai and pro-Vietnamese factions among Cambodian royalty and elite, see Chandler, *A History*, chapter 7.

<sup>65</sup> Similarly, the greater enemy for the Lao states on the eastern side of the Mekong was Bangkok, in spite of similarity of culture and even language, which Cambodia did not share, with Bangkok.

differences than of the result of different experiences of colonialism in the 19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Patterns of behavior which were to emerge clearly after World War II are, however, already in evidence from the first colonial contacts. In his first dealings with the French in 1856 the Cambodian king Ang Duang requested them to regain for Cambodia certain provinces in southern Viet Nam which had been lost to Viet Nam in the 18th century. He seemed to consider that the French were not different from the stronger local powers between which Cambodian elites had been forced to maneuver.

His son, King Norodom, willingly took both French and Thai help against a rebellious, and reportedly more popular, brother, while the Thai court took the side of Norodom because, as one of their council discussions records, “the people do not like him, he is unstable ... if we make [him] king, he will be very grateful, because no one respects him ... ”.<sup>66</sup>

Until it was achieved in 1907, Cambodians constantly pushed the French to take back the northwestern areas of Battambang and Siemreap which had been appropriated by the Thai in the 18th century. The French were willing to undertake this task, for it represented territorial aggrandizement for them as well, under the guise of obtaining justice for their Cambodian dependents, but the earlier request for territorial transfer within Indochina, from Cochinchina to Cambodia, was never heeded.

Thus a Cold War cause left in Indochina from the colonial period was irredentism, over a large and important part of Cambodia by Thailand, or over eastern Thailand by Cambodia, depending on the point of view, and over a small and less significant part of southern Viet Nam by Cambodia.

In the first instance there was reason enough for Cambodia to feel concern. The provinces of Battambang and Siemreap had come under Thai administration when the local governor sided with Bangkok in a conflict; and after the territory was returned to the French in 1907, the attitude in Thai ruling circles was that real Thai territory had been lost and should be reconquered.

This was the view of the first Phibul Songgram regime (1938-1944), and his adviser, Luang Wichit/Vichit Watthakan/Vadhakarn prepared a study, *Thailand's Case*, which in fact claimed that most of Cambodia should be Thai.<sup>67</sup> This spirit of irredentism was a reason behind the Thai-French Indochina war of 1941, after which Battambang and Siemreap were ceded again to Thailand, only to be regained by Cambodia in 1946.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> For details see above, p. 9.

<sup>67</sup> *Thailand's Case* was published in Bangkok in 1941. The author's name has been Romanized in different ways.

<sup>68</sup> *Chandler, A History*, pp. 166-70. [2009: The Thai attitude is again apparent in the revival of conflict over the temple of Preah Vihear/Khao Phra Viharn]

On 9 March 1945, the first period of French administration in Cambodia ended when the Japanese interned the French and offered independence to the three Indochina states. King Sihanouk took up the offer, abrogated all treaties with the French, promulgated a new Basic Law, and formed a government of traditionalists who had already made administrative careers under the French.

In May, So'n Ngoc Thanh, an anti-French and anti-royalist nationalist, was brought back from Japan, whither he had fled in 1942 following the suppression of an anti-French movement in which he was involved; and he was soon appointed Minister of Foreign Affairs. Then, after a group of his young followers invaded the palace on 9 August, Sihanouk was forced to make Thanh Prime Minister.<sup>69</sup>

The local 'Cold War' goals at the time, that is the Cambodian international relations and security problems, were probably (1) secure independence, (2) regain Battambang and Siemreap from Thailand and thereafter maintain territorial sovereignty against Thai irredentism, (3) try to regain some of the lost territory of Cochinchina (now called in Cambodia *Kampuchea Krom* / 'lower Cambodia').

The ardor with which the goals were conceived and pursued varied among classes and political factions. There is no indication of any disagreement on the question of Battambang and Siemreap and defense against Thai irredentism. Although few were opposed to the ideal of independence, Sihanouk and his conservative supporters, as proved by their subsequent actions, were willing to compromise, or delay independence if necessary to preserve their ruling position.<sup>70</sup>

There was much disagreement over Cochinchina, although the available evidence is almost entirely retrospective, and perhaps in the 1940s the question had not come to the fore. Eventually it is clear that Sihanouk did not wish to

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<sup>69</sup> Michael Vickery, "Looking Back at Cambodia [1945-1974]", in Ben Kiernan and Chantou Boua, eds., *Peasants and Politics in Kampuchea 1942- 1981*, London, Zed Press, 1982, pp. 89-113; David P. Chandler, *The Tragedy of Cambodian History*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1991, pp. 14-26; Ben Kiernan, *How Pol Pot Came to Power*, London, Verso, 1985, pp. 41-56. Unless referred to the second edition (2004) all notes to this work are to the first. On some matters the second edition is more detailed, with more and better sources. Unfortunately the index, already inadequate in the first edition, was not updated to include new names in the second.

<sup>70</sup> One prominent figure who ridiculed the very idea of independence was Sihanouk's maternal uncle Prince Sisowath Monireth, who was behind a French-language newspaper with a Khmer name, *Le Krabei Prey* ('The Wild Buffalo'), which ridiculed the pretensions of the new generation of Cambodian politicians and at least implicitly argued that Cambodia was not ready for independence.

press the issue, and one interesting reason was that the Khmer of southern Viet Nam were considered dubious royalists.<sup>71</sup>

Those Khmer were perhaps interested in unification with Cambodia, but their desire was tempered by their own factional differences in relation to one or another Vietnamese political tendency, leftists among them being less interested if the choice were between a socialist Viet Nam and a reactionary royalist Cambodia. It is probably significant that one of the leaders, and at least two other members of the group whose coup made So'n Ngoc Thanh Prime Minister were Cochinchinese Khmer, as was Thanh.

The Thanh government showed an intention to make the most of such independence as had been granted; and some of his pronouncements, long forgotten, are worth reviewing at the present time. Already as Foreign Minister, Thanh took control of all domestic propaganda, and his ministry announced the following program in July 1945:

- (1) Support the Great Asian War, which is the emancipation of the peoples of this part of the world,
- (2) only complete victory will guarantee independence,
- (3) reawaken the historical grandeur of 'Kampuchea' [in French text],
- (4) create a national army,
- (5) achieve the union of all peoples in Cambodia, especially the Annamites [Vietnamese] and the Khmer,
- (6) concentration of all economic activities.<sup>72</sup>

Some of these themes, emancipation, complete victory to guarantee independence, the historical grandeur of Kampuchea, a national army, concentration of economic activities, and even union of all peoples if it is taken to mean their Khmerization, prefigure Democratic Kampuchea [1975-1979] policies, showing the persistence of old Khmer attitudes across political factional boundaries.

There seems also to have been considerable ferment in the school system. The Thanhist group wished to eliminate French influence, and remove that language from primary schools; and among the Phnom Penh intellectuals there was a movement to introduce 'Annamite', that is, Vietnamese, as the first foreign language.

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<sup>71</sup> Sihanouk, in contrast to Lon Nol and Pol Pot, only insisted on recognition by the Vietnamese of Cambodia's existing frontiers. See further below.

<sup>72</sup> Information here and in the next two paragraphs is from *Cambodge*, a newspaper published in Phnom Penh, respectively from no. 94, 17 July 1945; no. 87, 6 July; no.96, 17 July; no.116, 11 August; no.9, 30 March; no. 110, 4 August; no. 121, 17 August; no. 79, 27 June; no. 124, 21 August; no. 126, 23 August; no. 127, 24 August. See also Kiernan, *How Pol Pot*, p. 51.

This was apparently not popular with the king, for suggestions emanating from the palace were for Khmerization of the schools, without Vietnamese; and while Thanh was advocating 'close relations with the Annamite Empire', Sihanouk spoke out against a Vietnamese government proclamation to unify all of the old Vietnamese Empire's territory, if it included Cochinchina.

Perhaps in answer to this was a denial from Thanh's camp, in an article about his earlier organization of a club for 'Khmero-Annamite rapprochement' in 1938, that the Khmer and the Vietnamese were preparing to fight one another. This was followed a week later, 23 August 1945, by a long article on the similarities of the Khmer and the 'Annamites'. Thanh also recognized Ho Chi Minh's independent Viet Nam on 2 September 1945 and allowed a Vietnamese mission to be established in Phnom Penh.

Here is clear evidence of differences in Cambodian Cold War aims concerning Khmer-Viet Nam relations and the question of Cochinchina. King Sihanouk was skeptical of Vietnamese intentions, inimical to emphasis on Vietnamese culture in Cambodia, and concerned about the future of Cochinchina, whereas an important group of political reformers, some of whom later made a 180 degree shift, saw close relations with Vietnam, including the Ho Chi Minh tendency, as the key to Cambodia's progress.<sup>73</sup>

Two weeks later *Cambodge* was warning the populace of the imminent arrival of British and French troops to disarm the Japanese, and urging that there be no violence. The Vietnamese question was still an issue, for the government took the trouble to deny that all 'Annamites' would be expelled. Khmer and Vietnamese civil servants would get equal treatment.

By mid-October Thanh had been removed to Saigon, according to a communiqué signed by Brig-Gen Murray, because of 'his activities contrary to the security of the allied troops and to the detriment of Cambodia'; and Sihanouk's uncle, Prince Monireth, not a partisan of quick independence, took his place as President of the Council of Ministers, in a regime again under a French Protectorate.<sup>74</sup>

A second Cold War-type issue in Cambodia was rivalry between two political camps, the royalists, and the new non-royal urban educated represented by So'n Ngoc Thanh. The goals of the Thanh nationalists seem moderate today, but they

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<sup>73</sup> So'n Ngoc Thanh ended his days as the leader of an anti-communist and anti-Vietnamese movement in Cochinchina which actively supported the Khmer Republic during 1970-75, and among his 1945 followers were several who later became part of the Democratic Kampuchea leadership, the most anti-Vietnamese of all Cambodian factions. On this period see Chandler, *Tragedy*, chapter 1; Kiernan, *How Pol Pot*, chapter 2.

<sup>74</sup> *Cambodge*, nos. 140, 8 September and 144, 13 September on allied arrival; no. 149, 19 September on status of Vietnamese; no. 172-173, 18-19 October, Murray's communiqué, and Kret no. 305 of 17 Oct naming Monireth head of government; Kiernan, *How Pol Pot*, pp. 50-52.

shocked the traditionalists and may have contributed to the alacrity, even enthusiasm, with which the latter greeted British, then French, troops who began arriving in September 1945 to disarm the Japanese and restore French authority.

This was the first clear evidence of the traditional rulers' willingness to compromise independence to preserve their position against rivals whose ardor for independence was stronger. The young rebels were imprisoned, Son Ngoc Thanh was packed off to exile in France, Sihanouk stayed on his protected throne, and among the seven members of the first Ministerial cabinet after the French return there were three from Sihanouk's first independence cabinet from March to August and four who had been appointed by Son Ngoc Thanh. The Cambodian elite were very adaptable.<sup>75</sup>

### **The recovery of Battambang and Siemreap**

This important issue, related to Cold War strategy in both Cambodia and Thailand, has not received sufficient attention. David Chandler, for instance, in his *A History of Cambodia*, gives it one sentence, "The Issarak armed struggle against the French ... slowed down after Battambang and Siem Reap were returned to Cambodian control in 1947 and a regime unsympathetic to Issarak aspirations assumed control in Bangkok".<sup>76</sup>

The Issarak struggle was as much against Sihanouk as against the French, and the Bangkok "regime unsympathetic" to them was the resurgent military under Phibul Songgram. By 1949 he had ousted from political life both the rather leftist civilians led by Pridi Panomyang, and a more conservative group whose best-known representatives were the brothers M.R. Seni and Kukrit Pramoj of a minor branch of the Thai royalty, and Khuang Aphavong, scion of the traditional ruling family of Battambang who had been responsible for a long period of Bangkok domination over Cambodia's Northwest, including Angkor, from the 1790s to 1907.

The switch in Bangkok, and the Pridi government's involvement in Indochina which preceded it, also involved the United States in perhaps its first clear manifestation in Southeast Asia of the Cold War mentality.<sup>77</sup>

After the end of World War II the US, and Britain even more strongly, had insisted on maintenance of a civilian government against a return to power of the Thai military who had allied with Japan during the war. This meant that even the leftist Pridi government enjoyed allied favor, no doubt because of the pro-allied Free Thai movement which he had organized, mainly in Thailand's Northeast,

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<sup>75</sup> Details of cabinet membership from Université Bouddhique Preah Sihanouk Raj, *Les élites khmères*. Phnom Penh, Institut Bouddhique, 1965, based on a doctoral thesis by Phouk Chhay.

<sup>76</sup> Chandler, *A History*, pp. 176-177.

<sup>77</sup> Aymonier, *Le Cambodge III*, pp. 792-793; Chandler, *A History*, p. 118; Ben Kiernan, *How Pol Pot*, pp. 55-56; David K. Wyatt, *Thailand: A Short History*, pp. 271-2

during the war.<sup>78</sup> But by 1949 and the Communist victory in China the US found it more important to ensure the predominance of strong anti-communist regimes, no matter what their domestic policies or past records.

Whatever the virtues of Pridi Panomyang as seen by the US after 1945, a staunch anti-communist he was not. During his government Bangkok was the center of the Southeast Asian League which supported, and provided haven for, offices representing all the anti-colonialist, including communist, movements in Indochina. It also projected a leftist orientation in Thai politics, and was inimical to the traditional Thai military. Among its leaders there were probably also some who would willingly have transformed Thailand from monarchy to republic.

Had that tendency remained dominant in Thai politics, the history of Southeast Asia, particularly in its cold and hot war aspects, would have been much different. Even though the US government in the 1940s had not clearly formulated a Cold War policy for Southeast Asia, and was still inimical to the return of the Thai military to power, its lack of sympathy for the Southeast Asian League and its international policies is shown in the State Department's refusal even to receive a letter which Lao Prince Souphannouvong delivered to Ambassador Edward Stanton in Bangkok.<sup>79</sup>

The Pridi government, its Southeast Asian League, and a policy of good will toward nationalist and independence movements in Indochina were terminated through joint action by the military and the conservative royalist civilian group, whose political vehicle became the Democrat Party. They were opposed to Pridi both on domestic grounds – his presumed anti-royalism and socialist economic tendencies – and with respect to his foreign policy.

They were probably as irredentist as the military – Khuang Aphavong at least because Battambang was his hereditary appanage. Kukrit Pramoj's irredentist attitude came through later when, commenting on the 1987-88 conflict with Laos, he said Vientiane should be burned to the ground, as was done by Bangkok armies under his ancestors in 1778 and 1828.<sup>80</sup>

With the overthrow of civilian government, and the reemergence of Phibul Songgram, Thai irredentism raised its head again, and the lesson for Cambodia

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<sup>78</sup> See for example, John B. Haseman, *The Thai Resistance Movement During the Second World War*, Bangkok, Chalernmit Press, n.d., apparently reprinted from a monograph of the Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Northern Illinois University.

<sup>79</sup> See Kiernan, *How Pol Pot*, pp. 55-56.

<sup>80</sup> See Michael Vickery. Review of *Chao Anou 1767-1829 pasason lao lee asi akhane*, in *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, XXI, 2 (1990), p. 445. M.R. Seni and Kukrit Pramoj are direct descendants of King Rama II (1809-1824). The Democrat Party and the overseas branches of the Free Thai movement in World War II seem to have represented efforts by low-ranking royalty, and elite sympathizers, marginalized by the anti-royalist coup of 1932, to regain political influence which they probably considered their due.

was that its interests, including territorial integrity, could not be guaranteed by the new US-led Cold War bloc which was being formed in Southeast Asia.

From the restoration of French control in 1945 until formal independence in 1953 and the end of the First Indochina War in 1954 Cambodian politics centered on the control and operation of a new European-type constitutional parliamentary system.<sup>81</sup> The larger Cold War impinged via a growing rural communist movement closely linked with the Viet-Minh, which by 1952 had registered considerable success, and which was viewed with sympathy by the political party representing Thanh's position, the 'Democrats'.<sup>82</sup>

All Cambodian factions, like those caught between the Thai and Vietnamese in the 1830s, made some effort to garner foreign support, from France, the US, China, and the Soviet Union. Before 1954 they had little success in manipulation of the larger Cold War, for neither the US nor the Soviet Union, nor apparently even China, saw Cambodia as an important area or wished to meddle there.

[*excision from original article*]

### **Domestic politics**

Conflict between the National Assembly, elected in 1947, 1948, and 1951, and the King marked the first eight years of postwar Cambodia, and much of it was related to Cold War issues. Because of the widespread leftist tendencies, which were anti-royalist as well as anti-French, Sihanouk, even while campaigning for independence, was forced to move toward accommodation with France and opposition to Viet Nam.

Domestically he also pursued increasingly authoritarian policies toward his enemies organized in the Democrat party, who won all elections and dominated the government. In January 1953 both houses of parliament were dissolved and the constitution suspended while the king ruled under a 'Special Law' declaring 'the Nation in Danger' with parliament transformed into an appointed National Consultative Assembly of 74 members.<sup>83</sup> This was a measure similar to the coup d'état by General Sarit Thanarat in Thailand in 1958.

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<sup>81</sup> For details see Vickery, "Looking Back", pp. 89-113.

<sup>82</sup> Note the wide ideological difference between the Thai and the Cambodian 'Democrat' parties, the former elitist and royalist, the latter moderately leftist, probably to some degree republican, and consisting of 'new men', not the traditional elite. One similarity was that the Cambodian Democrats were also led by a minor prince, Sisowath Youthevong, whose ideology was quite different from the Thai Democrat leaders, but interestingly he was, like them, from a branch of royalty outside the dynastic mainstream. See Chandler, *Tragedy*, chapters 1-2; Kiernan, *How Pol Pot*, chapters 4, 6; and Vickery, "Looking Back", pp. 89-113.

<sup>83</sup> For treatment of the 1952-53 events as a coup d'état, see Chandler, *Tragedy*, pp. 61-67. Although this Consultative Assembly was chosen autocratically, party participation was maintained in the same proportions as in the previous National Assembly. The



Sihanouk and the political right had won the first round in their domestic Cold War, partly through taking skillful advantage of the larger Cold War. There Sihanouk also won, in fact won independence, by convincing France that without independence Cambodia would certainly go communist and become a base to attack French forces in Viet Nam from the rear.<sup>84</sup>

The French, hard-pressed in 1953, acceded to this argument, perhaps because by then independence would be given to the Cambodian francophile elite rather than to the seemingly leftist Democrats.

### The Geneva Conference

Cambodia was the only non-communist Indochina country which went to Geneva as an independent state and signed its own agreements with the French and Democratic Republic of Vietnam. The Lao and the southern Vietnamese governments were represented by France, and French representatives signed the agreements with the DRV on their behalf.

The Cambodian goals at Geneva were:

- (1) to have their independence, which had not been given universal recognition, ratified in a wider international venue,
- (2) to have Vietnamese forces removed from Cambodia and Cambodian communist forces disarmed without any political recognition or a special regroupment zone like those conceded to the communists in Laos and the DRV in the northern half of Vietnam,
- (3) to be accorded total freedom in arranging their foreign relations, including freedom to admit US military,
- (4) to maintain the type of dictatorial regime which Sihanouk had succeeded in imposing on his domestic opponents in 1953.

The Cambodians also insisted at Geneva that they did not accept the existing boundary between their country and Viet Nam, and reserved the right to contest it in the future because it had been arbitrarily established by France.<sup>85</sup>

They succeeded in the first three aims; indeed, Sihanouk's representative Sam Sary nearly derailed the conference on its next-to-last day with a long list of

Democrats had 43 of the 74 members, and the Secretary was a left Democrat, So'n Phu'o'c Tho (*Punakkar*, Phnom Penh Khmer-language newspaper, organ of Lon Nol's Khmer Renovation Party, no. 136, 19 March 1953).

<sup>84</sup> Gouvernement Royal du Cambodge, *Livre Jaune sur les revendications de l'indépendance du Cambodge (Depuis le 5 Mars 1953)*, [Phnom Penh, 1953], pp. 3-18, 5 mars 1953, "1er Message du Souverain à M. le Président de la République, Président de l'Union Française, exposant la situation générale du Cambodge et les problèmes qui se posent".

<sup>85</sup> This position was elaborated in Sarin Chhak, *Les frontières du Cambodge*, Tome 1, Paris, Librairie Dalloz, 1966.

demands, the most important of which were granted by the Great Powers. Although they were unsuccessful in the fourth, within little more than a year they managed to circumvent the provisions of the Geneva Accords while ostensibly observing them.<sup>86</sup>

At that time the Cambodian position was strongly anti-communist and pro-’Free World’, and the US could regard Sihanouk as a potential ally of themselves and of a government of South Viet Nam against the DRV. The US experts of the time, however, realized some of Cambodia’s inherent weaknesses, “vulnerable to Communist pressures chiefly because of their military weakness ... unpredictable leadership [emphasis added], the rivalry of cliques, and ... the existence of armed, non-Communist dissidence”.<sup>87</sup>

The dissidence to which they referred was that of So’n Ngoc Thanh, whom they saw as an independent nationalist. Interestingly, in view of Thanh’s reputation in later years as an ally, even agent, of the US, in 1954 the authors of the above memorandum opined that “his future behavior cannot be predicted and it is conceivable that he might join forces with the Viet Minh”. Clearly the US position at that time was more favorable to Sihanouk than to Thanh.

Independence and its confirmation by the Geneva Conference of July 1954 represented a defeat for all progressive currents of Cambodian politics from the communist Khmer People’s Revolutionary Party (KPRP) through the Thanhist guerrillas to the urban Democrats. In contrast to Viet Nam and Laos, the Cambodian revolutionary forces were allowed no regroupment zone, and were left with no choice but to lay down their arms and reintegrate with Cambodian society under Sihanouk and his conservative supporters.

About one thousand of the leading KPRP cadre withdrew to North Viet Nam, while the rest who remained active changed from armed to political struggle in order to contest the coming elections as *Krom Pracheachon* (‘Citizens’ Group), in fact the new political form of the KPRP.<sup>88</sup>

In recent years there have been attempts to attribute the defeat of the Cambodian left at Geneva to deliberate betrayal by one or another larger power, China or Vietnam, in the interest of their alleged hegemonic goals in Southeast Asia, thus an intra-Communist Bloc Cold War issue within the larger Cold War.

The official line in the People’s Republic of Kampuchea (PRK) – that is, the government in Phnom Penh from 1979 to 1989, when the name was changed to

<sup>86</sup> Lacouture et Devillers, *La fin d’une guerre*, pp. 270-1; and see below on the 1955 election. [Sam Sary’s son, Sam Rainsy, following the 1998 election, tried the same technique in an effort to derail the election results and formation of a new government.]

<sup>87</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States 1952-54*, Volume XVI, “The Geneva Conference”, p. 1023 Memorandum by Chester Cooper and Joseph A. Yager, Geneva, June 3, 1954.

<sup>88</sup> Chandler, *Tragedy*, chapter 2; Kiernan, *How Pol Pot*, pp. 153-164; Vickery, “Looking Back”, p. 97.

State of Cambodia (SOC) – and also that of the Vietnamese government, was then that the course of the Cambodian revolution under Pol Pot was determined by China's desire for hegemony over Southeast Asia, and that the Pol Pot clique was carrying out Chinese policy.

This line was adopted uncritically by some foreign friends of the PRK, such as Wilfred Burchett, and it is also reflected in the most thorough treatment to date of the history of the Cambodian revolution, Kiernan's *How Pol Pot Came to Power*, in spite of his recording of evidence to the contrary.<sup>89</sup>

This tale of Chinese perfidy starts with the Geneva negotiations of 1954, and the failure to secure representation of the revolutionary side or a regroupment zone for the revolutionary forces as was done in Laos and Vietnam. According to the SRV and PRK, they were betrayed by China who sold out to the western powers, and then in Cambodia supported Sihanouk.<sup>90</sup>

Democratic Kampuchea, on the other hand, has blamed Vietnamese treachery for the same result, and western writers have chosen one or the other line, more or less, depending on their relative Chinese or Vietnamese sympathies.<sup>91</sup>

Let us return, however, to the events of 1954 when both the Vietnamese and the Cambodian revolutionaries were forced at the negotiating table to withdraw from gains they had made on the battlefield. Both the Chinese and Russians urged this retreat, and the main reason was fear of military intervention by the US, including the use of nuclear weapons.

This very real threat, which the Chinese and Russians would have understood much better than the Cambodian Issarak and KPRP forces, sufficiently explains the Chinese and Russian positions; and there are no grounds to postulate at that date an intention by them to sabotage Vietnamese unification or to utilize Cambodia against Viet Nam.<sup>92</sup>

The Vietnamese, for their part, were persuaded that the retreat was temporary, and that their goal would be achieved in 1956 following the elections which the Geneva Accords called for.

<sup>89</sup> Wilfred Burchett, *The China-Cambodia-Vietnam Triangle*, London, Vanguard Books and Zed Press, 1981; Kiernan, *How Pol Pot*, pp. 140-153.

<sup>90</sup> See Michael Vickery, *Cambodia 1975-1982*, p. 197, and references there.

<sup>91</sup> 'Democratic Kampuchea', from 1976, was the official name of what is popularly called the 'Khmer Rouge regime' of 1975-1979. The standard document is Pol Pot's 'Black Book', original foreign language edition, "Livre noir: faits et preuves des actes d'agression et d'annexion du Vietnam contre le Kampuchea", Phnom Penh, Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, September 1978. For an accessible interpretation see Stephen R. Heder, 'The Kampuchean-Vietnamese Conflict', *Southeast Asian Affairs 1979*, Singapore, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1980, p. 13, and n. 25.

<sup>92</sup> Which is not to say that such was not the intention of the western powers. See sources listed in Kiernan, *How Pol Pot*, chapter 5, note 8.

Within Cambodia, not only had formal independence been granted to Sihanouk's government before Geneva, which thus entitled that government to a place at the conference, but a fundamental weakness of the Cambodian revolution had been revealed by that independence. Much of the revolutionary ardor in the countryside disappeared, for independence was what it had been about, and there was insufficient popular support for further struggle in the interest of political or social revolution.

Quite apart from the danger of US intervention, clear assessment of the real balance of forces would have indicated to the Vietnamese, Chinese, and Russians that insistence on support for the KPRP against Sihanouk was premature.

If Geneva disappointed the Cambodian left, it also added an unexpected difficulty to the plans of the right. The latter, under Sihanouk, had hoped to continue the dictatorial regime instituted with Sihanouk's January 1953 coup, but the Geneva accords required all three Indochina countries to hold elections, in Cambodia before the end of 1955, under existing constitutions and with freedom for all factions, including former guerrillas, to participate.

This made possible the open organization of the *Krom Pracheachon* under Keo Meas, Non Suon and Pen Yuth, while the old Democrat Party was revitalized and pushed leftward by former students of the Paris Marxist Circle, such as Keng Vannsak and Thiounn Mum, perhaps with organizational work by Saloth Sar. Because of the Democrats' previous successes, and the popularity which both groups had gained during the anti-French struggle, it was expected that in an honest election the parties of the left would at least win a strong minority in the new National Assembly.<sup>93</sup>

In the election of 1955 Sihanouk confounded the objective of Geneva, just as Ngô Đình Diem, with US support, betrayed the Geneva Accords in Viet Nam by refusing to allow the nation-wide election scheduled for 1956 to take place. Faced by a clear electoral threat from the left Sihanouk first attempted to amend the existing constitution in ways which would permit him to continue to rule unhindered whatever the election result.<sup>94</sup> This was vetoed by the International Control Commission as contrary to the Geneva Accords, which called for elections under the existing constitution.

Then Sihanouk succeeded in getting the election postponed from April to September 1955, and in those months the Cambodian right, which had been divided among several parties, managed to unify in a single party loyal to Sihanouk. The election campaign was characterized by arrest, occasionally murder, of opposition politicians, the silencing of their press organs, intimidation of voters, and allegedly even ballot-box fraud on election day. The result was

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<sup>93</sup> Vickery, "Looking Back", pp. 96-99.

<sup>94</sup> Chandler, *Tragedy*, p. 77.

total victory for Sihanouk's *Sangkum* which took all seats in the National Assembly.<sup>95</sup>

The US attitude was shown by a military aid agreement signed with Cambodia on 16 May 1955, in the middle of the election campaign. The newspapers of the opposition, both Democrats and former communist guerrillas, denounced this agreement, and warned of the dangerous situation developing in Viet Nam and imperialist, i.e. American, responsibility for it. In the light of what happened later their 1955 analyses seem extremely prescient.

At Geneva, and throughout 1955, it appeared that the Cambodian ruling group under Sihanouk intended to ruthlessly suppress communism at home and rely on alliances with western capitalist powers, especially the US, for international security. In Washington, Sihanouk may have appeared as a Cambodian Ngô Đình Diem, or, had he been on the political horizon, Sarit Thanarat, both of whom by 1960 were the most bitter enemies of Sihanouk's state.<sup>96</sup>

### 1955-1964

This period saw gradual disillusionment with US protection, as the US, in its support of Ngô Đình Diem, favored Viet Nam in its disputes with Cambodia. When South Viet Nam invaded an area of northeastern Cambodia, the US said its military aid to Cambodia must not be used against the Saigon forces.<sup>97</sup> Sihanouk, who had earlier sought protection by the US and the capitalist world, began to diversify his international relations. He traveled to the Soviet Union in 1956, and relations were established with China in 1958.

Sihanouk's enemies were twofold, Thailand and Viet Nam, especially with respect to irredentist problems, and internal opposition. During 1955-1960 Sihanouk seems to have considered the foreign threats the more dangerous, and his opening to the international left was intended to block them.

The internal opposition appeared defeated after 1955, and vigorous measures were maintained to keep them under control. Such measures, however, provoked recrudescence of communist movements, which gained increasing popular support as ordinary Cambodians, particularly peasants, realized that independence had not brought an end to their problems, and that their life had hardly improved from the French period.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> For more detail see Vickery, "Looking Back", pp.96-99; Ben Kiernan, *How Pol Pot*, pp. 155-164. The full name of Sihanouk's party was 'Sangkum Reastr Niyum', which was rendered as 'Popular Socialist Community'. See Chandler, *Tragedy*, pp. 83-84 and n. 94, on dishonest balloting and fake reporting of results.

<sup>96</sup> Chandler, *Tragedy*, p. 136

<sup>97</sup> Chandler, *Tragedy*, p. 98.

<sup>98</sup> See Kiernan, *How Pol Pot*, chapter 6.

Sihanouk tried to play the Cold War game to the advantage of his country and his class; and for several years he seemed remarkably successful. The success depended on what happened in Viet Nam, where the US-sponsored war gathered intensity after the refusal to hold elections in 1956. Sihanouk's left-leaning neutrality brought economic aid from the Socialist Bloc and some degree of assurance that they would not support his leftist opposition.

He also garnered economic and military aid from the West, particularly the US, by not moving so far left in foreign policy that they could not hope to keep Cambodia within the 'Free World' by means of such aid. It seems also that Sihanouk, in the early 1960s, believed that the US effort in Viet Nam would fail, that the communists would win, and that Cambodia must insure its future by developing better relations with them than with the Diem government in the South.

Several things happened to disrupt Sihanouk's nicely balanced policy. His repression of domestic opposition, and worsening conditions for the rural population, caused a new development of an active communist movement, particularly in rural areas. In 1960 the communist party was reorganized; throughout the 1960s many old fighters who had laid down their arms in 1954 reactivated a maquis, sometimes in order to save their lives from Sihanouk's police. In Phnom Penh there was increasing leftist opposition among the newly educated youth.

A second disruptive factor was that the US believed Sihanouk's Red Prince rhetoric, and obtusely refused to recognize that his domestic policy was firmly, even brutally, anti-communist. Or perhaps, for the US, Cambodian domestic policy was irrelevant (something which seems apparent since the 1970s), and it was only Sihanouk's stance in the Cold War, and with respect to the hot war in Viet Nam, that mattered.

US official criticism of Sihanouk and Cambodia's policy increased, and it seems that there were US-backed plots to overthrow the Cambodian government. This so exasperated Sihanouk that by 1964 he announced the rejection of all forms of US aid, and all US personnel in Cambodia involved in aid programs had to leave. The following year diplomatic relations were broken.<sup>99</sup>

Ironically, the end of Sihanouk's close connection with the US, and his officially increasing reliance on the Socialist Bloc, did not bring relief from domestic dissidence. Obviously the communist movement in Cambodia developed out of local conditions, popular dissatisfaction with the regime, not from external subversion, and it was independent of Cold War considerations.

In fact, by the mid-1960s it was certain that China, the Soviet Union, and the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam all supported the existence of Sihanouk's right-wing regime even to the point of sacrificing, at least temporarily, the

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<sup>99</sup> See Chandler, *Tragedy*, pp. 99-107, on the Sam Sary and Dap Chhuon plots.

communist movement, because of the value of a formally neutral, peaceful Cambodia whose border areas could be used as sanctuaries for Vietnamese communist forces, and through which arms could be supplied to them.

A major arms supply route ran from the port of Kompong Som/Sihanoukville in Cambodia's southwest to the Vietnamese border, with arms transported courtesy of the Cambodian army under Lon Nol, an activity which generated great profit for the Cambodians involved, just as the transit of arms through Thailand to the Khmer Rouge today [1979-1991] cannot be stopped because of the wealth it brings to well-placed Thai generals.<sup>100</sup>

By 1967, and even more clearly 1968, Sihanouk's policy had failed. The rural communists had initiated revolutionary civil war, and the army was powerless to suppress them.<sup>101</sup>

Besides this, it seems that Sihanouk began to believe that the US would win in Viet Nam through sheer weight of numbers and arms, and contacts between Phnom Penh and Washington gradually improved until diplomatic relations were restored in 1969. This did not help Sihanouk very much, though, for in March 1970 he was overthrown by his own close supporters, who also in general

<sup>100</sup> On Cambodian profits from aid to Vietnam see Chandler, *Tragedy*, pp. 188-9; and on Thai transport of arms to the Khmer Rouge see M.R. Sukhumbhand Paribatra, "Unholy Alliance Must End", *The Nation* (Bangkok), 22 July 1988, in which he warned that there is a strong interest among some of the Thai military in keeping the supply routes to the Khmer Rouge across Thailand open: "[t]o resolve the Khmer Rouge problem means to sever a relationship, which is based ... also on vested interests, and an attempt to do so may prove to be both futile and dangerous"; also M.R. Sukhumbhand Paribatra, "Indonesia can play a leading role", *The Nation*, 28 February 1990. All further references to '*The Nation*', unless otherwise designated, are to the Bangkok newspaper of that name.

For a touch of humor we may note Gary Klintworth's claim (*Vietnam's intervention in Cambodia in international law*, Canberra, Australian Government Publishing service, 1989, p. v), that he developed his interest in Cambodia as an 'intelligence' (military, of course) operative in 1967, checking out "the carrying capacity of bicycles on the road from Sihanoukville to Ratanakiri".

Had intelligence operative Klintworth never looked at a map? He has obviously confused the wide US-built Sihanouk highway from the southern port of Kompong Som/Sihanoukville with the narrow jungle 'Sihanouk Trail' in Cambodia's northeast, some 600 km distant. No wonder the Australians and Americans never discovered what was going on. No bicycles ever carried supplies out of Sihanoukville. Transport was on Cambodian army trucks supplied by General Lon Nol with Sihanouk's connivance.

Nor did the road lead to Ratanakiri. It went straight to the Vietnamese border in southeastern Cambodia. The bicycle traffic was through the jungles from northern Vietnam, via Laos and Cambodia's northeastern province, to southern Vietnam: the 'Sihanouk Trail'.

<sup>101</sup> Ben Kiernan, , "The Smlaut Rebellion and its Aftermath, 1967-70: The Origins of Cambodia's Liberation Movement", Parts I-II, in Monash University, Centre of southeast Asian Studies, Working Papers, nos. 4 and 5, n.d [1975-76].; Kiernan, *How Pol Pot*; Chandler, *Tragedy*.

avored close relations with the US, both for help against the communist disidence, and for aid in economic reorganization and development.

The suspicion, nurtured by Sihanouk himself, that the US engineered his overthrow, is probably unfounded.<sup>102</sup> Sihanouk was already moving back toward a pro-US position, and with his solid record of domestic anti-communism, and increasingly overt hostility to the DRV, he was in fact the perfect picture of a US Third World client. Probably Sihanouk's enemies on the right, who included both old-fashioned conservatives like Lon Nol, and a group of young, well-educated technocrats and lawyers who wanted a modern capitalist economy and a functioning pluralist parliament, saw that if Sihanouk regained US favor, their projects, whether reactionary or modernizing, were doomed.<sup>103</sup>

It is probable too that the old Cochinchina irredentism was a factor in Lon Nol's move. During his period of friendship with the DRV and the NLF in southern Viet Nam in 1967, Sihanouk had agreed to the fixing of Cambodia's borders as they were, that is recognition of Cambodia's territorial integrity "inside its existing borders", which meant giving up the old claim to the traditionally Khmer provinces in southern Vietnam.<sup>104</sup>

Lon Nol was notably expansionist with respect to traditional Khmer territory, and among the most ardent military supporters of the Lon Nol regime were Khmer troops from southern Viet Nam under the political leadership of the old nationalist and Sihanouk enemy, So'n Ngoc Thanh.<sup>105</sup> This did not, however, make for a close relationship. Lon Nol needed the military skills of Thanh's American-trained soldiers, but, like his old patron Sihanouk, he distrusted Thanh politically, and when Thanh's term as Prime Minister (March-October 1972) ended with no success, he renounced Cambodian politics, returned to Vietnam, and probably died in prison after the Communist victory there.

The details of the disastrous five-year war which ensued are well known. Each American initiative – the April 1970 invasion, the massive bombing of 1972 and 1973, the attempt to secure Khmer communist agreement to a cease-fire in 1973 via Vietnamese influence, acquiescence in Lon Nol's crooked elections, and the insistence on maintaining him to the end even when many

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<sup>102</sup> See Norodom Sihanouk and Wilfred Burchett, *My War with the CIA*, London, Penguin Books, The Penguin Press, 1973; and for more nuanced detail of possible US roles, Chandler, *Tragedy*, pp. 190-199.

<sup>103</sup> The second group was represented by the founders and publishers of the French-language Phnom Penh newspaper *Phnom Penh Presse*. A still-active survivor is Douc Rasy.

<sup>104</sup> Malcolm Caldwell and Lek Tan, *Cambodia in the Southeast Asian War*, Monthly Review Press, New York and London, 1973, pp. 168-9; Chandler, *Tragedy*, p. 168. Recognition by the NLF came on 31 May 1967, and by the DRV on 8 June.

<sup>105</sup> Kiernan, *How Pol Pot*, pp. 348



among his closest associates wanted him removed – led to ever greater political and military fiascoes.

With respect to the Cold War, the Cambodian hot war revealed some interesting modifications in the international lineup. China, with whom the US was seeking good relations, supported the Cambodian revolutionaries, while the Soviet Union, and the Eastern European bloc, maintained correct relations with the Khmer Republic, and embassies in Phnom Penh.

Possibly unknown at the time was that the relationship between the Vietnamese and the Cambodian communists, both of whom were fighting against the US as well as against their domestic opposition, was souring, until there was no way the Vietnamese could prevail on the Cambodians to respect the 1973 Paris agreements.<sup>106</sup> When the war ended in April 1975, the victorious Khmer Rouge assaulted the Soviet Embassy and expelled its diplomats as ignominiously as those from capitalist countries.

### **After 1975**

The end of the wars in Cambodia and Viet Nam in 1975 which left all of Indochina under Communist states, was the nadir of US cold and hot war policies in Asia. Not only had they lost those wars, but Thailand, in its new democratic euphoria after October 1973, had overthrown the military who had made Thailand a virtual satellite of the US since the 1950s, and had unceremoniously told the US to remove its numerous military personnel from their Thai bases.

The new Thai government also refused to exhibit the traditional fear of communist expansion, and hastened to establish normal diplomatic relations with their neighbors to the east. More than that, in the Thai parliamentary elections of 1975 the government and military did not exert pressure to prevent the formation and campaigning of socialist parties, which operated in freedom for the first time since 1946, and won an impressive number of seats in the lower house of parliament.<sup>107</sup>

It must have appeared to Cold Warriors that not only had they lost Indochina, but the leading candidate for domino status was cooperating in its own knockdown. Fortunately the new Khmer Rouge regime in Cambodia provided reason for hope. The rough policies which were instituted there were bound to alienate their own population, and, if utilized properly, dampen the socialist ardor of Thais or other Southeast Asians who might have otherwise been attracted to an Indochina-type solution to their own domestic problems.

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<sup>106</sup> Becker, *When the War Was Over*, pp. 147-150; Chandler, *Tragedy*, pp. 216-220; Kiernan, *How Pol Pot*, chapter 8.

<sup>107</sup> Jeffrey Race, "The January 1975 Thai Election: Preliminary Data and Inferences", *Asian Survey (AS)*, Vol. XV, Number 4 (April 1975), pp. 375-382.

A propaganda campaign was set in motion to assimilate socialism to Pol Potism, and there was no lack of journalist helpers who did all they could to search out the worst incidents and treat them as what happened every day, everywhere, in Democratic Kampuchea. Most of them were not organized, but simply searching for what would make the most saleable stories; even when some US government experts, when questioned formally in public, tried to provide objective information.<sup>108</sup>

As Edward Herman wrote later in a letter to the editor of *The Progressive* criticizing that publication's treatment of Cambodia, media "focus on KR violence in the late 1970s ... was clearly not to help Cambodians ... it was to discredit revolution, retrospectively justify our Indochina interventions, and help slough off the 'Vietnam syndrome' freeing us for more interventions (as in Angola, El Salvador, and Nicaragua)".

It was what I called, in the new introduction to the second edition of my *Cambodia 1975-1982*, "reverse intellectual history, less an explanation of sources contributing to DK ideology than an attempt to discredit the precursors via the disasters attributed to DK".<sup>109</sup>

The Standard Total View, as I called it in *Cambodia 1975-1982*, got wide coverage in Thai publications, and this no doubt contributed to increasing tolerance for right-wing extremism, showing itself in violence against activist students, leftist party members, and organized farmers.

As a result of the propaganda and violence, the socialist parties lost most of their seats in parliament after the election of 1976; and, in October of that year, in the bloodiest Thai coup ever, Thai democracy was overthrown and a new militarist and fanatically anti-communist regime set in place.

The Cambodians then surprised everyone again by turning on their erstwhile allies and wartime backers, breaking the supposed Indochinese socialist unity.

Armed conflict on a large scale between Cambodia and Viet Nam began in 1977 and ended in December 1978 when Viet Nam invaded, overthrew the Democratic Kampuchea government and established in its place the Peoples Republic of Kampuchea with a leadership drawn from former DK personnel who had broken with that regime, Cambodian communists who had lived in Viet

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<sup>108</sup> Noam Chomsky and Edward S. Herman, *After the Cataclysm, Postwar Indochina & the Reconstruction of Imperial Ideology*, Boston, South End Press, 1979, chapter 6; Vickery, *Cambodia 1975-1982*, chapter 2.

<sup>109</sup> Letter from Herman to *The Progressive*, 1 September 1997, with criticism of its issue of September 1997, kindly provided to me by Herman; Vickery, *Cambodia 1975-1982*, second edition, p. ix. Reverse intellectual history is seen in Shawcross and continues in particular in the work of David Chandler. See below, note 815, on Chandler's reference to Ceausescu; and in his *A History*, fourth edition p. 296 on the "Leninist Politics" of Pol Pot, against which see chapter 5 of Vickery, *Cambodia 1975-1982* and comment below, pp. 258, ff., on Friedman.

Nam since the 1954 Geneva settlement, and a few people of non-communist background.

This posed a problem for the Cold Warriors. The Pol Pot regime, “worse than Hitler”, whose overthrow by an international force had been demanded, not just by the usual clique of Washington warmongers, but even by decent and reasonable people like George McGovern, had really been overthrown.

The Vietnamese record in their own country was such that a repetition of DK brutality could be ruled out; and in justification of their move the Vietnamese pulled out all the western anti-Pol Pot publications, including known fakes.

The US reaction proved that Washington had never cared about what was happening in Cambodia, but had only desired to use the DK example to discredit ‘socialism’. Not only was no joy in the end of DK expressed, but Viet Nam was condemned, and by the end of 1979 a save-DK program, with clear US participation and support, was organized along the Thai-Cambodian border.

Under the guise of a humanitarian program to help refugees fleeing disaster, DK forces were helped to rebuild; and non-communist anti-Phnom Penh groups, with their own armed forces, were developed from scratch. As an International Committee of the Red Cross representative described it 12 years later:

“[t]he Cambodian border population has always been used for political purposes in the past. In the eighties the people escaping from Cambodia were kept at the border and used as a buffer as long as Vietnamese troops were in Cambodia. The camps became the most effective places to recruit fighters. At the same time they were a very convenient shield against attacks from the other side, with their civilian appearances and the presence of large numbers of foreign aid workers”.<sup>110</sup>

As a result of this international, but largely US and Thai, initiative, the DK regime and military which were thoroughly defeated in 1979, were rebuilt until they again threatened the existence of Cambodia. And to give them a thin fig leaf of political respectability a Sihanoukist group and another non-communist group, the KPNLF, were in 1982 forced by US, Chinese, and ASEAN pressure to unite in the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea (CGDK), which preserved the name of the hated Pol Pot regime.

This Coalition was henceforth recognized diplomatically by all ASEAN states, China, and most of the capitalist West. The Peoples Republic in Phnom Penh was recognized by Viet Nam, the Soviet Union, most of the former Soviet Bloc countries of Eastern Europe, India, Nicaragua, Cuba, and a few African countries.

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<sup>110</sup> Michael Vickery, “Refugee Politics: The Khmer Camp system in Thailand”, in David A. Ablin & Marlowe Hood, editors, *The Cambodian Agony*, Armonk, New York, M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 1987, pp. 293-331; Mr. Jean-Jacques Fresard, 8 February 1991, in a CCSDPT Open Session, in Bangkok.

Occasionally the ongoing conflict over Cambodia has been portrayed as a proxy war between China and the USSR, since China has indeed backed the DK group as a legitimate government which was overthrown by foreign intervention, while the Soviets gave economic and military support to Viet Nam and to the new PRK government in Cambodia.

This made the Cambodia problem a kind of Cold War issue, and provided the US, which favored China at the end of the 1970s, with a *realpolitik* excuse to justify its position as following the Chinese lead on Cambodia.

This has been the official US answer to critics of its stance on post-1979 Cambodia: the US is following the lead of its friends among the front-line states, ASEAN and China, and in spite of alleged revulsion at the result – rehabilitation of DK until it has the potential to regain power – the US must follow the lead of its friends who are directly involved.

This argument is disingenuous. There have been too many instances of the US following from in front, insuring that ASEAN, perhaps even China, maintain the pressure against Cambodia and Viet Nam.

Right after the defeat of DK in January 1979, Prince Sihanouk, who had been held in seclusion in Phnom Penh, was taken away by the fleeing DK government and the Chinese, first to China. Then he was allowed to go to New York to plead the case of Cambodia against Vietnamese intervention at the UN.

While in New York he tried to defect from his DK minders. He made contact with US State Department officials, saying he wished to escape and live in the US or France. This would have been a near fatal blow for DK; but the US State Department, rather than welcoming Sihanouk, persuaded him to remain with DK.<sup>111</sup>

At about the same time National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski “concocted the idea of persuading Thailand to cooperate fully with China in its efforts to rebuild the Khmer Rouge”. He “encouraged the Chinese to support Pol Pot [and] ... encouraged the Thai to help the DK”. The United States “winked semipublicly’ ... while encouraging China and Thailand to give the Khmer Rouge direct aid to fight against the Vietnamese occupation”.<sup>112</sup>

In this light, the secret meeting discovered by Nayan Chanda between Thai Prime Minister Kriangsak Chomanand and representatives from China, which secured Thai support for Chinese aid to the DK forces regrouped on the Thai border, loses some of its significance.<sup>113</sup>

Nearly all Western powers and ASEAN condemned the Vietnamese action, without heed for the improvement it brought to the lives of most Cambodians.

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<sup>111</sup> Chanda, *Brother Enemy*, pp. 364-368; T.D. Allman, “Sihanouk’s Sideshow”, *Vanity Fair* (April 1990), pp. 151-60, 226-34.

<sup>112</sup> Becker, *When the War Was Over*, p. 435.

<sup>113</sup> Chanda, *Brother Enemy*, pp. 348-349.

Indeed many Western and ASEAN officials, and a pack of sycophantic journalists, tried to blame the parlous state of Cambodian society and economy in 1979, not on the policies of Democratic Kampuchea, but on its overthrow.

There were even suggestions, including a CIA report on Kampuchean demography, that the largest death toll had not occurred under Pol Pot but during the period of Vietnamese intervention which led to his removal.<sup>114</sup>

In February 1979 China invaded northern Viet Nam as punishment, to teach Viet Nam a lesson, as they said. This caused immense destruction in Vietnam's northern border provinces, but turned into a military defeat for China, and had no effect on the situation in Cambodia.

Later in 1979 Thailand allowed remnants of the defeated Democratic Kampuchea army to cross Thai territory carrying their weapons to find sanctuary in another part of Cambodia near the Thai border. This is a violation of international law, according to which belligerents entering non-belligerent territory are to be disarmed and interned pending resolution of the conflict.<sup>115</sup>

International cooperation against the new Cambodian government during 1979-1980 was concentrated in the development of huge refugee centers near and along the border between Cambodia and Thailand. Indeed there were tens of thousand of Cambodians who had fled to the border in the perilous early months of 1979, when no one knew how the war would end and which party would emerge victorious.

In the Western press this was usually portrayed as rejection, by up to a quarter of the surviving population, of the new People's Republic as well as of the old Democratic Kampuchea. The refugee centers, however, were created for the purpose of drawing the maximum number of people, particularly the better educated, out of Cambodia into the refugee camps where they could be used for propaganda against the new government and as a recruitment base for armed forces who would eventually cooperate in its overthrow.<sup>116</sup>

These anti-Phnom Penh armed forces were first of all the Democratic Kampuchea remnants, who were given rest and rehabilitation facilities both within Thailand and in the ill-defined border zone. Food, medicine, money and arms were transmitted to them through a variety of open, semi-clandestine, and clandestine arrangements which within a couple of years had revived their fighting qualities.

Two other non-communist armed groups were developed, with more overt Western and ASEAN aid in the form of food, medicine, shelter, money, and

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114 National Foreign Assessment Center, Central Intelligence Agency, "Kampuchea: A Demographic Catastrophe", [Washington, D.C., May 1980]; Michael Vickery, "Democratic Kampuchea: CIA to the Rescue", *BCAS*, Vol. 14, No. 4, 1982, pp. 45-54.

115 Michael Battye, Reuters, *New Straits Times* (Kuala Lumpur), 2 May 1979; *Far Eastern Economic Review* (FEER) Yearbook 1980, p. 293.

116 Vickery, "Refugee Politics: The Khmer Camp System in Thailand".

arms. They were the Khmer Peoples National Liberation Front (KPNLF) under an old politician named Son Sann, and another group loyal to Prince Sihanouk (FUNCINPEC).

Within the United Nations Cambodia's seat continued to be occupied by the representative of Pol Pot's Democratic Kampuchea, and annually the UN, in one form or another, voted against the replacement of Democratic Kampuchea by the Peoples Republic.

In spite of political isolation by most of the developed world, and a virtual economic blockade initiated, and enforced, by the United States, the Peoples Republic of Kampuchea (after 1989 State of Cambodia), made rapid progress in restoring normal, and steadily improving, conditions of life for its people. Substantial foreign aid came from the Soviet Union and from Viet Nam, even though the latter was hardly in a better position than Cambodia following the destruction wrought by the US during the war of 1960-1975.

If Cambodia since 1979 had had normal international political and economic relations, instead of facing blockade and subversion by the world's largest (China) and most powerful (US) countries, it would probably by now [1991] have at least returned to the level of its best prewar years.<sup>117</sup>

The progress under the new Peoples Republic in Phnom Penh has not been denied by its enemies. Neither do they deny that the Pol Pot group does not deserve to return to power. Nevertheless, allegedly because Pol Pot was overthrown by an illegitimate foreign intervention, the state which resulted, the Peoples Republic/State Of Cambodia (PRK/SOC) may not be allowed to survive, but must be replaced by some other entity which more certainly 'represents the will of the Cambodian people'.

For the West this should be a non-communist government based on the KPNLF and the Sihanoukists. These two groups, however, have shown such incompetence, disunity, corruption, and brutality towards civilians within their small enclaves on the Thai border, that they cannot be taken seriously as the nucleus of a state apparatus.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> See Vickery, *Kampuchea, Politics, Economics, and Society*; Vickery, "Cambodia 1988", *Asien*, Nr. 28, April 1988, Hamburg, pp. 1-19; Vickery, "Notes on the Political Economy of the People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK)", *JCA*, Vol. 20, No. 4 (1990), pp. 435-465.

<sup>118</sup> See Michael Vickery, "A Critique of the Lawyers' Committee for International Human Rights, Kampuchea Mission of November 1984", *JCA*, Vol. 18, No. 1 (1988), p. 115, for KPNLF brutality.

For the incompetence and corruption of the Sihanoukists see the reports of the first attempt to sell off the Cambodian national heritage on the Thai market initiated by Sihanouk's group in 1982 – "Sihanouk endorses timber agreement", *The Nation*, 27 November 1982 citing Buor Hell, a high-ranking official in Sihanouk's group, and a distant relative of the prince, for the news that they had signed an agreement with a private Thai company to supply one million cubic meters of Cambodian timber. See also

Simultaneously, a propaganda campaign, in which well-known professional humanitarian organizations collaborated, was cranked up, its objective to convince the world that the Phnom Penh government violated human rights. This campaign ignored the great improvement in that area consequent on the enforced change of regime in 1979, and the subsequent steady enhancements, despite lack of trained officials and the wartime conditions which the US, China and ASEAN imposed on Cambodia.<sup>119</sup>

Until 1989 PRK legitimacy was also denied because of the alleged presence of 100-200,000 Vietnamese soldiers and Vietnamese advisers to the administration who supposedly ran the country, demonstrating that it was not independent. The first demand of Phnom Penh's enemies was that the Vietnamese must withdraw, after which, it was implied, occasionally even stated explicitly, there would be no problem in reestablishing normal relations with Cambodia.

At that time the US, China, and ASEAN believed that Viet Nam had no intention of withdrawing, but intended to transform Cambodia into some kind of Vietnamese colony or province. It was also believed that without the large Vietnamese presence the PRK could not survive, but would be defeated by the three-party Coalition within a few months.<sup>120</sup> Then, against all predictions, Vietnam, after several partial withdrawals beginning in 1983, withdrew all their troops in September 1989, and not only did the PRK not collapse, but defended itself very well, even making impressive gains against the Coalition forces.<sup>121</sup>

This is why what is called the 'Peace Process' had to be initiated. The 'Peace Process' has been a process of trying to take away from the PRK at the negotiating table what could not be won from it on the battlefield or through blockade, embargo, and subversion.

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Buor Hell's statements reported in *The Bangkok Post*, 27 October 1982, and in the *Asian Wall Street Journal*, 29 November, 1982, p. 1. A few days later Sihanouk denied that he had backed the deal, but nevertheless was quoted as saying he "hoped that the contract would be approved by other members of [the coalition]".

<sup>119</sup> See Lawyers' Committee for International Human Rights, "Preliminary Summary of Findings and Conclusions, Kampuchea Mission", New York, November 1984; their final report, *Kampuchea: After the Worst*, New York, August 1985; Michael Vickery, "A Critique of the Lawyers' Committee for International Human Rights, Kampuchea Mission of November 1984", *JCA*, Vol. 18 No. 1 (1988), pp. 108-116; Amnesty International, "Kampuchea Political Imprisonment and Torture", June 1987. See comment on these reports below, pp. 277 ff.

<sup>120</sup> Vickery, "Notes on the Political Economy of the Peoples Republic of Kampuchea", p. 437 and note 12.

<sup>121</sup> Vickery, "Postscript: 1983", *Cambodia 1975-1982*, pp. 291-98. [On the propaganda campaign about Vietnamese troops in Cambodia see *Cambodia: A Political Survey*, Phnom Penh, Funan Press, 2007, pp. 14-42].

Whether ‘Jakarta Informal Meeting’, ‘Australia Plan’, the August 1990 UN-endorsed ‘Framework’ proposal, the Big Five November 1990 ‘Proposed Structure for a Comprehensive Political Settlement’, the 1991 US ‘Road Map’ for normalization of relations with Viet Nam and Cambodia, and finally the Paris agreement of October 1991, they have all had as their goal the dissolution of the present Cambodian government and its replacement by its enemies, or at least by a coalition of Phnom Penh with its enemies, even at the risk of return to power of the blood-stained Pol Pot group.<sup>122</sup>

Ironically, after years of pressure on Viet Nam to remove its troops from Cambodia, the US Road Map requires them to intervene again to force the Cambodians to accede to the Big Five ‘Proposed Structure’ of political suicide.<sup>123</sup>

The US and ASEAN were quite cynical. While pretending to abhor Pol Pot, they created and supported all initiatives to weaken his most effective opponents, although knowing that their envisaged coalition was unviable because of the deadly enmity among the three, or if the PRK were included, four, parties.

Earlier chances for peace were energetically blocked, with the US taking the lead. There could have been peace as early as 1979, after the defeat of the internationally-condemned DK regime. Probably the Vietnamese would have withdrawn more quickly if they had been assured that the Pol Pot group would not be rebuilt on the Thai border, and if the ASEAN draft declaration for the July 1981 International Conference on Kampuchea, calling for the disarming of all Kampuchean factions, had been adopted, rather than rejected under Chinese and US pressure.

All that would have been necessary was not to construct the refugee camp system, to keep the then small guerrilla groups on the Thai border isolated and deprived of new arms, and to channel needed aid to the interior of Cambodia rather than to the border. That this was not done, that the opposite policy was carried out, was a deliberate choice, chiefly by the US, China, and Thailand, to try to destroy the new Cambodian state at all costs.

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<sup>122</sup> See Michael Vickery, “Cambodia”, in Douglas Allen and Ngo Vinh Long, eds., *Coming to Terms, Indochina, the United States and the War*, Westview Press, Boulder, Colorado, 1991, pp. 89-128. A summary of the Road Map was published in “A US-VN normalization road map”, *The Nation*, 25 October 1991;

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.* Vietnam must “convince Phnom Penh to sign and fully implement the Paris Agreement [of October 1991]”, and “convince the Phnom Penh authorities to agree formally to cooperate on PoW/MIA matters ...”.

Apparently the US has learned nothing since the Paris Agreement of 1973 which also mistakenly assumed an ability by Vietnam to coerce the Cambodian communists. On a visit to Bangkok in July 1991 Assistant Secretary of State Richard Solomon confirmed the linkage between “a solution to the war in Cambodia” and normalizing relations with Viet Nam (“US links VN ties to MIA issue, Cambodia peace”, *Bangkok Post*, 29 July 1991).



The Cold War was still alive, and Viet Nam and the PRK were seen as Soviet proxies. On the part of the US, it was also to punish Viet Nam, not only for deposing Pol Pot, but for defeating the US in the earlier war. The US was kicking at its 'syndrome'.

In 1985 there seemed to be interest within ASEAN for a negotiating process with Viet Nam in regard to Cambodia. The US, which until then had claimed to be following the ASEAN lead, came forward in the person of then Secretary of State George Shultz to warn ASEAN against making proposals which Viet Nam might accept.<sup>124</sup>

Perhaps the most dramatic moves toward peace were the declaration of new (1988) Thai Prime Minister Chatichai Choonhavan that he intended to transform Indochina from a battlefield to a market place, and his invitation to PRK Prime Minister Hun Sen to visit Bangkok in early 1989 even before all the Vietnamese military had left Cambodia. Until Chatichai's democratically elected government was overthrown by a military coup in February 1991, Thailand broke with traditional ASEAN and US policy on Cambodia, and was clearly headed toward recognition of Phnom Penh instead of the DK Coalition, something which might have brought instant peace.

The Phnom Penh government and Viet Nam did their part to meet the West half way, short of total surrender and dismantling of the PRK government. Not only did Viet Nam withdraw its troops, demonstrating that the PRK was an independent, viable state, but both countries began to follow World Bank and IMF suggestions to liberalize their economies, after which, implicitly, they should have been eligible for normal economic relations with those international institutions.

In spite of glowing reports about Vietnamese progress from the World Bank and IMF, the US blocked all proposals to remove the economic blockade of Viet Nam and Cambodia, and in 1990 even made private contact with those countries by American citizens more difficult.<sup>125</sup>

Those peace moves by Viet Nam and the Phnom Penh government could not be tolerated because they offered some promise for real peace and recognition of the PRK/SOC, which the US was determined to destroy. Those **peace moves** were to be supplanted by the 'Peace Process', which was intended to remove the existing Cambodian government, whatever hardships were involved for the

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<sup>124</sup> Shultz was quoted in the *Bangkok Post*, 13 July 1985. [See more detail of Shultz's bullying of ASEAN and Australian Foreign Minister Bill Hayden in David Roberts, *Political Transition in Cambodia 1991-99*, London, Curzon, 2001, p. 15].

<sup>125</sup> See below, pp. 50 ff. Vickery, "Notes on the Political Economy of the People's Republic of Kampuchea", pp. 454-5. The World Bank report, *Cambodia Agenda for Rehabilitation and Reconstruction*, June 1992, was very positive about Cambodia's achievements and prospects.

Cambodian people, and even if the discredited Pol Pot group were enabled to return to power.

As happened in the 1960s during the Viet Nam War, opposition to US Cambodia policy began to appear in influential American circles, including several active Senators. The George Bush [I] regime in 1989-1990 was also discomfited by Thailand's opening to Phnom Penh, and probably feared that China, which announced the end of its aid to the Coalition (though they later reneged) at a time when Washington was not contemplating any such move, might change its Cambodia policy, leaving the US as the only major power supporting, however covertly, the Pol Pot Khmer Rouge.

Thus the unexpected announcement in July 1990 that Washington would no longer support the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea in the UN, and would begin a process of negotiated normalization with Viet Nam, should not be seen as a real shift in policy, but as a cynical finesse of domestic political opposition to Bush and his policies.

On the ground in Southeast Asia, US policy hardly changed; and combined with the sympathy for the anti-Phnom Penh Coalition shown by the Thai military-dominated regime after the coup in February 1991, the US 'Road Map' formulated in 1991 was a harder anti-Phnom Penh line than was being pushed a year earlier.

The increasing pressure during 1991 succeeded in the 'Peace Process' objective: to take away from Phnom Penh at the conference table a large part of what they had been able to preserve on the battlefield, even after Viet Nam had withdrawn.<sup>126</sup>

In the final Paris agreement in October 1991 the SOC managed to preserve its formal existence and avoid the dissolution which earlier drafts had envisaged. They also managed to secure Phnom Penh as the venue for the Supreme National Council (SNC), the supra-state body consisting of six representatives from Phnom Penh and two each from the three opposing factions, FUNCINPEC, originally led by Prince Sihanouk, the KPNLF nominally under Son Sann, and the *Partie of Democratic Kampuchea*, usually termed the 'Khmer Rouge', the group of Pol Pot, Ieng Sary, and Khieu Samphan.<sup>127</sup>

Under the new agreement the elections, scheduled for 1993, were stacked, as far as possible, against the SOC. After much protest they signed for proportional representation by province, contrary to former Cambodian practice, a formula

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<sup>126</sup> For a discussion of the true character of the sequence of events trumpeted to the world as 'peace proposals' resulting in a 'peace agreement', see *Cambodia: A Political Survey*, pp. 14-42.

<sup>127</sup> Since agreeing to return to Phnom Penh as President of the SNC, Sihanouk has taken pains to state that FUNCINPEC is no longer his party, but is led by his son Norodom Ranariddh. During the last days of October 1991 there were nightly announcements of this on Phnom Penh television.

which would give the maximum chance to their existing enemies, in particular the Khmer Rouge, and to any other parties which might be formed.

And there could be many. Another provision of the agreement said that any group of 5000 persons may be registered as a political party, and some cynics might argue that given local political propensities, the likely number of parties will be the adult population divided by 5000. The multi-party system which was accepted, both in the agreements and in the new People's Party programme, could produce an incompetent legislature and an impotent government.<sup>128</sup>

Read carefully, the new peace agreements seemed designed to ensure further destabilization, rather than lasting peace. They incorporated most of the anti-SOC provisions of the draft agreements devised by western states, which were designed to effect the dissolution of the Phnom Penh government.

As was obvious in advance, the implementation of the peace agreement undermined the SOC, gave the Sihanouk and Son Sann groups an entry into Cambodian politics which they could not achieve by their own efforts, and enhanced the position of the Khmer Rouge. As in the 1950s-1960s, these Cambodian groups took advantage of the international Cold War pressure of the Peace Agreement to engage in local Cold War maneuvers.

Of the older Cambodian Cold War issues independence had been removed from the agenda, for no power is now committed to keep Cambodia as a colony or protectorate. Jockeying for foreign support in domestic politics, and irredentism, however, have emerged as still vital relics of the old Cold War.

Sihanouk had no sooner returned to Phnom Penh when he gave the United States the green light to subvert the Phnom Penh government, as he once accused them of trying to subvert him.<sup>129</sup> While on the one hand blaming the Khmer Rouge for their intransigence, Sihanouk both criticized UNTAC for doing too little and warned them against using military force against the Khmer Rouge, and he smuggled Khieu Samphan into the non-aligned nations' conference where he was not expected, nor, apparently, desired.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> These provisions did not work out the way I projected here, and the proportional representation by province provision backfired. See below n.742

<sup>129</sup> Sihanouk seems to have given the new US envoy to Phnom Penh covert signals to subvert, not himself as the US did in the 1960s, but the existing government in Phnom Penh, the SOC, saying, "“Since you are rich you can help the Cambodian people who are so poor ... Your money should not go into the pockets of our officials or our civil servants ... You should go directly to the people”". “[T]he United States should manage the funds and hire workers itself rather than trust the government, he said ... ‘We cannot avoid corruption ... .Please don't give directly money to them [the SOC] or even materials – even cars, because they may use the cars for their families ... Asia is Asia, eh’” (“Sihanouk warns America: Don't oust me again”, *Bangkok Post*, 20 November 1991, AFP).

<sup>130</sup> Nayan Chanda, “‘Isolate Khmer Rouge’, Sihanouk chides UNTAC for feeble response”, *FEER*, 30 July 1992, pp. 18-19; “Khieu Samphan surprise”, *New Sunday*

Sihanouk, as in earlier days, was trying to play all sides against one another to strengthen his personal position, without regard for the needs of his country. Bursts of affection for the Khmer Rouge are staged to attract UNTAC and SOC support for himself. If the Khmer Rouge were eliminated from the political scene, either through UNTAC military action, or via diplomacy, Sihanouk's own position would suffer, while the SOC would gain.<sup>131</sup>

As for irredentism, the old Cambodian demand for return of part of Cochinchina would seem to have been permanently shelved, but there was a clear and present danger on the Thai border, which was being ignored, while alarms were being sounded about a mythical danger from the Vietnamese side. Sihanouk cut the Gordian Knot of the Cochinchina issue in the 1960s by insisting only on recognition of Cambodia's existing borders, and no one except DK extremists have overtly pressed to go beyond that.

There is, however, room for honest disagreement about precisely where that 'existing' border should be traced on the ground, a problem which has existed ever since the first French cartographic surveys, but which did not matter so long as both countries were within French Indochina, and which neither side has been willing to face honestly since independence from France.

A little known detail of Indochinese history – an error in the original French Indochina map survey and emplacement of triangulation points – resulted in objective errors in all maps, and the greatest errors were in the southern Cambodia-Viet Nam border region.<sup>132</sup>

During its period of friendship with Viet Nam, the PRK signed a new treaty designed to settle some of the inconsistencies. This treaty was then denounced by anti-SOC Cambodians as a sell-out to Viet Nam, and the Cambodian extremist side of the argument was supported by Sihanouk and received widespread sympathetic attention in the international press, even though at worst, the Vietnamese, it seems, may have gained a mere 55 square kilometers.<sup>133</sup>

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*Times* (Kuala Lumpur), 30 August 1992, followed in the *New Straits Times* (Kuala Lumpur), 2 September 1992 by a photo suggesting intimate friendship between Sihanouk and Khieu Samphan.

<sup>131</sup> Note that this was written in 1992; but as described below, pp. 404, 455, the UNTAC, and Sihanouk's, game plan required a vigorous KR.

<sup>132</sup> See Victor Delahaye, *La plaine des joncs et sa mise en valeur*, Rennes: Imprimerie de l'Ouest Eclair, 1928; and L. Malleret, *L'Archéologie du Delta du Mekong* tome I, Paris, École Française d'Extrême-Orient, 1959, pp. 6-7.

<sup>133</sup> Nayan Chanda, "Land Erosion, Cambodians question status of country's borders", *FEER*, 3 September 1992, pp. 16-17. Chanda's bias appears in his acceptance of a US State Department opinion that all but one square kilometer of the disputed areas went to Vietnam. For an objective treatment of the 1985 treaty see Evans and Rowley, p. 165.

[In fact, writing in 1992, I was too optimistic here about the end of irredentism on the Vietnamese border. Since the 1993 election, and particularly in 1997-98 and again in 2006, anti-Vietnamese chauvinism and irredentism have been cultivated by the extremist

The Cambodian extremists may have seen implicit UNTAC support for their anti-Vietnamese irredentism in the appointment of two Americans, US government officer Timothy Carney and his deputy Stephen Heder, who have long reputations of anti-PRK/SOC activism, even pro-DK activities, to head one of the important UNTAC components, the Information and Education Component, which is in charge of monitoring news and propaganda within Cambodia. Cambodians in leadership positions, whether of the SOC or its enemies, were aware of this background, and it was inevitable that they saw Carney and Heder as a kind of great power support for the anti-Phnom Penh position.<sup>134</sup>

The Cambodian-Thai border, relatively speaking, was being ignored, for Thai pressure there is part of the new Cold War vendetta against Viet Nam via Cambodia, and Thai interest there, including support for the Khmer Rouge, was being treated as solely economic, a scramble for quick wealth by Thai businessmen. The old Thai claims on northwest Cambodia were forgotten.

Interestingly, it was also Heder who was responsible for a good academic study of the question. Under the pseudonym 'Larry Palmer', Heder in 1987 published "Thailand's Kampuchea Incidents, Territorial disputes and Armed confrontation Along the Thai-Kampuchean Frontier".<sup>135</sup> This traced the history of Thai land-grabbing along the Cambodian border, including the way in which new settlements and anti-communist activities were being utilized for that purpose.

We may hope that now Heder, with his academic record of concern for the sanctity of Cambodia's borders, will, in his new capacity as deputy chief of propaganda for UNTAC [1992-93], revive his old study and call as much attention to the Thai danger – which he so brilliantly analyzed anonymously some years ago – as his subsequent writing in his own name, and presence in his new job in itself, calls to the Cambodia-Viet Nam border.

What was the reason for the US obstinacy, in which ASEAN cravenly acquiesced? Was it merely irrational, a continuing 'Vietnam Syndrome' by a handful of sick old men in Washington (VWRs, Viet Nam warmonger retreats) still nurturing the wounds of defeat by what they considered a fourth-rate power?

I think we would be fortunate if it were mere irrationality, for those afflicted with such irrationality are probably few and their numbers dwindling. Rather, they are pursuing a rational goal, and one which links the recent destruction of

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opposition to the government to greater levels than ever before. See Vickery, *Cambodia: a Political Survey*, pp. 183-192.]

<sup>134</sup> See further on this pp. 106, 392.

<sup>135</sup> Published in *News From Kampuchea*, I, 4, Waverly, N.S.W., Australia, Committee of Patriotic Kampuchians, October 1977, pp. 1-31.

Iraq with the earlier destruction of Cambodia, and the continuing persecution of that country [as of 1991, and with respect to Iraq even more obvious in 2007].

The rationality is summed up in the ‘New World Order’ of George Bush [I]. This New World Order means that since the Soviet Union has withdrawn from the Cold War and from confrontation with the US, the latter is now free to pursue hegemonistic goals worldwide. The goals are political and military submission, and submission to crude predatory capitalism.

No nation, however small, is to be allowed to challenge such US supremacy by opting for another political-economic structure, by trying to form a regional trade bloc, by protecting its infant industries, or even by fairly winning a share of the US market, or some other market to which the US wishes to export. The message in 1991 was Cambodia now (as earlier), and tomorrow any small weak country which does not voluntarily submit.

The foregoing introductory material may be supplemented with an article written a year earlier, and referred to several times, above. It emphasized PRK Cambodia’s economic progress, which was in line with the positive World Bank reports about Viet Nam noted above.

### Notes on the Political Economy of the People’s Republic of Kampuchea (1989)<sup>136</sup>

The theme of this conference, “Asia: Capitalist Development and the Future of Socialism” may seem so remote from Cambodian conditions that bringing Cambodia into the discussions is irrelevant. Cambodia is nowhere near even the beginnings of industrialization, and on its own will never become a ‘Little Dragon,’ nor an NIC; and unless linked to a regional bloc must make its way by efficient development of agriculture, something which all Cambodian regimes have been unwilling to face, or have failed to achieve.

A look at Cambodia, however, which no conference on the Asia-Pacific Region should try to avoid, may provide some insights on not only the social, but political and international dimensions of industrialization, and economic development in general, in countries which are still small and economically weak.

In the 1970s Richard Nixon characterized his April 1970 invasion of Cambodia as “the Nixon Doctrine in its purest form”;<sup>137</sup> and in 1989 we might

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<sup>136</sup> Paper presented at the *JCA* 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Conference, Manila 10-12 November, 1989, published in *JCA*, Vol. 20, No. 4 (1990), pp. 435-436. Pagination here and footnote numbering are different from the original.

<sup>137</sup> Recorded in Noam Chomsky, “The Wider War”, in *For Reasons of State*, p. 192, citing a press conference of 12 November 1971, and U.S. State Department Bulletin, 6 December 1971, p. 646.

profitably look at what the continuing U.S.-sponsored violence in Cambodia can tell us about a U.S. regime doctrine, perhaps only implicit.

Most discussions of Indochina are forced into the straightjacket of not just an orthodoxy, which implies some continuing discussion, but a *doxa*, “that which is beyond question and which each agent tacitly accords by the mere fact of acting in accord with social convention”.<sup>138</sup>

This is the *doxa* of unchanging Vietnamese aggressivity and expansionism which has been used since the early French colonial period to explain everything from the disappearance of Champa and the disintegration of pre-modern Cambodia, through the beneficence of French control over Cambodia, to the Cambodian rejection of French goodwill, the victory of Pol Pot, as well as his overthrow, and the PRK.

As an example note the map in page 50 of Nayan Chanda’s *Brother Enemy* showing “The Stages of Vietnamese Expansionism”.<sup>139</sup> A map like this is deemed essential in every basic textbook of Southeast Asian History, and the expansion of one country against its neighbors in Southeast Asia is presented as uniquely Vietnamese.

No similar map has ever been prepared to illustrate Thai expansionism, during roughly the same period, and against some of the same victims, Mon and Khmer, who like the Cham and Khmer of southern Viet Nam, have been reduced in the first case to an insignificant minority, and in the second to a somewhat larger potentially more troublesome minority, without recognized cultural or linguistic rights and conscious of its invidious position.<sup>140</sup>

The search for Vietnamese iniquity, and disinclination to find any fault with the Thai goes back to the first western contacts with both. Vietnamese kings persecuted Christian missionaries, and moreover in the only Southeast Asian country where they had any success, while Thai kings accepted and even

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<sup>138</sup> I have borrowed this concept from Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, quotation from p. 169, admittedly tearing it out of the context for which he devised it.

<sup>139</sup> In general this book, although ‘hailed’ as brilliant history, has refused to take a critical look at anything which might undermine U.S. regime orthodoxy. Perhaps this is why it has been ‘hailed’.

<sup>140</sup> Ethnic minority rights are guaranteed by the Vietnamese constitution, but unmentioned in the Thai; and primary education in minority languages is even less conceivable in Thailand than among the Cham and Khmer of Viet Nam. I must emphasize that my purpose here, and in the following paragraphs, is not to single out Thailand for blame, for in these matters Thailand’s conduct has been well within standard international norms. The purpose is to call attention to the way in which Viet Nam’s positions have been viewed through the blinkers of colonialist and imperialist prejudices, and, on the part of academics, intellectually dishonest analyses.

encouraged their educational activities, apparently secure in the knowledge that few of their people would convert.<sup>141</sup>

Later the Vietnamese energetically opposed French efforts to ‘civilize’ them, while Thai kings assiduously made deals which gave Europeans most of what they wanted, at the same time expanding royal power domestically. At the end of the 19th-century enthusiastic American missionaries were even predicting a brilliant future for Thailand, as compared to the stagnant Japanese, doomed to underdevelopment by their rigid culture, and of course by their resistance to Christianity.

Even later the Vietnamese had the effrontery, not only to fight for independence, but to win it, and then to win a continuation war against the world’s most powerful country whose leaders wished to deprive Viet Nam of the fruits of its independence struggle. In the Second Indochina War, we should not forget, Thai leaders were renting their soldiers to the U.S. to help defeat Viet Nam.<sup>142</sup>

The *doxa* shows even in what are presented as cultural-philosophical discussions of old literary texts. In his deconstruction of an early 19th-century chronicle in verse, David Chandler sometimes forces activities and reflections of its characters into an anti-Vietnamese mode, not giving sufficient heed to what he knows as historical fact: that between 1800 and 1846 the Cambodian elites were split into pro-Thai and pro-Vietnamese factions, each, so far as we can know at this remove, acting according to their conception of patriotism.<sup>143</sup>

Chandler has found it difficult to go beyond the modern *doxa* that no true Cambodian could ever be pro-Vietnamese, and thus he has skewed his interpretation of the very interesting text he was studying.

The *doxa* has been most powerful within the period of direct interest to this conference. Since 1979 journalists, academics, and politicians have seemingly been unable to write or pronounce ‘Cambodia’ or ‘Kampuchea’, not to mention ‘Peoples Republic of’, or even the acronym ‘PRK’. It is always the ‘Vietnamese-

<sup>141</sup> A hitherto little-known example of violent Thai intolerance, the murder of 7 Thai Christians by police in 1940 “for refusing to deny their faith”, was revealed by the *Bangkok Post*, 26 September 1989. Another report said they had “been suspected of working for French spies” (*Bangkok Post*, 19 September 1989). *The Nation* 23/10/89, “Pope beatifies seven Thai roman Catholics, French”; “Philip Siphong, a lay catechist and head of the Thai Catholic community of Songkhon, a village in Nakhon Phanom, was killed on December 26, 1940, for refusing to renounce his faith after his arrest”. “Thai military authorities viewed allegiance to ‘western’ religion in wartime as treachery”. “The same day sisters Agnes Phila and Lucy Khambang, who taught at the community, and four of their Thai companions aged between 14 and 21 were shot by firing squad.”

<sup>142</sup> George McT. Kahin, *Intervention*, New York, Anchor Books, 1987, pp. 333-335. Cannon fodder for rent was also provided by the ROK and Philippines, each of which made a better deal, according to Kahin, than the Thai.

<sup>143</sup> David Chandler, “Songs at the Edge of the Forest”.



backed Heng Samrin Regime', of which the only objectively accurate element is that the PRK indeed has had Vietnamese support. Otherwise it is less *à propos* than, say, 'U.S.-backed Bob Hawke regime', for no personality cult around Heng Samrin has ever been attempted, and he enjoys far less personal authority than Bob Hawke.

A more dangerously irresponsible example, dangerous in that its widespread currency impedes the peace process, is the *doxa* that Viet Nam committed a gross violation of international law in its invasion of December 1978 and overthrow of Democratic Kampuchea. On 8 July 1988 Michael Leifer, generally considered a responsible academic, in a seminar at the Institute for Strategic and International Studies in Kuala Lumpur, referred to "... the invasion of Kampuchea, which violated the principle of sanctity of sovereignty and distribution of power in the region".<sup>144</sup>

But the following day when I challenged his repetition of the *doxa* at Universiti Sains Malaysia in Penang, he agreed with my objections, apparently indicating that he did not even believe what he felt he was obliged to say in public gatherings.

He did not hesitate to admit that the international legal aspects of the Vietnamese intervention were anything but clear, that there were indeed international legal precedents for what they did, and that the Thai authorities may have been in even greater violation of international law when later that year they allowed the Pol Pot remnants to cross Thai territory fully armed in order to seek a safe zone in another part of Cambodia.

The same clique has followed the *doxa* that Viet Nam, always and forever expansionistic, would never willingly withdraw its troops from Cambodia, in spite of abundant evidence since at least 1983 that such was in fact their intention. And now that it is being realized, they feel obliged to punctuate every headline with a question mark.

As I have written in another context, there has been a rare dialectical reinforcement between official U.S. and ASEAN disinformation and housebroken journalists who with witless reverence have repeated whatever their favorite 'western diplomats' said until they have apparently come to believe their own propaganda.<sup>145</sup>

And in the academic milieu, a Cambodia scholar attending a conference in Canberra in 1987 was told by an analyst of the Office of National Assessments (with a delightful attempt at quantitative precision reminiscent of American warmongers in the 1960s trying to prove statistically that victory was imminent), that there was only a 1 in 300 chance Viet Nam would withdraw from Cambodia

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<sup>144</sup> *New Straits Times* (Kuala Lumpur), 9 July 1988.

<sup>145</sup> Michael Vickery, "Cambodia", in Douglas Allen and Ngo Vinh Long, eds., *Coming to Terms, Indochina, the United States and the War*, Westview Press, Boulder, Colorado, 1991, pp. 89-128.

by 1991, if they did the PRK would not last 7 months (mind you, not ‘half a year’, or ‘less than a year’, but seven months), that there was only a 50% chance that Sihanouk would meet Hun Sen that year (1987), and that the PRK army was suffering desertions of 50% in some units.<sup>146</sup>

One might have wondered on which side of the information relationship that analyst stood – disinformer, or misinformed. There were already so many signals that Viet Nam intended to withdraw that 1/300 odds against it was quite unrealistic, and Hun Sen’s first meeting with Sihanouk not long after showed that bet to be off also.

Although Cambodian youth have been reluctant to serve in the army, the numbers of PRK defectors reaching the border indicates that the rate was much lower, about what might be expected under the circumstances; and even if the maximum numbers of reported arrests of regime opponents according to quite prejudiced sources were added in as ‘deserters’ the total would be unimpressive in terms of total PRK armed forces.<sup>147</sup>

Was the ONA trying to disinform Cambodia specialists in Australia, or was this what ONA believed and the advice they were giving the Australian government (in the latter case perhaps contributing to Australian slowness in changing policy)? On one point an answer will appear. The Vietnamese have withdrawn, and there are only 6 months to go until the ONA deadline for collapse of the Phnom Penh government.

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<sup>146</sup> The Office of National Assessments is the research branch of Australian intelligence. The pseudo-statistical froth is no accident. The person in question is an American (an infiltrator in ONA?), and served in the Vietnam War, where he perhaps learned how to manipulate such figures. Unlike the CIA, in Australia the thugs and bookworms are organized separately. The thugs have been successfully ridiculed in Brian Toohey and William Pinwill, *Oyster: The Story of the Australian Secret Intelligence*.

While ONA awaits its Toohey and Pinwill I offer the above as an example of the gems which might be unearthed. The 1/300 odds is cited in Ben Kiernan, “The Inclusion of the Khmer Rouge in the Cambodian Peace Process: Causes and Consequences”, in *Genocide and Democracy in Cambodia*, edited by Ben Kiernan, New Haven, Yale, 1993, p. 193.

<sup>147</sup> By prejudiced enemies I am referring to the New-York based Lawyers’ Committee for Human Rights, whose work on Cambodia I have discussed in “A Critique of the Lawyers’ Committee for International Human Rights, Kampuchea Mission of November 1989”, *JCA* 18/1 (1988), pp. 108-116 and Amnesty International, whose special reports on Cambodia since 1986 have been designed to undermine the PRK.

Nevertheless, they have at most reported only hundreds of allegedly illegal arrests; and hardly that number of defectors have been boasted by the coalition groups on the Thai border. When on 20 September 1989, 116 PRK troops surrendered on the Thai border it was reported as “the largest ever [defection] by Phnom Penh soldiers fighting resistance guerillas along the frontier” (*The Nation*, 21 September 1989). Since 50% desertions imply tens of thousands, who could not simply go back to home and work, they would have to be forming dissident groups within the country, something which no one has suggested.

Whatever ONA believed then, or believes now, certainly the United States and ASEAN do not believe collapse is imminent, for they would not be searching frantically for new measures to force collapse, and the Thai government would not be trying so hard to build a new relationship with Phnom Penh – they could just wait for the collapse and then deal with the new leaders, with whom the Thai military at least, have been dealing profitably for 10 years.

Among the frantic measures intended to effect destruction of the PRK is a continuation of the economic blockade which the U.S. has so far successfully railroaded through international financial institutions, against the views of their experts.<sup>148</sup> Although no one thinks Cambodia will immediately fall apart economically, or be defeated militarily, there is a possibility of exhaustion in the long-term if U.S. policy to arm their enemies and block their economy continues.

The permeation of media, academia, and international political milieus by the *doxa* now threatens the very existence of Cambodia, for it has numbed resistance to specious arguments by enemies of Cambodia and Viet Nam who are trying to renege on implicit agreements offered between 1979 and 1988, and who seem intent on preventing Cambodian recovery from the destruction inflicted successively by incompetent royalty, corrupt bourgeoisie and officials, civil war, U.S. invasion and bombing, a disastrous revolution, and continuing factional conflict.

When the PRK was established in January 1979 all institutions, all political, economic, and social structures had to be rebuilt from zero. Besides the damage from several years of war and revolutionary transformation, during 1975-1979 the DK regime had attempted to forcibly return the country to poor peasant level with only a minimum of essential industry, primitive education, and wilful neglect of such trained personnel as existed.

Although they had intended to construct a new Cambodian society, the result compounded with the effects of the 1970-75 war was to leave Cambodia with a level of human destruction and social dislocation comparable to parts of Eastern Europe, such as Poland and Yugoslavia in 1945.

Cambodia's revolutionary experience had been unique. Military victory was achieved in 1975 by encircling the city from the countryside, but the Cambodian communist leadership then overturned all previous notions of how a socialist society should be built. In spite of ostensible allegiance to Marxism-Leninism, they followed policies contrary to all previous Marxist theory and practice.

They held neither to Marx's view that communism would come through proletarian revolution and working class rule after capitalism had reached its highest level of development, nor Lenin's programme of vanguard intellectual-proletarian leadership in a largely peasant society, nor even Mao's of the peasantry as the leading revolutionary class, but supported by industrial

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<sup>148</sup> Details are discussed below.

development and a large, skilled urban working class. Nor did they adopt a Stalinist programme of forced primitive socialist accumulation from the peasantry to build an industrialized urban sector.

Their Democratic Kampuchea (DK), to the contrary, evacuated the population from towns, denied the revolutionary importance of the proletariat, who were even treated as class enemies, and turned almost the entire nation into poor peasants, who in the DK scheme were the only revolutionary and progressive class.<sup>149</sup>

Money, markets, even barter trade, were abolished, and a command economy was instituted with centrally-directed requisition of goods from points of production to supply the needs of other localities or state foreign trade. People were tied to their workplaces, kept there by threat of violence, and towns were empty except for small numbers of administrators, military, and the few factories which were considered essential.

The ability to impose this system in 1975 was in part because of the near total economic, social, and moral breakdown of the 1970-75 war period, but also because destruction of the towns was welcomed by the peasant army in Cambodian conditions, in which the class enemy of the peasantry was not rural landlords, but usury networks emanating from the towns.<sup>150</sup> Total mobilization and an end to urban waste also made some sense in the emergency of the first few months after April 1975.

Once the DK administrative center had fled in January 1979, a true classless, and structure-less, society was left. No one owned any property beyond the simplest personal articles. They had been dispossessed of land, real estate, means of production and instruments of wealth since 1975, and the records on which claims to previous ownership of land and buildings might have been reestablished had long since been dispersed and destroyed.

In fact, there had hardly been a clearly-defined administration since 1975; by 1979 there had been no currency or markets for 4 years, no taxes had been

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<sup>149</sup> See Vickery, *Cambodia 1975-1982* for details.

<sup>150</sup> Vickery, *Cambodia 1975-1982*, pp. 266-7, 288, where I note that the analysis of W.E. Willmott, "Analytical Errors of the Kampuchean Communist Party", *Pacific Affairs*, 45/2 (Summer 1981), is correct, but that he was mistaken in believing that revolutionary potential among the peasantry was therefore weaker.

Recently Kate Frieson, "The Political Nature of Democratic Kampuchea", *Pacific Affairs*, Fall 1988, pp. 405-550, has resurrected the question, but in a not entirely straightforward – indeed, even devious – way. She has assimilated my argument that Cambodian peasants threatened by usury and indebtedness could become revolutionary to the Cambodian Communist Party argument that they were dispossessed by landlords, and used Willmott against both, choosing to ignore my discussion of these matters in *Cambodia*, with which she was thoroughly familiar, while citing a remark about "rural dispossessed" from a conference paper which summarized what I had discussed more carefully in *Cambodia*. See Frieson, pp. 421-2.

collected for at least nine and in many parts of the country for longer, and such manufacture as had not been deliberately neglected or destroyed after 1975 had been run down. Skilled manpower had been dispersed in agricultural communes, decimated by illness and execution, and many of the survivors had chosen to flee abroad as soon as the displacement of DK authorities permitted freedom of movement.

The announced economic intentions of the PRK were to 'carry out a sovereign independent economic policy moving toward prosperous and authentic socialism ... this new economy will serve the interests of the people on the basis of the development of agriculture and industry ... it will be a planned and market economy answering the needs of progress of the society'.

The DK obligations to work and eat in common would be abolished, as would the confiscation of rice and personal property. Mutual assistance and cooperation on the basis of free consent would be aided and encouraged, in order to boost production and raise the living standard. Currency, banking, and commercial transactions would be restored.<sup>151</sup>

To an inhabitant of the more or less developed societies, whether capitalist or socialist, the PRK declarations at first seem no more than the expression of an intent to reestablish normal socioeconomic life; and it may be difficult to realize that in the conditions prevailing in Cambodia in 1979 the change could be as problematic as the changes forced on the country in April 1975.

Such 'normal' life means the existence of a sector which does not immediately produce its own conditions of existence, and depends for such on appropriations from the other, in underdeveloped societies much larger, sector of food and commodity producers, the modern justification for such appropriation being that the activities of the non-productive sector in the long run promote greater productivity, redistribution and well-being for all. Such appropriation inevitably results in some tension between the sectors, and the seriousness of the tension, and ultimately the stability and successful development of the society depend on the modalities of appropriation.

In the best-run advanced industrial societies the appropriation takes the form of more or less fair exchange in which the primary producers receive desirable commodities and additional means of production. At the other extreme, in modern pre-capitalist societies, the primary products are more or less forcibly extracted with minimal remuneration via traditional dues and forced labor, excessive taxation imposed with the backing of state power, or as in pre-revolutionary Cambodia via networks of debt and usury.

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<sup>151</sup> Quoted from the 2 December 1978 programme of the National Union Front for the Salvation of Kampuchea; see Vickery, *Kampuchea, Politics, Economics, and Society*, p. 128.

The latter systems are loaded with revolutionary potential; they were one cause of the anti-urban violence of DK, and the new PRK authorities were in no position to reestablish such modes of extraction even had they been so inclined.

The problem faced by the PRK was thus to recreate from scratch a non-productive administrative and service sector, reactivate and restore a small essential industrial sector, and persuade the majority food-producing sector to support administration and industry with minimal return for the immediate future. That is, the PRK inherited a truly classless society, yet in order to move toward socialism they had to recreate social classes.

Such social reconstruction involved potential risks. Even at the highest level of prewar development around 80% of the population were engaged in agriculture. If the Cambodian peasantry, even the poorest who had at first been enthusiastic about the DK brand of revolution,<sup>152</sup> were eventually disillusioned, they at least could cope with primitive agricultural life, many of them in fact having known little else since long before 1975.

Cambodia's agricultural sector could have continued to live on its own at basic subsistence level without cities, industries, or officials. What in normal times had held them all, like members of other similar societies, together in an organic whole was an ideological superstructure culminating in monarch and church, and which legitimized the non-productive sectors and their claims on a living supplied by the peasantry.

That superstructure had been damaged by the Khmer Republic, totally destroyed by DK, and the PRK intended not to restore it, but replace it by a different one. There was no state for them to take over. They had to create it anew. There must have been many peasants who, although welcoming the freedom of movement and to organize their own lives which destruction of DK had brought, would see no reason to welcome the reconstruction of a type of class structure which had in the past been inimical to them.

In general, the survivors of the prewar non-agricultural sectors, the former administrators, technicians, teachers, medical personnel, artisans, and traders preferred to resume such occupations after their enforced and decidedly unwilling sojourn in the fields; and factory workers likewise needed little urging to leave the plough for the loom or press so long as they were fed adequately in return. In prewar society, however, positions not involving any kind of manual labor were not just a livelihood, but a status, which in some cases was more important than the material reward.

In general the new PRK did not intend to restore the old status differentials; and the poverty of the country would have made full restoration in any case impossible. There was in addition no intention to restore old property relations.

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<sup>152</sup> See examples in Vickery, *Cambodia*. In 1988 an OXFAM employee in Phnom Penh informed me that he had met peasants who told of their initial satisfaction with DK, and in particular the opportunity it gave them to exploit city evacuees.

All land, real estate, and heavy equipment, including automobiles, were taken as state property; and it was not certain in 1979 to what extent the former urban sector would return to work without the status and possibilities for wealth accumulation to which they had been accustomed.

Many, in fact, returned to Phnom Penh, but refused to resume work in their specialties, preferring to take up petty trade or simply live by their wits. Still larger numbers, damaging for the new regime, preferred to flee abroad rather than return to places in their old areas of expertise. This was usually due to realization that their old jobs no longer held the same status and extra-economic privileges as before.<sup>153</sup>

The PRK project to restore familiar sectoral divisions of Cambodian society, but with modified inter-sectoral relationships, was not something to be easily achieved by fiat. The necessary personnel had to be persuaded to resume the recreated positions and to work in them loyally without former privileges.

The procedure adopted to achieve the new mass internal migration of 1979 was at first nearly complete *laissez-faire*. The population was informed that they were free to return to old homes, resume old work, take up former places in the traditional urban sectors which would be recreated. Former doctors were encouraged to return to hospitals, teachers to schools, administrators to the new administration, trained personnel of all categories to appropriate tasks.

In Phnom Penh, and no doubt in other towns, this meant a total reappropriation of real estate by migrants who rushed in from the countryside. No former titles of ownership were recognized. All land and buildings were treated as state property to in fact be appropriated by whoever arrived first, except for buildings taken for use by the new state apparatus.

In Phnom Penh there has been a virtually total transfer of possession to new settlers. By 1984 the city's population was roughly what it had been before 1970; not in majority, however, old residents, but inhabitants of small towns and rural areas who took the opportunity to become urbanized. Even former residents who returned have rarely occupied their former dwellings, usually because someone else had reached them first in 1979. For many this has meant better housing than before, because most of the former upper classes have not returned, and their houses have been appropriated by the state for offices, guest houses, and residences for the highest cadres.<sup>154</sup>

In origin almost all who entered the new administration – except for the small nucleus of revolutionary veterans – and who, as members of the state apparatus,

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<sup>153</sup> See Vickery, *Cambodia*, chapter 4.

<sup>154</sup> In four visits to Phnom Penh since 1981 I have yet to meet anyone occupying his/her pre-1975 residence, though I have been informed that one technocrat was given his old house as an inducement to work for the new government. In Khao-I-Dang in 1980 I met someone who had reached his Phnom Penh house in 1979 while it was still empty, and could have occupied it, but chose to leave for Thailand instead.

constitute the new ruling class, were members of pre-revolutionary urban privileged groups, although not of dominant fractions of the ruling class.

They are not of the royalty (with one exception), nor of courtier or high official families, nor from the old business elite. In most identifiable cases they were employed in education or technical services, or still undergoing secondary or tertiary education before 1975. Few of them were active in left-wing politics, and had there been no war and revolution they could have expected middle-level administrative or bureaucratic careers under Sihanouk or Lon Nol.

If they had fled abroad in 1979, most of them could have found secure lives in exile, but instead because of ideology, idealism, or inertia they have chosen to remain and work for the new state. At least, even if the wealth and status of the old ruling class will not be theirs, they may reach higher administrative rank than they could have expected in prewar society, and they now dominate numerically the Party Central Committee and hold significant ministerial posts.

They also run technical services and industrial plant, which in this respect may be under more competent management than ever before within the state sector.<sup>155</sup>

### **PRK-SOC Economy**

At first three types of economic organization were recognized, state, cooperative, and family; and after the 5th Party Congress in 1985 a fourth, private sector was established.

Under the first are all industry, finance, transport, official foreign commerce, some large scale agriculture, especially industrial crops, such as rubber. The family sector includes most retail marketing, individual artisan, handicraft, and repair work, some agriculture, and de facto much commodity import trade. The cooperative sector is best described as semi-private/semi-state, and includes most agriculture, the two highest types of Solidarity Group, and certain urban enterprises like the larger restaurants.

The private sector which was formally approved in 1985 was obviously intended to channel profits made in the family sector into productive investment. It includes manufacturing with a limited hired labor force and income to the owner from profit. The state-private joint sector is to handle larger-scale investment, such as those by Khmer from overseas.

The markets quickly became a favorite area of work for people fleeing the fields, even for many who had not previously worked as traders, since Cambodia after DK was starved of commodities, and anything could turn over a quick

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<sup>155</sup> As an example, U.S.-educated agronomist Kong Samol served as Minister of Agriculture from 1981 until he was promoted to Deputy P.M. in charge of Agriculture and Rubber in 1986. Probably few ministers of agriculture under Sihanouk or Lon Nol had equivalent technical qualifications. One exception was Chuon Saodi, with degrees in agronomy from Belgium, who served as Secretary of State for agriculture in 1964-5.



profit. Buying and selling were freely allowed and, until 1983, were not even taxed.

This policy gained popular support, and it also achieved a mobilization of concealed capital remaining within the country for what at the time was a productive purpose, the acquisition of essential commodities which the state could not have purchased, confiscated, or obtained through foreign aid.

It represented a sort of primitive accumulation of capital via free trade; and state recognition of free market utility, in spite of its violation of old socialist ideals, was clear in an April 1980 order relative to cross-border private trade with Thailand and signed by then Vice-President and Party leader Pen Sovann, which forbade checking, searching, or obstructing transactions and flow of consumer goods; ordered the closure of all unnecessary checkpoints; and stated that no one, not even military or security forces, had the authority to stop trains except in emergencies due to danger.

After the experiences of 1975-1979, it might seem that no capital would be available for such a sudden spurt of trading. Democratic Kampuchea had not only abolished currency, but as an aspect of the millenarian peasantist trait in its revolution had held all wealth in contempt, and thus there had been little attempt to search out and confiscate cash, jewels, or precious metals held by the population before 1975.

Many people buried such possessions as soon as apprised of the coming evacuation to the countryside. Others concealed them on their persons, were rarely searched carefully and in an astonishing number of cases retained their valuables at the liberation in 1979.<sup>156</sup>

When released from the DK constraints in 1979 the first concern of all survivors was to retrieve valuables which they had concealed, which they knew others had concealed, or which had been left by the deceased; and those who did not try to carry them into flight across the Thai border immediately set about investing them in goods for resale within the country.

The more enterprising went themselves to the border to purchase goods from Thailand which they carried back to the markets of Battambang, Phnom Penh and other towns. Others established themselves in those markets, buying for resale the goods brought from the border and financing further trading ventures.

This should not be termed 'blackmarket', for it was not at all clandestine and there was no attempt to impede it. It was normal free trade, but carried over unusual routes – border woodlands and semi-battlefields – because Cambodia's normal routes westward were closed. The ultimate purchasers in the towns used

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<sup>156</sup> In Adelaide I met a Cambodian whose family had carried 10 kg of gold out of Phnom Penh in 1975, had used half of it to procure favors during the DK period, and tried to carry the rest across the Thai border into the Khao-I-Dang refugee camp. Much of it was then forfeited to border guards, but still enough remained to start a relatively comfortable life in Australia.

their own prewar hoards, where they existed, or the products which they made at home for sale, or even, where it could be spared, their government rice rations.

Thus in the beginning the market revival was almost entirely financed by private liquid capital which had been hoarded for several years. Ultimately this capital was exported abroad, principally to Thailand, but in the meantime it had financed a necessary part of the country's reconstruction which the state alone could not have achieved.<sup>157</sup>

Moreover, used in this way it did not generate severe inflationary pressure, and did not contribute to the reemergence of wide class differentiation. One danger, had this type of trade been allowed to continue without control or restriction, would have been to integrate the economy of the entire western half of the country with Thailand.

Another method of primitively accumulating business capital was pillage. As the population flowed back into Phnom Penh in 1979 everything still intact was fair game. Surviving libraries were looted and their contents put on sale or, in the case of dossiers or newspapers, used for wrapping parcels.

Many other articles for use or resale were available from both former government offices and private dwellings left untouched since 1975; and a more exotic method of appropriating old wealth was the collection of gold dental work from the mass graves of DK victims.<sup>158</sup>

The urban market sector was left to feed itself; only state employees received government rations from international food aid supplies. The market personnel, which included large numbers of spouses, relatives and friends of state employees, using hoarded valuables, loot, or commodities purchased with such, could offer adequate prices to entice surplus food from the rural areas; and some of this food also reached state employees either via their family members in the markets, or because they had their own hoards of prewar valuables.

The existence of different economic and political sectors and their inter-sectoral relationships are so much a part of 'normal' life, whether in capitalist or socialist societies, that the circumstances of their re-creation from zero may be difficult to grasp.

In Cambodia in 1979 a state administrative and small industrial sector was created, but paid at a level which precluded purchase of anything but basic necessities; a market and service sector was given freedom, but outside its own circle there were few with funds to buy the products it supplied; the agricultural sector comprising eight-tenths or so of the population was given virtual freedom to produce what it would and dispose of it as it liked, which meant channeling

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<sup>157</sup> On the flow of Cambodian wealth into Thailand via the refugee camp system, see Vickery, "Refugee Politics: The Khmer Camp system in Thailand", pp. 293-331.

<sup>158</sup> Nayan Chanda, "A Phoenix from the Ashes of Death", *FEER*, 4 April 1980.

much of the produce across international borders to Thailand and Viet Nam in exchange for consumer goods not supplied within Cambodia.

If the state just allowed total *laissez-faire* to prevail, given the ground rules of state ownership of land, major buildings and equipment, the farmers could in principle produce for the market and buy goods they required or desired, but for agricultural products to be negotiated at prices attractive to the farmers, and permitting them to buy from the market, the new state industries would have to provide all that they needed, or the market would have to be able to channel agricultural products, the country's natural wealth, abroad to the sources of manufactured commodities, or the state salaried sector would have to be able to buy from the market both foreign manufactured products and local agricultural products at prices corresponding to those prevailing in neighboring countries, Thailand and Vietnam, impossible at present salary levels.

None of those conditions prevails. Until 1989 at least local industry produced only a fraction of what the country required, even with respect to basic household commodities and agricultural implements. Salaries have been quite inadequate. There has not been an incentive for traders to make long-range plans, since profits could not be invested in land, real estate, or until 1985 manufacture. The market is free, but limited to petty trade; and the state sector might seem to exist for itself unable either to support market and agriculture or to benefit from them.

Anti-socialists might say: give complete economic freedom; why support a parasitical state structure which can neither pay its *fonctionnaires* nor buy its own people's produce? Let everyone buy and sell where he can without bureaucratic intervention.

Whatever economic sense such an argument contains, it would have meant in 1979 the reorientation of Cambodian producers toward foreign centers, first Bangkok, later Ho Chi Minh City, and ultimately, with half the country tied economically to one foreign country, half to another, the loss of Cambodian independence, a danger which the anti-socialists profess to view with particular concern.

Cambodia in the early PRK years could have *laissez-faire* or independence, not both. The latter depends on the recreation of a state center, which at first may be parasitical, but which must gather the country's economic and political forces and reunite them in order to hold the nation together.

Had Vietnam, as some have charged, desired to incorporate Cambodia, or at least a large part of it, nothing more would have been required than to remove the DK political apparatus without creating a new one, rather than to exert monumental efforts to establish a new state apparatus in Phnom Penh.

### **Currency, prices, and wages**

During 1979 there was no Cambodian currency, and market prices were established by supply and demand in Vietnamese *đồng*, Thai *baht*, gold, and rice,

with rates of exchange determined strictly according to market forces. State employees were paid in rice and allowances in kind, at minimum sufficiency levels, plus free housing.

In March 1980 a new Cambodian *riel* was placed in circulation, at rates of 1 *riel* to 3 *đồng*, and 4 *riel* to the US dollar. In domestic terms the *riel* was at first fixed as the price of 1 kg of milled rice. State salaries, which include wages of workers in state-owned factories, began to be paid in *riel*, and varied from 65 per month for an ordinary worker to 260 for the top three men in the state apparatus.

Between 1980 and 1984 salaries more than doubled, and in the latter year ranged between 140-500 *riel*. In 1987 there was another general increase in salaries of about 70%, and dramatic rises in a few key occupations.

Thus I was informed in November 1988 that rubber tappers may earn 1000-2000 *riel* per month, based on piece work rate, while since April 1988 workers in the rubber processing plant at Chup receive 1500-2000, against only 300 for administrative staff. The higher pay probably represents a living wage in that rural area.

Teachers were also said (November 1988) to have been given large increases, although there was conflicting information as to whether they had been implemented. Nevertheless, state salaries have barely kept up with increases in the free market prices of basic commodities.<sup>159</sup>

It has recently been reported that the “monthly salary for government workers is about 2500-3000 riels”, which seems unlikely since such a five-six fold increase in less than a year (since November 1988) would far outstrip the annual 13.5% inflation rate cited by the same source, and which is in line with other information.<sup>160</sup>

It is clear that state salaries have been set for the most spartan subsistence level, and they offer no possibility for state employees to become a privileged stratum via salaries and legal perks. In comparison with the situation in the best prewar years, the early 1960s, when prices in *riel* were roughly the same as in 1984, but salaries 10 times the 1984 level, the PRK has initiated a reversal in the relations between rural agriculturalists and urban wage earners, including

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<sup>159</sup> See Vickery, *Kampuchea*, pp. 131-134 for details of salary levels and comparative prices in 1981-1984, and comparison with 1962.

<sup>160</sup> Kavi Chongkittavorn, “Political Reforms in Cambodia”, *The Nation*, 11 October 1989. Thus the exchange rate of the riel is cited as 7.35 baht, or 180+ to the dollar, against 150-155 in November 1988, a change of 13-15%. The food price increases cited by Kavi, however, represent an increase equivalent to that cited for salaries; but it seems unlikely that such drastic rises in prices and wages would not be more strongly reflected in the exchange rate. In another article, “Inflation is our immediate enemy”, *The Nation*, 4 October 1989, Kavi reported that the new official exchange rate was 190 to the dollar, against 210-215 on the free market.

functionaries, who must now spend much more of their income on rural produce than before.

Besides the sectoral prices which favored agriculturalists relatively in comparison to the pre-1975 situation, workers, in comparison to administrators, were also to be treated as a relatively favored class, in line with socialist principle, and in contrast to both pre-war regimes and the DK system. PRK practice has instituted worker-management egalitarianism, both in terms of remuneration, and in interpersonal relationships.

Even more favored, however, and increasingly, have been those in the private sector. This included from the beginning those living by the market, and many of whom, through family membership or association also contribute to the support of state employees.

It also included home producers of artisanal or handicraft products, such as home weaving, cement Buddha images, mechanics, repairmen, etc., whose products easily brought them several times a state salary; and since 1985 it includes private industrial and commercial companies operating for profit on capital invested by owners and paying market wages which put their recipients also in a favorable economic position.

### **PRK-SOC Agriculture**

Market capital from hoards and loot is obviously a temporary expedient. The PRK, like its predecessor, recognized that the country's economy must ultimately depend on its agricultural sector, which is potentially capable of producing some food surpluses for export as well as certain industrial products such as rubber, timber, cotton, and jute, either for export or for local processing in the few industries for which the country is suited.

The key then, to both Cambodia's economic recovery, and its cohesion as an independent state, is agricultural recovery and development. The initial policy for agriculture was recovery through nearly complete *laissez-faire*, without taxation, compulsory deliveries or any large measure of state control; likewise, if only because of insufficient resources, without significant state aid either.

This is the first time an ostensibly socialist country has tried to encourage recovery from near zero without resorting to high taxation, compulsory deliveries, or state management of labor; and it should be contrasted with Eastern Europe in 1945, or Viet Nam in 1945 and 1954. It is in line, however, with the changes begun in Viet Nam in 1979, and in China in 1980.<sup>161</sup>

Basic state control and guidance was from the beginning exercised through state appropriation of all land and real estate; and the state was able from the beginning to influence the reorganization of agriculture, and guide it toward a

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<sup>161</sup> Michael Ellman, "Agricultural Productivity Under Socialism", *World Development*, Vol.9, No. 9/10 (1981), 979-989, see p. 983.

form of socialization. In contrast to Phnom Penh, it seems that most of the rural population resettled in former home villages, perhaps because they had always remained there during the DK period; and even though disputes occurred, former possession of land could be established by common notoriety.

In 1979 the government announced that in line with the policy of moving toward socialism agricultural producers should be organized in 'solidarity groups' of ideally 10-15 families in order to cooperatively produce and share in the rewards. At harvest time at the end of that year no taxes on agricultural produce were collected, and there were no obligatory contributions to the state. Food could be either consumed, or sold on the free market, after sufficient seed had been set aside for the next year's crop.

State plans for agriculture envisaged a three-tier structure of increasingly collectivized groups, ranging from hardly more than traditional family farming to almost totally collectivized groups at the highest level.

Although the ideal in 1979 was apparently to move toward increasingly collectivized farming, statistics released periodically have revealed the opposite trend with, in 1987, 12%, 68%, and 20% of farmers respectively in the highest to lowest groups; and since the middle category in fact represents little more than family farming with the minimum cooperation imposed by the objective situation (lack of animals, tools, manpower, etc), Cambodian farming has been dominated by the individual peasant producer.<sup>162</sup>

The latest reports indicate that the PRK has not tried to resist this trend, but has acknowledged it, and that farmers may be given more secure occupation rights, perhaps even some degree of formal ownership, of their land.

The significant difference between the real conditions of the PRK peasant economy and the same under a capitalist regime is that land ownership is nationalized. Land thus cannot be bought and sold, pawned, or otherwise used as security for debt with the risk of capitalist expropriation by users if the debt is unpaid. There is thus some security for the rural poor who in prewar days would have first tried to obtain loans for their land, then either lose it, and usually be forced to move to the towns to find work in petty, or undesirable service work, or else remain on the mortgaged land with the obligation to deliver ever increasing amounts of produce to their creditors at below market prices.

A consequence of this is that in the absence of other constraints there is no way to force peasants to supply food to the non-agricultural sector of the society, and Cambodian peasants since 1979 may have had a greater freedom of choice in the consumption and disposition of their produce than ever before.

Freed from debt obligations enforced by state power – the present situation of Cambodian agriculture – there has been a possibility that peasants might not find it in their interest to supply the market with large surpluses. In the

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<sup>162</sup> See Vickery, *Kampuchea*, pp. 137-146, for more detail.

Cambodian case the new peasant freedom, combined with state-owned land which cannot be sold or pawned for debt, might well inhibit expansion of the market once present cash resources run out.

This, however, represents only a potential future problem, for there have been objective constraints on what Cambodian farmers could produce at any price; and thus merely raising urban salaries and wages, which at first would seem reasonable, would not lead to correspondingly greater agricultural production, but only to inflation.

Not until 1986 did Cambodia become nearly self-sufficient in rice. This was partly due to several seasons of particularly poor weather, but most important was the lack of draft animals used in preparing the fields.

No increase of investment or urban purchasing power could have overcome this limit on agricultural production, and only gradual build-up of herds through natural reproduction could restore prewar rice production levels. By 1988 normal herd levels had been reached, and the latest predictions are that there will be an exportable surplus of rice by 1990.<sup>163</sup>

It should also be remembered that in southeast Asian societies where the free market controls agricultural production and sale, as in prewar Cambodia, farmers are forced to sell at prices outside their control, and often insufficient for their maintenance, in order to keep up payments on debt.

The low-priced agricultural produce thus extracted by the market sector secures profit for the market, and cheap food for urban workers, some of whom produce goods which may be sold profitably by their employers; but this type of trade in rice, for example, does not secure much industrial produce for the farmer. Laissez-faire is thus not really laissez-faire, but depends on a type of subsidy, state enforcement of commercial squeeze in favor of the non food-producing classes.

The situation of PRK agriculture seems to satisfy the demands of critics of collectivization as carried out in the major socialist countries. James Scott, for instance, in his defense of the Petty Bourgeoisie and argument “Why socialism and small property are compatible”, argues that in rice production small farms are more productive, and that if one of the goals is egalitarianism, “dividing up the land equitably, thus creating small private farms, could serve the same purpose so long as the sale of land were prevented”.

The PRK as so far constituted has been a victory for the aspirations of the petty bourgeoisie as cheered on by Scott, and further steps in that direction are the lower taxes on agriculture and increased rights of possession of land by individual farmers which have been reported in the press during the past year.<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>163</sup> Kavi Chongkittavorn, “Inflation is our immediate enemy”, *The Nation*, 4 October 1989

<sup>164</sup> James Scott, “Socialism and Small Property – or – two cheers for the Petty Bourgeoisie”, *Peasant Studies* 12/3 (Spring 1985), 185- 197. See also Michael Ellman,

Petty-bourgeois predominance is also seen in the rapidly growing state administrative and bureaucratic sector and in the upper echelons of the party. These bodies are not being filled by personnel drawn from the proletariat or peasantry, but by persons firmly situated in the prewar urban petty bourgeoisie, and who, while paying lip service to Marxism-Leninism, still bear petty bourgeois attitudes, which the circumstances of PRK economic organization can only reinforce.

It has long been recognized that most new Third World revolutionary movements are based on alliances between peasants and petty bourgeoisie, and the Pol Pot movement was also such an alliance. In that case, however, the alliance came to be dominated by poor-peasant extremism and petty bourgeois chauvinism, while the PRK is based on the middle peasant and industrious urban trader and artisan.

So long as their existence is enshrined in the constitution and accepted by the state, ownership of land by the latter protects the petty bourgeoisie from the displacement and absorption by the large bourgeoisie which occurs in capitalist regimes, and answers one of the traditional petty bourgeois demands.

If the Cambodian revolution indeed represents a class victory for the petty bourgeoisie, both in small-scale family production as the dominant form in agriculture and in the free markets and artisanal production which have dominated the urban economy, how will such a social formation – unforeseen in any theory of revolution – develop? A petty bourgeois formation based on small peasantry and without exceptionally valuable raw materials for export or specialized high-technology manufacture has little available surplus for development beyond basic self-sufficiency.

While the new economic policies in China and the Soviet Union might be called a tactical retreat to Menshevism, with the possibility for a later shift again in the direction of more complete socialism, their imitation by Cambodia cannot result in either capitalist or socialist accumulation. What accumulation might occur in the market sector, true to petty bourgeois form, is most likely to go into consumption and speculation, as happened in the 1960s. Some hint of what is to come may perhaps be drawn from developments in industry and large-scale trade.

### **Industry**

Beginning in 1979 the PRK reopened existing factories to the extent possible. Many of them had operated during 1975-1979, although without maintenance or replacement of equipment, and considerable damage had occurred in the confused early months of 1979.

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“Agricultural Productivity under Socialism”, *World Development* 9, 9/10 (1981), pp. 979-989. Perhaps if Scott realized he was arguing in defense of the PRK he would cheer less loudly for the petty bourgeoisie.



In 1984 I obtained a list of over 50 such state-owned plants with over 15,000 employees, not including the rubber industry, which, if everything from planting and tapping to processing is included, represents by far the largest industrial sector. Probably there has been little quantitative increase since then, except in rubber, where major development has occurred.

The most successful industries are the least essential: cigarettes and soft drinks. The major factories supplying essential goods, such as textiles and tires, both based on raw materials which may be produced locally, operate well below capacity, and for reasons which are the same throughout the country – obsolete machinery, lack of spare parts, lack of finance to import parts and supplies, such as secondary raw materials, chemicals, etc.

Not mentioned, perhaps not realized, is that in most cases the needed spare parts could not be purchased at any price, for they no longer exist. The machinery in question has long gone out of production and is not used anywhere else.

A typical textile plant, such as one I visited in Phnom Penh, may have a mixture of Belgian, Czech, Chinese, German, etc., machines, all manufactured in the 1950s-1960s; and the only way to bring the factory up to capacity is by complete re-equipment.

Until 1985-1986 all state industries were centrally controlled as to plan and financing, and, as they willingly acknowledged, plans were rarely fulfilled, if only for the objective reasons noted above – poor machinery and lack of materials. Beginning in 1986 or 1987 a certain degree of decentralization was instituted, both in planning and finance.

A Ministry of Plan official said in November 1988 that all enterprises were independent financially, but the staff of the large textile plant in Kompong Cham claimed they were not, although they did have planning autonomy. On the other hand the Chup rubber plant staff said they had had both financial and planning autonomy since 1986.

Industrial wages are in the same range as state administrative salaries, and the spread between remuneration for manual workers, administrative staff, and directors is small. The technically qualified and specialists are favored, and may earn more than factory administrators. This is particularly true in the rubber-producing plants, located in dangerous areas and with onerous working conditions.

A majority of the workers in most factories are women. A Phnom Penh textile factory in 1984 employed over 400 women in a work force of 700, the pharmaceutical factory 250 out of 400, the Kompong Cham textile plant 423 women and 393 men in 1988, and of the 12,000 employees of the Chup rubber plant a large proportion were said to be women.

This is not just an effect of war and revolution. Female workers predominated in textiles and pharmaceutical plants before 1975 as well.

The difference now is that they are not young single village women expecting marriage and return to domesticity after a short time, but independent women, often widows with children to support, who must earn their living without family help; or if married, they may be earning more than husbands working somewhere in an office.

Noteworthy also is the post-1979 movement of former workers into management positions, partly of course, because pre-1975 owners and managers have either perished or fled abroad.

In 1984 two of the three-person management committee of Textile Factory No. 3 in Phnom Penh were women, former workers; one of whom having obtained a high school diploma in 1964 could find neither white collar work nor afford further education, and began work in the same factory, then privately owned, in 1966, and remained there throughout the DK period.<sup>165</sup>

Similar situations of management in the hands of old experienced workers were observed in the Kompong Cham textile plant, and the Chup rubber plantation and factory. In the latter, two of the three-man directorate worked there under the French from the 1950s.

Since 1985 a certain amount of private industry has also been acknowledged, and incorporated into the constitution as a new economic sector. According to the Ministry of Plan in 1988 there were 2-3000 private enterprises in Phnom Penh and a few thousand more in other locations, generally with up to 50-60 workers, while some construction enterprises had 70-80.

Apparently no legal limit has been established. If accurate, the totals implied – plus the number of workers registered in state industries – mean that about 20% of the population is supported by the industrial sector.

Visits to two of these enterprises in Phnom Penh which produce utensils from scrap metal showed that their volume, pricing, and wages are entirely determined by the market. Skilled workers, in those plants all men, based on piece work, may earn up to 5000 riel per month, 10 times the highest state salary, and a decent living wage.

Interestingly, although this type of enterprise was not legalized until 1985, one owner said he had set up shop in 1979, and he proudly showed me certificates of achievement awarded to his factory by the state since 1982. The owners of these two plants said they had been established by joint investment of several individuals, although they refused to divulge details of capital invested, profits, or taxes.

Another such factory was reported in the press as having been established by 7 shareholders with a capital of 550,000 riel, to produce 5 and 10 liter tin containers. It had a workforce of 20 women, and its 1986 production was 60,000

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<sup>165</sup> This is a good individual example of the social and economic disintegration which was just beginning in the 1960s.

cans, of which 1600 were sold to the state at a price 2 riel less than market price.<sup>166</sup>

The four 'spearheads' of economic development announced in the 5-year plan (1986-1990), besides food, represent some of the few areas in which Cambodia has some potential for industrial development – rubber, timber, and fish. The immediate goal is simply to increase raw material production, most of which, beyond local consumption requirements, is destined for export.

The tire factory, established before 1970, uses local rubber, although most rubber is exported by the state to the Soviet Union; and industrial production of rubber goods could be increased. Probably the potential for wood products industry is even greater, and there was a pre-war beginning in a plywood factory, which has not yet been renovated.

At the moment it is probably timber and fish, together with precious stones, which are fueling the current import boom and its illusion of prosperity. In contrast to rubber, they are not under unified state control. Timber cutting and trade seems to be under at least three different administrations, the national Department of Forestry, provincial agricultural departments, and local solidarity groups.<sup>167</sup>

### **Monetary and fiscal policies**

The total laissez-faire which was tolerated in the beginning to encourage spontaneous economic renewal, especially in agriculture, has been modified since 1983 by the introduction of taxation, both on agriculture and market activities, and by increasing exhortation to farmers to sell their surplus to the state rather than for higher prices on the free market. The incentive is in principle sale in exchange for cheap commodities supplied from state industry, but the latter have so far been unable to satisfy demand.

The first taxes in 1983-84 were nominal, but have by now become a real source of state income, reaching, by 1986, approximately 8-10% on agricultural produce. Press reports in 1989, however, indicate that taxes on agriculture have recently been lowered.

The anti-inflationary efforts which these figures reflect has had a favorable effect on the exchange rate. The free market rate for the riel in 1981 was around 50=1\$US; and by early 1986 it was 155-160=1\$US; but early in 1987 it had improved to 120=1\$, a better performance than many more favored poor countries and far better than Vietnam.

By late 1988 it had declined again to 150-155=1\$US; but by then the state had lowered the official rate to 149, which probably undercut any new

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<sup>166</sup> *Pracheachon* (Peoples Revolutionary Party newspaper), no. 151, 27 March 1987.

<sup>167</sup> *Pracheachon*, no. 153, 3 April 1987, referring to the situation in Ratanakiri Province in the northeast.

inflationary tendencies. Even if the riel has in 1989 gone down to 180-190 to the dollar, it is not out of line with the reported economic growth in the same period, and still a far better record than the Vietnamese experience.<sup>168</sup>

This relatively favorable situation, particularly in comparison to Vietnam, not only shows that the Cambodian economy and currency have not been linked to its neighbor, but indicates a certain amount of intelligent planning. It cannot have been fortuitous. To introduce a new currency in 1980 after 5 years of no money, and 3-4 years of disastrous inflation before that, and to have it work so well, implies very careful control of currency emission and state salary levels in order to avoid either extreme inflation or rejection of the new currency by the population.

This is a subject, however, on which until very recently no information was forthcoming from the Cambodian authorities. They have refused to say whether there has been Vietnamese or Soviet advice, or how the amount of currency to be put into circulation was decided.

Since some of the PRK policies prefigure measures which began to be taken later in Viet Nam and the Soviet Union, it is not impossible that innovative economists from those countries saw Cambodia as a *tabula rasa* on which to try out policies which they could not yet implement at home.

Perhaps Kavi Chongkittavorn's recent interview with the director of the national bank represents the beginning of publication of economic statistics for the use of people outside the system. Revealed for the first time were the amount of debt to the Soviet Union (750 million rubles), and that repayment is indeed scheduled starting in 1991; the local interest rates for bank credits to private investors (between 10% and 24%); and inflation rates (5% in 1988, 13.5% in 1989). At about the same time Defense Minister Tea Banh told another Thai Journalist that the military takes over 10% of the entire budget, which is over 3000 million *riel*.<sup>169</sup>

The liberalization of the economy, which was always there in embryo, and which was given an official boost in 1985 with formal recognition of a private manufacturing sector, has gone rapidly ahead in 1989, with results which may have unpleasant consequences.

In the first four months of 1990 there has been a reversal of the tendencies noted above, with Viet Nam keeping control of its currency, while the Cambodian *riel* has declined to 345 to the dollar, nearly double what it was less

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<sup>168</sup> The prewar free rate was 50, declining to 120-150 during 1970, and thereafter disastrously until 1975.

<sup>169</sup> "Inflation is our immediate enemy", *The Nation*, 4 October 1989, interview with Cha Rieng. Tea Banh interview in *Matichon* weekly no. 445, 8 October 1989, p. 8. Although Tea Banh's figures seem far too low, they at least represent a beginning of statistical *glasnost*.

than a year ago.<sup>170</sup> Liberalism plus war, as has been demonstrated in other cases, not least of all in Cambodia itself in 1970-1975, may be a recipe for collapse.

With respect to private property, the increasing dominance of family farming is no more than an extension of what was already clear several years ago, and possession of land, though not ownership, was already guaranteed by the constitution. A real innovation, however, is the offering of ownership of urban houses to present occupants, and it is clearly related to loyalty of the new urban official, trading, and business sectors now that competition from the non-communist elements of the DK coalition may become more intense.

Thus, hardly anyone in Phnom Penh occupies a house which he or she owned or occupied before 1975, and the former owners, if still alive, are mostly in exile or with the Son Sann and Sihanouk groups, hoping that victory will mean return of their property. Even if a victory by that side did not lead to massacre, it would mean massive dispossession of most of the present Phnom Penh population, and in fact a turnover nearly as traumatic as 1975.

Phnom Penh residents, of whom many, including cadres, may have only superficially supported PRK socialism, now have an added incentive, not just to tolerate, but to work hard in support of the state under which they have lived since 1979.

More far-reaching changes are the openings to overseas investment, at first by Khmer residing abroad; and the increasing cross-border trade from Thailand, mostly in luxuries, but increasingly expensive ones, such as automobiles. Hoarded pre-1975 valuables will no longer suffice, and the imports must be paid for ultimately with Cambodian produce, either squeezed out of the countryside as before 1975, or in valuable raw materials such as rubber, timber, and precious stones.

Rubber seems firmly under state control, and doing well in state trade with the Soviet Union, but the first Cambodian logs have already begun to flow into Thailand, apparently via informal arrangements, and that represents one of the most obvious objectives of the new Thai orientation.<sup>171</sup> Will they be sold by carefully controlled state agencies, corrupt officials, or private entrepreneurs? In

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<sup>170</sup> *FEER* 3 May 1990, p. 66, for the current rate.

<sup>171</sup> Nauvarat Suksamran, "Thanit – the man behind the Thai-Cambodian trade relations", *The Nation*, 10 September 1989, profiles a businessman and Chat Thai Party politician, who has developed extensive trading links with the Koh Kong Province administration, and who is thus able to import hundreds of thousands of cubic meters of Cambodian hardwood for his own sawmill, while "others face a great deal of difficulty ... because of the nation-wide logging ban in Thailand". The quantities cited in the article, however, are probably exaggerated, for they represented nearly the entire projected output of timber in the 5-year plan.

either of the last two cases, the new commerce may lead to rapid class differentiation, which it seems is already causing concern in Phnom Penh.<sup>172</sup>

It may moreover mean that the state, having lost control of its valuable resources, will not be able to increase wages of its already underpaid employees, who, in spite of owning houses, will be increasingly disfavored in comparison to business and manufacturing sectors, and perhaps even with peasants who, if they have only possession but not ownership of their land (and on this information is not clear), may be able to prosper with increasingly high prices for their produce from the urban market sector and foreign markets, and without the ability to alienate their land, are in no danger of falling under control of those sectors.<sup>173</sup>

Will the high earnings in private craft production and industries put pressure on the state to increase salaries which cannot be sustained on state income, or will the state be able to accumulate enough in taxation and state trading to provide *fonctionnaires* with at least the same standard of living as private factory workers?

Even if the most favorable circumstances prevailed, however, it must be remembered that no Cambodian regime since independence in 1954 lived on its own resources. Foreign aid, increasing from year to year, supported the budgets of both Sihanouk's monarchy (1954-1970) and Lon Nol's Republic (1970-1975).

One of the reasons was the addiction of the entire urban sector to foreign luxury commodities and lifestyle, a problem which the PRK once seemed intent on preventing through a policy of very low incomes, but which now seems to be emerging again as a result of the increasingly free market. Nevertheless, to escape a situation which, except for food, would be shared poverty, Cambodia probably requires integration into some larger economic entity.

Even simple petty bourgeois recovery requires more aid from outside than Cambodia is receiving. The international situation has seriously hampered Cambodian recovery. Normal international aid and financing have been blocked, and considerable resources must be expended on defense, both in the creation of an army, and in conscription of civilians for war-related construction along the Thai border.

It is noteworthy that PRK economic performance – holding down wages, deflationary policies, and relatively free market practices except in major industries – would under normal international conditions qualify it for favored

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<sup>172</sup> James Pringle, “‘Rampant graft’ hurting image of Hun Sen regime”, *Bangkok Post*, 21 September 1989, citing convincing examples from interviews and the Cambodian press, in spite of the possibly unsympathetic attitude of the writer (thus he labeled as “leftist-leaning” a foreign relief official who remarked that “We [the western world] complained they were too socialist, so they liberalized the economy, and along with materialism came corruption”).

<sup>173</sup> James Pringle, “‘Rampant graft’”, reports that “peasants now have 15-year title to the land”.

treatment by the World Bank and IMF, and it is clear that such aid is withheld to exert political pressure rather than for any objective economic reason.

In this connection it is amusing to note the remarks of Jose Maria Sison in Bangkok three years ago, that “Aquino cannot solve the basic problems without help of the CPP”. Her government is under US orders, through the World Bank and IMF, to stick to agriculture, shun industrialization, liberalize importation, attract foreign investments, comply with debt obligations, increase the domestic tax burden, freeze wages, depreciate the currency and so on.<sup>174</sup>

The PRK has been doing all of this on its own.

The inability of Cambodia to access normal international economic channels is not an aberration of a few bank officials, nor can it any longer be called punishment for 1979. As was recently reported in the *Far Eastern Economic Review*, Viet Nam is now facing the same hard line, in spite of having done what until last year was believed to be the requirement for normalization: withdrawal of its armed forces from Cambodia.

In June the U.S. blocked “a plan by the UN Development Programme to send a six-man team to Cambodia ... to assess the economic needs of the country during the post-settlement period”<sup>175</sup>; and the U.S. and Japan “have blocked Vietnam’s reentry into the international economic community, despite what is considered an exemplary Vietnamese effort at economic stabilization and structural adjustment”.

They “are now insisting Viet Nam must not only withdraw ... but also contribute towards a comprehensive political settlement”, even though the World Bank and IMF think Viet Nam deserves help on the basis of what they are doing with the economy.<sup>176</sup>

This happened at an IMF executive board meeting on 13 Sept, where the “fund’s specialist staff submitted a glowing report on Hanoi’s economic management from its visit to Viet Nam in July ... Viet Nam began unilaterally implementing an adjustment programme in March 1989 based on consultations with the fund”.

“The IMF report was full of praise for Viet Nam’s recent economic reforms, which got under way in mid-1988 and accelerated in March this year. The IMF staff ... were particularly impressed with the Vietnamese understanding of the

<sup>174</sup> *The Nation*, 7 July 1986, p.5, interview with Jose Maria Sison. Compliance with debt obligations is not comparable, for Cambodian debt is held mainly by the Soviet Union, and a bilateral agreement on repayment seems to have been made.

<sup>175</sup> *FEER*, “Intelligencer”, 1 June 1989, p. 10

<sup>176</sup> Susumu Awanohara, “US, Japan block IMF effort to support Vietnam, fiscal interdiction”, *FEER* 28 September 1989, pp. 22-23; further quotations below from this source. One might wonder what leverage Viet Nam now has on the PRK to make them accede to U.S. demands, now that Vietnamese troops have left. Or would the U.S. like Viet Nam to invade again to force compliance with U.S. requirements?

need for compatibility and consistency between domestic and external reforms”, devaluation of *đồng*, decreasing discrepancy of official and free rates, rise in interest rates and reserve requirements, prices raised from controlled to market levels on most staples, except power, transport, post, fuel; dismantling domestic monopolies advanced; collectivized production in agriculture also effectively ended.

Cambodia, it must be emphasized, has been in advance of Viet Nam on almost every point.

One economist said Viet Nam has accomplished since mid-1988 all that China had implemented since 1979, and more, but urgently needs help; a top official said, “I would be happy if all the other countries [in arrears] behaved in the way Viet Nam has done”.

This U.S. action is not just pique by a handful of sick old men in Washington nursing Viet Nam War wounds to national pride. It follows consistently from U.S. policy.

One of the few really interesting bits of new information in Nayan Chanda’s *Brother Enemy* is that in spite of economic measures against Viet Nam taken in 1975, by September 1976 Viet Nam was admitted to the International Monetary Fund, and after a World Bank team visited Viet Nam in February 1977 their confidential report “praised the Vietnamese government’s efforts to mobilize its resources and tap its vast potential”.<sup>177</sup>

The World Bank urged donors to give substantial assistance on concessional terms. This moreover was at a time when Thailand, even after overthrowing its experiment in democracy in October 1976 and getting back into the U.S.-preferred type of dictatorial regime, was doing very badly, as the World Bank revealed a year later.<sup>178</sup>

For Washington this was disastrous. Communist Viet Nam was being praised by international capitalist institutions, while U.S.-favored capitalist Thailand was wallowing in economic incompetence and unjustifiable exploitation of the poor by the rich. If Viet Nam was allowed to take off as the IMF and World Bank thought possible, its example could not fail to attract the peoples of Thailand, and elsewhere in Southeast Asia.

Viet Nam was moreover trying to make a good impression on the capitalist world. Hanoi had refused to join COMECON, and was reducing the level of relations with the USSR, which complained about losing Viet Nam to the capitalist world. But Viet Nam was trying to insist that the U.S. honor Nixon’s

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<sup>177</sup> Chanda, *Brother Enemy*, p. 151. This report is called “Introductory Report No. 1718-VN”, dated 12 August 1977. Chanda dates the World Bank mission to Vietnam in January, but bank literature says February. I have so far been unable to obtain a copy of the report, and rely for its tenor mainly on Chanda together with references to it in subsequent bank literature.

<sup>178</sup> *Far Eastern Economic Review* 1 Dec 1978.



promise to give aid for reconstruction, and their development plans depended on this.<sup>179</sup>

This then, is part of the setting for the U.S. actions against Viet Nam in 1977-1978, described by Chanda, and the necessary background to study of negotiations over ‘normalization’ both then and now. It has never been just the question of Chinese relations being more important, or ‘amnesia’ about Indochina. The real problem was the danger that Viet Nam might make an economic success of socialism, and this had to be stopped.

Now again Viet Nam, in its relatively successful responses to new challenges in its own way, poses an ideological threat, and the continued efforts to destroy Cambodia are because that country has been perceived as Viet Nam’s Achilles Heel, ‘Vietnam’s Vietnam’, as one of the extremist hacks once put it.<sup>180</sup>

The difference is that the US entered a Viet Nam which was merely in political disorder and destroyed it, including the sector the US most desired to protect, while Viet Nam entered a Cambodia which had been destroyed, in no small part by US actions, and oversaw a remarkable reconstruction in the most unfavorable circumstances.

### **Some concluding generalizations**

The lessons from Cambodia for the Asia-Pacific, and other, regions is that the U.S. will try to prevent economic progress under any regime that is not subordinate or closely allied. Particularly disliked are states which maintain some semblance of socialism while gaining popular support, perhaps even prosperity through economic liberalism and personal freedom. The Sonnenfeldt doctrine seems to have become ever more firmly rooted in Washington; and the real enemy is not Stalinism, but ‘Communism with a human face’.<sup>181</sup>

The ideal outcome of a Prague Spring, for Washington, is a Soviet invasion, but now the Soviets no longer oblige, and the Vietnamese are obviously intending to let presumed clients go their own ways.

Since Viet Nam cannot be counted on to keep Cambodia subjugated, thus dissatisfied and a threat to Indochina stability, both countries must be starved into collapse. Otherwise there is still the danger that they might become moderate socialist success stories, as it appeared in 1975.

In the consternation over the reality of Vietnamese withdrawal the U.S.-ASEAN position has in fact been “don’t leave yet”, and this has been masked by assertions that it is Vietnamese intransigence which prevents setting up an

<sup>179</sup> Chanda, *Brother Enemy*, pp. 184,149 respectively. As Grant Evans and Kelvin Rowley wrote, “as Le Duan put it ... ‘accumulation from internal sources is non-existent’, the whole strategy [for development] depended on an influx of foreign aid to finance investment” (*Red Brotherhood at War*, p.38).

<sup>180</sup> Stephen J. Morris, “Vietnam’s Vietnam”, *The Atlantic Monthly*, January 1985.

<sup>181</sup> See below, notes 403 and 457

International Control Mechanism. In fact, even with cooperation of all concerned, it would literally take months to prepare for International Control.

In a report which the fact-finding team submitted after their visit to Vietnam, Cambodia, and Thailand during 5-16 August, they said “international peace-keeping force would need to be self-sufficient in all aspects of its day-to-day operations, due to scarcity of resources and facilities”; Cambodia “lacks the sufficient infrastructure, supply sources, and services to accommodate an ‘international control mechanism’ (ICM)”.

The report recommends that an “engineering team first be dispatched ... to improve the overall condition of road networks and airfields”; also calls for “‘comprehensive and self-sufficient communications network’ ... for contacts with the outside world and within the country”; because of bad roads, “peace-keeping forces would have to move around mainly by air”; the engineering corps would need to construct long-term accommodations at various locations; ICM would need to be self-sufficient in food and other supplies for 60-90 days, also self-sufficient in water and electricity; field hospital facilities would need to be set up throughout Cambodia.

Because of all this “‘a significant lead time’ would be needed before the peace forces are stationed”.<sup>182</sup>

Lest these considerations of the background to U.S. harassment of Viet Nam and Cambodia be dismissed in the current indecent haste to celebrate the collapse of socialism, it must not be forgotten that it is ‘Stalinist’ Romania which has been able to repay its foreign debt, that Poland got into its precarious state by trying to play capitalist games – large foreign loans to fuel a consumerist type of development which was unsuccessful, while a move usually advocated by international capitalist institutions, slackening price control of food, precipitated Solidarity;<sup>183</sup> and that much of what Chinese students were protesting was capitalist-type inequalities resulting from business freedom initiated by Deng.

For once Derek Davies, in his usually rather silly “Travelers’ Tales”, hinted at something of more than casual interest: that the protesters were comparing Deng’s cadres unfavorably with Mao’s.<sup>184</sup>

It has been in communist Poland, not in a developing capitalist state, where a working class was nurtured and educated to the point where it could effectively challenge state power in its own interests and those of the economy as a whole, and where even at its worst, state efforts to repress the movement were far less

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<sup>182</sup> Kavi Chongkittavorn, *The Nation*, 25 August 1989.

<sup>183</sup> Juan Cameron, “What the Bankers did to Poland”, *Fortune*, 22 September 1980, pp. 125-128; Alex Pravda, “Poland 1980: From Premature Consumerism to Labour Solidarity”, *Soviet Studies*, vol. xxxiv, no. 2 (April 1982), pp. 167-199.

<sup>184</sup> *FEER* 1 June 1989, p. 10.

violent, certainly less effective, than corresponding regime measures in capitalist Chile, Argentina, Turkey and the ROK during the same time.

Solidarity could not have occurred in a developing capitalist state where the working class is held in tight control through economic and administrative means in favor of growth of the state and capitalist class.

In 1945 most of Eastern Europe belonged to what would now be called the poor, underdeveloped Third World, and it has been socialism which has dragged them up to a level from which their expressed wishes to 'rejoin Europe' are not mere empty rhetoric. After the first euphoria we already see tacit admissions of some of the benefits and popularity of socialist measures.

Thus, "agricultural land, nationalized in Hungary from 1947 on, is unlikely to be returned to those from whom it was confiscated because of fear that such a move could cause a disastrous fall in food production. Nor will such acreage be given back in Czechoslovakia or Romania, at least for the moment".

"In Bulgaria, by contrast, all the major parties including the former Communists, support an immediate return of farm land to private ownership. The revival of this country is not possible without the revival of agriculture says Viktor Vulkov, leader of the Agrarian Party, and that means private ownership".<sup>185</sup>

What *Time* failed to mention was that Hungarian peasants (until land confiscation by the Communists) had lived under oppressive conditions rarely matched in modern times, while Bulgaria had been a nation of small owner-operated farms since the 1920s. Return of land to former owners in the three first-named countries would not only hurt production, but would spark a peasant-led revolution.

Worldwide, outside of the western European industrial democracies, the capitalist states hardly look better than those socialist states supposedly in disarray. The U.S. is wallowing in debt which is sustained by enticing wealth, including drug money, from already impoverished third-world capitalist regimes;<sup>186</sup> and a huge section of its populace lacks the rudiments of a decent life.<sup>[187]</sup>

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<sup>185</sup>*Time*, 30 April 1990, pp. 24-26, "Which way to the Free Market?"

<sup>186</sup>*Time*, 16 October 1989, p. 40, reported that the U.S. administration has been reluctant to initiate new methods for tracking down drug money in electronic transfers, for fear of "doing anything to frighten away billions of dollars in private investment, including an estimated \$200 billion in flight capital from Latin America, which has helped finance the huge federal budget deficits of the past eight years".

What this implies is that the US government, because of a surreptitious dependence on drug profits, cannot be completely serious in its now world-wide anti-drug campaign. It is unlikely to be merely coincidental that designated Third World drug producing areas are already, or potentially, areas of leftwing guerilla activity, and the increasingly militarized 'anti-drug' operations abroad represent a new opening to imperialism, while corresponding measures domestically foreshadow the danger of a police state.

Country for country during the last ten years [written in 1989] it is hard to find a third-world capitalist state which, in comparison to a relevant socialist example, looks better in terms of economic development, quality of life, human rights, or democracy. If DK be excluded the comparison could go back over 20 years, perhaps even to the death of Stalin. In particular, capitalism, except for the most advanced western countries, does not show the symbiosis of a free market economy and liberal democracy which is supposed to be its most attractive selling point.

One of the usually cited good examples of a developing capitalist country, ROK, has been characterized both by lack of democracy and quite non-free enterprise state direction of the economy; until September 1987 “most South Koreans under 50 years old were forbidden to travel abroad”, and only in June 1988 did the government take “the first of a four-step programme to make the won a fully convertible currency”, and, like Romania, by means of rigid state authority over production, may also pay off its foreign debt this year, showing that by these economic indicators we might be justified in calling ROK a type of Stalinist capitalism.<sup>188</sup>

Whereas failed consumerism in Poland could lead to a powerful workers movement that could virtually take over state power, failed consumerism in the capitalist third world only results in increased squeeze on workers and peasants to continue financing luxury consumption by the privileged classes.

It should not be forgotten either that an important component of Solidarity’s demands have been egalitarian, against the capitalist-type inequalities which emerged with the foreign-loan fed consumerism of the 1970s.<sup>189</sup>

The Bush reaction to Solidarity’s takeover of the Polish state is characteristic – far less money than requested after years of U.S. encouragement for anti-regime movements in Poland. Of course it was assumed that such movements would ultimately be crushed by a bloody Soviet intervention, not that they would take power via free elections permitted by the communist regime. Solidarity is now an embarrassment to Washington.

Likewise in Cambodia, it was assumed that Viet Nam would never willingly leave and would attempt to crush moves toward independence and a liberalized economy, which would continue to weaken both countries while maintaining

The cold war is not over, and when the American right says they ‘won’ it, they mean that Soviet retreat opens up opportunities for aggression in the Third World which they would not have dared undertake before.

<sup>187</sup> This is even more true in 2009 than when I first wrote this.

<sup>188</sup> *Asiaweek*, 24 June 1988, p. 6; *FEER* 16 June 1988, p. 14 and Karl Moskowitz, “What if they were one?”, *FEER* 22 June 1989, p. 56, respectively.

<sup>189</sup> Alex Pravda, “Poland 1980: From ‘Premature Consumerism’ to Labour Solidarity”, *Soviet Studies*, vol xxxiv, no. 2 (April 1982), 167-99.

'socialism's' bad name,<sup>190</sup> but now that Viet Nam can no longer be trusted to repress Cambodian economic independence and incipient capitalism, the Cambodian contras must be given the means to do it, even if this means bringing back the DK leadership which the U.S. has claimed to abhor, although their utility to Washington's Indochina policy has been apparent since at least 1980.<sup>191</sup>

Even if the DK group were excluded, the end of the PRK would open up Cambodia to rapacious carpet-bagging by the KPNLF and Sihanoukists, whose capacity for mismanagement has been demonstrated in the border camps they control. Not only would their claims to ownership of housing mean another traumatic evacuation of Phnom Penh, as I indicated above, but some of them are previous owners of industrial plant, and the scramble to reassert ownership would disrupt production and result in dramatic deterioration of conditions for workers.

The deterioration, depending on the foreign aid available, might be more social than economic, for the returning exiles were used to a wide social gap between owners or officials and workers, whereas, to return finally to the subject of this conference, PRK-SOC policies have nearly wiped out such distinctions between workers and management, and between men and women.

They are more cohesive as a class, and more self-confident than before 1975. It seems they are also more numerous, if state and private industry are totaled, and they might well react to KPNLF carpet-baggers in a manner reminiscent of Solidarity.

On the other hand, the new economic policies, or lack of clear policy, of the Phnom Penh government, seem to represent competition with the Son Sann and Sihanouk groups on the latter's terms. The new economic freedoms, with concomitant income and class disparities, may so alienate the population that, as in the 1970s, they would support an extremist solution, such as offered by Democratic Kampuchea.<sup>192</sup>

We would then be witness to a case of economic liberalism destroying a country which had made notable progress in the most difficult conditions under socialism.

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<sup>190</sup> Paisal Sricharatchanya, *FEER* 25 May 1989, p. 32, wrote, "... until recently Bangkok's Cambodia policy was predicated on the assumption that the Vietnamese would not genuinely leave Cambodia".

<sup>191</sup> Vickery, "Democratic Kampuchea: CIA to the Rescue", *BCAS*, 14/4 (1982).

<sup>192</sup> The preoccupation with 'Pol Pot genocide' as a willful aberration by a single leader and his close associates has tended to obscure, both within and outside Cambodia, the circumstance that the Cambodian revolutionaries won in 1975 because of overwhelming popular support, which their own policies subsequently dissipated.

## Chapter 2: Tentative polemics before contact

My first published comments on contemporary Cambodian politics were in letters to the *Far Eastern Economic Review* in the 1970s, based on study of the Cambodian press from the 1940s to the early 1970s and the published work which then existed.

Just a month after the revolutionary victory in Cambodia (17 April 1975), Spencer Davis wrote an article, “The men most likely to ...”, which I considered in error on several points, and to which I wrote an answer which *FEER* published.<sup>193</sup> Already a Vietnam syndrome was apparent in the exaggerated attribution of a Vietnamese background to the leaders of the new regime.

### Cambodia’s mysterious leaders (1975)<sup>194</sup>

By now the whole question may be purely academic, but I nevertheless feel some remarks are in order concerning Spencer Davis’s “The men most likely to ...” Much of Davis’s article looks like it might have been copied from raw files of the American Embassy in Phnom Penh, or perhaps when classified material was being burned, a couple of sheets blew away and found their way into his hands. Thus, we read of Khieu Thirith, “a well-known anti-American communist.” (Are there any well-known pro-American communists?)

The remark about Keat Chhon defecting due to a “debt owed from his student days” and Poc Does Komar [*sic*] disappearing “after irregularities were found in the bank for which he was working” also smell of the Embassy, perhaps lifted originally from speeches of Sihanouk in the days when he was against anyone who seemed, however remotely, to belong to the Cambodian Left.<sup>195</sup>

To start at the beginning and the elements which are said to make up the insurgents, the existence of the “Hanoi 6,000” as a cohesive group is due more to speculation and a desire to make the liberation forces appear as North Vietnamese puppets than to any solid information. The total given has varied over the years and what they represent is not at all certain. In any case, it is

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<sup>193</sup> Spencer Davis, “The men most likely to ...”, *FEER* 28 March 1975.

<sup>194</sup> Michael Vickery, “Cambodia’s mysterious leaders”, *FEER* 6 June 1975, p. 6. I have added explanatory footnotes.

<sup>195</sup> Khieu Thirith is the wife of Ieng Sary. Keat Chhon was a university rector until 1968 and a minister in the Cambodian government in 1969. In 1970 he joined Sihanouk in Peking, and worked with the PDK until 1984. Then in 1992 he joined the SOC. In the 1993 election he became a Cambodian People’s Party deputy in the National Assembly, and became Minister of Finance and Economy in October 1994.

For the fate of Poc Does Komar/Deuskomar, who did not survive the war, see Milton Osborne, *Before Kampuchea: Preludes to Tragedy*, Sydney, George Allen & Unwin, 1979, reviewed below, pp. 91 ff., and Vickery, *Kampuchea, Politics, Economics and Society*, Chapter 4, note 10 (p. 179).

inaccurate to characterize Saloth Sar as one of those who “have now filtered back”.

Whether he ever went then to Hanoi I do not know, but early in 1963, at least, he appeared on a list of leading leftists present in Cambodia drawn up by Sihanouk, and, in the summer of that year, figured in the first major disappearance of leftist intellectuals, along with Ieng Sary and Son Sen, the last-mentioned individual in your article.<sup>196</sup> Ieng Sary, at that time, taught in a private school in Phnom Penh, and Son Sen was a teacher employed by the Ministry of Education (indeed; he was not a military man).

Their disappearance caused consternation among Cambodian teachers, who, as a group, were suspect in Sangkum days as ‘leftists’ and ‘anti-royalist’, and the general belief was that they had been murdered. As for their present position, which one, Son Sen or Saloth Sar, is supposed to be chief-of-staff? Or are we to suppose that “army chief-of-staff” (Saloth Sar) and “chief-of-staff of the liberation army” (Son Sen) are different positions?

The mood in 1963 was intensified when other lesser figures, such as Tiv Ol, whom your article mentioned, also disappeared (Davis does not seem to distinguish in this case between Kompong Cham Lycée and the Pedagogical Institute). The disappearances would have gone unnoticed had it not been that Son Sen had worked at the Pedagogical Institute, where he was known to many American and French teachers and had just been appointed headmaster in the Takeo Lycée, where there were several French teachers on the staff. The notice thus given to his disappearance caused Sihanouk to announce that Son Sen had run off to South Viet Nam to work for So’n Ngoc Thanh and the CIA.

Ieng Sary’s wife, Khieu Thirith, who had a *Licence* in English from the University of Paris, was at the time teaching in Lycée Sisowath, one of Phnom Penh’s more important schools. She disappeared a year or so after her husband.

Another group just as shadowy as the “Hanoi 6,000” is the “Khmer Communist Party (KCP), established in 1951”. If it exists as such, it must certainly include an organization which needs mention, the Pracheachon (‘Citizen’) Group, formed in late 1954 by Cambodians who had fought the French alongside the Vietminh.

It contested elections as a political party in 1955 and 1958, but when the time came for the election of 1962, most of its members were arrested. The best known of them, Non Suon, was released from prison by Lon Nol’s coup in 1970,

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<sup>196</sup> It is now considered that the Cambodian communists who took refuge in Hanoi after the Geneva Accords in 1954 numbered around 1,000. It is now certain that they were not prominent among the 1970-75 insurgent leadership, and that Saloth Sar/Pol Pot was not among them. Of course, he eventually visited Hanoi, the first time in 1965, two years after disappearing from Phnom Penh.

and promptly went off to join the guerrillas. In 1971-72, he was reported operating south of Phnom Penh.<sup>197</sup>

Also in 1954 the Democrat Party, which had been a thorn in the sides of both the French and Sihanouk since 1946, was reorganized with a younger and more leftist group of leaders, including Thiounn Mum.<sup>198</sup>

Among the 'leftist' demands of the Democrats in 1954-55, as well as of the Pracheachon and the remnants of So'n Ngoc Thanh's guerrillas, was strict application of the Geneva Accords, while one of the aims of Sihanouk and his newly-formed (March 1955) alliance of the far right, the *Sangkum*, was to sabotage those agreements insofar as they affected Cambodia's internal affairs.

Of course the best-known of the new Cambodian leaders, the ones who disappeared in 1967 causing extreme public concern, are Hou Yuon, Khieu Samphan and Hu Nim, the first two having disappeared in the spring of that year and the last in the autumn. As National Assembly members (among the few who had won seats by clear majorities in 1966) and critics of Sihanouk, they were well-known even before their disappearance. The consensus of opinion at the time was that they had been murdered, although Sihanouk always denied any knowledge of it.

Although by 1974 people in Phnom Penh were generally convinced that these men were alive and among the leaders of FUNK, their cause was hurt during the first two or three years of the war by their failure to provide convincing evidence of their existence and position, thus giving the Lon Nol Government an

<sup>197</sup> There is now more information about Cambodian communist organization than I had in 1975. The party which was established in 1951 was then called Khmer People's Revolutionary Party. Beginning in 1960 it was taken over by the Pol Pot group, and the name changed to 'Workers Party'. In 1966 the name was changed again to 'Communist Party', but that name was not made public until 1977. The Pracheachon Group was the legal communist front from 1955, contesting elections and publishing newspapers. Non Suon reappeared as a minister in the Democratic Kampuchea government after the end of the war, but in 1976 was arrested and executed.

<sup>198</sup> Thiounn Mum had been a leader of the group of Marxist Khmer students in Paris in the late 1940s and 1950s. After 1970 he joined Sihanouk in exile, and from 1975 until sometime in the 1980s he was a member of the Democratic Kampuchea inner circle. For several years he remained loyal to the Democratic Kampuchea group in exile on the Thai border, where he served as an intellectual front man, meeting journalists and diplomats. Since the final collapse of DK in 1998 he has lived in Paris.

Two of his brothers, Dr. (Medicine) Thiounn Thioeun and Thiounn Prasith, were also early adherents of the revolution. A third brother, Thiounn Chum, a business man before 1975, was treated as an ordinary person from 1975 to 1978 when he was brought to Phnom Penh in a late effort to make use of educated persons. Their family was one of the highest in a new aristocracy based in the colonial bureaucracy. Their grandfather, Thiounn, starting out under the French as a clerk and interpreter, had been Minister of the Palace, and the most powerful among the ministers, from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century until retirement in 1941, and their father Thiounn Hol, although of lesser official rank, moved in the highest royal and official circles.



opportunity to portray the “Khmer Rouge” as leaderless puppets of the Vietnamese.

It should also be pointed out that until early 1972, GRUNK information made no mention of Ieng Sary, Saloth Sar and Son Sen, and they were unfamiliar even to a Western friend of GRUNK who appeared in Phnom Penh in 1971 with material intended to prove the continuing existence of the men then considered as the three principal ‘ghosts’, Hou Yuon, Khieu Samphan, and Hu Nim.

Thus, reporting on the “men most likely to ... ” has always been made difficult by the mystery which they themselves (probably for good reason) seemed to cultivate.

An Editor’s note at the end of my letter quaintly affirmed, “Spencer Davis was writing from Washington. It would have been impossible for him to see files from the US Embassy in Phnom Penh before they were destroyed”.

Three years later Nayan Chanda offered more information about the DK leadership, and I offered corrections, which *FEER* published, with a significant cut, as follows.<sup>199</sup>

### Crossed Lines On Cambodia (1978)<sup>200</sup>

The “insider account of an obscure period of communist struggle in Indochina” which Nayan Chanda picked up in Hanoi shows that Pol Pot is not the only one who is trying to rewrite Cambodian communist history.

Chanda, based on interviews in Hanoi, wrote that after the Paris-educated intellectuals, like Pol Pot, returned to Cambodia in 1953, there were two political lines in Cambodian revolutionary thinking.

One was “to unite the forces in the country to fight the colonial enemy and cooperate with Vietnamese and Lao resistance fighters”, while “the other proposal was simply to overthrow the then King Norodom Sihanouk”, who “held high the banner of national independence”. “While the first line favored promoting Sihanouk, the other line, led by Pol Pot, opposed this. The Pol Pot line triumphed in 1963” after the murder of then party Secretary Tou Samouth.

By early 1953 Sihanouk had succeeded in destroying the system of parliamentary democracy set up after World War II in order to run the country personally with the support of the extreme Right, including Lon Nol who had been prominent in politics since at least 1948. In November 1953 the French granted Cambodia the independence which they had refused to all elected Cambodian governments, obviously feeling their interests would be more secure in the hands of the Cambodian Right.

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<sup>199</sup> Nayan Chanda, “The bloody border”, *FEER*, 12 April 1978.

<sup>200</sup> Michael Vickery, “Crossed lines on Cambodia”, *FEER*, 2 June 1978, pp. 6-7. On the cut, see my follow-up letter, below.

Any opposition, or communist, policy which at that time proposed “to unite the forces in the country with Vietnamese and Lao resistance fighters” would have inevitably meant the overthrow of Sihanouk as well, and the “two party ‘lines’” simply could not have existed as described. There may well have been a group who “simply wanted to overthrow ... Sihanouk”, but that sounds more like the non-communist nationalist guerrillas, of whom the most important was So’n Ngoc Thanh, but it is doubtful that they would have supported what the Vietnamese now call the correct line.<sup>201</sup>

Again after 1954 – that is, after Geneva – there was no opposition faction, at least through the elections of 1955, which favored “promoting Sihanouk”, and none of them, judging from the newspapers they published at the time, considered that “Sihanouk held high the banner of national independence”. The two most important opposition groups were the Pracheachon (the communists) and the Democrats, among whose leaders were Norodom Phurissara and Thiounn Mum; both groups considered that Sihanouk and his Sangkum were trying to destroy democracy and would endanger Cambodian Independence.<sup>202</sup>

‘Saloth Sar’ does not appear in the published material from that time, and it is not clear what he was doing. The editor of *Solidarity* (Khmer title *Samakki*), who was arrested in 1955 [*FEER*, 21 Oct., 1977] was not Saloth Sar but his brother, Saloth Chhay. Or more precisely, the name on the masthead of *Samakki* was ‘Saloth Chhay’, who was indeed arrested, and later released, in 1955; and in the 1970s ‘Saloth Chhay’ also appeared as editor of the Lon Nol government newspaper and was accepted in Phnom Penh at that time as Saloth Sar’s brother.

It was only when the Sangkum destroyed all other parties between 1955 and 1962 that some of the Left decided to cooperate with it, probably in hopes of guiding Sihanouk’s apparently anti-imperialist sentiments along genuinely socialist lines.

It was probably only during this period, after Sihanouk’s coup of 1955, that a genuine policy split, as described by the Vietnamese, may have developed, with the group of Saloth Sar, Ieng Sary and Son Sen really holding the line attributed to them. In any case, when Sihanouk announced that he would lead the Left in 1970 it is clear that he made a distinction between the two groups and much preferred to work with Khieu Samphan.<sup>203</sup>

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<sup>201</sup> Pol Pot’s policy, after his rise to prominence in 1960-62, was also to overthrow Sihanouk, but not to form joint forces with the Lao and Vietnamese, and of course, he wanted a social revolution.

<sup>202</sup> On Thiounn Mum see above, note 198. Norodom Phurissara left Phnom Penh to join the anti-Khmer Republic guerrillas in 1972, became the first Democratic Kampuchea Minister of Justice in 1975, and was arrested and executed in 1976 or 1977.

<sup>203</sup> In those days Khieu Samphan was believed to belong to a different faction from Pol Pot. See Ben Kiernan, “Conflict in the Kampuchean Communist Movement”, *JCA* 10, 1/2 (1980).

It is probably premature to accept that the “Pol Pot line triumphed in 1963”, and as for the death of “Touch Samut” (error for Tou Samouth, also written Toussamouth), Jean-Claude Pomonti and Serge Thion wrote in their *Des courtisanes aux partisans* that he was still “président du parti communiste”, and was commanding Khmer Rouge troops around Kompong Cham and Prey Veng in 1970.<sup>204</sup>

In this connection it is worth noting that Saloth Sar, Ieng Sary and Son Sen did not appear to have any connection with the Pracheachon in the 1950s and 1960s, and the men who were active in the Pracheachon then have not surfaced among the leaders of Cambodia since 1975.<sup>205</sup>

Finally, the anti-Vietnamese line attributed to Pol Pot was also a constant of Sihanouk’s policy. Whatever his attitudes towards “imperialists”, Sihanouk, at least in his Khmer-language speeches and writings, always emphasized that the

<sup>204</sup> This was erroneous. It has been established that Tou Samouth (as the name is now generally written in romanization), was killed in 1962, although there is still disagreement among researchers whether he was killed by the Pol Pot group or by Sihanouk’s police. Ben Kiernan has insisted that Tou Samouth death was because of intra-party rivalry, and organized by Pol Pot (Kiernan, *How Pol Pot*, second edition, pp. 241-2, while Chandler (*Tragedy*, p. 120) prefers to put the blame on Sihanouk while admitting that Saloth Sar might have been involved in Samouth’s betrayal.

Pen Sovann, in his “Political Report” to the Fourth Party Congress in 1981, said definitely that in May 1962 Pol Pot’s “agents assassinated Tou Samouth and other party leaders” (Vickery, *Kampuchea*, p. 72). Another intriguing source, in an interview with Youk Chang on 20 February 2003, was Vann Rith, who was in charge of DK foreign commerce with Hong Kong and China, and who claimed to have been involved in both leftist politics and the Lon Nol army in the 1960s-70s, and said that “After being arrested”, Tou Samouth was detained at Um Savut’s Banteay Sloek, to which Rith was attached, after which he was transferred to another location, where he was killed. Rith presumed this was on Lon Nol’s orders. “Um Savut warned Rith that he needed to be careful.”

The late DC Cam interviews of DK survivors, such as Vann Rith, are not always reliable for detail, but there is much surviving contemporary (DK period) documentation of his importance in DK foreign commerce, and no apparent reason for him to lie about the fate of Tou Samouth. Attributing the immediate agency to Um Savuth lends credence, for the latter was famous during the 1970-75 war as one of Lon Nol’s most brutal officers.

Another pre-revolutionary banker, called into financial service under DK, and whose survival seems miraculous, is Sar Kim/Keum Lamut, in April 1975 evacuated from Phnom Penh but brought back in 1976 to direct the bank for foreign trade, and who returned to banking after 1979. There seems to have been some rivalry between him and Vann Rith, for the latter, in the interview cited here, said that Sar Keum Lamut in fact knew nothing about Democratic Kampuchea finances.

<sup>205</sup> I was in error here. The Pracheachon leader Non Suon reappeared briefly as a minister in the Democratic Kampuchea government after the end of the war, but in 1976 he was arrested and executed. His confessions show that there was lack of contact between the Pracheachon group and Pol Pot.

Vietnamese, whether communist or not, were Cambodia's long-term enemy, and he would have been delighted to serve as "an accomplice in a Chinese and Western plan of containing and weakening Vietnam".<sup>206</sup>

In an answer published along with my letter, Chanda said he was aware of inconsistencies in the two-line struggle theory, but was unable "to go into detail for space reasons". He referred Saloth Sar's editorship of *Solidarity/Samakki*, to a "Monash University research paper by Ben Kiernan", and Pol Pot's takeover of the party in 1963 to Pol Pot's interview with Yugoslav journalists; and he correctly pointed out that Pomonti's and Thion's information about Tou Samouth was not from a very good source.

I responded with an unpublished letter dated 13 July 1978 and reproduced below.

### Answer to Chanda (1978)<sup>207</sup>

I was hasty, I admit, in citing the paragraph in Pomonti's and Thion's book concerning Tou Samouth as coming from good leftist sources; but Pomonti and Thion, who did claim to have leftist sources, did not entirely wish to discount that information.

I suppose part of the difference in point of view between Chanda and myself is the perennial conflict between the tasks of the journalist and the academic. The former prefers, or in any case is usually forced, to take his information in face-to-face contact with individuals who are deeply involved in the activity being investigated and he must generally get it quickly into a more or less entertaining form for his readers, while the latter, if historian or social scientist, tends to distrust what people say about long-past events and wishes to search for what was recorded as close to the event as possible.<sup>208</sup>

Whatever Hanoi is now saying about Cambodia is indeed News, but it may not be History.

As to the case in question, you probably realize that all parties to the Cambodian conflict are to some extent trying to rewrite history. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, before Sihanouk's Sangkum harassed its opponents into extreme caution, there was a period of very active parliamentary politics in which all parties rather freely campaigned in elections and produced newspapers exposing their points of view and criticizing their opponents without hesitation. Nearly all the important factions and individuals of the 1970s began their

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<sup>206</sup> Of course, it was true that in the late 1960s Sihanouk's policy of aiding the communist side in the Vietnam war in order to preserve peace within Cambodia was more useful to Viet Nam than the Pol Pot's desire to overthrow Sihanouk.

<sup>207</sup> Michael Vickery, unpublished letter to *FEER*, 13 July 1978. Footnotes and a few bracketed comments have been added.

<sup>208</sup> On this subject see my review of Chanda's *Brother Enemy*, below, pp. 197 ff.

political careers in that earlier period and it is often possible to check what they have claimed since 1970 with what they were really doing and saying 20-30 years earlier.

Thus those of us who have done documentary (as opposed to oral) research on the politics of prewar Cambodia know who was overtly working for what party or newspaper and what political line they were promoting to the public; and we know that “Saloth Sar” was never mentioned as editor of *Samakki*.

Admittedly we cannot know anything from such sources about clandestine operators whose names were never mentioned publicly, and it may well be true that Saloth Sar/Pol Pot “was active in underground operations in Phnom Penh between 1954 and 1963” (Chanda’s answer 2 June 1978), which is not the same thing as being editor of a newspaper.<sup>209</sup>

In this connection I understand that editors may find it necessary to cut letters for various reasons, but it seems to me that when an answer to the letter is planned to coincide with the letter’s publication it is incumbent on the editor to avoid cuts which load the argument on either side.

Thus you cut from my letter a sentence remarking that no one who has written about Saloth Sar has ever checked *Samakki*, while Chanda was able to justify his statement about Saloth Sar’s editorship with reference to Ben Kiernan’s research report (presumably “Working Paper No. 4, The Samlaut Rebellion ...”, Centre of Southeast Asian Studies, Monash University, p. 15). Kiernan, I believe, relied for that detail on Milton Osborne who, I also believe, obtained such information in the 1960s from Cambodians claiming to be close to the dissident milieu.

This would seemingly lend credibility to the report, except for the fact that the editor of *Samakki* was ‘Saloth Chhay’, not ‘Saloth Sar’. Osborne and Kiernan could of course argue that Saloth Sar in 1955 used the pseudonym ‘Saloth Chhay’, which may have been the name of a brother, and that in the 1970s the brother, or someone else, again made use of the same name. They have not argued in this way, first of all because they have not, as I wrote, and indeed could not have, read [the Khmer-language] *Samakki*, and thus had no way of knowing that a controversy could arise.

The credibility of Osborne’s informants is also damaged by the circumstance that they were even more in error in telling him about “the killing in 1960 of an editor of the left-wing newspaper *L’Observateur* ...”.<sup>210</sup>

<sup>209</sup> Now there is much information about Pol Pot in those years, when he indeed worked secretly for the party, while living openly as a teacher. See Ben Kiernan, *How Pol Pot*; and Chandler, *Brother Number One. A Political biography of Pol Pot*, first edition, Chiang Mai, Silkworm Books, 1993; second edition, Chiang Mai, Silkworm Books, 2000.

<sup>210</sup> Milton Osborne, *Politics and Power in Cambodia*, p. 95, n. 5. [For more such misinformation see Osborne’s *Before Kampuchea*, and my review of it below, pp. 91 ff.].

The sole editor of *L'Observateur* was Khieu Samphan, who in its number 6 of 13 October 1959, and in later issues, reported and commented on the murder of Nop Bophann, editor of the Pracheachon Group's newspaper [in Khmer, entitled *Pracheachon*]. Khieu Samphan was later, in 1960, attacked by police thugs, probably on Sihanouk's orders, but did not suffer severe injury.

I think it should be clear why some of us maintain a certain amount of skepticism about what is being said now, in the heat of inter- and intra-party conflict, about opposition activities in Cambodia two or three decades ago, particularly by someone who has nurtured as much mystery about himself as Pol Pot.

My next effort with *FEER* was in part academic and in part a spoof, although both involved matters which I still think worthy of attention. The first part of this unpublished letter concerned the history and etymology of the word 'yuon', used in Cambodia to mean Vietnamese, and still a matter of controversy, and use of which may mark one's chauvinism, if Cambodian, or inimical feelings toward Vietnamese. Since 1979 it has been considered polite, in Khmer, to say 'Viet Nam' rather than 'Yuon'.<sup>211</sup>

At the time of writing, I had not yet had any post-revolutionary contact with Cambodia or with persons who had spent the revolutionary years within the country, and I expressed doubt about Chanda's reference to "the pejorative appellation *youn* [*yuon*, which Chanda, April 21, 1978 wrote as *xuan*] (savage)" used for Vietnamese; and I added that "it is in no way pejorative, but is simply, in colloquial Cambodian, the ordinary term for Vietnamese, just as in English we say 'Dutch' for Hollander. Furthermore, *yuon* is the standard Central Thai term for Vietnamese, and is also used in Mon in the form *yon*."<sup>212</sup>

My remarks were based on my experiences in Cambodia between 1960 and 1972, and they were true for that time. What I did not yet realize was that the Khmer Rouge, continuing in this matter from Lon Nol, had succeeded in transforming the word into an insult, and in inculcating an anti-Vietnamese chauvinism much worse than what had prevailed before 1970. Indeed, by 1993 'yuon' was considered so offensive that the radio of the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC), not notably sympathetic to Vietnam, censored election campaign speeches which used it.<sup>213</sup> I continued my 2 September 1979 letter with comment on the "Traveler's Tales" column of *FEER*.

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<sup>211</sup> The letter was dated 2 September 1979, in answer to Chanda's report from Phnom Penh, 31 August 1979.

<sup>212</sup> The Bangkok, and official, use of *yuon* continues. At the funeral of Princess Galyani in November 2008, Thai television used 'yuon' for a group of Vietnamese Buddhist monks who participated.

<sup>213</sup> *PPP*, Vol. 2 No. 9, 23 April-6 May 1993, p. 4; "Rainsy Bemoans Censorship, UN Cites Racism". The prominent FUNCINPEC member, Mr. Sam Rainsy was refused

### On Traveler's Tales (1979) <sup>214</sup>

While on the subject of linguistics, I would like to compliment you on your amusing examples of fractured English which are now and then inserted at the end of "Traveler's Tales". Although some of my unduly Asia-centric friends consider them arrogant and even culturally imperialistic, I find them quite harmlessly humorous.<sup>215</sup> I do wonder, however, if we westerners who try to use Asian languages do not commit similar errors, and if it would not be both fair and stimulating to find such examples for "Traveler's Tales".

As an example, I would like to call your attention to the *FEER* of 8 December 1978, p. 36, where your writer [Nayan Chanda] reported from Thong Hi Nhay [Laos] ('Plain of Big Cunt'), presumably an error for Thong Hin Nhay ('Plain of Big Stone'), an error very easy for one ignorant of Lao. Of course, given the Lao sense of humor, the name reported by your correspondent could conceivably be the right one, and in such case I apologize for any hint of criticism (I have been unable to find either name in the gazetteer of Laos to which I have access).

In the autumn of 1979 the Australian historian of French Indochina, Milton Osborne, published a volume of reminiscences from his time as a diplomat in Phnom Penh in the 1960s, and finding in it similar errors to those noted above, I wrote a review, of which a modified and somewhat bowdlerized version was published in Australia. I offer here the original version.

### Milton Osborne, *Before Kampuchea: Preludes to Tragedy* (1980) <sup>216</sup>

When a friend of some prewar experience in Cambodia asked me if I had learned anything new from reading Osborne's book, I answered, yes, now I know who was driving the British Racing Green TR-2 sports car that nearly ran me down in Bung Snao one night in 1965. Bung Snao was a famous social and educational

permission to broadcast one of his election speeches because it was considered too racist in his attacks on Vietnamese. UN spokesman Eric Berman said "the text did not take into account the responsibilities involved in the freedom of expression" ... "The freedom of expression also has responsibilities". See further comment on continuing propaganda usage of *yuon* in Michael Vickery, "From Ionia to Viet Nam" *PPP*, vol. 12/14, July 4 - 17, 2003.

<sup>214</sup> Michael Vickery, unpublished letter to *FEER*, 2 September 1979. Footnote added.

<sup>215</sup> This was too early to make use of the terms 'orientalism', or 'political correctness', which had not yet become trendy.

<sup>216</sup> Osborne, *Before Kampuchea*. My published review was in *Asian Studies Association of Australia Review* (1980), pp. 125-27 Osborne was both a diplomat and a prominent historian of Cambodia. Among his high quality historical writings are *The French Presence in Cochinchina and Cambodia: Rule and Response (1859-1905)*, Cornell University Press, 1969; *Power and Politics in Cambodia*, Longman, 1973; and *The Mekong: Turbulent Past, Uncertain Future*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 2000.

quarter on the southeast edge of Phnom Penh. Contrary to the opinion of most western analysts, it was not the fall of Neak Luong, a river port some 30 miles farther down the road, but the realization that Bung Snao could no longer be held, that caused the final collapse of the Lon Nol army in 1975.

The above is not quite true. Not only am I certain that Osborne would never have gone to Bung Snao, but there are in fact several details throughout the book which are new to me (for instance, the rumour, p. 56, that one of Sihanouk's sons swung on the wrong side of the bed). The purpose of this frivolous introduction is to emphasize that the book contains too much frivolous gossip when there were a good many more serious things to write about the year 1966.

Gossip about the royal family did make up a good bit of the conversation at the parties of foreign diplomats and businessmen in Cambodia, but then, as now, it was usually third-hand name dropping in the manner of small-town American housewives retailing fan-magazine gossip about film stars. It is surely legitimate to ask whether a book on Cambodia could not have dispensed with speculation about how many nights a week Sihanouk spent with whom; or about which niece, cousin, or aunt he variously tried to bed, matters about which Osborne could not possibly have had any good information, even if his "pedicab riders seemed particularly knowledgeable" (p. 45).

For although he is quite right in asserting that Cambodians cared little about the sexual adventures of their elite, and perhaps even admired them for it, it was an area from which that elite generally excluded foreigners, due to their proven hypocrisy, whom they met in other realms of social intercourse.

I also think it is in bad taste, unless it is really of some historical importance, to devote space to stories about alleged perversities of a certain prince (p. 56), or the tendencies of poor old Jean Barré (pp. 145 - 46). Particularly, again, since it is all, in Osborne's case, I hope, second or third hand gossip.

It would be another matter if a writer, say a diplomat, writing of his personal experiences in Cambodian elite circles, would report that on April 1, 1966, in the higher national interest and for the gravest reasons of state, he had been bugged by prince so-and-so. (However, since the subject has come up, I cannot resist noting that one of Jean Barré's more literate protégés used to write a column for *Realités cambodgiennes* [a French-language weekly magazine in Phnom Penh] which he signed "Thvear", Khmer for "doorway, orifice, etc.")

In any case it is essential that a writer who buttresses his claims to expertise by dropping names and retailing court gossip insure that the names, at least, are accurate.

Thus, Osborne's stories about his friend Prince Entaravong, whose long-lived family stretched back through only three generations to the pre-colonial period, and who could therefore relate choice anecdotes of 19th-century court life heard from his father, are spoiled when we come to the father's name, "Prince Yubhiphan", since **Princess** Yubhiphan was Entaravong's mother and was still alive when Osborne was in Phnom Penh visiting with her son (her death, at age



89, was reported by the *Agence khmère de presse* news bulletin on January 5, 1967).

The father, whose name was Chamroeunvong, had died about fifty years earlier. Other names that should be rectified are Kantol, not Kanthal (p.45), and Chhean Vam, not Cheam Vann (pp.121-22).

Whether or not name-dropping, as such, is of historical value, Entaravong's family was interesting, and there was another aspect of their history which might have had political importance, and which Osborne, with his research in 19th century archives, might have been aware. Sihanouk had always shown conspicuous asperity towards Entaravong's younger brother Youtevong, which seemed excessive, even considering the latter's leadership of the Democrat Party in the 1940's.

A possible reason may have been dynastic. When the French put Sihanouk on the throne, one of the justifications was that he united the two main branches of the royal family, the Norodoms and the Sisowaths. Such a consideration had never been important in Cambodian tradition, but once introduced by the French, it was immediately clear that the family of Entaravong and Youtevong, otherwise of relatively low royal rank, might have an even greater claim to the throne through uniting Norodoms, Sisowaths, and other branches of royalty going back to the early 19th century before the Norodom-Sisowath split.

It is a pity that Osborne felt compelled to fill out his book with the type of padding cited above (and other padding, such as Charles Meyer's Binh Xuyen background, irrelevant for Cambodia of 1966; excessive detail about Sihanouk's films; and even the entire chapter 11, on Vietnam).

Even his contention that 1966 was a "turning point in Cambodia's modern history" (p.13) may be questioned (I would say 1962-63 and 1967-68 were both more crucial periods), although 1966 did not lack in matters of political and historical importance which Osborne could have better emphasized had he been less concerned to demonstrate that he "had access to members of some of the great families ... both to sections of the royal family and to descendants of the semi-hereditary officials" (p.67).

As a whole all of Osborne's vignettes make an important point about pre-1970 Cambodia which has usually been neglected, or made in the wrong way. This is that a major reason for the tragedy since 1970 was the breakdown of the system which Sihanouk tried to develop from the 1950's and to which breakdown Sihanouk himself contributed.

Although there was no lack of anti-Sihanouk critique among foreign writers, it was usually made by the wrong people and for the wrong reasons. In western countries both the right and the left, the latter of whom, at least, should have been able to distinguish rhetoric from substance, looked on Sihanouk as a 'Red Prince' and never saw that within the context of Cambodian politics he was conservative, if not an outright reactionary, and in every important political

confrontation threw his weight behind the most reactionary elements of Cambodian society.

Thus he gradually alienated everyone from the far left to the moderate right, while at the same time inculcating an ideology which would insure Cambodian inability to meet the dangers of the 1970's.

Facets of this process are shown with particular clarity in Osborne's chapter 8, "The Revolutionary," chapter 12, "Business is Business," and in the remarks on Cambodian journalism on pp. 149-50. The first shows the transformation of a young man of the aristocracy into a revolutionary who spent the war years among the guerilla leadership, and includes, p.82, some very pertinent conclusions about the nature of the revolutionary organization before 1970.

I would add, though, that the difference between the two stories about Poc Deuskomar's disappearance (p. 81) may not be just "academic," but could cast doubt on the reliability of Ith Sarin's book, which has been used as an authoritative source for Khmer Communist organization in the 1970's but which is in fact a second version published with the blessings of the Lon Nol government.

The discrepancy also points up the perils of writing about Cambodian politics on the basis of oral history, something which Osborne knows well from misinformation given him by Poc Deuskomar himself and which he has corrected in the present book.<sup>217</sup>

"Business is Business" is devoted to the pervasive corruption which was eating away Sihanouk's economy, and Osborne's general point could have been strengthened by giving less attention to Chou Kong, who was only doing what traders are supposed to do, and more to Mau Say, Minister of Finance and also heavily involved in the great garlic scandal of 1966, who was thereby forced to resign his ministerial post only to be promoted by Sihanouk to the Haut Conseil du Throne, one of the most prestigious honorific bodies of the realm.

Another valuable chapter is "The Priest," which given the recent publicity on the destruction of the Phnom Penh cathedral as an act of Khmer Rouge vandalism, provides a more nuanced insight into the role of the Catholic Church in Cambodia as an element of French neo-colonialism which may have given offense even to an ethnic Khmer bishop. The destruction of the cathedral, as a

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217 Compare p. 149 on Nop Bophann and *L'Observateur* with Osborne, *Politics and Power in Cambodia*, p.95, n. 5. Among the sources cited by Osborne was Ith [It] Sarin, *Sranoh Proleung Khmer* ['Regrets for the Khmer Soul'], Phnom Penh, 2517 [1974], no publisher indicated (English translation of title from Timothy Michael Carney, *Communist Party Power in Kampuchea [Cambodia]: Documents and Discussion*, Data Paper: Number 106, Southeast Asia Program, Department of Asian Studies, Cornell University, January 1977).

The author was a teacher who joined the communist maquis in 1972, then redefected to the Khmer Republic government and wrote a memoir of his adventure. For a record of the fate of Poc Deuskomar, see above, and Vickery, *Kampuchea, Politics, Economics and Society*, Chapter 4, note 10 (p. 179).

symbol of this role, may well have been viewed sympathetically by other than Khmer Rouge fanatics.

More of neo-colonial Sihanoukism is revealed in chapters 14 and 15, “Scribes and Sycophants” and “A Colonial Connection”, and here Osborne accurately describes the more influential Frenchmen as unreconstructed colonialists with little sympathy for Cambodia or Cambodians (saying this, I must emphasize that there were also dozens, if not scores, of other French men and women, mostly in the educational services, of a quite different type who made valuable contributions both to Cambodia and to scholarship about Cambodia).

One more positive contribution is the attention given to life on the fringes of Cambodian society (pp.132-35), and to how the inhabitants of those fringes, perhaps even the central rice peasants, were so ground down by their life that they could have accepted any kind of revolution. This is extremely important, and the fringes, many more than Osborne saw or heard of, often began five miles or so from the center of major towns (See Vickery, *Cambodia 1975-1982*. chapter 1).

As a final criticism I would take issue with the conclusions of chapter 16 about “the hereditary enemy,” the Vietnamese. It is much too simplistic to regard what has happened in 1979 as “the ultimate proof of the validity of ... .. traditional fears” that Viet Nam wished to annex Cambodia.

Osborne also knows very well that Pol Pot’s “Black Book” is full of historical distortions, if not outright lies, and it can in no way be taken as evidence that “the nature of Viet Nam and of the Vietnamese ... is that of ‘an aggressor, an annexationist, and a devourer of the territory of other countries’” (p. 174).

It is a particularly strange conclusion for Osborne, who has been arguing for derecognition of Pol Pot in favor, inevitably, if not expressly, of the new Cambodian regime supported by Viet Nam. If the Vietnamese were simply expansionist aggressors and nothing more, as Pol Pot would have it, then Osborne and all the rest of us should be exerting ourselves in support of the latter.

### Chapter 3: First experiences with post-KR Cambodia

An interesting case in the pathology of market journalism is that of William Shawcross, who became famous and gained credit as an anti-Viet Nam War activist, implicitly an opponent of American imperialism, with his book *Sideshow*.

This approach was also evident in a report in the 2 January 1976 issue of *FEER*, reporting from the Thai-Cambodian border that refugee accounts “suggest [emphasis added] that the Khmer Rouge is finding it hard to govern the country except by coercion” and “even suggest that terror is being employed as a system of government”. The refugees themselves, however, in spite of complaints about “young and old ... dying of starvation”, “did not appear to be in a sorry condition”.<sup>218</sup>

Shawcross concluded that life in Cambodia was “appalling”, but he recognized that “it is impossible ... talking to some refugees and reading the radio monitoring, to say how a country is being run”; and he emphasized that if an atrocity was being perpetrated, it “did not begin in April [1975] – it simply entered its sixth year”. Here Shawcross showed the same critical analysis as Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman, and he continued to blame the US and Henry Kissinger for the Cambodian tragedy.<sup>219</sup>

Then, in his second book on Cambodia, *The Quality of Mercy*, published in 1984, he shifted ground and, in what was presented as a study of the aid organizations on the Thai-Cambodian border, reproduced all the criticisms of the government in Phnom Penh then trendy in US regime and allied circles.

I did not write anything about *Quality of Mercy*. For good treatments of it see the review article by Grant Evans, “William Shawcross’s Cambodia Crusade”, *New Left Review*, 152, July/August 1985, pp. 120-28, and Ben Kiernan, “Review Essay: William Shawcross, Declining Cambodia”, *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* 18/1 (Jan-March 1986), pp. 56-63.

Evans’s treatment is the most subtle. In contrast to most critical comparisons of *The Quality of Mercy* with *Sideshow*, Evans concludes that “there is not a radical discontinuity” from one to the other. In the former Shawcross took the position that “the use of American power and violence in Cambodia was an aberration from the US’s ‘naturally’ pacific role in world affairs”, and he “showed little sympathy for the communist cause in Indochina”. The US was on the right side, but in the wrong way.

But “in *The Quality of Mercy* the main actors are the communist states”, and “in this context Shawcross reaches for the home-truths of Cold War liberalism”,

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<sup>218</sup> One whom I then met and who fit this description was Siv Sichan, on whom see Vickery, *Cambodia: A Political Survey*, p. 40.

<sup>219</sup> Chomsky and Herman, *After the Cataclysm*.

in the event, that the goal of Viet Nam “was to conquer Indochina”. Evans himself later switched to that same position in his *A Short History of Laos*, Chiang Mai, Silkworm Books, 2002.

The shift in Shawcross’ position was first revealed clearly, I believe, in “The End of Cambodia?” (*The New York Review of Books* [NYRB] 24 January 1980) and, with some modifications following a trip to Cambodia, in “Kampuchea Revives on Food, Aid, and Capitalism”, (*The Bulletin* [Australia] 24 March 1981).

At that time I had had my first post-revolutionary contact with the Cambodian situation, working for four months in the summer of 1980 in the Cambodian refugee camps on the Thai border, mainly in Khao-I-Dang, the largest, with a population of over 150,000 in July 1980. It was information from these refugees which permitted me to resume active research on current Cambodian affairs, and eventually, after my first post-revolutionary visit to Phnom Penh, Battambang and Siemreap in 1981, to write *Cambodia 1975-1982*.

This refugee information also enabled me to discern errors in Shawcross’ treatment of Cambodia in its first year after the replacement of Pol Pot’s Democratic Kampuchea by the People’s Republic of Kampuchea.

I wrote an answer (“Ending Cambodia – Some Revisions”) covering both of those Shawcross articles and sent it to NYRB on 15 June 1981. I very quickly received a rejection notice dated 15 July 1981. Then in August 1981 I met Shawcross in Chiang Mai at a small conference on Cambodia organized by the Social Science Research Council, and found that NYRB had sent him a copy of my piece, apparently as soon as they had received it from me.

This appears to have started the tradition, which they have maintained, of allowing Shawcross to exercise prior censorship of material submitted critical of his work or presenting other information about Cambodia. The *Bulletin* (Australia) also refused to print a very short critique which I offered. Its main points are included in “Ending Cambodia”.<sup>220</sup>

Below I reproduce my 1981 article, with a few points marked, as indicated, added later.

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<sup>220</sup> The Chiang Mai conference was held on 11-13 August 1981. It resulted in the book, *Revolution and its Aftermath in Kampuchea: Eight Essays*, edited by David P. Chandler and Ben Kiernan, Monograph Series No. 25, Yale University Southeast Asia Studies, New Haven, 1983. Shawcross’ contribution is entitled “Cambodia: Some Perceptions of a Disaster”, and my own is, “Democratic Kampuchea: Themes and Variations”, from which I developed Chapter 3 of *Cambodia 1975-1982*. For more detail on the refugee camps see my “Refugee Politics: The Khmer Camp System in Thailand”.

### Shawcross 1: Ending Cambodia – Some Revisions (1981) <sup>221</sup>

The writing on Cambodia since early 1975 has well-illustrated the point made so often and so eloquently by Noam Chomsky that western media treatment of the third world, and in particular Cambodia, is generally of more interest as ‘work of art’ than for the information it conveys about the countries concerned.

There is no clearer illustration of that, and of what I would call the new revisionism on Cambodia, than a comparison of William Shawcross’ “The End of Cambodia?” in *NYRB* and “Kampuchea Revives on Food, Aid, and Capitalism” in *The Bulletin*.

“The End of Cambodia?” was full of errors of both fact and interpretation, and represented little more than the propaganda line, now known to have been largely untrue, which the US government hardliners were pushing. The old Indochina hands in the back rooms of the Embassy establishment in Bangkok must have taken great glee in conning Shawcross, whose *Sideshow* would have infuriated them, into the role of PR man for their policies toward Cambodia.<sup>[222]</sup>

Since an important theme of *Sideshow* was deception practiced by American agencies in, or concerned with, Southeast Asia, particularly Cambodia, it may seem strange that Shawcross was taken in, for he must have known with whom he was dealing.<sup>223</sup>

Of course, in mitigation, we must remember that the internal situation of Cambodia was much less clear in 1979 than two years later, the evidence for an important change in American inner-circle policy toward Cambodia had not yet appeared, and Shawcross was misled by confidence in the integrity of François Ponchaud, whose work since 1979 reflects back negatively on his famous book, *Cambodia Year Zero* and shows that those who viewed it with a critical eye were correct.<sup>224</sup>

In “The End of Cambodia?” the tenor of Shawcross’s critique was directed more against the new regime and its Vietnamese protectors than against the Pol Pot system they replaced; and he even seemed to doubt that Democratic Kampuchea had been as bad as portrayed. Thus he wrote “some of the international relief agencies have accepted without question all the details of the

<sup>221</sup> Michael Vickery, unpublished, 15 June 1981, rejected by *NYRB* 15 July 1981

<sup>222</sup> On the Bangkok Embassy see John Pilger, “America’s Second War in Indochina, *New Statesman*, Aug 1, 1980.

<sup>223</sup> For example, Michael Eiland, whom Pilger identified as one of the top men in the Bangkok embassy’s Cambodia operations in 1980 and who, in *Sideshow*, appears as operations officer for the ‘Daniel Boone’ secret missions into Cambodia in 1968. See *Sideshow*, Fontana Paperbacks edition, p. 25.

<sup>224</sup> François Ponchaud, *Cambodia Year Zero*, Penguin Books, 1977. [Since then Pochaud has made an almost 180 degree shift, finding now positive things to say about Democratic Kampuchea. See his “Social Change in the Vortex of Revolution”, in Karl D. Jackson, ed., *Cambodia 1975-1978 Rendevous with Death*, Princeton 1989, pp. 151-178.]

anti-Khmer Rouge propaganda issued by the Vietnamese client government”); and “whether there was an ‘Asian Auschwitz’ in this particular place [Tuol Sleng] and with these precise methods remains uncertain.”

Close investigation of the evidence, some of which is described below, proves that doubt about certain details of the anti-Democratic Kampuchea picture was quite reasonable, and even John Pilger, who hews much more closely to the Vietnamese line, has acknowledged that “the Vietnamese case has always been better than their propaganda”.<sup>225</sup>

[Shawcross’s remark implying that the Vietnamese had set up a Potemkin Tuol Sleng in 1979 foreshadowed Jean-Marie Le Pen who “is, after all, the man who ... said that ‘it was the Americans who built the gas chambers in Buchenwald after the war’”.<sup>226</sup>]

Doubt about the specifics of anti-Democratic Kampuchea accusations is one thing, suggestions that the new regime might be as bad or worse is something else. Shawcross seemed to accept “reports that the [Vietnamese] are treating the Cambodians with almost as much contempt as the previous regime did”, as well as Ponchaud’s “charge that the Vietnamese are now conducting a subtle ‘genocide’ in Cambodia” (pp. 28-9).

As support for this we find a number of Ponchaud stories which charge the Vietnamese with preventing peasants – by violence if necessary – from harvesting their own rice, giving aid rice during the day and stealing it back at gunpoint at night, withholding medicine, and forcing Cambodian men to go to fight the Chinese in northern Vietnam. Those stories are retailed seriously, with no warning that if true they might have been isolated exceptions rather than a general pattern; and as a result of that information, Cambodia was depicted as a country threatened by a general, serious famine.

While providing those stories Ponchaud did cover his rear by noting that the sources were the Khmer Serei organizations along the border who are not overburdened by objectivity in reporting events within the country.<sup>227</sup>

But Shawcross chose to accept them because “then [1975-76] as now his [Ponchaud] information was at first decried, and it is well to remember that his early accounts ... proved largely correct.” Ponchaud’s earlier work was of course *Cambodia Year Zero*. If indeed there is a relationship between what Ponchaud

<sup>225</sup> Shawcross, “The End of Cambodia?”, p. 25; Pilger, Letters to the Editor, *New Statesman*, Aug 29, 1980.

<sup>226</sup> Glyn Ford, MEP, Rapporteur, European Parliamentary Committee of Inquiry into Racism and Xenophobia, British Labour Group, letter to the editor, “Rise of the extreme right cannot be ignored”, *Guardian Weekly*, 17 June 1990, p. 2.

<sup>227</sup> Khmer Serei, “Free Khmer”, is a cover term for the anti-Communist political and military groups who opposed Sihanouk, supported Lon Nol, and after 1979 opposed both Pol Pot and the PRK.

has been producing in 1979-80 and his earlier work, it is clear now that a critical eye must be turned again on the latter.

Allegedly because of the famine, which, reading Shawcross, we would believe to be largely a result of Vietnamese perfidy, hundreds of thousands of Cambodians were fleeing as refugees towards the Thai border.

“About half a million, in terrible condition, are camped along the Thai border and may soon break into Thailand.” “Very soon the Thais will have 25 per cent of surviving Cambodians under their control,” and since “it is widely feared that the worst famine will come in the spring ... the Thais may be host to over a million Cambodians by early next year [1980]” (p. 29).

In spite of the urgency, said Shawcross, few people were paying sufficient attention. Only the American Embassy in Bangkok was strongly “arguing the cause of the Cambodian people” against a ‘lackadaisical’ State Department, who “assured me that talk of starvation was alarmist ... based only on refugee accounts from a limited area” (p. 25).

Reading Shawcross now (1981), or even towards the end of 1980 when I first saw the article, one is astonished at how totally mistaken even a competent, honest, conscientious journalist could be [writing in 1981 I gave full benefit of the doubt], and at how talents manifested in researching and writing a book about foreign involvement in Cambodia and based on foreign sources may be unequal to the task of dealing with the internal situation of the country through the medium of indigenous oral testimony.

In fairness to Shawcross, it must be emphasized again that the situation then was confused and that he was dependent on interpreters – not only Ponchaud – whom he believed he could trust. The only aspect for which there is no excuse is his strange faith, even after the experience of researching and writing *Sideshow*, in the Bangkok American Embassy.

Shawcross apparently now realizes how wrong he was in 1979, although I think he is still mistaken about where the fault lies. In his March 1981 article in *The Bulletin* he acknowledged that “the threat of famine was exaggerated”, and that “there was never a danger of ‘two million dead by Christmas’ in 1979”; but he blames the exaggeration on what “the Vietnamese had originally told the aid agencies”, rather than on the US Embassy or Ponchaud who provided him with such information for his article of January 1980.

He is still captive of the US Embassy-Ponchaud line to the extent of complaining about ‘diversion’ of aid “to officials of the Vietnamese-backed government in Phnom Penh” (*Bulletin*, p. 81).<sup>228</sup>

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<sup>228</sup> *Chandler, A History*, made the same errors as Shawcross, but, unlike Shawcross, never recognized he had been wrong. On pages 229-30 (third edition) he claims that by the middle of 1979 “a famine had broken out” because stored rice had been consumed, the 1979-1980 crop had not been planted, and of course much had been “appropriated by Vietnamese forces”. Inexplicably, “conditions stabilized in 1980 when the rice harvest



The major points of Shawcross 1981 show a nearly complete revision of Shawcross 1979, which itself represented an important revision in attitude toward the demonology of *Sideshow*. Those revisions, which are symptomatic of media treatment of Cambodia over the past six years, are a good preface for a discussion of the way in which that country's recent history has been used as an international political football.

In what follows I wish to treat three main themes of that history, both to provide a more accurate picture for 1975-81 and to show how certain revisions of it have been used for peculiar purposes. The three themes are (1) the damage inflicted on the country during 1975-79, (2) life in the PRK, (3) the refugee question.

### 1. 1975-1979

Shawcross probably didn't know that the conclusions in his article of January 1980 were the same as those to be presented in a report which the CIA were slapping together at about the same time and which reached the public in May 1980 with the title, "Kampuchea: a Demographic Catastrophe".<sup>229</sup>

In spite of the devastation which it chronicled for the early Democratic Kampuchea period, it claimed that 1979 was a worse disaster than any DK year but the first, and it concluded, like Ponchaud, that it was only then (1979-80) that the end of the Cambodian people might be near.

When carefully read, the report shows a shift in the treatment of Pol Pot's regime from about 1977, a shift both in the presentation of 'facts' and in the CIA evaluation of them. There had already been a couple of hints of such a revision in earlier work on Cambodia.

In his *Survive le peuple cambodgien*, completed in June 1978, Jean Lacouture remarked that "up to 1977 ... the CIA considered the [Cambodia Communist Party] as a simple appendage of the Vietnamese party". If that is really what the CIA thought, they were far behind all other serious observers of Cambodian affairs, including some in the employ of the US Government.<sup>230</sup>

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doubled in size", and Chandler seems not to have even noticed the contradiction in his treatment.

<sup>229</sup> Published by the National Foreign Assessment Center, May 1980, based on research completed January 17, 1980. My analysis of it was later published as Michael Vickery, "Democratic Kampuchea: CIA to the Rescue", *BCAS* 14/4 (1982), pp. 45-54.

<sup>230</sup> Lacouture, *Survive le peuple cambodgien*, Paris, Editions du Seuil, 1978 p. 54; and compare Kenneth M. Quinn [US State Department, in 1995 appointed US Ambassador in Phnom Penh], "Political Change in Wartime: the Khmer Kraham Revolution in Southern Cambodia, 1970-74," *Naval War College Review*, Spring 1976, based on research completed in 1974.

But in any case, why a change of views in 1977? Although adding that the CIA opinion might in fact still be the same, Lacouture must have had some contact which suggested a change at that time.

Someone with even better CIA contacts than Lacouture, Guy J. Pauker, in a book devoted to predictions and policies for Southeast Asia in the 1980's and published in 1977, revealed a very interesting nuance in the conventional wisdom about Democratic Kampuchea.<sup>231</sup>

One of Pauker's topics in the chapters he wrote was "population and development"; and he evoked the problems of growing populations, need for more food, increasing scarcity of land, and insufficient urban employment for the hordes of peasants moving into the cities. He showed some concern that voluntary migrations within Southeast Asia were "not from overpopulated villages into the wilderness" (as they should be, in order to develop new land) "but from the countryside to the cities", and that "the noncommunist countries use only mild administrative measures to slow down the flow".

In this connection one would expect some reference to Cambodia, and Pauker wrote, "the forced migration inflicted on the Cambodians after April 1975 ... is certainly not a desirable model" (Pauker, p. 33). And that was all – not that the Cambodians were doing the wrong thing, or that Cambodia was being destroyed by inhuman murderers, but only that they were not taking apparently necessary steps in the best way.

Thus in a serious work on policy the lurid accusations put out in propaganda tracts for the general public were ignored, and the Pol Pot regime was treated as on the right path, if somewhat too radical.

This point of view was also shared by U.S. Foreign Service Officer Peter Poole, who, in testimony in congressional hearings said, "the general thrust of moving people out of the city was something that practically any regime would have contemplated and done at some stage in that year, getting the people back on the land and producing rice".<sup>232</sup>

The clinching evidence for an evolution of the CIA view toward a revisionist position on Cambodia is "Kampuchea: A Demographic Catastrophe". I had first heard of it in early 1980 when press speculation before it appeared indicated that it might show an unexpectedly, even embarrassingly, large number of surviving Cambodians; and when I finally obtained a copy in October 1980, after about four months working with and interviewing Cambodian refugees in Thailand, I opened it with no little interest.

The rumor of its revelation of a large surviving population proved to be false, for it claims that by January 1979 the population had fallen to 5.8 million, which

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<sup>231</sup> Guy Pauker, Frank H. Golay, Cynthia H. Enloe, *Diversity and Development in Southeast Asia*, The Council on Foreign Relations, McGraw-Hill, New York.

<sup>232</sup> Chomsky and Herman, p. 153

of course was better than the 4.5 million and 3 million dead first put forward by the Vietnamese on the basis, apparently, of earlier western press accounts.

The report contains a long ‘methodology’ section in which the reader finds impressively ‘scientific’ descriptions of how things like ‘birth rates’ ‘death rates’ and ‘vital rates’ were calculated and applied year by year to the remainder from the 1970 population estimates to reach the estimate for 1979.

In spite of this ritual devotion to the statistician’s art, when I got to the paragraphs concerning the number of estimated deaths resulting from executions or forced evacuation, or attempting to escape to Thailand, I experienced a troubling sense of *déjà vu*.

And sure enough, as I checked back over the literature on Cambodia published since 1975 I found that John Barron’s and Anthony Paul’s *Murder of a Gentle Land*, published in December 1976, had virtually the same figures for the first two years of Democratic Kampuchea as the CIA report: 400,000 dead on the first exodus from the towns; 430,000 more of the new people dead during the rest of 1976 (CIA 400,000), largely as a result of the ‘second great migration’; 250,000 of the survivors dying during 1976; plus 100,000 former military, civil servants, and teachers executed in 1975-76; and for Barron and Paul at least one dead for every surviving escapee, or in all about 20,000.

On this last point there is no longer correspondence between the two estimates since Barron and Paul were dealing with refugee figures in November 1976 while the CIA included the total through 1978.<sup>233</sup>

Now if the CIA figures are supposed to be the results of demographic calculations, it is strange that they conform so closely to Barron’s and Paul’s estimates which were crude guesses extrapolated from refugee stories, unless there was an embarrassing coordination of effort between Barron and Paul and CIA from the beginning.

For 1975 the CIA admittedly relied “largely on refugee reports and other eyewitness accounts” and if they mean by that the work of Barron and Paul, it would appear that the latter colluded with the CIA on figures which the CIA could take up later as “the expert interpretation of events” by analysts of Kampuchean affairs.<sup>234</sup>

Whatever degree of collusion or wild guesswork went into the figures, we now know, from more careful and larger-scale refugee interviews, that some of the historical events on which both Barron and Paul and the CIA based their estimates were quite different.

- (1) The initial urban evacuation from Phnom Penh was much less violent than depicted, proceeding in most sectors at a leisurely pace, with few killings,

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<sup>233</sup> John Barron and Anthony Paul, *Murder of a Gentle Land*, Reader’s Digest Press 1977, pp. 203-206.

<sup>234</sup> CIA, “Kampuchea”, p. 7.

and the resultant immediate death toll, although impossible to establish, would have been much less, perhaps, as Kiernan has since acknowledged, only a fifth or a tenth of the CIA estimate.<sup>235</sup>

- (2) The communist forces did not methodically hunt down all former Lon Nol military and civil servants – only those of high rank, and that not everywhere nor all the time; and the ‘targets of execution’ in 1975-76 may have been no more than one-tenth of the Barron/Paul-CIA figures.
- (3) The ‘second great migration’ at the end of 1975 was not a country-wide exercise, but was of major importance only from parts of the Southwest Zone into the Northwest, affecting perhaps one-fourth to one-third of the urban evacuees, and thus the number of deaths would have been proportionately less, even accepting the other CIA assumptions about the death rate.
- (4) There were very important differences in living conditions among the administrative zones into which Democratic Kampuchea was divided, and the terrible conditions depicted by Barron/Paul and the CIA prevailed, before 1978, in probably no more than one-third of the country.

The number of deaths occurring after the migrations to the countryside would thus have been proportionately lower, and the birth and survival rates for the better two-thirds of the country would have been at least as good as the CIA estimates for more favored category of ‘old people’ – their number was maintained after 1975.<sup>236</sup>

Thus even accepting the other CIA assumptions about ‘rates’, but allowing for the modifications introduced above, one can figure a 1979 surviving population of over 6 million, which approximates the latest independent estimates. If, moreover, as American specialists in Phnom Penh near the end of the Khmer Republic were predicting, a million deaths would occur in the coming year even in Khmer Republic conditions, then the forced evacuation of Phnom Penh may have saved up to half a million lives.<sup>237</sup>

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<sup>235</sup> Ben Kiernan, *The Pol Pot Regime: Race, Power and Genocide*, Yale 1996 [an extreme critique of DK], pp. 48-49, suggested “a toll of 10,600 deaths in an evacuated population of two million”, with executions of officers, high-ranking officials and others who disobeyed orders raising the total to “around twenty thousand”.

<sup>236</sup> CIA. “Kampuchea”, p. 5. The new information offered here and below derives from interviews with refugees in Thailand in the camps of Khao I Dang, Sakeo, Nong Chan, and Nong Samet between May and September 1980. In most details it also agrees with the information obtained by Ben Kiernan from entirely different groups of refugees and published in part in *JCA*, Vol. 10, 1/2, 1980.

<sup>237</sup> Six million, estimated by a “senior UN official”, in Bangkok, *FEER*, Nov 14, 1980, p. 9; and 6.5 million, estimated by FAO, *FEER*, Dec 19, 1980, p. 37. [(Added 1998) It seems now, given the total population revealed by the recent census (11.5 million) that these estimates too may have erred on the conservative side. For American projections in

But that is not the aspect of the CIA report which I wish to treat here. The precise number of people who perished in various ways between 1975 and 1979 is beyond knowing, and was too large, even in the best hypothetical scenario. What I wish to emphasize, in connection with Shawcross' articles, is the evidence in the CIA report for an important revision in American policy which has been carried through to the present in the treatment of the rump Democratic Kampuchea government and the refugee operations.

After the horrific picture of 1975-76, already found in Barron's and Paul's *Murder of a Gentle Land*, the CIA report places the "final executions" at the end of the July 1976-January 1977 period, and for January 1977 to January 1979 merely says, "living conditions most likely did not vary during these two years from the conditions during 1976." That meant an assumption of slightly better food supply and marginally more stable living conditions which contributed to a higher survivor rate than in previous periods.<sup>238</sup>

That assessment of 1977-79 is grossly erroneous, and was known to be erroneous when the CIA were compiling their report. Nearly all refugees from all over the country testify that large-scale executions, in particular of party cadres, and usually related to intra-party factional struggles, began in 1977, gradually spread, in some areas, to the 'new people', and that the absolutely worst year was 1978.

In May of that year the long-simmering conflict between the two main tendencies within the Communist Party – the hyper-chauvinist, anti-Vietnamese Pol Pot group and the more internationalist and orthodox faction descending from the old Indochina Communist Party – exploded into open warfare between the central government and the Eastern Zone where the second faction had been dominant.

The central forces won and first massacred all of the East Zone cadres they could lay hands on, with the survivors fleeing to Viet Nam whence they emerged later as the nucleus of the PRK government.

Then, assuming that nearly the entire population of the East had been permeated by pro-Vietnamese sentiments, the Phnom Penh authorities began large-scale executions on the spot and drove other tens of thousands, perhaps even a couple of hundred thousand people out of the East into the North, and in particular the Northwest, Zones where they were the objects of further indiscriminate massacres.

Those events, in-mid-1978, were in the nearly unanimous opinion of all refugees, the absolutely worst spate of killing in the entire Pol Pot period; and most of the mass graves and piles of bones probably date from that time.

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1974-75 see George C. Hildebrand and Gareth Porter, *Cambodia: Starvation and Revolution*, New York, Monthly Review Press, 1976, pp. 21-29,]

<sup>238</sup> CIA, "Kampuchea", p. 12.

Thus the CIA, who in 1975-76 had set out to exaggerate derogatory information about Cambodia in order to discredit what appeared to be a new and threatening socialist regime, finally moved to the position of tacitly abetting the Pol Pot clique in their worst crimes. The reason is clear. By 1978 it was apparent that Democratic Kampuchea was not going to be a Marxist success which would attract the peasantry of neighboring countries.

In fact, it had lost any Marxist coloring it may once have had, and had become a vehicle for hyper-chauvinist, poor peasant, populism, and considered its most important task to be a life and death struggle with the 'hereditary enemy', Viet Nam. Pol Pot's worst massacres were for traditionalist, racist, anti-Vietnamese reasons. At last his regime was becoming bloody enough to attract the American support which continued until the 1990s in the hope of making use of him to roll back revolution in Indochina.<sup>[239]</sup>

Pol Pot and his comrades have responded in kind. Renouncing socialism, they call American diplomats 'comrade', and offer their aid in what they conceive as American plans to restore reactionary regimes in Laos and Viet Nam. Never did the old 'running dog' epithet fit any group better than these remnants of *Angkar*.<sup>[240]</sup>

## 2. 1979-1981

Because of the internal evolution of Democratic Kampuchea described above, their displacement, following a war largely provoked by their own actions, and by a polity whose record on human rights was much better, not only failed to elicit great rejoicing in official American quarters, but Pol Pot remnants along the Thai border began receiving material aid and diplomatic support in the United Nations.

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<sup>239</sup> This utility of Pol Pot for US regime policy continued until the election of 1993. We should note that Stephen Heder, one of Shawcross' current favorite Cambodia scholars, wrote in 1984, "With different national policies, the number of deaths during the Democratic Kampuchea period might well have been below 100,000 ... in comparative revolution terms ... not ... outrageously high. And those deaths probably would not have been a result of national policies. They might have come from starvation and disease along with a certain amount of uncontrollable social and political strife". 'National policies', it would seem to me, can only be understood as their policy toward Viet Nam

See also below, comment on Shawcross' November 1996 "Tragedy in Cambodia"; Steve Heder, "Why Pol Pot? Roots of the Cambodian Tragedy", *Indochina Issues* 52, December 1984.

<sup>240</sup> These details from an interview of Thiounn Mum, leading intellectual of the Pol Pot remnants, with Stephen Heder, August 1980, from a transcript generously provided by Heder. The individual referred to by Thiounn Mum as 'comrade' was US Foreign Service officer Timothy Carney, who became chief of UNTAC 12, the Information and Education Component, during the 1993 election, on which see below, comment on Shawcross, "Tragedy in Cambodia".

Although no one was willing to suddenly declare Pol Pot a bulwark of the Free World against Godless Communism, it was conveniently forgotten that for two-three years previously even usually responsible public figures had been calling for international intervention to remove his government.

It would have been too much to deny the Pol Pot record, and the ideological preparation, or *agitprop* work, required to justify the sudden swing in overt American policy on Cambodia, took the form of increasingly negative assessments of Viet Nam and the PRK government, rather than any direct effort to rehabilitate Democratic Kampuchea; and Shawcross was used as a vehicle for the new propaganda campaign.<sup>[241]</sup>

The refugees themselves, generally former middle-class urban people, being both anti-DK and anti-PRK, spontaneously provided unending stories to discredit both regimes, but as I was able to listen to them in their own language, without benefit of the ‘interpreters’ who set Shawcross up, I soon realized that many of those stories were contrived in order to justify their flight from the regime which had delivered them from Pol Pot’s goon squads, given them virtually complete freedom of movement, and offered them work in their former professions or elsewhere in the newly evolving administration.

A fairly typical case was that of a former Lon Nol official, sent to France before the end of the war, and who with his wife returned to Cambodia in 1976 in hopes of being reunited with his family. Instead, he had been kept in various detention camps until January 1979. At the Khao I Dang refugee center he prepared a written report of his experience which concluded that “for the future of Cambodia I can conceive of nothing but a political settlement supported by the great powers,” refugee code for a US-led enforced re-establishment of the status quo ante bellum 1970.

Yet from April 1979, when he had been able to get away from the retreating Pol Pot forces, until November of the same year when he finally crossed the Thai border to become a refugee, his experiences at the hands of the new regime were almost totally benign. He was able to move all over the country at will, apparently had no trouble with food supplies, met many old friends in the new administration, found that his entire family had survived and were in good health, received medical care when needed, including two months in the country’s best facilities, and finally obtained free transport from the Vietnamese for his last flight toward the border.

The only unpleasant experience was at the hands of the Thai military when he first tried to cross the border earlier in the year. He found himself among the 40,000 or more people pushed back over the mountains of northern Cambodia with no concern for their safety. The principle fault of the new Cambodian

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<sup>241</sup> By 1997 it was obvious that he was not just used, but was a willing, even enthusiastic, participant

government, which was sufficient for him to reject it, was its socialism and pro-Vietnamese stance.<sup>242</sup>

Other reports were in the same vein. Although they often started out with remarks to the effect that the Vietnamese were harassing, or even exterminating, intellectuals and former officials, when examined closely it was impossible to pin down any case of extermination and only a handful of prominent people arrested for anti-regime political activity or corruption in their new responsibilities. Even some of the latter had by September 1980 been released, showing that in the new Cambodia prison sentences were not equivalent to death, and were often very light.

Some of the stories were entirely untrue, the product of wild rumor, and the facts behind which would tend to prove the opposite of what their authors desired. In June 1980 a man who had for several months worked in the PRK Ministry of Education gave me, as an example of persecution of intellectuals, the name of X., a well-known prewar figure who held a high position in the new government.

“You mean he has been arrested?”, I asked. “No”, he replied, “but he will be”. The reason? He had opposed a certain project proposed by the Vietnamese advisers.

Whether that is true or not, the man was never arrested, and still held the same office, which means, if the report of his opposition to certain policies is true, that the regime is in fact tolerant of diversity [Later, in 1990, this person did refuse to return to Cambodia from a mission in France, but the stories surrounding his defection are too confused to permit any conclusion].

Such tolerance is also illustrated by the experience of a hydraulics engineer put to work after January 1979 in a responsible position concerned with the survey and rehabilitation of irrigation works. At one point, he told me, he had strenuously opposed some of the plans of the Vietnamese irrigation experts. The result? He was allowed to put his plans into effect, while the Vietnamese carried

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<sup>242</sup> The source, Seng Chen-An, prepared a written report in French destined for western embassy officials, and given to me by another refugee, Ken Khun, who helped draft it. I never met the author himself.

[Added 2008] See more detail on Seng Chen-An in my *Cambodia 1975-1982*, pp. 164-65, 205-08, 210, 217. Many years later, in 1996 or 1997, his great-nephew Lundi Seng, an activist in right-wing Cambodian emigré circles in California, contacted me by e-mail to accuse me of perverting his great-uncle’s testimony. I offered to send him a photocopy of his uncle’s report if he would supply a postal address, but he did not respond.

Lundi Seng’s sister, Theary Seng is now, 2008, in Phnom Penh as “Executive Director” of the Center for Social Development, from which she issues regular statements published in *PPP* as paid advertisements. She also, like her brother, while claiming that I had distorted her great-uncle’s testimony, refused to acknowledge receipt of a copy of his report which I sent to her.]



out theirs in another area; and he knew right up until he left that he was respected and trusted. His departure, he said, was simply a refusal to cooperate in a socialist, pro-Vietnamese regime, however benign.

What became clear from persistent questioning was that the people spreading most of the derogatory information had left the country for personal or ideological reasons, not to escape economic or political oppression, and that they wished to capitalize on western, first of all American, antipathy to the new regime in order to justify their refugee status and to open channels for emigration to the western countries about which they had always dreamed. They would only have been willing to remain in Cambodia if the overthrow of Pol Pot had led to restoration of the pre-war Sihanouk-Lon Nol status quo.

Of course, the propensity of that class of people to repeat rumor, distort, and even lie about conditions in 1979-80 inevitably gives cause to reflect on their stories about 1975-79 as well, and retrospectively justifies the efforts of those who since 1975, and continuing until the present (1980), have insisted on the necessity of subjecting all such stories to close analysis.

When the corpus of those stories was examined carefully, and their authors' experiences in 1979-80 studied in detail, the picture of that latter period which emerged was very nearly the opposite of what had been intended.

It became clear that in spite of the very bad conditions left over from the Pol Pot years and the war of 1979, the new government was showing good progress in the restoration of a normal civil society. There was much personal freedom of movement and activity, political discipline was at a minimum, the Vietnamese kept a low profile, people were encouraged to return to work for which they were trained, schools and religious centers were being restored as rapidly as possible.

Of course the intention was still to construct a socialist society, and redevelopment of the same inequalities and special privileges as prevailed before 1975 was not envisaged. That was what irked many of the middle-class refugees.

One of them, a former schoolteacher who had returned to work in 1979, proclaimed that the culmination of his disgust with the new government came with observing the new Minister of Education, an old acquaintance, preparing fertilizer for his personal vegetable garden, a task in which ministers, in his view, just should not be engaged. Of course it is a policy, and in the circumstances quite reasonable, that all officials should contribute something to the food supply, and perhaps also keep in touch with some of the basic realities of life, by maintaining gardens.<sup>[243]</sup>

The peasants, who rarely deserted to the refugee camps in 1979-80, but who regularly came to the border distribution point at Nong Chan for seed and food rice, also confirmed the generally benign picture of the new regime. According

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<sup>243</sup> (added 1990) the Minister in question was Mr. Chan Ven, whom I met in the late 1980s, and who was quite amused to hear this story.

to their statements, little or no oppression was felt at village level at all. Vietnamese had never been prominent so far down in the administration, and they were gradually being withdrawn from all levels.

The peasants also said freedom of movement was very broad, except in border areas, and even there it was easy to get around the impediments in order to reach the international aid at Nong Chan. In fact, they had no serious complaints about the new government as such. To be sure, rice supplies were short, but that was generally blamed, not on government incompetence or perfidy, but on the warfare of the previous year and on lack of rain.

Most important, the peasants themselves appeared healthy and adequately fed, in fact little different from prewar peasants, no doubt because of “the land’s extraordinary abundance” of fruits, “frogs with legs the size of chickens’ drumsticks ... fish, shrimp, crab,” etc., which so impressed Shawcross on his visit in 1980 ( Shawcross, *Bulletin*, p. 84).

Indeed, there are few places in Cambodia where people, least of all experienced peasants, should go hungry if simply left to themselves; but Cambodians will complain about lack of good quality rice no matter how well they are supplied with other, perhaps to them less tasty, sources of food. The testimony of the bourgeois refugees, then, when analyzed, and the peasant testimony directly, were quite different from the stories transmitted to Shawcross by Ponchaud.

They were also in striking contrast to a publication by State Department researcher Stephen Heder, which I first saw in July 1980, and which is much more serious because of Heder’s high qualifications as a Cambodia scholar.

On reading it I was astounded to find stories similar to those of Ponchaud – induced starvation, restriction on movement – as well as an assertion that in May there had been an attempt to re-evacuate the cities, and a lurid picture of “[Vietnamese] mortar shells scream[ing] down on refugees trekking ... toward the tantalizingly close border,” which proved that the Vietnamese, finally revealed to be as murderous as Pol Pot, were “capable of killing innocent civilians whose only desire was to find enough rice to stave off starvation”.<sup>244</sup>

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<sup>244</sup> Stephen R. Heder, *Kampuchean Occupation and Resistance*, *Asian Studies Monographs No. 027*, Institute of Asian Studies, Chulalongkorn University, January 1980, based on research up to November 1979, p. 52.

[(added later) Because Heder has objected to being described as “State Department researcher” I cite the following: in the Preface to the study in question here, Heder wrote “Funding was provided by the External Research Section of the US State Department, with the clear understanding that the author would be completely free to draw and express his own conclusions”. In another paper of November 1980, “Kampuchea October 1979-August 1980, The Democratic Kampuchea résistance, the Kampuchean Countryside, and the Sereikar”, unpublished, but widely distributed among those interested in Cambodia, Heder made a similar statement in the Preface, adding that the State Department funds were for June to August 1980, and that “In certain other periods

I then rechecked among the refugees at Khao I Dang, this time asking specifically about the incidents described by Heder, and found no confirmation for them. The restrictions on harvesting in certain places had been an effort to conserve seed, but in general, in 1979, people had been given considerable freedom to harvest and eat the large supplies of rice left in fields and warehouses, which in most places meant enough for several months.

In particular, there was no evidence of any Vietnamese plan to carry off rice to Vietnam, as alleged by both Ponchaud and Heder, although it cannot be excluded that a few troops did that clandestinely. Furthermore, there had never been an attempt to re-evacuate the towns, although in the planting seasons of early 1980 people had been taken out temporarily to help plant the new crop, and that was what had provided grist for the rumor mill.

As for violence at the border, that had apparently been restricted to a very few minor incidents, rather than a Vietnamese policy, not at all unexpected in an area where three or four Khmer Serei groups, the PRK Khmer troops, Vietnamese, and the Pol Pot remnants were all struggling for advantage.<sup>245</sup>

The Ponchaud-Shawcross and Heder stories, then, were just what Ponchaud had hinted – but which Shawcross ignored – products of Khmer Serei propaganda.

I had seen their methods in action myself at the Nong Chan land bridge when a camp leader told visitors that the rice taken away by the peasants would immediately be stolen by the Vietnamese, although 200 yards away the peasants would tell anyone capable of asking them that, on the contrary, the Vietnamese made no difficulties on their way home.

In another case, later on in September, when it was apparent that a fairly good rice crop could be expected in Cambodia, a Khmer Serei leader at the Nong Samet border camp acknowledged the fact, but claimed that the Vietnamese would of course steal it, “just like they did last year.” Again, testimony by peasants showed that the Vietnamese had not stolen the previous year’s crop. All locally-grown rice was left in peasant hands to be consumed or sold as they saw fit.

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funds were provided by Kyodo News Service and the Thailand National Commission for UNESCO with the same understanding”.

Subsequently Heder has been extremely sensitive about any reference to this. In a letter of 20 September 1981 to the editor of *BCAS* concerning a proposed article he said, “I was funded part of the time by a State Department grant, but I was never, as is often gleefully alleged, ‘employed by the State Department’ (no more than someone with SSRC funding is ‘employed by SSRC’) ... The results of my research in no way constitute ‘a State Department study’ ... nor do I need permission from the State Department ... to make my research public”. He may have been referring to my remark in this article which has never been published, but was passed around among Cambodia scholars.]

<sup>245</sup> *FEER*, Nov 2, 1979, pp. 13-15; Nov 9, 1979, p. 41; *Asiaweek*, Oct 26, 1979, p. 16.

This brings us to the question of rice, and other food, brought into the country under various foreign aid programs and placed in government hands. Throughout 1979-80 hardly any journalistic treatment of Cambodia failed to criticize the new government for first feeding its officials and employees while leaving the villagers for last. Heder also gave disapproving attention to the point, and Shawcross, even after he had realized that many of his earlier opinions about PRK Cambodia were mistaken, still complained of 'diversion' of aid "to officials of the Vietnamese-backed government in Phnom Penh" (Shawcross, *Bulletin*, p. 81).

Such criticism is dishonest. Throughout the world the Pol Pot regime was blamed for unnecessarily destroying the towns. Its successors righted that 'wrong'. Phnom Penh and other towns were reopened, a normal administration was set up, schools were reestablished. How were all the people involved in those activities expected to feed themselves?

With short supplies and at first no money, food had to be given them by the state, and it was quite reasonable that such employees be first on the official distribution lists. A cabinet minister, a hydraulics engineer, a doctor, a school teacher, or a factory worker could not be expected to grow his own rice, catch his own fish, etc., and still perform his daily tasks.

As for the peasants, even if 1979-80 were bad years for rice, they were out where all the food was produced. They had first crack at whatever rice was grown, they could forage for other foods, they could fish and hunt; and as Shawcross saw, they did feed themselves from this natural abundance of the land. The government food distribution priorities can in no way be called 'diversion'; and it is nothing but perverse to insist that city life must be reestablished, but that food distribution should go first to the food producers.<sup>246</sup>

By mid-1980 the true picture of PRK Cambodia was beginning to appear clearly in spite of Khmer Serei rumors, their propagation by certain Bangkok-based journalists, and the efforts of the US Embassy. It was seen to be a moderate regime pragmatically applying first aid to a severely injured social body, eschewing ideological rigidity, and achieving rather impressive results.

This is clear even when the country is viewed through the optics of an unsympathetic observer such as Stephen Heder, whose first published report was in such violent contrast to direct refugee information. Two further reports compiled at later dates in 1980, and based on more intensive research than undertaken at the border by anyone else, also present gloomy conclusions about

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<sup>246</sup> "Kampuchea Revives", p. 84; Heder, *Occupation*, p. 31 (the peasants had fish, meat, fruit, and vegetables to trade); Heder, "From Pol Pot to Pen Sovann to the Villages," International Conference on Indochina and Problems of security in Southeast Asia, Chulalongkorn University, June 1980 (based on research up to April 1980), p. 22; *Asiaweek*, April 6, 1979, p. 16 (the countryside won't starve, there are vegetables, tapioca, fish, fruit).

the prospects for Cambodia, yet when all three are read in series they show a clearly improving situation in nearly every respect, and which contradicts both their author's preconceptions and his assertions about any particular instance.<sup>247</sup>

Movement within the country continued throughout 1980 to be relatively free, notwithstanding the special passes which were formally required. Even the technically out-of-bounds Thai border was easy to reach, according to Heder, because "villagers have the right to engage in extra-village travel and activities in order to augment and supplement their collectively produced income and their private plot production, so their trips to the Thai border, although technically illegal, are compatible with the rights generally accorded to villagers" (Heder, "From Pol Pot", p. 58).

Another kind of freedom, possibly contrary to the long-term policies to the government, was also developing. Although the countryside was supposed to be organized in various types of cooperative structures, the lack of trained cadres and sufficient equipment meant that most peasant villages and households carried out their work with very little regimentation; and the retreat from collectivization continued all through 1980, a development generally welcomed by the peasants.<sup>248</sup>

From April to August Heder was forced to change his prediction about the coming (1980-81) rice crop. In the earlier report he wrote that "1980 was going to be a year of shortages and that in many areas the shortages would be more severe than ... in 1979," but by August the situation, on the contrary, had improved, and Heder felt that the new crop could well be more than twice that of 1979, with peasants in parts of Battambang, a traditional rice-surplus area, even predicting a normal crop.

More encouraging still, and indicative of the general rehabilitation of the country, the peasants gradually raised their expectations as the season progressed.<sup>249</sup>

Along with the material improvement the Vietnamese, contrary to predictions, were clearly trying to withdraw their personnel from administrative and advisory positions, and, also contrary to predictions, they had not only refrained from exploiting the Cambodian peasants, but had even ignored their own ideological preferences in an apparently pragmatic realization that the best way to effect the stabilization of the countryside and increase food production was to leave the peasants as much as possible to themselves.<sup>250</sup>

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<sup>247</sup> Heder, op. cit., and "Kampuchea October 1979-August 1980", mimeographed, 115 pp., Bangkok, November 1980. [(added later) See further analysis in Vickery, *Cambodia 1975-1982*, pp. 194-99, 212-26, 248-51]

<sup>248</sup> Heder, *Ibid.*, pp. 22-29, 31,37; and Heder, "Kampuchea 1979- 1980", pp. 91-92.

<sup>249</sup> Heder, "From Pol Pot", pp. 38-39; and "Kampuchea 1979-1980", p. 104.

<sup>250</sup> Heder, "From Pol Pot", p. 21; and "Kampuchea 1979-1980", pp. 104-108.

Within the first months of 1981, the results of the rice harvest and the general improvement in other fields showed a continuity from the positive evolution apparent in Heder's work and definitely gave the lie to the gloomier predictions current in early 1980.

Some reports even spoke of the "miracle of Cambodia recovery" and a possibility of the country achieving food self sufficiency by 1982. International aid is still needed of course, particularly in the provision of seed, if the country is to be rice sufficient by 1982.<sup>251</sup>

Typically, certain Bangkok-based 'western diplomats', in all probability the US Embassy, and their local news outlets, have chosen to emphasize the lack of complete recovery rather than the impressive progress, and as in the previous two years have begun to predict another famine (ignoring that neither of the previously predicted famines occurred), and have blamed the 'critical' situation on UN bungling.<sup>252</sup>

The tenor and timing of that news release suggest that the people at its source are unhappy with Cambodian progress and are anxious, as ever, to denigrate the regime, whatever the truth.

This year, however, the position of the PRK government is less vulnerable than in 1979 or 1980, and the thrust of the attack is directed at the UN, coinciding with the recent prominence given another issue on which UN policy may prove embarrassing to the anti-Phnom Penh Coalition: the resolution of the refugee problems.

### 3. The Cambodian refugees

The term 'refugee' conjures up an image of people fleeing some kind of natural or political catastrophe, and the expression 'refugee camp' a temporary emergency shelter to receive them. Such images are not inappropriate for Cambodian refugees and the camps set up to house them in Thailand, but they do not convey the whole story. The refugees who have left Cambodia since January 1979 are not just people fleeing a catastrophe, and the camp system is much more than temporary shelter.

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<sup>251</sup> Shawcross, "Kampuchea Revives"; Barry Wain, *Asian Wall Street Journal*, Dec 30, 1980; Richard M. Harley, "Christian Science Monitor Service", in *Honolulu Advertiser*, Jan 31, 1981; FAO, Office for Special Relief Operations, "Kampuchea, Report of the FAO Food Assessment Mission", Rome, November 1980.

<sup>252</sup> Sylvana Foa, UPI, Bangkok, May 8, 1981, in *The Weekend Australian*, May 9-10.

[added 2007] Foa, like Shawcross, is a journalist who switched jackets. In Phnom Penh, during the 1970-75 war, she was considered a gadfly of the Americans and Lon Nol regime, but after 1979, hostile to the PRK and to the Vietnamese, she in fact moved into the US camp. The move paid off. She moved steadily upward into important positions in UPI, UNHCR, the World Food Program and the UN, where in 1996 she became spokeswoman for the Secretary-General. See [www.scienceblog.com](http://www.scienceblog.com), 17 November 1995, SG/A/614 BIO/2997]

Refugees first began leaving Cambodia the day after the communist victory of April 17, 1975, but up to January 1979 no more than 30-40,000 had crossed into Thailand. In contrast, by May 1979, there were already over 40,000 more massed on the Thai- Cambodian border at points 30-40 km. north of the town of Aranyaprathet, and many tens of thousands more were reported on the way. By the crude calculus of people voting with their feet, it might have seemed that the new regime was alienating more of its population, and was therefore worse, than the old.

Such a conclusion, however, was not yet being drawn. The Thai had announced that no more refugees would be accepted after January 7, 1979, obviously considering the once the Pol Pot regime had been destroyed there were no longer reasonable grounds for people to flee the country.

They also took decisive action to emphasize their position. In June about 42,000 of the potential refugees on the border were enticed onto buses, supposedly to be taken to a safer place, transported around to a point on Cambodia's northern border and forced down steep, mine-strewn trails back into their own country. Hundreds, or thousands, are said to have died, and the international outrage concentrated attention on the burgeoning refugee problems and Thailand's refusal to face it alone.<sup>253</sup>

This was also at a time when developments within Cambodia were of increasing concern to Thailand, the United States, China, and the ASEAN countries. No one had really mourned the passing of the Pol Pot regime for itself, but within a few months of its overthrow it was clear that Viet Nam had no intention of permitting another unfriendly group to take power in Phnom Penh, and that they would keep their troops in Cambodia as long as was necessary to secure the kind of relationship they desired.

Vietnamese hegemony over Cambodia, however, was directly contrary to Thai, American, Chinese, and ASEAN desires, and measures had to be taken to block or to mitigate its effects. Thus, the removal of Vietnamese influence from Cambodia and the replacement of the PRK government by one more likely to serve as a client of Thai and US interests has been a constant objective in all refugee and aid policies since formulated.

Even though the reaction to the Thai move in June was based first on humanitarian considerations, it must soon have been realized that more sympathetic treatment of people who were anti-PRK and anti-Vietnamese could serve the long-term goals of Thai and US policy. First of all, their desire to leave the country put the new Cambodian authorities in a bad light, and their stories, selectively used, could serve as direct anti-Phnom Penh propaganda.

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<sup>253</sup> My information on that event, particularly on 'enticement', comes from interviews with survivors among the refugees in Khao I Dang, (and in later years from survivors who returned to Phnom Penh). See also *FEER*, Aug 3 and 17, 1979, and *Asiaweek*, June 22, 1979.

Just three months later the political importance of refugees was again underscored by events at the border. If it had been supposed earlier in the year that the Pol Pot forces, operating as guerrillas, could keep the Vietnamese/PRK government off balance and ultimately impose a compromise solution less inimical to the anti-Vietnamese bloc, the appearance in September of the miserable wrecks of those forces along the Thai border south of Aranyaprathet after a seven-month trek through the mountains and forests of western Cambodia showed conclusively that a military solution based on domestic forces was out of the question.<sup>254</sup>

The emergence of those Pol Pot remnants was the occasion for the first large-scale manipulation of the refugee issue for political purposes, and it provided a catalyst for the more purposeful refugee policy which was to develop.

The world's press was flooded with pictures and descriptions of ill and starving 'Cambodian refugees' presented in a way to imply that they represented the effects of conditions prevalent within Cambodia. Only a very careful reader with some background knowledge would have realized that they were a special case – remnants of the Pol Pot armed forces or administration, together with mainly base peasant villagers who had retreated with them into the hills in January and who were therefore completely cut off from conditions prevailing in the lowland agricultural and urban areas.

In contrast to what had happened in June, emergency aid was taken to the border, and asylum in Thailand, which had by then been assured of international support, was offered as a humanitarian gesture. Interestingly, over half of those Cambodians refused to become refugees, preferring to slip back into the forest and set up fortified bases close to the border on the Cambodian side, where aid could still be given to them by various international and private aid agencies with the cooperation of the Thai government.

A group of 25-30,000, including those in the worst physical condition, were taken to a camp near Sakeo, about 50 km. west of the border, which was to become an R & R center for the 7,000 hard-core cadre and troops among them. It should be emphasized that the creation of those refugees was a result of joint Thai-international aid policy, rather than a response to the desires of those people themselves.

The medical and food aid they required could have been sent to the border, as it was for those who insisted on staying there, and at Sakeo the 'camp' had not yet been constructed. Sick and hungry people had to be dumped on the bare ground and covered with makeshift shelters. It is arguable that fewer would have died if treatment had been taken to them right at the border.<sup>255</sup>

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<sup>254</sup> *FEER*, Sept 21 and 28, and Nov 9, 1979.

<sup>255</sup> *FEER*, Nov 9, 1979, p. 29, and conversations with foreign relief personnel present at the time.



The viewpoint of the Thai government had obviously undergone a change, and the change was made even more explicit in October when Prime Minister Kriangsak announced an open door policy “allowing all Khmer refugees who wished to come to Thailand to do so”.<sup>256</sup>

Once the picture of Cambodia as a country of mass starvation under an incompetent and alien administration had been stamped on the public mind, and the door opened, attention was turned again to the entirely different group of refugees who had followed the trail of those deported by the Thais in June.

They were still, like those of May and June, some of whom were making a second try, in majority former town dwellers forced into peasant life under Pol Pot; and now, uncertain of what was in store for Cambodia, they were coming to the border, some in hopes of going abroad, others to trade, still others to join the Khmer Serei anti-communist guerilla groups which had begun to form in early 1979, perhaps in some cases even during 1975-79.

At the border they settled into the Khmer Serei camps of Nong Samet, Nong Chan, or Non Mak Mun which are located, in part at least, on the Cambodian side.<sup>257</sup>

Since January or February 1979 they had been released from the work sites to which they had been assigned, accorded freedom to move about, and had generally fed well on rice left in fields and granaries and on the land's natural produce. Starvation, in 1979, was not a widespread threat, particularly for those who stayed in place, but was in general a problem only for those people who set off cross-country to search for old homes or who tried to crowd into Phnom Penh where there were insufficient stocks of food.

Thus the people proceeding to the border north of Aranyaprathet in the last half of 1979 were not in the parlous state of the Pol Pot refugees, nor, pace Shawcross, “in terrible condition” waiting to “break into Thailand”. The more astute observers noted the difference, and reported from the border that “most people (were) in relatively good health,” and were even attempting to conceal the amount of food available in the border camps. But for the world at large, and even for many aid organization personnel on the spot, ‘Cambodian refugee’ meant someone close to death from hunger and disease.<sup>258</sup>

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<sup>256</sup> *FEER*, Nov 2, 1979, pp. 12-13.

<sup>257</sup> The precise tracing of the border on the ground in that area is not known with any precision, and the locations of the camps must be distinguished from the villages of the same names, all of which are on the Thai side. Among the camps Nong Samet stands the best chance of being on Thai territory, while Nong Chan and Non Mak Mun, occupied by the Vietnamese in the ‘incursion’ of June 1980, might well be on the Cambodian side.

Interestingly, Thai sources, both official and journalistic, except for the excitement following the ‘incursion’, have been exceedingly circumspect when discussing the location of the camps in relation to the border. [See Michael Vickery, “Refugee Politics: The Khmer Camp system in Thailand”.]

<sup>258</sup> Shawcross, “The End of Cambodia?”, p. 25; *FEER*, Nov 9, 1979, p.42

If the anomaly was ever carefully considered it was offset by a belief that conditions inside Cambodia were rapidly changing for the worse. There were the stories, noted above, of Vietnamese brutality, and the reports, carefully fostered by the US Embassy, that famine was imminent.

All through the last three months of 1979 the estimates of miserable Cambodians on the border waiting to “break into Thailand” to become refugees rose dramatically, from 80,000 in October to 180,000, then 600,000 with 750,000 more predicted, and finally to one million or possibly up to one-quarter of the Cambodian population which would find itself under Thai control.

Thus the Thai, who would not consider accepting 40,000 in June, had, with their new open door policy, agreed by October to take several hundred thousand; and the political advantages which might thereby accrue to Bangkok could not fail to be noticed.<sup>259</sup>

With the door open and massive exodus expected, some place had to be prepared to receive them, and the Thai Supreme Command chose Khao I Dang, 15 km. from the border, as site for the principal ‘holding center’. The United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) was given the task of setting it up in the expectation that 300,000 or so miserable Khmer would immediately rush across to settle there, and on November 21, 1979, after only four days preparation, the first small team of UNHCR officials waited on the bleak landscape for the buses and trucks sent out to bring the people in.

To their astonishment, in the first week after the opening of Khao I Dang, only 28,000 people took the opportunity to come over, and they were in fairly good condition. Many of them had cash or gold and hoped to set up business in the new campsite.

In the next two weeks similar numbers arrived, but then, except for one week in January when Khmer Serei factional struggles caused over 20,000 to flee the border, the weekly totals plummeted to under 4,000, then 2-3,000, and finally less than a thousand. On January 24, 1980, when the total population of Khao I Dang was about 111,000, just over a third of what had been expected, the Thai authorities ordered it closed to further entry.<sup>260</sup>

It appeared that the UNHCR might have been conned. The numbers of people prepared to become refugees were only a fraction of the estimates, and most of them were hardly in circumstances justifying emergency refugee treatment. Indeed some of those who did come required persuasion, or they came to Khao I Dang, like the mountain climber, “because it was there”. Otherwise they would

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<sup>259</sup> *FEER*, Nov 16, 1979, p. 25; *Asiaweek*, Nov 30, 1979, p.16; *FEER*, Dec 7, 1979, pp. 5, 14; Shawcross, “The End of Cambodia?”, pp. 25, 29.

<sup>260</sup> The UNHCR statistics are found in an appendix to Milton E. Osborne, “The Kampuchea Refugee Situation; a Survey and Commentary”, Bangkok 1980. Other details are from interviews with both refugees and foreign aid personnel present at the time.

have continued to trade between the border and the interior, and as conditions at home improved, gradually return.

That was in fact the choice made by most of the people congregated at the border, who did not even want to become refugees. Moreover, by the end of December it was clear that conditions within Cambodia were not so bad as had been imagined, indicating that the US State Department had been correct months earlier in resisting the 'data' from the Bangkok embassy, and that nothing like one million, or even half a million, Khmer were going to rush across the border and put themselves under Thai control.<sup>261</sup>

What the latter got was not one-quarter of the Cambodian population which could perhaps be used politically, but 100,000 or so of those Khmer who wanted nothing more to do with their country's politics, and whose only goal was resettlement in the West, pending which they were quite willing to remain indefinitely as welfare refugees in Khao I Dang.

Although it did not come up to initial expectations, and the people who wished to take advantage of refugee status could not in general be used for direct political intervention in Cambodia, the refugee system, centered on Khao I Dang, could still serve the anti-PRK cause, which required new efforts, since the early predictions of administrative collapse and famine had proven illusory.

First, the number of people who came to Khao I Dang, although far fewer than expected, was large enough to be misrepresented as inferential evidence that the regime was nearly as onerous as its predecessor.

Their number was also large enough to represent a serious destabilizing element in the economy through the gold and other valuables which they brought out. The amount was probably more than doubled by the purchases of the other tens or hundreds of thousands of Cambodians who gathered at the border but did not come over as refugees. In September 1980 a Thai official estimated that 30-40 million *baht* entered the Aranyaprathet banks daily as profits from the refugee trade.<sup>262</sup>

Khao I Dang also served as a magnet which continued to draw off the classes of people most needed to rebuild the administration and social services within the country. Many of them had refused to cooperate with the PRK government from the beginning, and had been among the first refugee arrivals. Others, unhappy working for communists or for Vietnamese, gradually deserted their posts as news filtered in from Khao I Dang about the possibilities for resettlement abroad.

The Voice of America also contributed with its broadcasts about "Cambodians choosing freedom and crossing the border to Thai holding

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<sup>261</sup> *FEER*, Dec 28, 1979, pp. 10-11, reported that western observers traveling around Cambodia could not see the picture of general starvation which had been reported; and this was confirmed later by Shawcross in "Kampuchea Revives".

<sup>262</sup> *The Nation Review*, Bangkok, Sept 12, 1980, p.12. One *baht* = US \$.05.

centers”; and of course the US and Thai-led support for the rump Pol Pot forces panicked many who might otherwise have chosen to help rebuild their country. If Pol Pot had such impressive international support, they thought, his chances of returning were quite good, in which case former bourgeoisie who had cooperated with the PRK would be first on new extermination lists.<sup>263</sup>

Although formally closed, the venality of the Thai guards meant that new arrivals could always get in at night, and once inside they were accepted without discrimination by the camp staff. Thus from January to July 1980 the population rose from 111,000 to 136,000 with the increase consisting almost entirely of urban folk with a useful level of education. In that way Khao I Dang drained off about half of the doctors found alive in Cambodia in 1979, perhaps a thousand schoolteachers, plus assorted engineers and others with needed skills.

(Before the war there were around 500 doctors in Cambodia. In 1980 Khmer medical staff in Khao-I-Dang had compiled a list of over 250 survivors in various countries who had left Cambodia before its fall to the KR in April 1975, and they knew their list was not yet complete. There may have been no more than 100+ doctors still in Cambodia in April 1975, and approximately half of them died or were killed before the end of the DK regime.)

[(added 2007) Thus, David Chandler’s accusation that the DK leadership deliberately neglected health care (“Survivors’ memories teem with grisly accounts of arrogant, untrained medical practitioners in the countryside”) should be viewed against the lack of health personnel. Most people could not have received adequate care no matter what course the authorities followed, nor, because of lack of doctors and facilities, were most rural people able to receive adequate medical care before 1975.

A surprising testimony (surprising both as to fact and source) about DK efforts to palliate the deficiency by training new doctors is in the otherwise extremely anti-DK memoir by Ong Thong Hoeung whose wife and child were saved through an emergency caesarian performed in a rural labor camp by a 20-year old peasant woman trained in the maquis by Dr. Thiounn Thioeun.<sup>264]</sup>

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<sup>263</sup> Information on Voice of America broadcasts from refugees who claimed to have been influenced by them. John Pilger, in his, “America’s Second War in Indochina”, also emphasized the magnet effect of Khao I Dang.

<sup>264</sup> Chandler, *Brother Number One*, first edition, p. 125, second edition, p. 119. My attention was directed to Chandler’s carelessness on this point by Louis Paulsen, review of Chandler’s *Brother Number One*, [www.marxmail.org/archives/june98/cambodia.htm](http://www.marxmail.org/archives/june98/cambodia.htm); Ong Thong Hoeung, *J’ai cru aux Khmers rouges*, Paris, Buchet/Chastel, 2003, pp. 185-190. On Thiounn Thioeun and his brothers see above note 198.

There are two published memoirs in Khmer by doctors who were put to work as such after April 1975 until 1977 and who survived until the present, My Samedi, *Ban ros’ ruom commaek thvoe oy ros’/Survivre pour faire vivre*, Phnom Penh, no publisher indicated, 2000; French translation, *Survivre pour sauver les autres*, Phnom Penh, no publisher or translator indicated, 2000; and Hun Chhunly, *Chivit kru pet mneak knong*

Once established, of course, Khao I Dang could not simply be closed down and the people forcibly sent back. Phnom Penh probably would not have accepted them *en masse*, given the evidence of their disloyalty and the presumption of their indoctrination by Thai and American military or intelligence services; and even though they were not escaping from starvation or from a cruel regime, they were adamantly opposed to life in Cambodia under any other conditions than what they had known before the war.

Any attempt to push them back once they had reached Khao I Dang would have involved an unacceptable degree of brutality, and UNHCR policy has always been that repatriation must be voluntary. Given the preferences of the refugees, UN policy, and the narrow criteria established for resettlement abroad, there were over 100,000 people in Khao I Dang who had no foreseeable future but years in refugee camps.

If that sounds like a tragedy, it is even more tragic in that it could have been avoided. The extra medical and food aid which some of the people needed when they arrived at the border could have been provided on the spot, as was done at Nong Samet and Nong Chan when it was discovered that over half the Cambodians massed there did not want to become refugees. Hospitals and special supplementary feeding programs and eventually some schools, like those at Khao I Dang, were set up.

The major difference between the border camps and Khao I Dang was lack of security and inferior sanitary conditions in the former. Had there been no Khao I Dang as an attraction, however, as conditions within Cambodia improved in 1979-80, the lack of certain amenities at the border would have persuaded larger numbers to gradually return to their homes and work productively, leaving only the most ardent 'politicals' at the border plotting the reconquest of their country.

Whether the refugee apparatus as established was necessary or not, official UNHCR policy had always held that most of the refugees, except for the few who qualified for settlement abroad, would eventually return to Cambodia once conditions within the country had improved. The Thai government also maintained that the refugees represent a nearly intolerable burden on the economy of Thailand and a risk to its security, and thus the sooner they could be returned home the better.

Had such been the whole story we should have expected Khao I Dang to be maintained at the minimum level of comfort consonant with basic human needs, no encouragement or aid in developing special programs to make camp life attractive, and full information to be provided about developments within Cambodia, all destined to persuade refugees that return was preferable to

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*robop khmer krohom / The life of a physician under the khmer rouge regime*, Phnom Penh, Indradevi Publishing, 2006. Neither has been translated, although French and English translations were promised at the time of publication. There has been little interest in their testimony, probably because their stories are not horrible enough.

stagnation in miserable holding centers. Voluntary return of individuals or small groups, because of the porous quality of the border, could have been effected without objections from Phnom Penh, probably even without its knowledge. In fact, there always was a constant traffic into, as well as out of, Cambodia.

Instead of that, Khao I Dang, within a few months of its establishment, had all the accouterments of a permanent settlement – schools, some adult education, special nutritional programs for mothers and children, even a Montessori kindergarten project – much of it, together with the high standard of medical care, superior not only to what is available in Cambodia now, but to what most of the camp's residents could have expected before 1975.

The only aspects of camp life definitely inferior to prewar Cambodian circumstances, abstracting from the lack of freedom to leave the camp, were the schools, which could not yet, in 1980, offer a full syllabus or school day for all children, and the housing, very primitive at first, but steadily improving, with the newest units being built in late 1980 suitable for long term, if not permanent, residence.<sup>265</sup>

Interesting to those informed of developments within Cambodia was that the steady improvement there was paralleled by the equally steady improvement in camp life, almost as though the purpose were to make certain that refugee life remained more attractive.

Moreover, instead of disseminating accurate information on progress within Cambodia, the Thai authorities, whose lead the UNHCR had to follow, insisted on blocking news which might have given a positive view of the PRK government. Short-wave radios were confiscated, and there were even attempts, sporadically, to prevent international news magazines, and the Bangkok English-language press, from reaching the refugees.

Why did the UNHCR allow these developments contrary to announced policy? It was certainly not deliberate obfuscation on their part. They had no independent Cambodia experts of their own, and in the beginning were as much the victims as the general public of the horrendous impression made by the Pol Pot refugees.

Furthermore, the actual operation of the camp programs was turned over to, mainly western, voluntary agencies, which as bureaucracies, however laudable their intent, wished to expand their areas of responsibility and test their own theories and projects. Their goals were generally to provide programs and services approximating as closely as possible normal conditions of middle-class existence, and they were not at all concerned about the policy of eventual voluntary return of the refugees.

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<sup>265</sup> After 1980, with the rapid decline in KID population to less than 40,000 in 1982, conditions still further improved.

In fact, most of the personnel were ideologically opposed to the new Cambodian government as much as to Pol Pot, an attitude congruent with that of the refugees, and they were quite willing to encourage the latter in their insistence on resettlement. Thus, founded on a misapprehension, to which the anti-PRK policies of Thailand and the US contributed, and allowed to grow without any overall policy control, Khao I Dang by late 1980 showed a very real potential for the Palestine-type situation which had been foreseen by some observers in the beginning.

It might be thought that the obvious answer to the refugee problem would be to grant what most of them wanted – resettlement abroad – and airlift them out to the United States, Australia, France, etc., *en masse*. After all, some of the western countries, in particular the United States, bear a large part of the responsibility for the destruction of the society those people knew at home.

A difficulty, aside from the fact that the United States, France, or Australia, just don't want to absorb so many people, would be that an open door to resettlement in the western 'paradise' might attract many thousands more out of the country. Resettlement of those already in the camps would have to be accompanied by withdrawal of all support from the Pol Pot remnants and Khmer Serei along the border, termination of all border aid, re-establishment of normal relations with the present Cambodian government, and delivery of all further aid through Phnom Penh. In other words it would require a complete reversal of the policies now pursued by the United States, China, and Thailand.

A less ambitious alternative is to convince increasing numbers of the refugees that they should go home. This is the long-standing UNHCR policy, and the rapidly improving conditions within Cambodia have encouraged new initiatives to implement it. In March 1981 a survey was conducted in the camps to determine refugee attitudes toward repatriation.<sup>266</sup>

Among the interesting discoveries of the survey were abysmal lack of information about recent developments in Cambodia, especially among the refugees most likely to choose repatriation, those of lower-class background, and the large number of people, over 40% of the survey, who would be willing to return "if the UNHCR said it was safe to do so". Another 24% would also like to return, but wanted additional guarantees.

Obviously the UNHCR should start providing information about Cambodia and organizing the return of those most eager to go; but the obvious course is not so easy as it might seem. Both an information program and organized return of people directly to PRK territory run against the wishes of the Thai authorities.

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<sup>266</sup> The survey report, dated March 30, 1981, is "Kampuchean Refugees in Thailand, Attitudes Towards Voluntary Repatriation", by Milton E. Osborne, Senior Research Fellow, Dept. of International Relations, Australian National University, whom I wish to thank for providing me with a copy.

The report of the UNHCR survey caused great consternation in Bangkok. A direct return of refugees from Thai to Cambodian territory would imply recognition of the Phnom Penh government, and it would be embarrassing to suddenly disseminate favorable news about a regime which Thailand and its allies are at pains to denounce. The political motives which could be imputed to the refugee operation since its beginning are revealed as still operative.

Of course, since the Thai authorities, for public consumption, have all along called the refugees an unwanted burden, it is difficult to openly block repatriation and admit that they would prefer to keep them around a while longer. Instead of that, they argue the danger of cross-border movement, or the non-recognition of the PRK, and suggest repatriation via a third country, such as Burma, patently ridiculous if only because of the logistics.<sup>267</sup>

Here is where the diplomatic warning of 'another famine', cited above, fits into the picture. The 'western diplomats' are weighing in on the side of Bangkok with information designed to discourage any efforts to return people to Cambodia.

The Phnom Penh government and the Vietnamese are also suspicious of repatriation moves, and reasonably so, since in June 1980 the Thai sent back about 7,000 Pol Pot cadres and military after R & R in the Sakeo camp; and Phnom Penh no doubt suspects that any large-scale movement cleared by Bangkok would involve people sent to work against the PRK.

The refugee problem is thus not amenable to any quick solution, but like most other aspects of Cambodian history since 1975 a close look at it imposes certain revisions on the conventional wisdom. Just as the refugees in 1979 were not simply people fleeing a catastrophe, their continued presence in Thailand in 1981 is not only because there is nowhere for them to go.

Their treatment in both instances has been determined by their perceived utility to the international maneuvers of certain powers, first of all Thailand and the United States, in the same way that Pol Pot's worst year was disguised by the CIA, and a disinformation campaign mounted against the PRK, in cynical disregard for the havoc played with Cambodia since 1970 and the needs of its suffering population.

### A Final Comment (2010)

In this critique of Shawcross I noted some evidence of changes in the sympathies of some official and semi-official Americans toward a relatively favorable view of the Khmer Rouge and Democratic Kampuchea, apparently because of their fierce enmity toward Viet Nam.

There is still more in this vein. In his book, *The Tragedy of Cambodian History*, David Chandler wrote that in March 1975, Lon Nol had offered to talk

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<sup>267</sup> *FEER*, May 1, 1981, pp. 22-23.



to the other side. They were not interested. “Having failed ... Lon Nol came under pressure from Ambassador Dean to leave the country, so that someone else could open negotiations that took Sihanouk into account ... he [Dean] assumed ‘we would prefer that the successor regime in Cambodia be oriented toward Peking rather than toward Hanoi ... can [anything] be done to strengthen Sihanouk’s hand ... so that he can return to Phnom Penh with some power, rather than abandon Cambodia to the Hanoi-leaning Khmer Rouge’”.

Chandler added that this document, which he found “extraordinary”, released only under FOIA in 1990, “foreshadows the U.S. ‘tilt’ toward China and the *pro-Chinese* Red Khmers over the next decade and a half”.<sup>268</sup>

Put in another way, it not only ‘foreshadows’, but confirms the US detestation of Viet Nam, which already by 1975 was fighting the US to a standstill, ‘foreshadowing’ the Vietnam syndrome as I define it in this book, and which is still not dead.

When I met Shawcross in Chiang Mai in August 1981, he was very upset with my treatment of his “Ending”, although it was difficult to discuss the subject because neither of us had copies to check the details. I made some notes after our conversation, and it seemed that he was particularly troubled by my suggestion that he had taken his information from the US Embassy in Bangkok. He said that was not true, that he had not even been in Bangkok at the relevant time, and had received the information about refugees, famine, etc., from François Ponchaud, apparently by post, since Ponchaud had spent most of the period in Thailand.

Of course if Shawcross had been sure of himself, and that I was wrong, he would have insisted on publication of my answer in order to demolish my position. Obviously, he was more comfortable with ‘killing the story’.

Nevertheless, on that one point, I accept the correction but note the following.

In his “End of Cambodia”, Shawcross started with inferentially on-the-spot reports of refugees and foreign aid workers. Then, on p. 25, still near the beginning of the article, he inserted himself explicitly, “in February [1979] I talked in Thailand to refugees from ... western Cambodia”. Following that he referred to the activities of the US Embassy, and then indicated a move “when I spoke to State Department experts in June”.

It was thus quite legitimate to infer that Shawcross had been in Bangkok and had obtained his US Embassy information from the Embassy itself. Certainly it seems that is what he wished the reader to believe – that he had been out on the front lines of journalism, rather than laid back in London being spoon-fed propaganda by Ponchaud.

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<sup>268</sup> Chandler, *Tragedy*, p. 363, note 118, citing U.S. Embassy Phnom Penh’s 5612, March 29, 1975. See more on this below, p. 125.

Shawcross has continued his revisionism on Cambodia right up to the present. The next important installment was entitled "The Burial of Cambodia", also published in *NYRB*, 11 May 1984, I also tried to place a response, dated 29 May 1984, but like its predecessor it was not published by *NYRB*.

### Shawcross 2: The Burial of Cambodia (1984) <sup>269</sup>

In my book, *Cambodia 1975-1982*, I devoted some discussion to the differing roles of journalist and historian, in particular with respect to the news out of Cambodia after 1975.

I had harsh words there for the jourmos (chapter 2), which led some of my fellow historians to criticize my tone, and I was indeed beginning to feel that my attention to the journalist as propagandist might have been slightly overdone. Then I read William Shawcross' "The Burial of Cambodia" and faith in my judgment was restored. It would be difficult to find anything in the post-1979 literature on Cambodia so loaded with mis-and disinformation.

Shawcross, it appears, has just discovered Tuol Sleng, as though it had not been prominently featured by the western press, including Shawcross' own writings, over the past 5 years. There is absolutely nothing new in this, major, part of "Burial", except the propagandist slant.

Emphasizing his coming charges of Vietnamese and PRK (Peoples Republic of Kampuchea – 'Heng Samrin regime') cover-ups, Shawcross starts off with the necessity to seek Foreign Ministry approval for his 1980 visit to Tuol Sleng, whereas in his 24 January 1980 *NYRB* "The End of Cambodia?" he wrote that Tuol Sleng, which he there implied might have been a Vietnamese-organized Potemkin Auschwitz, was "an obligatory stop for visitors" something which was still true during my visit in September 1981.

My remark on journalists in *Cambodia 1975-1982* treated them as propagandists, but not as intellectual pilferers, which I now see as a serious omission. Shawcross' description of the workings of Tuol Sleng, including the details of Hu Nim's confession, comes directly from the work of Ben Kiernan, Chantou Boua, and Anthony Barnett in *New Statesman* 2 May 1980.

That is the first example of the most glaring deficiency of this most peculiar article – Shawcross' deliberate neglect of current scholarship on Cambodia, of which there is now a rather wide variety, and the concomitant insinuation that only he, perhaps together with Elizabeth Becker and David Hawk, is interested in the present state of Cambodian affairs.

Shawcross does not even have the excuse of innocent ignorance. He has been in contact with all the serious students of Cambodian affairs ever since he was researching *Sideshow*, and he is well aware of all they have written. One of them, Ben Kiernan, accompanied Shawcross on travels within Cambodia in

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<sup>269</sup> Michael Vickery, unpublished. Written 29 May 1984, rejected by *NYRB*.

1980, and Shawcross became acquainted with most of the others at two conferences on Cambodia, in Chiang Mai in August 1981 and at Princeton in November 1982. He has also met, at least as early as 1981, another important scholar of revolutionary Cambodia, Stephen Heder, who was not present at either of the conferences.

Shawcross may disagree with what Cambodia specialists write, and indeed they disagree among themselves on certain points, but he must argue his disagreements, not pretend that “there has been little investigation of the Khmer Rouge regime” (p. 18), or that it is “difficult to arouse much Western interest in a detailed study of the Khmer Rouge” (p. 19). David Hawk, whom Shawcross mentions in connection with those statements is also cognizant of work done on Cambodia, having participated in the Princeton conference.

Shawcross’ problem is that he has a propaganda goal which would not be well served by most of the recent research on Cambodia. Probably none of the serious students of Cambodia would agree with Shawcross’ allegations about suppression of documents by the PRK and Vietnamese in order to conceal the present leaders’ previous activity or the nature of the ‘Khmer Rouge’ regime.

He complains that the files above the Tuol Sleng prison “were almost the only Khmer Rouge documents to which the Vietnamese had allowed foreigners access; nothing from the party leadership was available”. There is no reason why ‘party leadership’ documents should be at Tuol Sleng, if that is what Shawcross’ complaint is about. Tuol Sleng contains only dossiers (confessions) of political prisoners, plus a few personal notebooks, school texts, etc. There are over 4,000 confessions.

Furthermore, as Shawcross well knows, in 1980 when he and Ben Kiernan were there, in 1981 when Ben Kiernan and I were there, and in 1983, judging from material which Elizabeth Becker obtained, the PRK authorities were extremely generous in allowing foreign scholars and journalists access to browse, read, take notes, photograph, and even carry entire dossiers off to one or another foreign aid agency to photocopy.

Those of us who know Khmer, and who thus did not need the help of the librarian, had complete freedom to paw through the collections, take dossiers off the shelves for examination, check the catalogues being compiled, etc. There did not appear to be any secret documents, nor were there any Vietnamese there to check on what we did.

Whatever the truth about the PRK authorities’ refusal to allow microfiches to be made of the entire Tuol Sleng collection (and why should they? would Shawcross expect, say, Thailand to allow similar access to central government documents on all coup attempts since 1975?), the students of Cambodia capable of using such documents – they are all in Khmer – now have more in their hands than they have yet been able to study.

Shawcross’ sallies on the subject of documentation reveal a new twist in the anti-PRK line. Just over a year ago Elizabeth Becker alleged that the Tuol Sleng

files were closed to Cambodians and of very restricted access to foreigners in the interest of keeping a lid on the regime's secrets (*Washington Post* 28 Feb, 1 March 1983); and I countered with a statement similar to what I have written above and circulated among a number of people I deemed interested in Cambodia.<sup>270</sup>

Now Shawcross has modified the charge – Tuol Sleng is open, but it doesn't contain the real stuff. I think those who know about such matters would agree that Shawcross is wrong on both points.

The Tuol Sleng material is extremely valuable, as Elizabeth Becker wrote, and central government documents have not been systematically hidden. Ben Kiernan has several which he obtained from PRK officials, and David Chandler discussed one at the 1982 Princeton conference. If Shawcross is ignorant of the material really available for study, it can only result from a pretension that he alone is qualified to write about Cambodia.

Within the Tuol Sleng exhibit Shawcross writes of an "order of unreality" allegedly devised by the Vietnamese and a "new sanitized history of the Cambodian revolution" which is displayed there. It is not clear what he considers unreal, nor why.

The picture of Mao and Pol Pot? China was Pol Pot's most important foreign ally. "Obscure Cambodian communist cadres whose roles were now being exaggerated ... to demonstrate ... a tradition of true Marxism-Leninism and of international solidarity with Vietnam"? Nothing Shawcross has ever written reveals detailed acquaintance with the history of the Cambodian revolution.

If he is referring to Son Ngoc Minh, Keo Meas and Tou Samouth, their roles are not at all exaggerated. They were leaders of the first Cambodian revolutionary and independence struggle in the early 1950s when Pol Pot was still a student and when Sihanouk was more interested in French protection against democratic anti-monarchists (not just communists) than in independence. Their forces at one moment controlled nearly half of Cambodia, but beginning in 1962 they were supplanted by the Pol Pot group (on which see further below).

Shawcross in this passage seems to be suggesting that the Cambodian communists did not have "a tradition of true Marxism-Leninism", which would in fact be a reasonable position to take, but just two columns further on he complains of an attempt to "obscure the fact that the Khmer Rouge was a Marxist-Leninist organization".

He is even more confusing in alleging both exaggeration to demonstrate [falsely?] solidarity with Viet Nam and absence of anything "to suggest the extent of Vietnam's own past support for the Khmer Rouge revolution". And the last statement hardly squares with his assertion in another publication that "the poor state of the relations between the leaders of the Khmer Rouge and those of

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<sup>270</sup> See below, *A Cycle of Journalistic Poverty*, pp. 166 ff.

Hanoi ... not well-documented in the press in 1975... [but] was well-known to US intelligence ... [I]n researching ... *Sideshow* I found CIA and DIA documents of the tensions going back as far as 1970”.

Likewise, a few years earlier, Shawcross had emphasized long-standing differences between Vietnamese and Cambodian communists, and he stated that “until Sihanouk’s overthrow in 1970 the Vietnamese communists subordinated Khmer interests to their own”.<sup>271</sup>

Well, Bill, how **do** you view the relationship between Vietnamese and Cambodian communists? For the poor reader’s sake I shall try to summarize it in a few words. The first Cambodian communists of the early 1950s, including those “whose blurred” photographs decorate Tuol Sleng, wished to make a revolution in cooperation with the Vietnamese.

After 1960 they were replaced in leadership positions by the Pol Pot group who were anti-Vietnamese, and starting in 1962 with Tou Samouth, many of the first group were murdered, some eventually in Tuol Sleng.<sup>272</sup>

Although the Vietnamese communists supported an eventual Cambodian revolution, they disapproved of the timing and strategy of the Pol Pot group and did not favor the policies followed in Cambodia after 1975. The top leadership of the PRK, those with a revolutionary background, represent the political descendants, and in some cases are surviving members, of the first Cambodian revolutionary organization, they always agreed on some level of cooperation with Vietnam, and they are more Marxist-Leninist than the Pol Pot group.<sup>273</sup>

Shawcross berates the Vietnamese for “assiduously” trying “to associate Pol Pot with Hitler ... thus Tuol Sleng prison has been called ‘an Asian Auschwitz’”; and he goes on to explain why Tuol Sleng and Auschwitz are not comparable. Shawcross is far off base here. Although the Vietnamese have at times termed the Pol Pot regime ‘fascist’, it is rather with Mao and the Chinese Cultural Revolution that they ‘assiduously’ try to draw a comparison.

The Nazi analogy began, and has been propagated, in the West. In 1977 Jean Lacouture compared Cambodian executions with Dachau, and also with Katyn; and in 1978 Senator George McGovern declared that Cambodia made “Hitler’s operation look tame”.<sup>274</sup>

This theme continued after the overthrow of Pol Pot in 1979. In the middle of that year the *Far Eastern Economic Review* (20 July 1979) published photographs of execution sites, including Tuol Sleng, under the rubric, “The

<sup>271</sup> Chandler and Kiernan, *Revolution and its Aftermath*, pp. 241-2; “The Third Indochina War” *NYRB* 6 April 1978.

<sup>272</sup> Although it now, 2008, seems certain that Tou Samouth was killed by Sihanouk’s military, not, *contra* Kiernan, by Pol Pot. See above, n. 204.

<sup>273</sup> Ben Kiernan, *How Pol Pot*; and Vickery, *Cambodia*, chapter 5.

<sup>274</sup> Chomsky and Herman, *After the Cataclysm*, pp. 149, 138.

Kampuchean Holocaust”, and compared them to “post World War II films of the horrors of Dachau, Belsen and Auschwitz”.

Nearly a year later a *New York Times* article of 22 April 1980 likened the decrease in Cambodian population to a “holocaust”; and *FEER* correspondent Nayan Chanda, along with a photograph captioned “A Kampuchean Auschwitz” wrote that “each village seems to have its local Auschwitz”, a formulation which should come closer to satisfying purist Shawcross, since those local Cambodian ‘Auschwitzes’ were generally execution prisons near work sites, more like the real Auschwitz, rather than interrogation centers, like Tuol Sleng.

Chanda also noted “the Vietnamese propaganda line about Chinese instigation of the massacres” (*FEER* 4 April 1980). Chanda did not call Tuol Sleng an ‘Auschwitz’, and that particular usage, which Shawcross now wishes to knock down, may be strictly his own (although I have made no effort to collect all media references to Tuol Sleng).

In an earlier attempt to de-emphasize ‘Khmer Rouge’ atrocities in order to make the Vietnamese look bad Shawcross cynically referred to Tuol Sleng as “a school which, the Vietnamese say, was a Khmer Rouge torture chamber ... no one can doubt that the Khmer Rouge tortured people, but whether there was an ‘Asian Auschwitz’ in this particular place and with these precise methods remains uncertain” (see page 98, above).

Still later Shawcross found the Nazi analogy useful in his piece for *Revolution and its Aftermath*, and he there devoted most of 5 pages to it without objection (pp. 230-1, 250-2), although he also included a three-line warning that “the evocation of fascism [should] not obscure the fact that the Khmer Rouge was a Marxist-Leninist government”.

I would agree that the Nazi analogy is not very useful, but Shawcross cannot be taken seriously if he uses it in one context while denouncing it in another; and in any case it is not a propaganda device whose origin can be laid to the Vietnamese. I would also deny that the Pol Pot revolution was Marxist-Leninist (see my *Cambodia*, chapter 5). The Cambodian revolution, like most others in the Third World, must be carefully studied for itself, as a number of scholars ignored by Shawcross are attempting, not just associated with a series of negative buzz words.

Somewhat greater consistency appears in the final sections of “Burial” where the Vietnamese are assigned blame for most of the difficulties now faced by Cambodia. Four years ago, in “The End of Cambodia?”, Shawcross gave currency to François Ponchaud’s canard that the Vietnamese were “conducting a subtle ‘genocide’ in Cambodia”, suggesting that Cambodia was in more danger than under Pol Pot.

Although Shawcross later realized that the somber picture painted there was inaccurate, and that the ‘end’ he had evoked was not approaching, he now wishes to convince us of Cambodia’s burial at a time when most observers see a recovery in spite of the US-supported blockade of Cambodia and Vietnam.

“Burial” is thus a sequel to “End” in Shawcross’ campaign to make the Vietnamese appear even worse than Pol Pot. In the earlier article he swallowed whole and regurgitated a number of propaganda stories which he may now realize were inaccurate, and which I have discussed in *Cambodia 1975-1982* (pp. 209-10, and ff.). In “Burial” he simply piles up dubious and tendentious statements.

“Since 1979, Viet Nam has refused to compromise over its occupation of Cambodia”, he says. This is simply not true. All parties to the conflict have tried to drive hard bargains, but to accuse Viet Nam alone of intransigence is mischievous. Four years ago the best journalist reporting on Indochina, Nayan Chanda, wrote that what the Vietnamese considered irreversible was “the end of Pol Pot’s rule”. “Hanoi”, he wrote, “would not rule out the idea of a coalition government in Kampuchea with non-communist elements if the quid pro quo is the abandonment of Pol Pot by ASEAN, the West, and China”.

Chanda continued, “sources familiar with Hanoi’s thinking say that the word irreversible does not apply either to the Vietnamese military presence in Kampuchea or the composition of the present Phnom Penh administration” (*FEER* 14 April 1980). According to Chanda’s sources, and I would agree, one obstacle to such a compromise was “some senior officials of the Heng Samrin regime [who] do not seem to relish the prospect [of integrating non-communist elements from the opposition]”.

Of course this argument, which grants some independence to the PRK, is unpalatable to those who, like Shawcross, wish to dismiss the PRK as Vietnamese puppets.

It is utter sophistry to argue that the aim of “ASEAN and their Western partners” was a compromise with Viet Nam “in which the Khmer Rouge was removed as a significant force in Cambodia”, and that Viet Nam has not wished to see such a compromise. There was indeed a time when ASEAN seemed to be making such noises, but it was not Vietnamese intransigence which silenced them.

At the UN conference on Cambodia in July 1981 ASEAN wanted to find a solution without the Pol Pot group, and they even proposed inviting representatives of the PRK along with Son Sann and Sihanouk. They offered proposals that Viet Nam withdraw from Cambodia, the PRK dissolve, and an interim administration be set up until elections were held, pending which all factions would be disarmed. This was blocked by China, supporting the Pol Pot group, as interference in the affairs of Democratic Kampuchea, and the US acquiesced (see *FEER*, Nayan Chanda, 24 July 1981).

The following year China, the US and ASEAN colluded in making Pol Pot’s Democratic Kampuchea leading component of a tripartite coalition, thereby insuring that Vietnam, the PRK, and the Cambodia population would be hostile to compromise with that coalition.

A final serious misrepresentation is Shawcross' characterization of the PRK leadership as simply "cadres who had previously worked ... for Pol Pot", and the PRK system as one in which "former Khmer Rouge officers were often deemed to be more reliable than former officials or soldiers of the ... Lon Nol regime," or in which "more confidence was placed in the torturers than in their victims", who saw the former "actually being promoted by the new order into positions of new authority over them".

Above I noted the rival factions of Cambodian communists. The very thin stratum of communists at the top of the PRK government are of, or derive from, the original Cambodian communists whom Pol Pot saw as enemies, who in fact did oppose his policies, and most of whom he murdered. During 1975-78 the part of Cambodia which they administered, the East, was noted for better living conditions and significantly less brutality than most of the rest of the country, until Pol Pot destroyed them in 1978.<sup>275</sup>

Below the top communist stratum, the entire central government and provincial administration is staffed by former employees of the Lon Nol and Sihanouk administrations, not by "former Khmer Rouge officers". Furthermore, the numerous interviews conducted by Stephen Heder, some of whose views, of all Cambodia specialists, are closest to what Shawcross wishes to believe, established that throughout 1980, the year from which Shawcross' examples date, Lon Nol and Sihanouk era survivors were also dominating sub-district and village administration (see Vickery, *Cambodia*, pp. 221-224).

It is true that the policy toward defectors from the Pol Pot forces is lenient – a few weeks of reeducation, but this is true for anyone, of any faction, who returns peacefully from the border to be reintegrated into Cambodian society. Not every Pol Pot soldier was a 'torturer', as everyone in Cambodia knows. The longer periods of detention are for those involved, as Shawcross correctly states while misrepresenting the total situation, in "antigovernment activities" within the country. And what government does not give favored treatment to those who join it over those who are in armed opposition?

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<sup>275</sup> Although this was true in 1979, it was no longer accurate at the time I wrote, in 1984. After the arrest and exile of Pen Sovann in 1981 and the death of Chan Si in 1984, the thin stratum at the top were former DK personnel who broke with Pol Pot in 1977-78 (Hun Sen, Heng Samrin, Chea Sim) or who had remained estranged from the central DK authorities in outlying regions since before 1975 (Say Phoutang, Tea Banh, Bou Tang). It is accurate to say, however, that in the East Zone the influence of the older communist group remained stronger.



I was not the only student of Cambodian affairs to object to Shawcross “Burial”. David Chandler and Ben Kiernan also wrote critical letters to *NYRB*, of which Kiernan’s was published, with a weaselly response from Shawcross.<sup>276</sup>

Shawcross wrote a good book about the war in Cambodia – *Sideshow* – which we all admired. It is essential to recall, however, that *Sideshow* was not about Cambodia, its society and politics, but about American actions in Cambodia and based on American sources. Shawcross may have come to believe that *Sideshow* made him an authority on all aspects of Cambodian affairs.

Whether for that reason, or simply because he has tried to hew to a trendy journalistic line, his subsequent articles on Cambodia have precipitously declined in quality, with “Burial” the nadir, as he reworks his own and others’ material to redefine the demon in the Cambodian dilemma. Perhaps when he becomes aware that the Pol Pot group are denying the *Sideshow* thesis about the effects of American bombing we will see as his next move an autocritique of *Sideshow* published in *Commentary*.

So far as I know, my facetious proposal for an autocritique of *Sideshow* in *Commentary* has not been realized, but equivalent revisions of himself have now been published by Shawcross, as will be shown below, “Shawcross in the 90s”.

## Cambodia in and about 1981: assorted articles

Following the conference in Chiang Mai in 1981 where I met Shawcross and found that he had seen my unpublished critique of his changed position on Cambodia, I traveled to Phnom Penh, and then to Battambang and Angkor, altogether spending three weeks in Cambodia.<sup>277</sup>

From that experience I wrote five articles which were published in the *Canberra Times* [Australia], and two more pieces which were not published at the time. Below is an unpublished description of the first phase of our trip, followed by the five *Canberra Times* articles, and then an article on Cambodia’s International situation as I saw it then..

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<sup>276</sup> “An Exchange on Cambodia”, letters by Nayan Chanda, Ben Kiernan, and Shawcross, *NYRB*, 17 September, 1984.

<sup>277</sup> On the trip to Phnom Penh I was accompanied by Chantou Boua, David Chandler, Ben Kiernan and Serge Thion, and traveled to Battambang and Angkor with Thion and David French of Church World Service, who, because of his work, was able to travel rather freely in his own vehicle even at that early date.

ANU-Monash-University of Paris joint mission to Saigon (1981) <sup>278</sup>

In the comfortable pre-World War II past, when an ‘Indochina Federation’, being run by the French rather than by the natives, was quite acceptable to ‘Free World’ official opinion, the French who settled there liked to describe, half in jest, how they took on the coloration of the particular area in which they worked – becoming in the process ‘Tonkinese’ (North Vietnam), ‘Cochinchinese’ (South Vietnam), French ‘Lao’ or ‘Khmer’.

Thus the ‘Tonkinese’, like their stereotypical local counterparts, were supposed to be industrious and efficient, while the ‘Cochinchinese’ were lazier, given to intrigue, preferring to get rich through clever manipulations rather than honest work. The difference between the two groups, even if not the terms by which it was described, was real since the French society of Hanoi, then the capital of Indochina, was dominated by officials, while Saigon was the center of an agricultural colony where the French were landowners, bankers, and businessmen.

The French ‘Cambodians’, a relatively small group in a country much less important to the metropolis and working through an intact, ‘protected’ local administration, were characterized as insouciant hunters and skirt chasers; and it was held that anyone who spent a few years in Laos was thereafter useless for work anywhere else, an attitude exemplified by a character in André Malraux’s *Voie royale / Royal Road* who, speaking of a European doctor met in southern Laos, says (appositely, I would say), “anyone who chooses to spend his life out here must be either a dope addict or a sex maniac”.<sup>279</sup>

Present-day journalists and academic specialists on the Indochina countries are also similarly divided, although in saying this I do not mean to impugn (or extol) my colleagues’ idiosyncrasies, nor to give away any of my own secrets. The division is less complex, however; essentially between ‘Vietnamese’ and ‘Cambodians’.

There may in fact be some ‘Lao’ academics, but by the very nature of the stereotype they would never be able to tear themselves away from the delights of the country long enough to produce any work. And the one well-known journalist who has written frequently on Laos over the past few years proved, if not just by his productivity, but also by his inability, in one situation, to

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<sup>278</sup> Michael Vickery, August 1981. An abbreviated version of this article was published in *Vietnam Today* (Canberra), Number 19 (November Quarter 1981), p. 11. ANU is the Australian National University in Canberra, where I was employed from 1979 to 1982, while Monash University, Chandler’s and Kiernan’s location at the time, is near Melbourne. Serge Thion was based in an institution under the University of Paris.

<sup>279</sup> On this see also Norman Lewis, *Dragon Apparent*, London, Eland, 1982 [1951], “Preface to 1982 Edition”, p. 2.

distinguish between ‘stone’ and ‘cunt’ that he had really not adapted to the spirit of the country.<sup>280</sup>

A disproportionate amount of journalistic and academic writing about Indochina since 1975 has been from the pens of the ‘Vietnamese’ – an inevitable result of the attention focused on that country in a way that produced a whole new generation of ‘Vietnamese’ journalists and scholars. Cambodia, still a backwater, or a ‘sideshow’ to the main attraction, was throughout the 1960’s and 1970’s visited on quick trips by Vietnam-centered writers who saw, and wrote about, its problems in relation to Vietnam.

The few Cambodia specialists of those years were scholars, not journalists, whose work was confined to academic journals, and who after April 1975 were so stunned by the unexpected developments there that, if they could not be propagandists for the new regime, preferred a careful silence.

Following the American Social Science Research Council-sponsored conference on Cambodia in Thailand in August 1981, some of the participants visited Cambodia and Vietnam. For David Chandler and myself, both chronologically and in terms of preoccupation with Cambodia the oldest of the occidental ‘Cambodians’ there, it was our first visit to Vietnam.

In 1960, already disgusted by American involvement in the war there and by reports about the Diem regime, I had decided to avoid Viet Nam until the situation improved. It was a stupid choice of course, since in 1960-62 I could have traveled with relative ease by car from Phnom Penh to Saigon and then over most of south and central Vietnam.

Even now Chandler and I, unregenerate ‘Cambodians’, had not planned to visit Vietnam, but because of poor connections in plane schedules we were forced to spend four days in transit in Ho Chi Minh City. On the trip with us were Ben Kiernan of Monash University and his wife Chantou Boua, who although ‘Cambodians’, adopted and real, had previously visited Vietnam, and Serge Thion, a French sociologist-journalist, who before 1975 worked as a teacher in both Viet Nam and Cambodia and in the latter country became the sole western journalist ever invited to visit a pre-1975 revolutionary liberated zone.<sup>281</sup>

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<sup>280</sup> This was Nayan Chanda in *FEER* 8 December 1978. See my letter on this above, p. 91.

[(added 1997) Since I wrote this in 1981 three very productive academics have appeared on the Lao studies scene, demonstrating that some Westerners could resist succumbing to the stereotype. Grant Evans, Geoffrey Gunn, and Martin Stuart-Fox, have demonstrated their ability to distinguish between cold stone and warm flesh, and all, interestingly, are Australians.]

[(added 1999) I am now aware of even more Western Lao specialists. Perhaps the changes in Lao society since 1975 do not encourage the traditional adaptations)].

<sup>281</sup> See his account of this in Serge Thion, Chapter 1, “Cambodia 1972: Within the Khmer Rouge”, pp. 1-19, *Watching Cambodia*, Bangkok, White Lotus, 1993.

The visit to Ho Chi Minh city proved well worth while, since if ‘Vietnamese’ journalists and scholars may be insensitive to the special problems of Cambodia, the ‘Cambodians’ as well as the Kampucheans must finally break out of their insularity vis-à-vis their larger neighbor and see the two countries in a joint perspective.

We were met at the airport by a Foreign Ministry representative who told us that while in transit we could not travel outside the city but were free to move around at will within it. No program of official sight-seeing was imposed on us, and we were able to choose our hotel among the four or five open to foreigners, settling on the Ben Thanh, former Rex, mainly because it was cheaper, at \$13 (US) for a single room or \$21 for a double.

This change of names, and language, thorough and universal, is disconcerting to old Viet Nam hands, who still only feel comfortable with ‘Majestic’, ‘Caravelle’ (former hotel names) and Rue Catinat, but is of no consequence to those making a first visit to the city. The only such relic of former days I regret missing is Le Grand Monde, apparently a sort of eighth wonder of the world in French Saigon, but which passed out of existence when most of the present crop of journalists and scholars were still too young to have appreciated its variety of delights.<sup>282</sup>

Not only have the street names and signs over doorways been changed, but ‘hotel’ or ‘restaurant’ has been carefully scraped out or painted over, and signs on exhibits in the museum are entirely in Vietnamese.

If the form is determinedly national, the content may be less so. In the dining room of our Ben Thanh Hotel the menus were consistently the food of colonial French ‘Bungalows’, those government-operated rest houses which existed in all provincial centers and which continued to function until destroyed by the war.

The food was not always bad, either in earlier years or now. For our first lunch on arriving from the airport we had frog legs; and I never heard even the steak and chips Aussie of our party complain. The same practice prevailed in the more expensive former Majestic Hotel overlooking the river, and in both places Vietnamese food could only be had with 24 hours advance notice.

That would have been the wrong way to get local food, since on virtually every street corner there are small bars and food shops filled with local customers and selling all the usual Vietnamese dishes. Particularly pleasant was a riverside open-air place specializing in crab, and which once during the war received world-wide publicity when a bomb planted there caused a heavy casualty toll. Now it is packed every evening with Vietnamese who for a party of three or four find it possible to pay several times an average monthly salary.

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<sup>282</sup> See Graham Greene, *The Quiet American*. [Now (2006), for several years, those old hotel names have been restored].

There is nothing about Ho Chi Minh City which resembles the stereotypical socialist dictatorship. Besides the public display of people living on obviously illegal money, some of the streets in the center of town are filled with antiques and bric-a-brac shops where the prices are quoted in dollars which openly change hands. There, occasionally, remarkable pieces may be had for remarkably low prices; and it is there that one buys *đồng* [Vietnamese currency] quite openly at the black market rate. Indeed, there is less control of free currency transactions than in capitalist France or Germany in the 1950's when those countries were recovering from their war.<sup>283</sup>

This is not to say that total laissez-faire prevails in all domains. It is forbidden for foreigners to visit Vietnamese without permission, and the movements of the former are no doubt monitored, albeit unobtrusively.

Occasionally someone passes through Ho Chi Minh City and reports that he moved around without being followed at all. That is naive, and more astute travelers have come to realize that most foreign visitors, even if not on tour, will visit the same locations: certain public places, the museums, a famous Buddhist temple, a certain 'anti-regime intellectual', and so forth, and there is no need to annoy them with heavy-footed tails.

In all such places strategically placed personnel will make some kind of report. The security apparatus comes into more evident operation when one strays from the standard tourist path.

As 'Cambodians' in Saigon our first interest was not the antique shops nor the ostensibly dissident intellectual, nor the An Quang Pagoda, but rather Wat Chantaraingsey, a Cambodian Buddhist temple which in the 1950's had been a center for dissident Khmers working against the government of Prince Sihanouk, generally with the connivance of the South Vietnamese authorities and the CIA.

Our interest now was heightened by the revelations of General Chana, a Thai specialist in Cambodian affairs, that most of the alleged support of Cambodian dissidents by Thai, Vietnamese, and Americans was true; and we wondered if some of the men involved in those mysterious operations might still be at Wat Chantaraingsey, perhaps retired from politics in monastic robes.<sup>284</sup>

The trishaw drivers we engaged did not know the name, but they knew the university nearby; and not far from the university gate Khmer faces became numerous among the sidewalk throngs and the typical Khmer temple roof could be seen among the trees.

The temple and surrounding streets formed a distinctly Khmer village where Khmer was spoken by nearly all and there were even Khmer signs on the shops. It was probably the first time in years that a group of Khmer-speaking foreigners

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<sup>283</sup> This observation made from personal experience traveling in Europe in 1950-51.

<sup>284</sup> For more on General Chana Samudvanija, and the material he provided us, see Chandler, *Tragedy*, pp. 60, 100. Among the Chana material were photographs of US military officers with the So'n Ngoc Thanh *Issarak* guerrillas in Thailand in the 1950s.

had been seen there, and a suitable crowd immediately gathered. The monks invited us in for tea and an unconstrained conversation began.

Soon, however, two newcomers, one in uniform, entered, and the crowd dispersed. The two men were from the police station. They spoke only Vietnamese. They wanted to know why we had come to Wat Chantaraingsey without permission; and because we had violated regulations we were to accompany them to the police station about 100 meters away.

With one of the Khmers from the temple acting as interpreter the station chief explained that we had violated the law by visiting the temple without first reporting to the police for permission. We showed the card of the Foreign Ministry official who had told us on arrival that we were free to move around the city as we wished. The policeman said freedom to move around did not supersede the regulation about permission to enter premises, and our violation of the law was therefore real.

We thus went back and forth a few times until he finally said the offense having been committed, nothing could be done about it, but he would consider our enforced visit to his police station as the requisite request for permission, and we could return to the temple to continue our visit. We did, the crowd gathered as before, with the same curiosity and lack of fear, and we continued our chat with this small island of Khmers in the middle of Saigon – some of them natives of the Khmer-inhabited provinces of Vietnam, others refugees from Pol Pot wondering whether they should now try to return to Cambodia.

The conversation was mostly about conditions in the latter country. The old politicians of Wat Chantaraingsey seem forgotten; So'n Ngoc Thanh, the most notorious, a rapidly fading memory – although one never knows, and it would probably in any case have been impolitic to speak of them. So'n Ngoc Thanh might have been the monk who poured tea, insisting that he had never heard of himself.

Vietnamese security, then, does keep track of foreigners' movements, and can become obtrusive if they stray into unexpected places, but it is clearly not so oppressive as to inspire great fear. The Khmers of Wat Chantaraingsey were not afraid to talk to us either before or after our encounter with the police, it is not difficult to strike up conversations elsewhere, shopkeepers deal in illegal goods, and the public flaunts illegal money in restaurants.

Even illegal gasoline, which ultimately can only come from the military, is sold on street corners in old liquor bottles; and when two foreign academic researchers, after a night of testing the 11-4 curfew law and other things, found themselves broke, sleepless, and hungry, tramping the streets and warming the benches of central Saigon until their hotel opened at 7 a.m., they were given scarcely a glance by the armed militia patrolling the streets.

At the same time I wrote five articles for the *Canberra Times*, published on 22, 26, 29 October; and 2, 9 November, 1981. The titles under which they were published, and

which are reproduced here, were not mine, but, as too often happens, to make propaganda points different from the author's intentions, devised without consulting me by the *Canberra Times* editors. All footnotes and comment in square brackets have been added later.

### Phnom Penh decays behind a bustling cheerful facade (1981) <sup>285</sup>

Kampuchea starts for the traveler today (as in French colonial times, but not in the Sihanouk-Lon Nol-Pol Pot interim) in Saigon, or Ho Chi Minh City as it is now called.<sup>286</sup>

More precisely, travel begins at Tan So'n Nhu't airport where the Soviet-built jets of the Vietnamese national airline begin their twice weekly flights to Phnom Penh.

During 1979-80 the International Red Cross flight from Bangkok could also take in travelers with Kampuchean visas, but after too many of them came back with positive accounts of progress under the PRK the Thai authorities forbade non-official passengers on those flights.

The aircraft between Ho Chi Minh City and Phnom Penh are always full – with Kampuchean officials on their way to study in Viet Nam or in socialist Europe, Vietnamese military and advisers, foreign diplomats and international-aid personnel, and the occasional journalist or scholar.

After a flight of less than an hour over the rice plains of south-eastern Kampuchea, which because of the serious flooding looked last month like a vast lake, the aircraft flies over Phnom Penh, which from the air seems not to have changed.

Even on the ground most of the old landmarks can still be seen, and the city, for those who knew it before 1975, makes an impression which is at once cheering and yet disappointing. It has suffered much from neglect and disrepair, but few important public buildings or private houses have been destroyed or badly damaged; not even the important Buddhist temples, pre-1979 Western misinformation and post-1979 foreign regime propaganda to the contrary.

The population is certainly in the hundreds of thousands, and may even approach the 600,000-plus of the pre-war city; and the people appear well-fed, active and cheerful. The food emergency has definitely ended and even if much of the city's rice supply has been from foreign aid the other foods, vitamin-rich vegetables and protein-filled meats, eggs and fish are local products. The country

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<sup>285</sup> Michael Vickery, *Canberra Times*, 22 October 1981.

<sup>286</sup> In the real old days, before the modern highway was built, the normal route was by river steamer up the Mekong from Saigon to Phnom Penh, and then all the way to Angkor across the Tonle Sap by boat, taking three days, including a 24-hour stop in Phnom Penh. See J. Commaile, *Guide aux ruines d'Angkor*, Paris, Librairie Hachette et Cie, 1912, pp. 1-4.

has been feeding itself and its already overgrown capital, and has so far given the lie to the annual predictions of famine which are spread abroad by certain media.

Little coffee shops and restaurants, some surprisingly good, abound and provide a wide choice of Khmer, Vietnamese, Chinese, and Western food, with which one can drink the seemingly unlimited supply of bottled Vietnamese, or tinned Heineken, beer.

Both in these establishments and in the innumerable small markets which have sprung up in every section of the city the careless display and consumption of food shows no concern for the serious rice shortage which is projected for 1982. Indeed, given such projections, reasonably based on drought in the west and floods in the east, one would expect some system of rationing.

The footpaths too are lined with all kinds of small tradesmen – bicycle, tyre, and radio repairmen, photographers, barbers, tailors, and the ubiquitous old women selling petrol, obviously obtained illegally, in whisky bottles. Since there is as yet no privileged class which would normally be the beneficiaries of these service occupations, the population seem to be essentially trading with each other, “taking in one another’s laundry”, as one foreign aid official put it.

There is much movement, on foot, by bicycle and motorcycle, and in the ‘cyclo’, that Indochinese institution made of a passenger seat attached either before or behind a bicycle or motorcycle frame. Just as before the ‘cyclos’ are owned, not by their operators, but by fleet proprietors who rent them out at 20 *riel* a day, above which the driver hopes to make at least a 10-*riel* surplus for his livelihood. There are, however, few cars. Phnom Penh may be nearly as bustling as before, but at a lower level of personal wealth.

The first impression is thus of a newly burgeoning healthy urban life after its devastation in 1975-79. It is soon clear, however, that very few of the present population are of the pre-war 600,000. Most of those people either perished or have fled abroad since 1979. Phnom Penh has been resettled by former villagers who have rushed into the city and squatted in the new freedom of the past two years.

They live in flats and shop house with their chickens and pigs, cook in the streets, and try to make an urban life for themselves by petty trade, essentially with one another. Phnom Penh has thus already become the non-productive, consumer city which it was before, although on a much less lavish scale, but with the same inherent dangers for national development, or more accurately at present, national recovery.

Water, light, and sewerage services have not yet been restored to a capacity sufficient for the new population, and although in most parts of the city water cannot be pumped above the ground floor, the upper stories are inhabited by people as careless of rubbish and sewage disposal as they would have been in back-country villages. There is a real danger that the inevitable wear and tear of such disordered urban village life may outstrip the capacities of the new



administration to repair the damage done before 1979 and restore the city to a semblance of its former self.

It will not be possible in the future to blame every malfunction or damage on 'Pol Pot'. The evils of the regime associated with the name were real enough, but they did not include a great deal of physical damage to the city of Phnom Penh. After the evacuation of the population in 1975, masonry buildings not put into use by the new regime were closed off, often with their contents intact to be recovered by the few surviving owners who returned in 1979. Many old wooden buildings were marked for removal, but they still remain in outlying sectors and some even in the center of the city.

Although it is impossible to prove, it is likely that Phnom Penh has suffered more physical deterioration since 1979 than in the Pol Pot years, first of all from the rapid, uncontrolled resettling by hundreds of thousands of people accustomed to making do in austere rural conditions. The new settlers in the disorganized months of early 1979 tore window and door frames out of public buildings, including temples, for firewood or house construction, leaving the gaping holes and gutted interiors which deface much of the city today.

They were also responsible for much of the damage to libraries, in search of paper to wrap goods in the market stalls they were erecting and of books to sell in them.<sup>287</sup>

All of this may have been unavoidable. After the oppression of 1975-79 a period of anarchic freedom may have been socially and politically necessary. Because of the freedom permitted, Phnom Penh is active and cheerful again, and its people are healthy and smiling as before, but as a city it is still decaying, and the new administration seems unable, or unwilling, to risk taking the social disciplinary measures which would be necessary to arrest the decay.

### Communists are scarce in today's Kampuchea (1981)<sup>288</sup>

The present Kampuchea Government has generally been termed the 'Heng Samrin regime' in the West, and its leading personnel have been characterized as unknowns who owe their positions only to Viet Nam.

If 'unknowns', they are in a long tradition with respect to the outside world. But in their struggle they have been no more dependent on Viet Nam than Lon Nol was on the United States and its South-East Asian client-regimes.

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<sup>287</sup> Evidence to support this assertion has accumulated since 1981 until one European research specialist is of the opinion that no libraries in Phnom Penh suffered damage before 1979. See Olivier de Bernon, "À propos du retour des bakous dans le palais royal de Phnom Penh", in *École Française d'Extrême-Orient, Études thématiques 6, Renouveaux religieux en Asie*, Textes réunis par Catherine Clémentin-Ojha, Paris, 1997, p. 44, note 33. In particular, the tale of the National Library turned into a pigpen has been revealed as untrue. See also below, note 386.

<sup>288</sup> Michael Vickery, *Canberra Times*, 26 October 1981.

The top level of leadership consists of a small group of communists who fought against the French in the 1940s and 50s in close co-operation with Viet Nam. When peace came to Indo-China in 1954 hundreds of those first Khmer revolutionaries went to Viet Nam for study and training, intending to return in 1956 after the free elections, guaranteed by the Geneva accords, gave them, or so they expected, a position of strength in a newly constituted Government. The communists who did not go to Viet Nam formed a legal organization within the country, working for their goals by political methods rather than armed struggle.

But the Cambodian Right scored an overwhelming victory in the 1955 elections and the Sihanouk Government decimated the internal party organization, which was eventually captured by a group of relative newcomers led by Saloth Sar, to become known as Pol Pot, and Ieng Sary.<sup>289</sup>

Those who had gone to Viet Nam could not return until war broke out in 1970, and they then discovered that they were considered dangerous enemies by the Pol Pot faction, which over the next few years was responsible for the deaths of most of them. The survivors are the more perspicacious who realized their danger before 1975 and escaped to Vietnam, to return only in 1979.

There are also in the Heng Samrin administration a few members of the post-1954 internal communist organization who escaped both Sihanouk and Pol Pot, as well as a number of younger revolutionaries who began their political careers after 1954 and in the Pol Pot organization, but who rejected it before 1979.

Pen Sovann, for example, and Lay Samun, respectively the party secretary and the governor of Battambang province, represent the returnees from Viet Nam, while Heng Samrin himself and Mat Ly, Vice-Minister of Agriculture, are of the group who stayed behind in 1954.<sup>290</sup>

Ouk Bun Chhoeun, Minister of Justice, joined the Pol Pot-dominated party in the 60s and apparently served that organization loyally until open warfare broke out between the central Government and the eastern zone in 1978.

Of whatever group, the total number of genuine communists is extremely small. There may be about 40 in Phnom Penh; in some of the provinces, such as Battambang and Siemreap, the local party chief who is also provincial governor,

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<sup>289</sup> For detailed treatment of these historical details see Vickery, "Looking Back"; Kiernan, *How Pol Pot*; Chandler, *Tragedy*.

[(Added 2008) It is now known that Ieng Sary was not so important as believed by foreign observers in the 1980s. He was never 'Number 2', a position held by Nuon Chea.]

<sup>290</sup> When this was first published Pen Sovann was Prime Minister and First Secretary of the Party, as well as Army chief. At the end of 1981 he was suddenly removed and sent to Viet Nam where he remained under arrest until 1990. He returned to Cambodia in 1992, but had no political role until the 1998 election for which he formed a political party, but without electoral success. Mat Ly, and his father, were among the Cham who supported the communist revolution from before 1975.

may be the only communist, and there is no party organization below provincial level.

Below the topmost layer the administration is staffed mainly by former officials, technicians and intellectuals of the Sihanouk and Lon Nol eras who were considered enemies by Pol Pot, demoted to poor peasant status, and were one of the groups most in danger of execution.<sup>291</sup>

Such people were often in opposition to the Sihanouk and Lon Nol policies, and many were close associates of the intellectuals who joined the revolution in the 60s and 70s. However, they are probably unsympathetic to socialism, and before 1975 generally hoped for some kind of liberal regime run – in contrast to the Sihanouk and Lon Nol Governments – on honest, democratic lines in which they could continue to enjoy the comfortable bourgeois status to which higher education and a government job opened the door.

As a whole, they were nationalistic, some the most virulent anti-Vietnamese chauvinists, and they are probably unsympathetic to the goals of the present regime. Those who remain to work honestly for it may hope by their presence and efforts to turn it away from its proclaimed goal of socialism.

The policy of the regime to make use of those people is not just an effort at national reconciliation, although that is also a real goal. The small number of communists require for the most elementary administrative tasks the co-operation of all competent people, of whatever political background.

Also, as most of the highest ranking, and a majority of the most competent, of the prewar technicians and administrators either disappeared during the Pol Pot period or have emigrated, the pool of those left to be integrated was shallow; many people are holding posts of a much higher rank than anything to which they might have aspired before 1975.

When Pol Pot was overthrown in 1979 the new authorities invited all pre-war intellectuals, technicians and administrators to return from the peasant co-operatives to which they had been consigned so that they could participate in rebuilding the country.

The call was met with mixed enthusiasm. What most of them wanted was a restoration of Sihanouk / Lon Nolism minus its corruption and inefficiencies, probably a utopian goal. Some refused to co-operate with socialism or with Viet Nam, and promptly used their freedom to head for the Thai border.

Others worked for the new regime for a while and then took the same road westward. Thus Kampuchea lost about half its surviving doctors, perhaps thousands of teachers and countless skilled administrators, technicians and other educated people.<sup>292</sup>

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<sup>291</sup> Research revealing this was by Stephen Heder in interviews on the Thai-Cambodian border, published in his *Kampuchean Occupation and Resistance*.

<sup>292</sup> To keep one detail in perspective, it should be noted that pre-war Cambodia at the end of the 1960s had around 500 medical doctors. According to a list being prepared by

Because flight was easy, those left probably intend to remain and work for the Government with reasonable loyalty, if not with real enthusiasm. Their decision may be patriotic-to rebuild their country-or pragmatic, a calculation of relative career advantages in Phnom Penh against the ever more precarious situation of refugees.

What cannot be foreseen is whether the inevitable tension between them and the communist hierarchy will be resolved in favor of an increasingly bourgeois order or whether, faced with Kampuchea's severe economic problems, the technocrats will be won over to socialism.

It may be worthwhile to bring the matter in the last paragraph up to date. Many technocrats worked loyally without ever becoming convinced of socialism, and throughout the 1980s bourgeois tendencies increased slowly until 1988, then explosively, encouraged from 1991 by the United Nations intervention. Now it would be difficult to find even a closet socialist, and Cambodia has fallen into the extreme unfettered capitalist mode of Thailand. See my *Cambodia: a Political Survey*, Phnom Penh, Funan Press, 2007.

### Kampuchea's markets are totally free and thrive on smuggling (1981)<sup>293</sup>

In the previous article I evoked the tensions inherent in the dual and contradictory types of background and experience of the members of the administration and government services.

If the present regime continues for a few more years without being disrupted by a new foreign intervention, it is unlikely that the probable desires of the former urban bourgeoisie to return to prewar ways will be realized.

Since the possibility of flight leading to resettlement abroad is ever more uncertain, they may be forced – simply to assure their careers – to prove their loyalty and efficiency by hard work; for in a few years a new generation of

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Cambodian doctors in the Khao-I-Dang refugee camp in the summer of 1980, around half were alive and outside the country in early 1980, most having left before the communist victory in 1975. If it is true, as Bannister and Johnson have written, that “during the Khmer Rouge period ... the health and survival chances of the Cambodian people were reduced to a primitive level devoid of modern medical inputs”, this was not just the fault of the Khmer Rouge.

Most backwoods Cambodians had always lived at a “primitive level devoid of modern medical inputs”, and by 1975 half of the doctors in the country had bugged out. It is not true that the medical deficiency was because, as Bannister and Johnson wrote, “the Pol Pot regime intentionally killed the doctors and pharmacists, laid waste the hospitals and clinics...”. See Judith Bannister and E. Paige Johnson, “After the Nightmare: the Population of Cambodia”, in *Genocide and Democracy in Cambodia*, edited by Ben Kiernan, New Haven, Yale, 1993, pp. 65-140 (p. 102).

<sup>293</sup> Michael Vickery, *Canberra Times*, 29 October 1981.

solidly indoctrinated and technically competent young people will be ready to enter service.

While waiting at Tan So'n Nhu't airport in Ho Chi Minh City to board the flight to Phnom Penh I got into conversation with the leader of a group of a dozen or so Khmer youngsters, boys and girls, in a uniform of white shirt or blouse with red scarf of a distinctive East European appearance. They were 'pioneers', and were on their way home after a month-long vacation trip to Hungary, which they had greatly enjoyed, in particular the spicy goulashes, which they found an acceptable substitute for Kampuchean food.

All were orphans, chosen two to a province, and they were one of many such groups who went every summer to all European socialist countries.

The children were healthy, obviously well fed, cheerful, voluble, and full of praise for the present 'socialist' regime of Kampuchea. Pol Pot, Lon Nol, and Sihanouk seemed for them to be nearly indistinguishable demons of the past.

One of them asked David Chandler, of Monash University, if everyone in Australia spoke Khmer, and he countered with the remark that all of the non-Khmer but Khmer-speaking residents of Australia were there in the airport. One girl then asked if Australia was a socialist country, and when Chandler said, "No, capitalist", she gasped in astonishment and asked, "Then how did you get out?"

It is no doubt that on children such as these the Government hopes to develop a loyal, efficient administrative structure, which it does not yet have. One of the legacies of Pol Pot is hundreds, or even thousands, of such children whose families are either dead or broken, for whom life today in Kampuchea is as day to night compared with what they have known previously, and for whom Hungary or the Soviet Union, friendly nations held up as models, must seem paradises.

The Government clearly appreciates this fund of potential human capital cut off from its roots, and the organization of orphanages, creches and day-care centres is superior to anything existing previously [*or since the international intervention in 1991-1993*]. Where in pre-1975 [*and post-UNTAC*] times homeless children would have [*and now again do*] become servants or ill-paid unskilled labour, they can now become the loyal armature of the new state, free of the traditional family or class ties which were so conducive to the nepotism and corruption which plagued old Cambodia.

According to the Minister for Industry, Keo Chenda, thousands of Khmer students are now abroad in the socialist countries, studying technical subjects, and the first crop of graduates is expected back in about four years, to be followed each year by new graduates until the country has the technical staff it requires.

Given their orphan-cum 'pioneer' upbringing, they will no doubt serve more loyally and efficiently than many pre-war graduates whose experiences in the

West often alienated them from Kampuchean realities, or inspired a taste for luxuries which neither they nor the country could afford.<sup>294</sup>

That, however, is in the future; and the problems of the present must still be solved without sufficient trained personnel, in a pragmatic, often ad hoc, manner. Parallel with the dual background of the present administrative class is the paradox that the regime is socialist in name but economically liberal in fact.

Nothing really 'socialist' has as yet been attempted. Markets seem to be totally free, with no restrictions except that they may not be located in the former central market places of the major towns, which are empty and have been set aside for future use by the State.

These new markets are abundantly supplied with local foodstuffs and handicrafts plus all sorts of consumer goods smuggled in from both Thailand and Viet Nam. The Government has set up no serious obstacles to the smuggling trade, which has been financed first of all by the export of hoarded gold and other valuables, but now also involves such Kampuchean products as dried fish, a delicacy prized in Thailand.

In the very first months after the end of the Pol Pot regime the free market might have been a way to rapidly supply basic goods which were in short supply, but since trade had to be financed by gold, little of which was in the hands of the peasants – 80 percent or more of the population – the market has come to be a channel of luxuries and more or less useless, if not noxious (uncontrolled medicines from Thailand) items to the city population who seem to be engaged in petty trading with one another.

Although the new *riel* currency, established in April, 1980, has been accepted by the population, and is used in the markets, the *riel* salaries paid by the Government are too low to permit much purchase on the market, and thus hoarded gold or silver are still the ultimate mediums of exchange.

In theory the market might be a way of attracting surplus food production in exchange for consumer goods for the peasants, obviating the need for the State to rely on foreign aid to feed its employees. But surpluses have so far been small, government employees could not buy their requirements on the unsubsidized market without higher salaries, and the peasants, especially those of the north-west and south-east, might just as well trade directly across the borders as through the Phnom Penh market.

Surplus food does come into Phnom Penh, as the well-stocked numerous small restaurants testify; but the prices indicate that most of it is not being consumed by people on salary, but by those with an income from trade.

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<sup>294</sup> In writing his *History of Cambodia*, Chandler seems to have allowed ideology (see pp. 535 ff. below) to obscure this 1981 experience, in the beginning of the PRK. In his fourth edition, p. 284, he writes that it was "children of PRK Cadres" who "were favored for scholarships to study overseas".

There is thus a danger of Phnom Penh regressing to the pre-war situation in which an urban trading community accumulated the country's surplus agricultural wealth to sell abroad, importing luxuries which most people, especially government employees, could not honestly afford, and leading to a downward spiral of corruption.

Some observers, seeing the lively Phnom Penh market through Western eyes, have found it a healthy development, and talk of Kampuchea recovering under capitalism, but this may be no more than ideological prejudice.

Previous Kampuchean experience shows that wealth thus accumulated will not be invested in productive activities, but will go for direct consumption and acquisition of luxuries, representing a steady drain of potential capital abroad and a glut of imported products which the country, at the present time, would be better off without.

At least one would expect the State to cream off some of the surplus through taxation, but aside from some exiguous market stall fees there is no taxation at all, and the most profitable activities, such as gold trading and the sale of imported medicines, being illegal, cannot be taxed.

When it is suggested that stricter licensing, heavier taxation, or the organization of the underemployed urban population into labour groups to perform such needed infrastructural tasks as restoring urban services or repairing roads, might be practicable ways of contributing to the State budget, officials throw up their hands in horror and evoke 'Pol Pot'.

Allegedly because of the excesses of his regime Kampuchean can no longer accept any form of discipline. There is admittedly a problem there, but in the refusal to deal with it in other than a laissez-faire manner, Kampuchean show that they are still, even under 'socialism', a 'soft country' as described years ago by Gunnar Myrdal in his *Asian Drama*.<sup>295</sup>

#### Postscript on Gunnar Myrdal (2010)

Myrdal's remarks are worth inserting here with some discussion. They were mainly based on his experience in India, and have proved to be both right and wrong – right in diagnosing the problem, but mistaken as to its etiology.

Myrdal began (pp. 65-66) by saying that Oriental Despotism will not return, even if democratic institutions evolve into something unlike the original democratic models. Governments now must strive for economic development, and successful development presupposes a high degree of popular acceptance of development goals.

"All effective governments, whether democratically based or authoritarian, must enforce some measure of social discipline through compulsion; but even an

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<sup>295</sup> Myrdal, Gunnar. *Asian Drama*. Pelican, 1968.

authoritarian regime cannot record major achievements unless it can somehow mobilize acceptance, participation and cooperation among the people". Thus popular participation, decentralization, and democratic planning are widely accepted as valuation; but "no country in the region has progressed very far toward its realization".

"These countries are all 'soft states', both in that policies decided on are often not enforced ... and in that the authorities, even when framing policies, are reluctant to place obligations on people". "This reluctance ... derives from the economic, social, and political structure of the South Asian countries as they have emerged under the impact of colonialism and the fight for independence".

It is "excused and, indeed, idealized". It is implied that policies should not require compulsion, and this is often held to be the difference from practice in Communist countries. "The abstention from compulsion has thus been permitted to masquerade as part of the modernization ideals".

There is an unwillingness among rulers to impose obligations, and by people to obey rules laid down by democratic procedures. The tendency is to use the carrot, not the stick; and the "level of social discipline is low compared with all Western countries – not to mention Communist countries" (p. 277).

Myrdal continued (p. 895), "The Paramount Dilemma of the 'Soft State'" is the "Low level of social discipline [which] is one of the most fundamental differences between the South Asian countries today and Western countries at the beginning of their industrialization. Pre-industrial European societies had widely ramifying and stratified systems of obligations defining ... duties of different categories of village inhabitants", roads, bridges, fires, police, etc.

There were similar systems in pre-colonial Asian villages, but the purpose was to preserve the status quo. The heaviest obligations were on the lowest classes. But in Europe these systems tended toward perfection, transformed from individual relationships to the community.

In South Asia colonialism led to the decay of the ancient village system, without creating a substitute, "though this was less true in Indonesia ... than in Burma and the Indian subcontinent".

Disobedience and non-cooperation were characteristic of liberation movements;<sup>296</sup> and are now characteristic of popular political movements and social behavior in Cambodia and Thailand.

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Among the articles I wrote in 1981, the following one requires the most comment today. All my optimistic projections proved wrong, and the pessimistic alternative possibilities have come true, particularly since the disruption caused by the UNTAC international intervention in 1991-1993.

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<sup>296</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 65, 272, 895.



With the return of the royalist and bourgeois parties to equal participation in the central government, and the attendant anti-socialist propaganda encouraged by all influences from the West, the youth educated in Socialist Bloc universities were shunted aside and their degrees treated with contempt. Thus this group of high-quality human capital was unable to make the expected contribution to the country's revival, and their contemporaries who thronged in from France, Australia, the US, and the contra camps on the border were, with some notable exceptions, less competent, and eager to restore the negative traits of the old society.

### Supervised free elections could become a farce (1981)<sup>297</sup>

Among the resolutions passed by an international conference on Kampuchea in July was one calling for UN-supervised free elections to replace the present Government with one chosen through a more complete expression of the people's will.<sup>298</sup>

This demand has been repeated by every party opposed to the continued existence of the 'Heng Samrin regime'.

Because of the election fetishism prevalent in the West, that demand may seem reasonable, and many people unfamiliar with Kampuchea might see the reluctance of the Heng Samrin Government to accede to it as proof of their illegitimacy, particularly since the elections they held a few months ago did not fulfil all the conditions of free elections as generally understood.<sup>299</sup>

It must first be emphasized that the resolution does not call on the Heng Samrin Government to hold free elections, but in fact for that Government to remove itself from power and fade away so that the elections may be arranged by some other agency.

Since the Heng Samrin Government, as I indicated in my earlier articles, possesses as many attributes of legitimacy as any other government Kampuchea has had since 1970; and since its own election, even if defective by the standards of advanced democracies, stands favourable comparison with those of Pol Pot, Lon Nol, or Prince Sihanouk, the resolution is absurdly arrogant.

The powers responsible for it must realize that such an act, in the eyes of the Kampuchean public, unfamiliar with the niceties of Western democratic processes, would constitute an admission of impotence and lead to the loss of much of whatever popular support the regime now has.

Such an election could very well turn out to be a farce in any case, whatever good intentions the international supervisors might have. In saying this I am

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<sup>297</sup> Michael Vickery, *Canberra Time*, 2 November 1981.

<sup>298</sup> The conference was held in New York on 13-17 July, 1981. See Patrick Raszelenberg and Peter Schier, *The Cambodia Conflict: Search for a Settlement, 1979-1991 – An Analytical Chronology*, Hamburg, Institute for Asian Affairs, 1995, pp. 42-44.

<sup>299</sup> See Vickery, *Kampuchea, Politics, Economics and Society*, pp. 106-108, 111-113.

abstracting entirely from the likelihood that an international supervisory force which could ensure the disarming of the Pol Pot, Son Sann, and Sihanouk factions after their entry into the country, and the peaceful conduct of an election campaign would have to be as large as the Vietnamese army now alleged to be there.<sup>300</sup>

An internationally supervised election was once held in Kampuchea, and the results were such as to inspire great skepticism about the efficacy of such supervision and to underline the importance of control of the State machinery during elections.

Between the end of World War II and the granting of Kampuchean independence by the French in 1953 three relatively free elections were held in the country under the still-existing French protectorate. The result was a National Assembly dominated by the anti-French and anti-Sihanouk Democrat Party, which won handily all three times. Unable to survive the democratic process, Prince Sihanouk and the Cambodian Right resorted to extra-constitutional measures to gain political power, and between the last of the three elections (1951) and 1954 embryonic Kampuchean democracy was all but wiped out.

The Geneva accords of that year called for free elections, supervised by an international control commission, throughout Indo-China, with the participation of all political groups, regardless of their ideologies or activities during the independence struggles of the previous nine years.

Given these conditions it was expected that the Democrat Party would repeat its performance in the elections scheduled for 1955. Moreover, because of the Geneva accords, another more radical group, the communists, excluded from previous contests, could form a legal party and participate.

Because of the great success the latter had had in the countryside over the previous three to four years – controlling between a third and half of the peasant regions – it was anticipated that they would do well, perhaps along with the recently more radicalized Democrat Party, even dominating the National Assembly, and giving the country a left-wing government.

This would have spelt the end of the traditional Cambodian ruling class which had benefited from the modalities of the independence arrangements, perhaps even the monarchy itself. Extraordinary measures were taken to ensure that the Left collapsed in the elections. Methods included arrest and harassment of candidates, murder, threats to the populace, and on election day even destruction of ballot boxes.<sup>301</sup>

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<sup>300</sup> When an internationally-supervised election was finally held in 1993, the international military component was over 20,000, about the same as the Vietnamese military in the last two years before their withdrawal, and they were indeed unable to disarm the Cambodian factions, in particular the Khmer Rouge.

<sup>301</sup> For the events of 1951-1955 see Vickery, "Looking Back"; Ben Kiernan, *How Pol Pot*; and Chandler, *Tragedy*.

Prince Sihanouk's Sangkum Party won, rather took, all seats, with the international control commission certifying the results as 'correct'. Thereafter Prince Sihanouk did his best to subvert the intent of the Geneva accords as they affected his country.

His elections of 1958 and 1962 were virtual rubber-stamp affairs with opposition candidates either terrorized into withdrawal or arrested. In 1966 when free candidacy was permitted, threats and harassment, often unsuccessful, were still used, an enormous number of charges of electoral fraud were brought, and the resulting Assembly has since been judged as the least competent in the country's history.

For Kampuchea, internationally supervised elections have been discredited as a fair process; and any faction would favor them only if it was believed the supervision could be manipulated in their favor. 'Free elections' may not connote the same process as in the West, given the experience of 1966.

The last reasonably fair election was 30 years ago [1951], when a majority of the surviving Kampuchean population was still too young to be concerned. Elections both free and fair can only be assured by a supervisory apparatus, whether foreign or local, which will prevent powerful individuals from terrorizing or bribing the voters of each individual constituency.

Under present-day condition the proposed UN-supervised elections would be even less reliable than in 1955. The present Kampuchean Government, which contains the survivors of the groups cheated then, is unlikely to see any virtue at all in the proposal, which is in fact little more than a cover for introducing some other foreign hegemony in place of the Vietnamese.

To be honest, those who, as I do, prefer the present regime to any of its competitors, must recognize that they might not do very well in full and free elections. Most Kampucheans, born to a culture in which dependency on someone more powerful, both individually and nationally, is an unavoidable fact of life, are not concerned with hegemony. They would probably vote on the basis of the hegemony they preferred.

The remnants of the town bourgeoisie, wanting a new inflow of Western money, would probably vote for the Son Sann group. Peasant preferences are not at all clear, but their memories should be long enough to make them opposed to the return of Lon Nol elements or Sihanouk-era mandarins, although there might still be considerable support for Prince Sihanouk himself.

The results could very well be indecisive, with three or four mutually inimical factions forced to share power.

In Kampuchean conditions, such an outcome, however "democratic" would be a disaster for the country. However the Heng Samrin people might react, the record shows that the Pol Pot, Sihanouk, or Son Sann Factions, once admitted to the country with international support, would be unlikely to respect an indecisive result, or one in which the present regime retained any considerable measure of influence.

We could then expect to see Kampuchea, as a result of democracy, return to civil strife, with every faction relying on foreign support against their own countrymen.<sup>302</sup>

### Border diplomacy lesson given by Thailand (1981)<sup>303</sup>

On the morning of October 9, at Nong Chan on the Thai- Kampuchean border, the same place where in June, 1980, Vietnamese troops made an incursion into allegedly Thai territory, Thai military personnel returned the favor and penetrated into Kampuchean territory in order to eject several foreigners, including the representative of the United States Embassy's border-watching intelligence team.

The occasion was a ceremony marking the second anniversary of the founding of Son Sann's KPNLF on the date which coincidentally is also that of Lon Nol's proclamation of the Khmer Republic in 1970, and the KPNLF was eager to have foreign visitors and thorough international news coverage. The Thai move took everyone by surprise, since the KPNLF is the most respectable, even though not the strongest, of the three anti-Phnom Penh Khmer factions presumably enjoying ASEAN (including Thai) and US support.

There was intimation of what would happen in the afternoon of the 8th when a group of journalists, including NBC's Australian correspondent Neil Davis, was informed that Task Force 80, the special Thai military unit in charge of Khmer refugee camp and border operations, would refuse to grant any passes to Nong Chan. On the morning of the 9th the Task Force 80 office posted an unusual notice for journalists saying that in order to visit Nong Chan that day they would need a special pass from higher-level army headquarters at Watthana, some 20 kilometers back along the road to Bangkok.

Of course, since the restriction originally came from army headquarters, the Watthana office was not going to provide any special passes; and in spite of the intervention of one ASEAN embassy whose government had sent its own media personnel to cover the event, and the Thai Foreign Ministry, the journalists' requests were turned down.

Throughout all of this I had been feeling quite smug since I had already acquired a pass to Nong Chan, and I had had some sport with the journalists, suggesting they might like to buy the story and photographs of the celebrations from me.

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<sup>302</sup> As an essay in futurology, this piece, written in 1981, was not too bad. Like most other observers, I was wrong about the potential popularity of the Son Sann faction, which in the 1993 election split into BLDP which won 10 seats, and LDP, which won none; a couple of other parties proved weaker than I, and other observers, had expected; and I misjudged the strength of Sihanouk's appeal; but was right about the problems of an indecisive result. See below, pp. 393, and *Cambodia: a Political Survey*.

<sup>303</sup> Michael Vickery, *Canberra Times*, 9 November 1981.

All seemed to be going well at 9 AM when, along with a small group of aid agency personnel who normally work at Nong Chan, I went several hundred meters eastward from the Nong Chan land bridge distribution centre into Kampuchean territory, to the KPNLF military base. There we were welcomed by General Dien Del and other KPNLF officers and civilian administrators, some of whom I knew from a year ago when I worked in the area, and taken to the special visitors' seats just behind the speakers' podium.<sup>304</sup>

I unlimbered my camera and was just finishing a first roll of film when a Thai officer in paratrooper's uniform rushed up and asked to see my pass, which I confidently produced. He informed me, however, that the usual Nong Chan pass which I and all the other foreign visitors carried was not valid for the KPNLF ceremony at that particular place, and we were told firmly, although politely, to leave immediately.

The entire affair was a slap in the face for the KPNLF, as of course was intended. For them the ceremony was meant to be an important occasion, and they wanted foreign visitors and international press coverage. The reason for the Thai action was apparently Son Sann's reluctance to co-operate with the Pol Pot forces, who are the Thai favorites, and the Thai move represented crude pressure applied to change the KPNLF attitude. It was intended to show them who runs the show and that they cannot behave independently even if they are on Kampuchean territory.

The lesson could easily backfire, however, if it should lead the interested international public, or Kampuchean who might consider Son Sann to be an answer to the country's problems, to realize that his group, and all the other border factions, are no more independent of foreign influence and support than Heng Samrin is alleged to be. The KPNLF base, in contrast to the uncertain geographical position of the Nong Chan land bridge, has been located in clearly Kampuchean territory in order to give it some air of independence and to permit the Thais to deny that they give sanctuary to Kampuchean rebels.

When asked how they could justify obstructions placed in the way of journalists invited by a Kampuchean organization on Kampuchean soil, the Thai military authorities replied that they were in fact refusing passage across Thai territory leading to the Khmer base, presumably just as the Thai Government could refuse direct travel from Bangkok to Phnom Penh, even to people carrying Kampuchean visas. The refusal, though, underscores the fact that all supplies which reach the KPNLF, or other border groups, must pass over Thai territory which is under close control and supervision of Thai authorities.

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<sup>304</sup> During the summer of 1980 I worked for about three months for the International Refugee Committee supervising the schools which they supported in the Cambodian refugee camps, mainly in Khao-I-Dang, with its 150,000 population then the second-largest Khmer agglomeration in the world. See my "Refugee Politics: The Khmer Camp System in Thailand".

The Thai action would also seem to give the lie to recent press speculation (Alan Dawson, *Bangkok Post*, October 14, 1981) about ASEAN displeasure over Democratic Kampuchean (Pol Pot) arrogance in negotiations with the Son Sann and Sihanouk factions. Of course, ASEAN forms anything but a united front on the Kampuchea issue, and the Thai move on October 9 would seem to indicate that they find the Pol Pot group more congenial bedfellows, perhaps because they are seen as a more reliable defense force against the Vietnamese invasion menace which is constantly being conjured up in certain Thai milieus.

The implication of the October 9 affair will also inevitably raise the question of what the US means when it claims to be following the ASEAN lead on Kampuchea. Will they follow those ASEAN members who find the Pol Pot position unreasonable, or the hardlining Thais who want Son Sann to make further concessions? American experts know very well that Viet Nam has no intention of invading Thailand, and their choice of ASEAN tendency to support will indicate whether they genuinely desire a peaceful settlement in Indochina, or simply a rolling back of Vietnamese influence whatever the additional human and material cost to those crippled countries.

The above article surfaced again when Ben Kiernan used it in writing the annual Cambodia article in the Singapore-based Institute of Southeast Asian Studies yearbook, *Southeast Asian Affairs 1982*, "Kampuchea 1979-81, National Rehabilitation in the Eye of an International Storm". Kiernan, referring to my article, wished to say that "Thai military personnel ejected from Kampuchea Western observers who had been invited by the KPNLF ... ", but the editors changed 'from' to 'into', and refused to correct it even when Kiernan, after reading the proofs, objected.<sup>305</sup> Three years later then Secretary of State George Shultz made the US position very clear (see above, p. 45)

The next article, below, was written at the same time as the previous five articles, following my September 1981 trip to Cambodia. A version of it was published in Australia.

### Kampuchea's International Position (1981)<sup>306</sup>

On the grounds that Kampuchea is occupied by a foreign armed force and its government a puppet regime existing only because of the occupying power, an International Conference on Kampuchea in July 1981 (see above, pp. 44, 149) passed resolutions calling for the withdrawal of foreign troops and internationally supervised elections to replace the present government with one

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<sup>305</sup> See Kiernan's page 189, note 30 and associated text.

<sup>306</sup> A version of this article was published in *Vietnam Today* (Canberra), Number 19 (November Quarter 1981), pp. 9-11.

more freely chosen among the contending factions both inside and outside the country.

Of course, no one objects to the ideals of independence and freedom from foreign hegemony, but the resolutions passed on Kampuchea seem to be rather distantly removed from the realities of international life.

At no time in the past two hundred years, perhaps even longer, has Kampuchea been free from foreign interference. It was formally independent, nonaligned, and neutral only from 1954-1970 and during the Pol Pot years 1975-1979, and the increasing complexity of international life makes chances of such independence, non-alignment, and neutrality even less likely in the future than in the past, even supposing the good intentions of all concerned.

Since, however, few of the countries involved in the recent conference showed equal concern over the reimposition of French rule in Indochina after World War II, or over Thai and non-Communist Vietnamese efforts to destabilize the regime of Prince Sihanouk, or the extremely destructive American intervention between 1970 and 1975, it would seem that they are less disturbed by violations of the principle of independence than by a particular specific violation.

Thus the conference resolutions to the effect that Kampuchea should “remain non-aligned and neutral” and refuse to “be used against the security, sovereignty, and territorial integrity of other states, especially those sharing a common border with Kampuchea” appear as pious obfuscations.

The historical record shows that any undertaking by the regional states and superpowers most interested in the removal of the Vietnamese from Kampuchea to “refrain from all forms of interference, direct or indirect, in the internal affairs of Kampuchea” would probably not be worth the paper it was written on.

Well-known Thai political scientists have argued that Kampuchea should be returned to be buffer-state status it occupied in the early 19th century, which would mean a hegemony in which the Thai shared and, if the Khmers themselves did not wish to be buffers, some degree of foreign interference.

At a recent conference of Kampuchea scholars General Chana Samudvanija, a thirty-year Thai intriguer in Kampuchean affairs and ambassador to the Lon Nol regime, in response to a question said that Thailand would not accept a solution which involved removal of the Vietnamese troops yet left the Heng Samrin government in place, indicating a Thai insistence on much more than mere security of their borders.<sup>307</sup>

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<sup>307</sup> This was the conference in Chiang Mai 11-13 August 1981 and to which reference has been made above. On that occasion General Chana gave a large volume of documents relating to Thai intrigues on the Cambodian border to David Chandler and Ben Kiernan. The documents have been placed in the library of Monash University, and include photographs of American officers with Cambodian dissident figures.

Later a Foreign Ministry official told me that General Chana did not represent official Thai opinion; yet even former Foreign Minister Bhichai Rattakul, who has attacked the present Thai “policy of confrontation with the Indochinese States”, wants not only Vietnamese withdrawal, but new UN-supervised elections, implying that the present government must be replaced.

For the country most concerned, then, the Vietnamese presence in Kampuchea is not the only issue, and may even be something of a red herring; it is clear that the problem is not so much the overthrow of Pol Pot by an external force which is at issue, but that the force was socialist Viet Nam.

Had Thailand, in response to similar provocation, administered the lesson, set up its Kampucheans, the Khmer Serei, in Phnom Penh, and overseen the same progress which has occurred in the last two years, it would be hailed as a great victory for the Free World and its methods.

[The remainder of this article has been excised to avoid duplication. See the more detailed presentation in the Princeton letter following below.]

After the trip to Cambodia in 1981 that inspired the articles above, I spent the remainder of 1981 and most of 1982 at the Australian National University in Canberra finishing *Cambodia 1975-1982*. I also wrote a critique of a CIA report on population loss in Democratic Kampuchea, which demonstrated collusion between the CIA and the journalists John Barron and Anthony Paul in their *Murder of a Gentle Land*.<sup>308</sup>

During 12-14 November 1982 I was invited to an International Conference on Cambodia organized at Princeton University, where I presented the regional analysis of conditions in Democratic Kampuchea which appears in a book deriving from the 1981 Chiang Mai conference mentioned above, and in chapter three of *Cambodia 1975-1982*, neither of which had yet been published. I also wrote a paper on the Cambodian refugee camps in Thailand which was eventually published in a book edited by the Princeton conference organizers.<sup>309</sup>

I was dissatisfied with the way the discussion sections of the conference were organized, and the manner in which the organization prevented, or made it difficult, to bring up several matters for discussion. Therefore, following the conference I sent the following letter to all panelists, all those mentioned in its program as involved in its organization, and to selected members of the audience known to me as seriously interested in Cambodia.

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<sup>308</sup> Michael Vickery, “Democratic Kampuchea: CIA to the Rescue”; the CIA report was “Kampuchea: a Demographic Catastrophe”, National Foreign Assessment Center, May 1980.

<sup>309</sup> “Democratic Kampuchea, Themes and Variations”, in Chandler and Kiernan, *Revolution and its Aftermath*, pp. 99-135; “Refugee Politics: The Khmer Camp system in Thailand”. The very late (1987) publication of this book meant that much of my information about the refugee camps, new in 1982, had been superseded.



### Letter regarding Princeton Conference on Cambodia (1983)<sup>310</sup>

The purpose of this letter is to present, generally in terms of responses to matters raised in some of the panels, arguments for a point of view which I feel did not get enough attention at the conference – that the present government of Cambodia is the best of the available options and that support of the anti-Phnom Penh Coalition is malevolent.

Perhaps a useful point at which to begin is the presentation by Martin F. Herz during the final panel. Herz, as the self-appointed doyen of American Cambodia scholars, told us that because of his long experience with Cambodia he knows what the Cambodian people want, surely a relevant consideration. He says they want to be free, and under the present government they are not; that even if the Vietnamese and the PRK regime have made life a little bit better, they have destroyed ‘freedom’, and the Cambodians would prefer ‘freedom’ to a better life under Vietnamese hegemony.

Now, having begun my own contact with Cambodia in 1960, I may be the second oldest – in terms of involvement with that country – among the conference participants; and since Cambodia has been at the center of my academic and personal preoccupations ever since (residence 1960-64, frequent visits 1964-67, Ph.D. work on Southeast Asian history 1967-70, extended visits 1970-72, academic post teaching Southeast Asian history 1973-79, historical research 1979-present, work in Khmer refugee camps in 1980, visit to Cambodia 1981), I also have views about what the Cambodian people prefer.

To say simply that they want ‘freedom’ is both true and irrelevant. ‘Freedom’ means different things in different cultures and for different groups within a given culture; and without further specification talk of ‘freedom’ is meaningless [*by now, in 2008, the Bush-Cheney regime info-ganda has forever discredited that argument about ‘freedom’*].

In particular, ‘freedom’ versus de facto foreign domination may not even be an appropriate antithesis. The historical record shows that no Cambodian political faction for 200 years, perhaps longer, has chosen ‘freedom’ versus dependence on outside powers, with one exception – Democratic Kampuchea; and the preoccupation with that kind of freedom was one of the important factors leading DK down the horrible path it eventually followed.<sup>311</sup>

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<sup>310</sup> Michael Vickery, unpublished letter to panelists, organizers, and selected audience members of the *Princeton Conference On Cambodia*. Sent 28 January 1983.

<sup>311</sup> From the end of the 18th century Cambodia collapsed into factions relying on Thai or Vietnamese support to further their aims; then King Ang Duang, who presided over a buffer state under joint Thai-Vietnamese suzerainty, wanted French intervention even before the latter were ready for it; until 1953 Sihanouk, among Cambodian nationalists, had a constant credibility problem establishing his credentials as a fighter for independence; and the ‘Sihanoukist system’, after 1955, was unviable without dependence on foreign economic support for Cambodia and foreign political intervention in Southeast Asia. Democratic Kampuchea was of course the ‘Pol Pot Regime’.

Dependency at the national level on outside forces has become so much a part of the national psyche that it is not even an element in the calculation of 'freedom' for ordinary Cambodians.

During the 1970-75 war, Cambodians who worked loyally for Lon Nol, even while detesting his regime, justified their choice in the following terms: "we can be slaves of Viet Nam or slaves of the United States, and we prefer the latter" and certainly other Americans in Phnom Penh in those days must have heard their Cambodian friends ask plaintively, "Why doesn't the CIA do something?", i.e. to replace Lon Nol by a better leader.

The first statement expressed a belief that the Cambodian revolutionaries were Vietnamese puppets, something since proven false; and since the only Cambodian regime to insist fiercely on full national independence behaved so abominably, that policy may now have been discredited rather than seeming, as in the pre-1975 period, merely impractical.

Certainly at the individual level Herz's characterization of Cambodian desires is mistaken. Numerous foreign aid workers, journalists, and scholars who have visited the country since 1979 have fully documented, *pace* Herz, the general preference among the population for the present government over that represented by the DK remnants, or any coalition in which DK is important.

This preference for Vietnamese-backed amelioration of living conditions was apparent as early as January 1979 when the massive defection of the Cambodian population, including the relatively favored peasantry, allowed the Vietnamese forces to progress much faster than they had planned. As Timothy Carney pointed out in the first conference panel, they outran their logistics, clearly because they had expected much more popular support for DK than in fact existed.

The rapid fall of DK also surprised outside observers at the time. As Thai Supreme Commander General Saiyud Kerdphol recently said, no one had foreseen "the speed with which the Vietnamese troops drove across Kampuchea to the Thai border."<sup>312</sup> There can be no doubt that if 'freedom' means return of the DK leaders, or any coalition in which they are prominent, most Cambodians living within the country prefer the system now in place.

That is not to say that they would prefer it to some other kind of hegemony, and that may be where Herz's remarks were intended to lead. As his prescription for 'freedom', Herz called for greater American support for the 'resistance', that is the tripartite Coalition, with which the balance of forces, given outside support, could be redressed in favor of Sihanouk and Son Sann, to whom the DK

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<sup>312</sup> See pp. 200, 202 in the published version of Carney's conference paper, "The Heng Samrin Armed Forces and the Military Balance in Cambodia", in Ablin & Hood, editors, *The Cambodian Agony*, pp. 180-212. For General Sayud's remarks see *Nation Review* (newspaper, Bangkok), 7 December 1982, quoted in BBC, "Summary of World Broadcasts", FE/7204/A3/2, 9 December 1982.

forces would supposedly rally once the required outside support had enabled the Sihanouk and Son Sann groups to build up their strength.

Such is in fact the line expressed by those latter groups: if they received money and arms they could attract more soldiers, and if their forces then rose to a level equivalent to the Pol Pot group, most of the Pol Pot soldiery would defect to the other Coalition partners.

There is, however, a corollary to that argument which they sometimes express privately to foreign visitors to their border camps.

Gareth Porter, in his Panel I presentation, said that none of the concerned outside powers really believe that Sihanouk or Son Sann represent a viable third force. Neither do the leaders of those groups on the front lines. They are quite prepared to admit that even if their forces achieved maximum projected development, they would not be able, even in alliance with the DK group, to reconquer Cambodia. They are not even looking for a national popular uprising within the country against the present government and in support of the Coalition.

The displacement of the present Phnom Penh government, they say, can be accomplished only by foreign intervention, diplomatic or military, and the buildup of their own forces is thus for the purpose of inter-factional maneuvering, both now and in the future, after international pressure has reintroduced them to Cambodia [this is what happened in 1997. See pp. 501, ff.]

The third force, then, is no more independent of foreign support than the Heng Samrin-led PRK is alleged to be; and its internationally legitimized nucleus, which has nevertheless been rejected by the Cambodian population, has been cobbled together with leaders brought in from outside by foreign powers (Son San, In Tam, Dien Del, Buor Hell, etc.), and who having left Cambodia in 1975, or earlier, are now foreign creations even more than Heng Samrin.

Although it is possible that some Cambodians might prefer western hegemony with Son Sann or Sihanouk to the present situation, there is no way to determine the extent of such preference, and there is certainly ample spontaneous expression of opposition within the country to that third force so long as DK remains in the equation.

What about the half-million or so refugees who have voted with their feet and chosen 'freedom' over the PRK? As Zia Rizvi correctly stated in Panel VII, the refugee exodus in 1979 was prompted by a general fear of the unknown, not by persecution, which had ended with the overthrow of DK in January of that year, months before there was a large-scale movement to the border.

As Rizvi also noted, refugee situations take on significance when the movement is from socialist to capitalist areas, there being no chance for a socialist to socialist refugee movement (and, I would add, where the movement is from capitalist to capitalist countries, as from the Philippines to East Malaysia, or even from Thailand to the United States, movements numerically comparable to that out of Cambodia, they are disguised and the refugee aspect ignored).

Because of this, people who desired to leave Cambodia for whatever reasons (and their reasons have always been varied) have inevitably spoken of Communist or Vietnamese oppression. I have analyzed such stories in some detail in a forthcoming book and have treated the politics of the refugee camps in a paper for the Princeton conference.<sup>313</sup>

I will therefore only assert in the present context that in 1979-80 there was virtually no persecution of anyone but former DK cadres, and there was little starvation except among the DK remnants whose condition on reaching the Thai border was inaccurately generalized by the media to all refugees. The refugee situation was in part artificially created to discredit the PRK and weaken both it and Viet Nam; large numbers of those who chose to become refugees, and whose continued presence in the camps in Thailand is now seen as a serious problem by that country, made their choice because Khao I Dang, the most important camp, was available.

Even if, as Lionel Rosenblatt said in Panel VII, there was no authority for the UNHCR to feed people on the border (as opposed to bringing them across the border into camps), subsequent developments have shown that adequate food and medical care both can be, and have been, delivered to the border by other organizations. The arrival of refugees at the border in 1979-80, and the continued presence of many of them, in no way constitutes an argument against the PRK or in favor of support for the DK-Sihanouk-Son Sann Coalition.

There is in fact good evidence that many of the remaining refugees would now opt for the Vietnamese-sponsored ameliorated conditions of life within Cambodia if they were given a free and fair choice. The members of Panel VII, in their discussion of repatriation, relocation, and resettlement, did not address at all the problem of the Thai attitude toward those issues.

As I have described in my paper, Thai authorities have taken extremely contradictory positions, insisting on different occasions on their desire to be rid of the refugees, and yet opposing UNHCR efforts to organize repatriation back into Cambodia – a situation which well illustrates the political manipulations permeating the Cambodian refugee operations from their inception.

Furthermore, if Rizvi is correct in his estimate of 150,000 refugees who have returned on their own to Cambodia from the border, where they have a freer choice than in the camps within Thailand, that is a significant number of people who have voted with their feet against the Herzian ‘freedom’ of the Son Sann-Sihanouk milieu in favor of the improved living conditions of Cambodia. And since the PRK authorities permit the UNHCR to monitor such returnees, while the latter apparently have no fear of declaring their presence to be thus

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<sup>313</sup> This note has been entirely rewritten to bring the bibliographic details up to date. The book is *Cambodia 1975-1982*. The Princeton conference paper is “Refugee Politics: The Khmer Camp System in Thailand”, subsequently published in Ablin & Hood, *The Cambodian Agony*.

monitored, the circumstances argue well for an important degree of normal freedom and absence of political persecution.

The Thai position toward the PRK was presented and explained by Ambassador Kasemsri Birabhongse in the final panel; he qualified as ‘simplistic’ suggestions that the Vietnamese riposte against DK attacks had been appropriate and that recognition of the PRK would solve the outstanding problems.

He said the Vietnamese riposte went far beyond an appropriate response, that Thailand had been equally threatened by Pol Pot’s border atrocities but had showed restraint, that the overthrow of a legitimate government cannot be recognized (aggression should not be rewarded), and that the present Cambodian government with its Vietnamese military presence is a threat to Thailand. He also said that Cambodia should serve as a neutral buffer between Thailand and Viet Nam.

Now what constitutes ‘appropriate response’ is inevitably to some extent a subjective matter, but we must note that in addition to the thousands of deaths which DK incursions caused on the Vietnamese border, it is now known that the DK soldiery were encouraged to believe that their goal was the reconquest of the ‘lost’ Khmer provinces in southern Vietnam, leading to a legitimate inference that such was DK policy, even if no official document which would prove it has been discovered. Surely the overthrow of a government which is massively attacking a state’s borders and plotting significant territorial conquest is not entirely inappropriate.

*Pace* Ambassador Kasemsri, there was no comparison between DK attacks on Viet Nam and the minor incursions registered along the Thai border, the worst of which, causing 30 deaths, may not even have been what it had at first seemed.

On that occasion, on 28 January 1977, the victims were reportedly killed during an unprovoked DK incursion. There were, however, suspicious circumstances, a journalist who pointed them out found himself expelled from Thailand, and several months later three Thais were executed and others imprisoned for involvement in provoking the incident.<sup>314</sup>

As for threats to Thai security, either from the present Vietnamese presence in Cambodia or from DK incursions during 1975-79, interesting but generally ignored comments have on occasion emanated from high Thai military personalities.

Last December the Supreme Commander, Gen. Saiyud Kerdphol, commenting on Viet Nam’s unexpectedly rapid campaign against DK in 1978-79 said, “for the first time in 40 years, we had a powerful enemy (Vietnamese

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<sup>314</sup> See Norman Peagam, *FEER*, 11 February 1977, pp. 8-10; and *FEER* 4 March 1977, pp. 9-10. Admittedly his report on that incident was not cited by the Thai authorities as the reason for his expulsion, but it is nevertheless reasonable to infer a connection. The most thorough treatment of the border incident is in ‘Larry Palmer’ [Stephen Heder], “Thailand’s Kampuchea Incidents”, *News From Kampuchea*, I, 4 (Oct. 1977), 1-31.

forces) poised on our doorsteps ... no longer could we afford to focus solely on domestic security considerations.”<sup>315</sup> So much for a DK threat to which Thailand, in contrast to Viet Nam, showed restraint.

Only a month earlier Gen. Saiyud had also said that “Viet Nam is incapable of mounting a major attack against Thailand”, implying thus that the undoubtedly “powerful enemy poised on our doorstep” was not there for the purpose of invading Thailand and was not a major threat to Thai security.<sup>316</sup>

The same message was conveyed by a Thai officer responsible for border security, the commander of the 9th Army Division in charge of the border in Prachinburi province who said that because of casualties and illness in their struggles with the DK forces, the Vietnamese had retreated about 10 km from the border where they lacked the capacity to strike into Thai territory.<sup>317</sup>

Another relevant remark in Gen. Saiyud’s November statement was that even if the Vietnamese engaged in “hot pursuit” into Thai territory, it “would not be on the scale of that mounted by Vietnamese forces ... over two years ago”.<sup>318</sup> As I have described in my conference paper, the scope of that attack, in contrast to subsequent propaganda about it, was very modest, and anything on a lesser scale could hardly amount to more than small cross-border spillovers, perhaps accidental.

Even at the time, in 1980, in the midst of hysteria generated by certain journalists and politicians, Gen. Saiyud tried to interject a note of calm: “it would take a 10-year Vietnamese buildup to create a serious invasion for conquest of Thailand”.<sup>319</sup>

There is thus an important section of Thai official opinion which does not see the Vietnamese troops in Cambodia as major threat to Thai security any more than the DK forces appeared to them as a threat during 1975-79; and if the undoubtedly very large Vietnamese military force in Cambodia is not there to threaten Thailand, it must be there, as the Vietnamese claim, and as the Cambodian population generally accepts, to protect the country from ‘Pol Pot’, whose forces, since 1979, have been rebuilt from defeat by Thai, Chinese, and American collusion.

The rationale for such support of the remnants of a ‘regime worse than Hitler’s’ has been, as Ambassador Kasemsri said, international legality,

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<sup>315</sup> *Nation Review* (Bangkok), 7 December 1982, quoted in BBC, “Summary of World Broadcasts”, FE/7204/A3/2, 9 December 1982.

<sup>316</sup> Quotations respectively from *Bangkok Post*, 4 November 1982, and *Nation Review*, 7 December 1982.

<sup>317</sup> Major General Somkid Changpayuha, *Bangkok Post*, 12 July 1982, p.2.

<sup>318</sup> *Bangkok Post*, 4 November 1982.

<sup>319</sup> *Washington Post*, 5 July 1980; quoted in Hans H. Indorf and Astri Suhrke, “Indochina: the Nemesis of ASEAN?”, *Southeast Asian Affairs 1981* (Singapore), p. 67. For the 1980 incursion see above, Mak Mun, pp. 117.

represented since June 1982 by the anti-communist [*sic!*] coalition, within which the Pol Pot group is in theory meant to be dissolved.<sup>320</sup>

Now the international legal ramifications are undoubtedly complex, and I do not pretend to be qualified to argue them, but certain elements of the situation deserve attention.

Following their victory in 1975 the Cambodian revolutionaries, already enjoying Chinese support, came to be recognized as Cambodia's legal government, Democratic Kampuchea, by a number of nations, including Thailand, but not the United States, where calls for their forcible overthrow were heard even in usually responsible quarters.<sup>321</sup>

The overthrow of the earlier internationally recognized Khmer Republic of Lon Nol was thus acceptable to much of the world, and one difference from the change in 1979 was that by 1975 the Cambodian revolutionaries were an indigenous force, not requiring foreign manpower for support.

Some might wish to argue that DK derived its legitimacy from Sihanouk, but the latter was removed in due legal form by his own government, and Lon Nol's Khmer Republic could claim to continue the legitimacy of Sihanouk's Kingdom of Cambodia, as was recognized by such diverse powers as the United States, the Soviet Union, and Thailand. Even China hesitated, and showed signs of willingness to recognize Lon Nol had he maintained Sihanouk's neutrality toward the conflict in Viet Nam.

Thus the presence of Sihanouk, and his former minister Son Sann, in the Coalition cannot add legitimacy to the DK remnants, whose position when in power was analogous to the Heng Samrin faction today, both groups having overthrown their predecessors by armed force, and the second of which in 1979, unlike the original DK of 1975, had already formed an important faction within the regime which it replaced.

Within the limits of these considerations the PRK government has a claim to legitimacy equal to that of DK in 1975, and as the victors in a civil war nearly equal to that of the DK remnants today. The sole important difference in their situations is that the PRK victory was gained with massive foreign armed support, which has permitted the charge that DK was the victim of foreign aggression and the PRK nothing more than a puppet regime.

Although the PRK nucleus was an indigenous faction within DK, and from May 1978 was engaged in civil conflict, they admittedly needed the Vietnamese

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<sup>320</sup> A coalition in which the dominant party was the leadership of former Democratic Kampuchea was called 'anti-communist'. Or, perhaps Ambassador Kasemsri held views similar to those which I put forth two years later in chapter 5 of *Cambodia 1975-1982*, arguing that DK policies were not Marxist-Leninist.

<sup>321</sup> Although 'Democratic Kampuchea' did not become official until 1976, I am using it here for the entire period 17 April 1975 to the end of the 'Pol Pot Regime' in January 1979.

support to win. The Pol Pot-led communists before them, however, had also needed and accepted Vietnamese and Chinese aid in their revolution against the Khmer Republic, and the latter had been dependent on American, Thai, and Republic of Viet Nam (Saigon) aid to maintain itself after overthrowing the legally constituted government of Sihanouk.

The revolutionaries of 1970-71 might very well have been destroyed without the Vietnamese support which they received in the early phases of their war, just as those in revolt in 1978-79 could not have succeeded without the aid which Viet Nam also provided to them.

The formal position of the PRK, then, is that of a rebel group which succeeded with massive foreign aid, as the Lon Nol regime tried to do but failed, and as the original Cambodian communist revolutionaries did, although in the end with less aid from foreign powers.

In spite of the foreign element in the PRK victory, the latter have increasingly taken on the appearance of a genuinely indigenous government which accepts the need for foreign military assistance for its national defense, a position toward which neither Thailand nor the United States, among its enemies, can convincingly adopt a high moral tone.

The members of the anti-Phnom Penh Coalition, on the other hand, not only required massive foreign aid to exist after 1979, but are still totally dependent on it. The DK remnants arrived virtually destroyed and starving at the Thai border and have been rehabilitated as part of the refugee operations, while the Son Sann and Sihanouk groups could never have developed at all without foreign aid. They are all even more dependent on foreign support than the PRK, and have little prospect of gaining power without foreign armed intervention, whether overt or disguised as an international supervisory force.

What the foreign supporters of the Coalition are trying to do, then, is to bring into Cambodia factions which could not on their own have become strong enough to enter the country and which probably have less popularity than the PRK government. If only the Pol Pot group are notorious, the Son Sann and Sihanouk groups also lack credibility.

I have discussed Sihanoukism in a recent publication; the reasons why Sihanouk's overthrow in 1970 was welcomed by all who are now active in Pol Pot's, Heng Samrin's, and Son Sann's forces are still operative. They were epitomized in November 1982 when the courtiers who run Sihanouk's operations in Bangkok, in a caper like the scandals which rocked Cambodia in the 1960's, attempted to sell forest timber rights within Cambodia to a private Thai firm – a move which finally had to be denounced both by Sihanouk and the Thai authorities.<sup>322</sup>

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<sup>322</sup> Vickery, "Looking Back". See *Nation Review* and *Bangkok Post*, 27 November 1982, p.1; *Asian Wall Street Journal*, 29 November 1982, p.1; *Bangkok Post*, 11 December 1982, p.3.



Half the present Cambodian population is too young to have a clear memory of Sihanouk as their leader; and when he visited the largest Cambodian refugee center in Thailand last July 7 [1982], I was able to observe that it required several hours of exhortation by camp authorities to get out a respectable crowd to greet him.<sup>323</sup>

Son Sann's officials in the field quite openly despise the Sihanoukists, but the KPRLF itself, although including honorable and professionally competent figures, is ridden with factional strife and its more corrupt elements seem to have too powerful backing to be removed with impunity.<sup>324</sup>

The international opposition to the PRK is not in order to make Cambodia genuinely free, independent, neutral, and non-aligned, but to change its alignment, to substitute one foreign hegemony for another. The buffer status evoked by Ambassador Kasemsri would mean a hegemony in which Thailand shared, as it did during the existence of an earlier Cambodian buffer state in the 19th century, and if the Cambodians themselves did not wish to constitute a buffer, some degree of foreign interference would be required now as then.

The only reasonable argument which could be pressed for a change of regime in Cambodia would be that a different hegemony would be better for the Cambodians, which, given the PRK record so far, would be a very difficult case to make.

[The present regime in Phnom Penh is by far the most benign the country has had since at least 1970, possibly even since some time before that date, and the Vietnamese troops there behave with exemplary correctness. The poverty of the Pol Pot-Son Sann-Sihanouk case is emphasized by the extremely dishonest anti-Vietnamese stories which they feel forced to propagate in order to justify their struggle.

As a substitute for the very benign hegemony and Vietnamese military protection which now prevails, the international conference resolutions are in fact asking for the return of (1) the Pol Pot forces whose record requires no comment, and (2) remnants of the Lon Nol army of scarcely better repute, and in support of which it is likely that we should eventually see (3) Thai troops, whom the most casual perusal of the *Bangkok Post* will show incapable of proper behavior even within their own country, (4) American military advisers, about whom the less is said the better, or (5) Chinese advisers, who, even if their behavior is exemplary, are tainted by the fact of having advised Pol Pot during his worst years.]<sup>325</sup>

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<sup>323</sup> See the well-balanced report by Alan Dawson and Supradit Kanwanich in *Bangkok Post*, 8 July 1982, p. 7.

<sup>324</sup> *FEER* 5 November, p. 13.

<sup>325</sup> These final paragraphs were added contemporaneously, but after the letter had been sent.

## Elizabeth Becker and Nayan Chanda

Among the participants of the Princeton conference was former US Ambassador to Cambodia Emory Swank, who later, early in 1983, published a very sympathetic account of the Peoples Republic of Kampuchea based on a trip which he had made there.<sup>326</sup> Such sympathy was extremely unusual among mainstream writers, and Swank's effort was not appreciated within his own milieu.

Another participant at Princeton was journalist Elizabeth Becker, who early the following year traveled to Cambodia and then in a series of articles in the *Washington Post* (28 February and 1 March 1983) offered a picture diametrically opposed to that of Swank.<sup>327</sup> Indeed, it was difficult to imagine that they were both writing about the same place at about the same time. I found her articles objectionable, and offered a critique, which the *Post*, in the manner of *NYRB* in the Shawcross case, did not acknowledge. Footnotes have been added later.

### A Cycle of Journalistic Poverty (1983)<sup>328</sup>

Even if Cambodia by the very nature of its problems is so complex that any statement about it at all may be controversial, Elizabeth Becker's "Cycle of Poverty" and subsequent articles belong on an editorial page, and cannot be accepted as straight news to be used as information to help the public form a reasoned opinion.

The title "Cycle of Poverty" is itself tendentious, and is not supported by the content, even if it is clear that Becker wishes to argue that Cambodia is caught in such a cycle. The subtitle, emphasizing "warfare and ban on aid" as 2 of 3 main causes for Cambodia's current difficulties, is much more honest, and is apparently to be credited to the *Post*, not to Becker, since it is in contrast with the tone and content of her articles.

The latter contain virtually no factual information not already published in material which is presumably in files consulted by Becker before her trip, and even the rumors she reproduces could have been picked up outside Cambodia; for example, in a background briefing from the chief of the Cambodia desk at the State Department. In their factual and allegedly factual content, then, the Cambodia articles could have been written without visiting Cambodia.

It is only in their slant that they present something new in comparison to most of the reports by journalists, scholars and other competent observers (such as former US Ambassador to Cambodia Emory Swank), over the past 2 years. Indeed, for sheer acceptance of unsubstantiated rumor and tendentious

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<sup>326</sup> *FEER* 17 March 1983, pp. 34-35.

<sup>327</sup> At Princeton, Becker appeared on Panel I, with a presentation entitled, "Current Political History in Perspective".

<sup>328</sup> Michael Vickery, unpublished submission to the *Washington Post*, 31 March 1983.

interpretation, they have hardly been matched in writing on Cambodia since 1979.

Before dealing directly with Becker's material, it is essential, given its editorial character, to recall certain background details of Cambodia's history since 1975, and the conventional view of those developments in the West.

Pol Pot's Democratic Kampuchea (DK) was castigated as the 'worst regime since Hitler's' for its atrocities, starting with the evacuation of urban areas and the destruction of all that was considered 'normal', civilized, bourgeois life.

When the Salvation Front, forerunner of the present Peoples Republic of Kampuchea (PRK) government, was formed in December 1978, it promised to rectify those atrocities and reestablish towns with their normal infrastructure of administration, schools, medical facilities, free choice of occupation, freedom of movement, and, with respect to religion, "liberty of conscience".

Thus the Salvation Front was promising to do what all western critics of DK had said should be done. The only serious difference between the SF program and western preference was the insistence that Cambodia should progress toward socialism rather than return to the Sihanouk-Lon Nol era 'capitalism' which the enemies of DK would have preferred.

Those promises have in very large measure been kept, *pace* Becker's assertions that recovery has ended, that the PRK has failed to "keep its word and rebuild the country as well as give them the basic freedoms outlawed under Pol Pot", and that Cambodians are well behind other Southeast Asian villagers who can "take for granted: clean water, a measure of sanitation ... and a dependable supply of affordable food" [*see further below*].

Throughout 1979-81 nearly complete freedom of movement was tolerated even if not officially authorized. This permitted both a rapid repopulation of urban areas and a large-scale movement toward the Thai border in which over half Cambodia's surviving doctors and other thousands of teachers, technicians and administrators whom the country badly needed were siphoned off into the refugee camp system, with the effect of further destabilizing the already fragile society.

Fear of starvation in 1979 was replaced by belief that the country might be food self-sufficient in 1981, a projection belied by natural calamities. Since then production has picked up, and although some food aid is still needed, the situation is steadily improving.

A conventional administration, centered in towns, has been built up; schools, as Becker wrote, were rapidly established, as were medical facilities, to the extent permitted by available personnel and supplies. To staff the new services, competent survivors of whatever political background – Sihanoukist, Lon Nol Republican, or reformed DK cadres – were invited to take up employment with the new government. Those who cooperated loyally, even if they had never been pro-revolutionary in the past, have often found themselves promoted to positions far higher than what they could have expected under Sihanouk or Lon Nol.

Tens of thousands of other people have been allowed to freely trade and enrich themselves, if possible, in the towns, which even if contrary to the professed socialism of the regime, is something which the capitalist West, along with the surviving apolitical populace, should approve.

It is obvious that this freedom has had some deleterious effects, as Becker noted, but that is not a problem on which the socialism, or the Vietnamese backing, of the PRK may be attacked. I agree that it is unpleasant to see traders “growing fat and wealthy” while officials are underpaid and children undernourished, but would Becker support the obvious solution: confiscation or high taxation of those traders, abolition of free trade, socialized markets? Becker seems at some points to damn them whatever they do.

It is true that claims to ownership of land and buildings have not always been recognized, but in Phnom Penh, at least, most former property owners are dead or have fled abroad, and the records to substantiate property claims have probably been destroyed.

If private real estate ownership were recognized, it would mean that those “fat and wealthy” traders who have squatted in Phnom Penh’s villas and apartments would be getting even fatter and wealthier on real estate speculation, something of which I think even Becker would disapprove in Cambodia’s present situation.<sup>329</sup> It would be interesting to know precisely where Becker obtained her information on this point.

I have met people who were able to return to their old homes after the overthrow of DK. In September 1981, in Battambang, on a visit to the provincial cadastral office and after listening to their new plans to re-survey a certain area for uniform-sized single-family housing plots, I asked about the status of a piece of land in the municipal area of Battambang owned by my wife and the deed to which was in my possession. The answer was that such claims to ownership could be given consideration, depending on the size of the plot, its location, and the presence of the owner in Cambodia.

Certain areas had been appropriated for state use, and claims to previously owned property could not exceed the size designated for housing units in the government’s new scheme; but I was not told that “claims of previous ownership have no validity”. In any case it must not be forgotten that the PRK promised development toward socialism, not return to full private ownership.

One of Becker’s very dubious assertions about PRK failures is that “the authorities have suppressed Buddhism”, something contrary to the observation of any other visitor of whom I have heard. First of all, to keep the record straight, the Salvation Front promised, not “to allow the Buddhists to form their own organization” [Becker’s words], but “liberty of conscience”. Even the refugees

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<sup>329</sup> This was precisely what happened when urban property was privatized and given free to occupants in 1988-89.

who streamed to the Thai border in 1979-80, and who were *ipso facto* anti-regime, were quite willing to report on the revival of religious life with reopened temples, reordained monks, and freedom for the populace to worship.

The same was clear during my visit to Phnom Penh, Battambang, and Siemreap in the autumn of 1981, when I saw many functioning temples and others being cleaned up preparatory to opening. Those in operation were not locked “except for the few most important religious holidays” [Becker’s words]. Suppression of religion now, since 1981, would represent a reversal of the policy of 1979-81, and if true it deserves attention, but Becker’s treatment of the issue is inadequate and propagandistic.

Becker may well have picked up complaints from people who are dissatisfied that everything did not immediately revert to pre-1970 conditions, but that does not justify her assertions of religious suppression, nor, in itself, criticism of the PRK.

If the authorities are attempting to integrate the religious structure with the political system they are only doing what the state authorities in every Theravada Buddhist country of Asia have done for centuries. Using temple buildings for meetings of general community interest, including political discussions, is nothing new. Under Sihanouk monks were expected to tout his *Sangkum*, while Lon Nol called for ‘Religious War’ and used temples as recruitment centers.<sup>330</sup>

The political use of religion has never bothered anyone so long as the politics were right; and there is nothing shocking about monks “learning about the new socialist system”. Sihanouk on occasion had them out building dikes in his program of manual labor for national development.

Certain activities connected with religion have been curtailed. The number of festival days has been limited as has the amount that should be spent on ceremonies, including weddings. Officially no one under the age of 50 is supposed to enter monkhood, but in 1981 it was easy to observe that the rule had not been enforced.

There are obvious practical and acceptable reasons for such limits. In the country’s dire economic straits as much as possible of its wealth and workforce should be directed into productive channels; and the undesirability of conspicuous consumption in, for example, weddings, by the fortunate few, say, Becker’s “fat and wealthy” traders, seems self-evident in Cambodia’s circumstances.

Incidentally, if old Cambodia hands wish to demonstrate their close contact with sources of information by dropping names, they must get the names right. There is no “Wat Niroat Reaingsei” (the temple where Becker picked up some of

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<sup>330</sup> In Lon Nol’s view of ‘war of religion’, about which he had a series of pamphlets published, the Vietnamese were identified with the Thmil (Tamil), the enemies of the true faith in old Sinhalese lore, and a term which has passed into Thai and Khmer in the sense of religious foe.

her information) in Phnom Penh, nor anywhere else, for that is an impossible name. Becker no doubt means Wat Pipheat Reaingsei; and the error intriguingly suggests a foreigner unsuccessfully attempting to decipher Khmer script.<sup>331</sup>

Once the towns, with their offices, markets, temples, and schools, were permitted to redevelop in 1979 the new authorities were faced with the problems of maintaining them in the absence of normal supply and support infrastructures which had not existed since 1975, nor functioned properly since 1970. The first problem was how to feed the new urban population. Should the new officials, teachers, monks, medical workers, students be expected to perform those tasks and at the same time grow or forage for their own food?

The pragmatic *laissez-faire* which has been permitted under a socialist facade has meant that no taxes or forced sales have been imposed on the peasants who may dispose of their surpluses as they choose. This has contributed to peasant efforts in redevelopment of agriculture, but the food grown is outside the towns and in the hands of the growers, who may choose to sell it across the border in Thailand, or exchange it in Cambodian markets for consumer goods imported across the Thai border.

Should the government, in order to feed the towns, have used Pol Pot-type discipline to forcibly squeeze food out of a severely disrupted countryside? Had they done so they would have been attacked both at home and abroad.

The solution chosen was to feed the towns with foreign aid and leave the peasants total freedom to consume or dispose of their production as they wished. As a result the PRK was subjected to months of dishonest criticism by virtually every journalist writing about Cambodia: food was being diverted from needy villagers to feed bureaucrats and party members.

Villagers were needy, but they were out where food was grown or available for forage. Urban dwellers were even more needy, and criticism about the distribution pattern is quite out of place from those who had made destruction of towns a symbol for the evils of Pol Pot and their rehabilitation a touchstone for return to normality.

Most serious observers of Cambodia have now realized the dishonesty of that particular criticism, and Becker does not repeat it. She does, however, speak of "politicization of aid", and only in the utilization of foreign aid by the

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<sup>331</sup> I shot from the hip on this, and was wrong, because this Wat, located outside the Phnom Penh city limits, was not on a list of Phnom Penh Wats in my possession at the time. On a later trip I visited it along with the same Foreign Ministry guide who had accompanied Becker. See my correction and apology in Vickery, *Kampuchea, Politics, Economics and Society*, note 13 to chapter 10, p. 197. It is interesting that Becker did not correct me in her hostile review of my *Cambodia 1975-1982*, published in *Problems of Communism* (May-June 1985), indicating she did not know whether she was correct or mistaken (see below, pp. 211-216).

Cambodian government, not in the “refusal of the international aid community, led by the United States, to give more than emergency aid to Cambodia”.

The last perfectly true and important consideration is among a list of 6 reasons for Cambodia’s slide into a “dangerous new cycle of poverty”. Another of the reasons, in an apparent show of evenhandedness, is “the failure of the Soviet Union to provide the major relief it promised”, which is amplified farther on in the article. The “Soviet record since (1979) has been dismal”, says Becker, and “according to Cambodian sources, Moscow has failed to provide at least two-thirds of the aid it promised”. “Little aid comes from Communist countries”.

Now without seeing the texts of the Soviet-Cambodia aid documents we do not know what precisely Moscow promised, but the picture of Soviet aid as seen from another angle is quite different.

In its 10 February 1983 issue the *Far Eastern Economic Review* reported on ‘politicization of aid’ to Cambodia. Western donors to the UN Cambodian relief operations had just pledged a total of \$14.2 million, but only \$1.2 million, from Sweden, was for work inside Cambodia, the rest being for support of the anti-Phnom Penh operations on the Thai border.

The western delegates had then complained about Moscow’s aid to Cambodia, which in 1982 alone had included the delivery of \$82 million of industrial and consumer goods. In addition there had been road and bridge equipment, which had apparently been put to proper use in a task which Becker recognizes as one of the more important: restoration of the transportation network.

The Soviets also restored about 7500 hectares of rubber trees to help get that rubber plant about which Becker complained into operation again. Further important contributions were to the restoration of telephone exchanges, power stations, technical education, both within Cambodia and for Cambodian students in the Soviet Union, the fishing industry, and medical facilities.

There was, indeed, no mention of a water system for Phnom Penh, which Becker faults them for neglecting, and it is impossible to know whether the aid actually given really represents less than one-third of what was promised, but their record on aid to Cambodia is so far superior to that of the US government that it is in bad taste for an American journalist to quibble over such details.

Indeed the magnitude of Soviet aid to Cambodia has incensed the western UN donors precisely because it is development, designed to keep Cambodia out of the ‘cycle of poverty’ which the US and ASEAN have sought to maintain in order to exert political pressure on the PRK and Vietnam.

In pointing out these other aspects of the question, however, I do not mean to deny all ‘politicization of aid’ by Cambodian authorities. There is no doubt that some “ministries want to squeeze ... money”, examples of which I was made aware during my visit in 1981. Whether there is more such squeeze than could reasonably be expected under the circumstances is impossible to determine, but

it is no doubt in part related to the pattern of survivors within the new government.

Becker noted, with apparent shock, that many officials “are survivors of the (Pol Pot) government that unleashed the bloodbath”. This is true, although Becker’s inferences, as I shall discuss below, are unfair.

Another aspect of the bureaucracy, and one which has been described in several articles over the past two years, is that the overwhelming majority of officials below the topmost level are non-revolutionary survivors of the Sihanouk and Lon Nol regimes where ministerial squeeze was a fine art and one of the reasons, as Becker notes, for the demoralized Cambodian society of 1970-75 and the government’s defeat by the communists.

It could well be that this numerical preponderance of pre-revolutionary survivors makes a large contribution to the return of “deeply ingrained customs ... leisurely (work) pace ... long rest at midday ... countless holidays,” which once upon a time were held to reflect the easygoing charm of those happy Khmers, but now, apparently, are to be evoked as signs of demoralization under socialist oppression.

The predominance of non-communist, even anti-communist, survivors in the bureaucracy, and the reemergence of quaint old Royalist and Republican customs no doubt account for the importance given to political indoctrination. People who grew up and were educated at a time when corruption in government was the norm must be convinced of the necessity to work for exiguous salaries while a profiteering private market sector is tolerated. The government should not be condemned for trying to inculcate loyalty to the common good in place of anarchic individualism.

And what is wrong with Indochinese solidarity? Why is it somehow more heinous than the anti-Vietnamese racist propaganda of the three preceding regimes? There have no doubt been silly mistakes in the organization of political courses, but given Cambodia’s experiences over the past 20 years political indoctrination in itself cannot be condemned, nor can it, on the basis of Becker’s anecdotes, be blamed for the country’s current poverty.

Within the “unsettling jigsaw puzzle of many layers of recent Cambodia history” (why ‘unsettling’? Every old and interesting city is a jigsaw puzzle), Becker noticed a “similarity ... to the Lon Nol era, particularly the later years”. She describes, now as then, officers in white Mercedes and soldiers treating friends to banquets.

There is a degree of truth in that. In 1974 Phnom Penh was run down, salaries were inadequate, and malnutrition was rampant among the underprivileged, as may well be the case today. But in 1974 it was wartime deterioration in spite of massive aid from the world’s richest country, while today Cambodia has been emerging from a chaos which was in part the legacy of that war, and in spite of the attempt by that same rich country to block all development.



Becker no doubt saw hungry people in Phnom Penh this year, and she may have seen a few pretentious officers or corrupt soldiers, but she has not, in contrast to 1974, seen a country bombed to pieces by its ally, nor daily shootouts in the streets, nor generals growing wealthy on phantom battalions paid for by the rich ally, nor an entire elite of officers, officials, merchants and landlords scandalously overprivileged and fattening themselves on war profits.

Today most of those in direct state employ are constrained to penury and subject to strict discipline, and there is no fat in military aid provided by the Vietnamese. In 1974 the white Mercedes and other luxuries were imported with money diverted from essential supplies or soldiers' salaries, whereas the few such cars that exist today have been pulled out of the scrap heaps to which superfluous vehicles were consigned by Pol Pot.<sup>332</sup>

If the "ruling government has (again) the air of a caretaker government" (and Becker doesn't tell us what that is supposed to mean), its record is incomparably better than that of 1974, and to say that "the country is far poorer" now is disinformative. On this last point one need go no farther than comparative food production statistics; but perhaps Becker thinks that national wealth is to be measured by the incomes and lifestyles of overprivileged elites. Did her sensitive nose detect a "scent of corruption in the air"? Quite possibly, but when in Cambodia's history was there not? Well, in Pol Pot's Democratic Kampuchea.

I noted above Becker's shock at DK survivors in the PRK leadership. Instead of 'de-Stalinization' or 'de-Nazification' with a mass trial of "tens of thousands" of former DK personnel which Becker wants, the same Communist Party, she complains, is still in power, led by men who had no objection to Pol Pot until they found themselves in danger. That party's complicity in DK crimes is studiously concealed, and the archives of the former Tuol Sleng prison have been closed because the confessions there would be embarrassing for the present government.

Surely de-Stalinization and de-Nazification are unfortunate examples to evoke, given the very limited extent of the former and the recent embarrassing revelations about who blocked certain de-Nazification proceedings in the past and contributed to the escape and concealment of a certain notorious Nazi, in a manner resembling contributions to the rehabilitation and maintenance of the Pol Pot nucleus since 1979.<sup>333</sup>

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<sup>332</sup> Alas, since the 1993 UN intervention and western-imposed 'democracy' with capitalism, all those unpleasant features of 1974 have reemerged with a vengeance.

<sup>333</sup> The Nazi in question was Klaus Barbie, saved after 1945 and employed by the US government in Bolivia until 1983. See Allan A. Ryan, Jr., *Klaus Barbie and the United States Government: A Report to the Attorney General of the United States* (Washington, D.C., U.S. Dept. of Justice, Criminal Division: 1983; and Erna Paris, *Unhealed Wounds* (New York, Grove Press: 1985). For more on this subject see Edward S. Herman, "Holocaust Doers and Deniers", *Z Magazine*, November 1993, pp. 7-10.

In any case the PRK, contrary to Becker's allegations, has gone much further than either. There was a trial of the former regime, in August 1979, and it produced several hundred pages of documents, translated into French, and available to researchers for the past three years. It was not conducted as a vendetta and blood purge leading to the execution or imprisonment of ten thousand more Cambodians, as Becker would like, but was in order to publicize and document what had happened during 1975-79.

In contrast to de-Stalinization, the DK political and economic systems have been completely destroyed, their policies reversed, and the 'examination' of them which Becker calls for may now seem superfluous since all Cambodians are well aware of what happened. And unlike the results of de-Nazification, those PRK leaders who were prominent in DK have not tried to conceal their past. Their positions are well known and have been proclaimed to the public in official publications; and they do not appear to fear acts of revenge from the population.

If they have no fear of revealing their past it is because all Cambodians know, and have described for foreign researchers, who over the 2-3 years have published material which must have come to Becker's attention, that in the very compartmentalized administrative structure of DK there were very great differences in living conditions and treatment of the population both among zones, regions, or even contiguous villages, and from one year to the next.

Because of such administrative compartmentalization those in one zone, including important officials, often did not know what was going on in other areas, and in particular were not involved in purges which occurred outside their own administrative units.

In general the best zone of all was the East, where living conditions were tolerable and killings few until it was purged by the DK central authorities, partly in 1977, and then totally and massively in 1978. Most of the DK survivors among the PRK leadership are former East Zone officials.

Their crime in the eyes of Pol Pot was to have been too closely associated with the old Indochina Communist Party, or the first Cambodia party founded in 1951, and therefore resistant to Pol Pot's extremism, or potentially conciliatory toward Vietnam (which, we may recall, was advising and following a quite different, and much more benign, revolutionary path). The real Pol Pot killers are not in Phnom Penh, but in the anti-PRK Coalition supported and maintained on the Thai border by the US, China, and ASEAN.<sup>334</sup>

Thus it is not just the same party which has been reconstituted as a continuity from DK, the present leaders cannot be qualified as the same "who ran the government for Pol Pot", and there need be no embarrassment about the role of

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<sup>334</sup> Or, in refugee communities in western cities, such as Toronto, as seen in Bill Schiller and Dave Walker, "Khmer Rouge Killers Find Refuge in Canada", *The Sunday Star* (Toronto), 28 February 1988.

the present party under DK nor its complicity in the crimes perpetrated under that regime. Although Pol Pot led the party from 1962, no one was aware of nor predicted the line he would follow after 1975.

The present party dates its founding from the party of 1951, in which some of the present leadership participated at a time when Pol Pot was still a schoolboy. For him, that party was anathema, and he dated his party from 1960 in order to signal a break with all that the old party represented, in particular its close links to Viet Nam.

The only point in all of this on which Becker is correct is that there were factions within the party and its leadership, and among them were many who opposed Pol Pot's policies both before and after 1975, especially afterward. There were even attempted coups against Pol Pot – thus the purges which tore DK apart.

Those purges of high party cadres were often clandestine and unknown outside the security apparatus and this, together with administrative compartmentalization, served to keep the opposition split, unable to present a united front against the Pol Pot faction. The central leadership did go mad after 1975, but the entire party were not accomplices, and there is no way to maintain that Viet Nam contributed to the massacres.

For the history of the DK period the archives in the former Tuol Sleng prison are indeed as important as Becker says. They are the major surviving documentary source for the DK period, and they have already contributed greatly to our knowledge of Cambodia under Pol Pot. They have not, however, been “completely closed to Cambodians” – I have met many who examined them.

If few foreigners have been allowed to see them, perhaps really the half dozen Becker alleges, it is because there are hardly more than that number of foreigners both qualified to use them – they are written in Khmer – and involved in the study of modern Cambodian history.

The present administration has in fact been extremely generous in giving foreigners access to those files. Every qualified researcher who has visited Phnom Penh has been given virtual *carte blanche* to browse, photograph, take notes, and carry entire dossiers off to some foreign aid agency office for photocopying. The access granted Becker herself is proof of this generosity, since she is not among those capable of using the documents.

Of course, one cannot just walk in off the street and demand to see them. A certain application procedure is involved, as is customary for such collections anywhere in the world.

Becker goes on to tell us what the archives ‘reveal’ about the nature of the Cambodian revolution, though how she knows what they reveal, since she cannot read them, is unclear. If, as she at one point writes, the documents tell of “purges based less on ideological differences than on Pol Pot's obsession with loyalty, power and searches for scapegoats,” which, I would say, is a reasonable inference from much of the Tuol Sleng material, then they support the present

government's contention that Pol Pot and his narrow coterie were to blame for the disaster of DK.

But Becker will not have this, and resorts to a claim that "certain factions won or lost in various power plays, but the entire party was involved." Now that is one thing which the Tuol Sleng documents do not reveal. In the power plays on record there, no other faction than that of Pol Pot ever won, their leaders were one after another wiped out because they were unenthusiastic about the Pol Pot line, and the Tuol Sleng records show that Pol Pot had developed an obsessive hatred towards the 1951 party and all who had associated with it.

Becker wishes to make a major point out of the circumstance that "one could argue" it was only the purges which "forced some party members to turn against the Pol Pot regime". One could argue, as I would, that it was only the purges that made the DK regime atrocious. Given the state in which the country was left by Lon Nol and the US it was not an atrocity to put everyone to productive work, eliminate old-regime privileges, and for a time insist on a rigidly egalitarian lifestyle.

It was an atrocity to assume that mediocre or poor results were due to traitors or malingerers and resort to mass executions as a corrective. It was also an atrocity to take available food away from hungry people to stockpile for attacks against Viet Nam, that is, for a goal like that encouraged by the present-day foreign backers of Pol Pot and his Coalition.

Cambodia may, unfortunately, be slowing down after the hopeful developments of the PRK's first three years; and it is discouraging that industry is at an even lower level than under DK, with PRK officials disingenuously blaming the situation entirely on Pol Pot's destruction. Pol Pot did, however, as Becker admits, kill off large numbers of the country's industrial personnel, including skilled workers, but he was able to keep factories going with captive laborers.

The PRK now suffers from a serious lack of skilled people, and having given the population freedom of movement and choice of work cannot dragoon them into factories at wages which may not be interesting. Those who might in other circumstances work in factories may now prefer to remain farmers or engage in petty trade. In any case it is in bad taste for an American journalist to assess major blame on political indoctrination or lack of Soviet aid.

Not only have the United States and its allies tried, as a matter of deliberate policy, to block redevelopment of Cambodia by limiting aid to emergency supplies, but they have rehabilitated Pol Pot and other anti-PRK groups on the Thai border under cover of a refugee system which has also drained off much of Cambodia's surviving talent.

Because of the escape valve on the border, Cambodians dissatisfied with even those irksome details of life which might occur anywhere may run to the border and, alleging Vietnamese or communist oppression, receive succor and sympathy. This is one important reason why the PRK cannot limit the runaway and wasteful free market, cannot tax in order to use local resources in

reconstruction, nor even organize the population in self-help work teams to repair roads or clean up Phnom Penh, measures which in the circumstances would be reasonable and could not honestly be attributed to ‘oppression’.

The insufficiencies of Becker’s treatment result from several circumstances. There is the lack of historical perspective, or even historical accuracy, to which I have given attention above.

Then there is the anti-Vietnamese, anti-socialist slant which permits denigration of anything done by Viet Nam, or in the name of socialism, no matter how objectively necessary or positive the measure might otherwise appear. Where perfect freedom is hindered, as in the private reappropriation of Phnom Penh real estate, that is bad, but where freedom is permitted, as in market trading, that is bad too.

If bureaucrats, or officers, envious of the “fat and wealthy” traders, seek to moonlight, or to apply ministerial squeeze, the regime is condemned, but efforts to keep them in line through education and persuasion, rather than with the threat of death as under Pol Pot, are castigated as political indoctrination.

There is also some question about the reporting of ‘fact’. I have no doubt that some “Cambodian sources” blame all defects on political indoctrination or that one may hear of misused aid and dishonest officials; but among Cambodian refugees over the past three years, or in casual contacts within the country, one has heard all manner of things which were just not true.

The preconceived anti-Viet Nam bias and a vacuum cleaner approach to ‘fact’ are combined in the contrast Becker asserted, in her 27 February article on Viet Nam, between liberalization in Viet Nam and Viet Nam’s “rigid colonial policies in Cambodia”.

This is grossly dishonest; in fact, it is disinformative propaganda on two counts. There is nothing in Viet Nam’s position in Cambodia which can be called ‘colonial’, by any accepted definition of that term, and liberalization of the type Becker describes in Viet Nam has in fact gone much further in Cambodia.

I realize that the determination of truth and falsity is not an easy matter. It requires comparison of many sources, and journalists may not have the time, or in the case of Cambodia, the linguistic competence. They could, however, even while protecting their sources, indicate whether the reports they have heard are from people who claim eye-witness experience or who themselves have only heard what they are reporting, whether the story is from an old and trusted friend or a random street acquaintance (the ubiquitous taxi driver, or in Phnom Penh the pedicab man), or whether it is generalized rumor.

Rumors, like hard facts, may be interesting items of news, but a certain unfortunate journalistic technique gives all such news items equal value as ‘fact’, regardless of source or context. The opinions on political indoctrination held by various groups and strata of the Cambodian population are interesting and valuable news items, but one cannot accept as fact that political indoctrination is

responsible for stagnation just because it is a fact that some Cambodians make such statements.

It is a fact that some features of Phnom Penh today resemble 1974, but the totality of the situation renders such comparison almost meaningless, if not consciously deceptive. Allegations that Soviet aid is less than promised, or less than required, are also facts, but set within the total foreign aid picture the slant given by Becker is disingenuous.

Although Becker no doubt heard such an assertion, as I have, it is not true that all good housing in Phnom Penh has been taken over by Vietnamese and Soviets; and it requires no more than a casual walk around the city and visits to Cambodian government installations to ascertain the inaccuracy of such statements.

I also recall a refugee, an engineer who had worked for the new government in 1979 and early 1980, when there were far more Vietnamese experts and advisers in Phnom Penh than now, telling me that the Vietnamese with whom he had worked lived, apparently as a matter of policy, at a less comfortable material level than their Cambodian counterparts.

It may also be a fact that the PRK does not encourage the return of people who fled the country since 1979, but those doctors, etc., who would be refused permission "to come back and help rebuild the country" ran away just at the moment when they had been freed from oppression and the threat of death, and when the new authorities were begging for their services. Neither have they shown notable inclination to return and offer their services.

There is certainly room for honest value judgement about what is desirable in economic recovery or political reconstruction, but honest assessment must take into account what is feasible under the given circumstances, and that in turn may involve consideration of comparable development in other circumstances.

Thus, it is true that Cambodia's health, economy and politics are precarious, and there may be reason for particular concern over developments during the past year, but is the situation simply depressing, or is it worse that could reasonably be expected under the existing circumstances? Becker seems to think it is worse, and wishes to place blame on political education, malevolence of the regime (broken promises), and niggardly Soviet aid.

More important, I should say, are the constraints placed on development by lack of trained personnel and equipment (which result primarily from DK massacres, the foreign backed border operations, and the refugee system), as well as limits placed on aid from the affluent West, matters outside PRK control and thus among the existing circumstances. Given such impediments to reconstruction, it is dishonest to focus on the low material standard of living rather than the progress made in the past three years, in particular the improved quality of life.

It is also informative to make some comparison with neighboring countries, as Becker attempted in her assertion that Cambodians were well behind other Southeast Asian villagers.

In Thailand, for example, where there has been no war, foreign invasion, carpet bombing, nor revolution, where foreign investment is massive and the sympathy of the most advanced Western powers is enjoyed, health authorities, as in Cambodia, are concerned about serious malnutrition among half or more of the country's children, and only 30% of the population has a safe water supply (*Bangkok Post*, 18 Oct. 1981, p. 8).

Moreover, the food supply situation there, in nutritional terms, may be deteriorating (*Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholar*, 14/4 [1982], p. 21). Since 1980, as I discovered while working in the refugee camps, there has been some concern that the 'high' standard of living of Cambodian refugees may evoke invidious comparison and ultimate political disaffection by the poor Thai peasants who observe them.

It is amusing now to set the tone and newsworthiness of Becker's presentation against the boasting of *Washington Post* Editor Ben Bradlee, "I have no politics. I'm a newspaperman, who tried to put out the best big-city daily in America". "I ... let the editorial pages take over the opinionated stuff".<sup>335</sup>

I not only sent the critique of Becker's articles to the *Washington Post*, but realizing of course that there was no chance of publication there, I also sent it to a number of persons interested in Cambodia and to the *Far Eastern Economic Review*. The then Deputy Editor, Philip Bowring, replied in an interesting manner. He said that they could not use my material directly, because "[a]s these [Becker's articles] did not appear in the *Review* – though they were offered to us – I really do not think we can devote space to demolishing them [*FEER*, apparently, did not think much more of Becker than I did]. However, if you would like to write us a 5th Column criticizing press coverage in general of developments in Cambodia since 1975, which could include references to Becker's recent pieces, we would be most interested".<sup>336</sup>

I accepted Bowring's suggestion, and on 5 May 1983 sent an article, "Cambodia and the Media", which is printed below. By that time *FEER* had published a letter from the KPNLF, who, relying on Becker's articles as evidence, attacked Emory Swank's positive assessment of the situation in the PRK. Whether or not Becker had based her

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<sup>335</sup> Martin Walker, "Hot mettle man, Ben Bradlee – life's been awfully good", *The Guardian*, reproduced in *New Sunday Times* (Kuala Lumpur), *Sunday Style*, 28 January 1996, pp. 2-3.

<sup>336</sup> Letter from Philip Bowring, 25 April 1983.

articles on information she was fed at the border, she had certainly written what they wanted.<sup>337</sup>

The reply to me from *FEER* came in the form of a rocket from Editor Derek Davies, saying, in essence, that Bowring had not meant what he had said. What the *Review* wanted was an expansion of “those portions of your critique of Elizabeth Becker which dealt with the difficulties faced by reporters in circumstances such as they faced in covering Cambodia [there were no such portions] ... a somewhat sympathetic analysis of these difficulties”.

In particular he objected to my attributing anti-Vietnamese feelings to Shawcross, and political bias to journalists. At the end, however, he wrote, “I would like you to try again along the lines I describe ...”, which I think can fairly be described as an offer of money to write something which he knew I did not believe (the *Review* was then paying \$250 per 1,000 words published).<sup>338</sup>

### Cambodia and the Media (2003)<sup>339</sup>

A recent series of articles in the *Washington Post* (27 February-1 March, 1983) by Elizabeth Becker has attracted attention for their striking contrast to what has been written about Cambodia over the past two years by most journalists, scholars and other competent observers, such as former US ambassador Emory Swank (*FEER* 17 March 1983), and because that slant is congruent with the line of one particular Cambodian faction who now cite Becker, against Swank, as proof of their legitimacy (*FEER* 14 April 1983, 6-7).

To be sure, Cambodia, by the very nature of its problems is a trap for the unwary, and the complexity of its situation is such that any statement at all may

<sup>337</sup> The KPNLF letter was published in *FEER*, 14 April 1983, pp. 6-7. Among the tripartite coalition parties the KPNLF in particular was well supplied with personable, multilingual young officials who were very effective with impressionable foreign visitors.

<sup>338</sup> Letter from Derek Davies, 11 May 1983. As Bowring noted in his obituary of Davies, “He could give out criticism but was less than ready to absorb it”. The *Review* was bought by Dow Jones in 1987. Davies was kicked upstairs to a less active post where he amused himself for several years by pasting together silly pictures and bad ethnic jokes in a column called ‘Traveler’s Tales’ (see above, p. 91), and Bowring became editor.

The final move in the *Review*’s decline was Bowring’s replacement as editor in 1992 by an American right-wing ideologue, L. Gordon Crovitz (see his article entitled, “Rule of Law”, “Hayek’s Road From Serfdom for Legal U-Turn”, about the work of the recently deceased Friedrich Hayek, in *Asian Wall Street Journal*, 10-11 April 1992).

The *Review* itself, as Bowring wrote, “a magazine once notorious for its feisty independence was submerged in Dow Jones, its editorial line a carbon copy of the *Wall Street Journal*’s right-wing editorial pages” (see Bowring, in *The Correspondent*, the on-line publication of the Foreign Correspondents’ Club, Hong Kong, October-November 2002, “Cover Story - Derek Davies - 1931-2002”).

<sup>339</sup> Michael Vickery, unpublished article prepared for *FEER* and submitted 5 May 1983.



be controversial. Even given that circumstance, however, English-language journalism since 1975 has been exceptionally noteworthy for controversy not only over interpretation, but also fact, and for abrupt shifts in viewpoint which indicate ideological bias and selective use of evidence.

Thus, in 1975-76 several articles in *FEER*, whose record in Indochina reportage has generally been good, characterized the Cambodian revolutionary leadership, in particular Saloth Sar / Pol Pot and Ieng Sary, as pro-Vietnamese, a view which seems ludicrous in the light of subsequent revelations about Democratic Kampuchea (DK). It illustrates how a simple preconception – that Cambodian leftists must somehow be working for Viet Nam – could totally distort the true situation.<sup>340</sup>

The search for a Vietnamese devil, often eagerly supported by Cambodian informants, has linked several phases of western media attention to Cambodia; including the recent articles by Becker, who asserted Vietnamese responsibility in the Pol Pot massacres.

During most of the DK period, however, arrangement of Cambodian news to fit an anti-Viet Nam bias was held in abeyance, for the allegedly atrocious nature of DK could hardly be related to the methods being used in Viet Nam, particularly from 1977 when full-scale enmity between the two countries became clear to all.

Most of the Western media sought to portray Cambodia, following the evacuation of Phnom Penh and the massacres of Republican officers in Battambang, as an unmitigated chamber of horrors where intellectuals were killed on sight and most people lived on starvation rations.

John Barron's and Anthony Paul's *Murder of a Gentle Land* and François Ponchaud's *Cambodia Year Zero* are the best known examples; and the Bangkok press corps has offered "a thick file of news clippings dating back to May 1975" to prove their assiduity in writing about "the massacres and misery in Cambodia" (*FEER* 5 February 1982, p. 3).

In contrast to that approach there were others, including myself, who saw that not all refugees had horror stories, that much of the general hardship was an effect of the war, and that the available evidence did not permit conclusions like those drawn by Barron and Paul or by *Time* in its article of 26 April 1976. This more nuanced material, when it was published at all, was given little notice until collected and published by Noam Chomsky and Edward S. Herman in the *Political Economy of Human Rights*, the Cambodia chapter of which requires little modification in the light of new evidence.

The same more balanced approach was also adopted by some of those reporting in *FEER*. William Shawcross wrote in the 2 January 1976 issue that

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<sup>340</sup> *FEER*, 28 March 1975, pp. 11-12; 1 August 1975, p. 22; 5 September 1975, p. 22; 24 October 1975, pp. 8-10; 7 May 1976, pp. 22-23; 25 June 1976, p. 26; above, p. 82 ff.

refugee accounts “suggest [emphasis added] that the Khmer Rouge is finding it hard to govern the country except by coercion” and “even suggest that terror is being employed as a system of government”. The refugees themselves, however, in spite of complaints about “young and old ... dying of starvation”, “did not appear to be in a sorry condition”.

Shawcross concluded that life in Cambodia was “appalling”, but he recognized that “it is impossible ... talking to some refugees and reading the radio monitoring, to say how a country is being run”; and he emphasized that if an atrocity was being perpetrated, it “did not begin in April [1975] – it simply entered its sixth year”.

Donald Wise, in *FEER* 23 September 1977, intended to follow the horror version of DK, emphasizing “the liquidation of intellectuals and professionals”, but he merely repeated the more extreme allegations then current, referred to Barron and Paul as a source, and cited one new informant who badly damaged his case by reporting that “the normal ration per person is two condensed milk cans [500 grams] of dry rice a day”, an adequate, almost normal, ration, and a luxury in most of DK.

The *Review*'s Indochina specialist Nayan Chanda, in particular, was properly circumspect given the evidence available at the time. On 16 October 1976 he wrote “most observers agree that the worst excesses are over”, adding that “part of the killing was the action of the have-nots against the haves”, inspired by a desire for revenge and the effects of a savage war. He also considered that most refugees, then coming from isolated work sites near the Thai border, “rarely have any information of value”.

A year later (21 October 1977), writing “occasional executions continue, the refugees say”, following “the first rush of executions of top military and civilian officials in the summer of 1975”, Chanda still showed concern for a fair analysis of the then available information.

After the simmering Cambodia-Viet Nam conflict erupted into open warfare in 1977 and relations were broken off at the end of the year, the Vietnamese began accusing Phnom Penh of atrocities after the manner of the Western press, and the latter took this as confirmation of their efforts to expose DK and as proof that those who had more skeptically assessed the evidence had been mistaken.

A careful reading of statements from Viet Nam, however, revealed that apart from reports of Cambodian attacks across the border, which did show a propensity for cruelty, most of the Vietnamese statements about DK atrocities had been culled from the uncritical Western press and could in no way be taken as independent confirmation of the latter.

But the Vietnamese intervention and overthrow of Pol Pot did not occasion the expected rejoicing from those who had most strongly attacked his regime. Rather there was a shift in journalistic attention from the atrocities of DK to alleged Vietnamese oppression of Cambodians, and the theme of Vietnamese malevolence behind Cambodian difficulties came once more to the fore.

One important article of that genre was William Shawcross's "The End of Cambodia?", *New York Review of Books* 24 January 1980, in which he retailed a number of anti-Vietnamese stories provided by François Ponchaud from the Khmer Serei (now Son Sann and Sihanouk) border camps, giving emphasis to Ponchaud's allegations that the Vietnamese "are treating the Cambodians with almost as much contempt as the previous regime did" and "are now conducting a subtle 'genocide' in Cambodia".

In the intensity of his anti-Vietnamese feelings, or perhaps just manifesting still the careful approach he had adopted in 1976, Shawcross even seemed to doubt that DK had been as bad as portrayed, writing "whether there was an 'Asian Auschwitz' in this particular place and with these precise methods remains uncertain".

The Ponchaud-Shawcross line of 1979 was shared by the CIA in their report, "Kampuchea: A Demographic Catastrophe", one of the purposes of which was to make the first Heng Samrin year appear even worse than the DK period. For 1975-77 the report presented the atrocity picture of Barron and Paul which Shawcross had earlier eschewed, but it then white-washed the last two years of DK by ignoring the purges of 1977 and the East Zone massacres of 1978, the worst of all Pol Pot excesses.

Shawcross himself, a year later and after a trip to Cambodia, came to realize, as did most journalists, that conditions in Cambodia were rapidly improving, and were far superior to the DK years. Like most of his colleagues, though, he continued an anti-Vietnamese theme in complaints about 'diversion' of foreign aid to "officials of the Vietnamese-backed government in Phnom Penh".

Later in 1981, apparently regretting that he might have been too soft on DK, Shawcross wrote that Barron and Paul had been among the few to do a proper job of describing DK and that journalists had in general been too skeptical of refugee stories before 1979.<sup>341</sup>

Those journalists certainly would not have appreciated Shawcross's remark, for a similar comment by Derek Davies – that Western reporters had only accepted Cambodian massacre stories after the Vietnamese invasion (*FEER* 25 January 1981) – brought stinging rebukes from "Concerned Correspondents" in Bangkok who alleged, on the contrary, that it was the *Review* which had been too lax in reporting Cambodian atrocities.

In this competition for first prize in DK-bashing where does the factual accuracy lie?

No one now doubts that DK was a failure, that its brutalities went beyond what was reasonable even in Cambodia's very trying post-war circumstances, and that it merited overthrow, but from the much greater volume of evidence

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<sup>341</sup> William Shawcross, "Kampuchea Revives on Food, Aid, and Capitalism", *The Bulletin* [Australia], 24 March 1981; and "Cambodia: Some Perceptions of a Disaster" in Chandler and Kiernan, *Revolution and its Aftermath*, 230-258.

which has been accumulated since 1979 it is clear that the attempts to discover nuances and to present a balanced picture were of much greater value and historically more accurate than the indiscriminate horror stories.<sup>342</sup>

When Derek Davies suggested that the Western press had neglected DK atrocities he was wrong – there had been too much atrocity-mongering from localized evidence, and the Bangkok-concerned correspondents who reacted to Davies were mistaken in asserting that their worst accounts of “the massacres and misery in Cambodia” had finally been legitimized by the Vietnamese (few of them have accepted Vietnamese statements about post-1979 Cambodia).

Davies was also off the mark in his listing of certain *Review* articles as rivaling the concerned correspondents’ work of damning DK (*FEER* 5 February 1982). To their credit his writers had often provided objective accounts which did not try to go beyond the available evidence, and those who tried to beat the atrocity drum sometimes failed to make their point (Donald Wise cited above and Nouth Choeum, *FEER*, 24 October 1975).

It is also clear now that the Vietnamese-supported regime has been beneficial for Cambodia economically, socially, and politically and that most of the anti-Vietnamese stories fabricated on the border and fed to uncritical journalists have been inaccurate, sometimes, as in Ponchaud’s case, reflecting invidiously back upon the reliability of his earlier work.

Even the complaint about ‘diversion’ of aid rice to cadres and bureaucrats was dishonest from those who had made destruction of towns a symbol of DK evil and their rehabilitation a touchstone for return to normality. The towns were fed with aid rice, leaving the peasants, the mass of the population, freedom to consume or dispose of their produce as they wished, thereby insuring peasant cooperation in the redevelopment of agriculture.

The failure of much of the mainstream press to report accurately on all of the evidence about DK, and in particular the alacrity with which many journalists switched from anti-DK to even less honest anti-Viet Nam stories after 1979, implicitly supporting the rehabilitation of Pol Pot – whose obsession with Viet Nam was the impetus for DK’s worst massacres – indicate that ideological prejudice and a scramble for sensations were the paramount concerns.

The same kind of preoccupation permeates Elizabeth Becker’s recent work, cited above. Becker complains that the PRK leadership is tainted by association with Pol Pot’s bloodbath, ignoring as did earlier writers the differences within DK, but with less justification, since evidence that the East Zone, where the Heng Samrin leadership worked, was the best run and least atrocious part of DK has been available for the past two years.

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<sup>342</sup> Kiernan and Boua, *Peasants and Politics in Kampuchea 1942-1981*, Part 3; Michael Vickery, “Democratic Kampuchea, CIA to the Rescue”. [Later publications were Vickery, “Democratic Kampuchea: Themes and Variations” in Chandler and Kiernan; Vickery, *Cambodia 1975-1982*, 1984].

She also alleges, no doubt on the basis of Cambodian informants, that an important reason for the country's present economic difficulties is failure of the Soviet Union to deliver promised aid, apparently having neglected to read in *FEER*, 10 February 1983, that for 1982 the Soviet Union delivered over \$82 million of industrial and consumer goods against \$1.2 million pledged for relief within Cambodia in 1983 by Western UN donors.

Another tendentious point was her comparison of similarities in Phnom Penh today and in 1974, forgetting that the situation then was due to war and corruption and in spite of support by the world's richest country, while today Cambodia is recovering, in part from that same war, and in spite of efforts by that same rich country, Becker's own, to block redevelopment.

With respect to Cambodia, journalists have often objected to criticism of their work by intellectuals and academics (*FEER* 5 February 1982, p. 3). Their ire could be given more credibility if they showed greater care in applying the same yardstick to all evidence on all sides of controversial issues.

Academics, after all, generally have to depend on journalists for the latest information and they are disappointed when the latter show palpable bias. The concerned correspondents of Bangkok, for example, could improve their record if they devoted attention to an abusive comparison made by Becker, and reported on Thailand with the same critical eye they direct toward its eastern neighbors.

Becker claimed that Cambodians are well behind the rest of Southeast Asia in health and sanitation, but Thailand's own health authorities, like their Cambodian counterparts, are concerned about serious malnutrition among half or more of the country's children, and only 30% of the population has a safe water supply (*Bangkok Post* 18 October 1981, p. 8).

Becker's *Washington Post* articles had wide influence, which I noticed and tried to counter in Australia, where I lived in Adelaide, employed at the University of Adelaide, from 1982 to early 1988.

The following month three of Australia's main urban newspapers used Becker's articles to condemn post-Khmer Rouge Cambodia and Viet Nam. The theme of the first, by Peter Day, in *The Australian*, Sydney, on 4 March 1983 was clear in its headline, "Hanoi 'had a hand in Pol Pot's atrocities'", and in its acceptance of Becker's claim that Viet Nam had a role in "contributing to the massacres under Pol Pot".

The second, by Michael Barnard in *The Age*, Melbourne, 15 March 1983, "Viet Nam a vital text for Labor", was crafted to undermine the newly elected Labor Party government which was believed to intend giving aid to Viet Nam. The third, in the Melbourne *Herald*, by Anthony McAdam, also used Becker to undermine Australian efforts to improve relations with Viet Nam and provide economic aid.

*The Age*, then considered Australia's premier newspaper, also jumped in with an editorial, to which I was able to publish this reaction.

### Becker and the Australian Press (1983)<sup>343</sup>

I hope *The Age* editorial of 5 April, "Brutality on the border", was written in ignorance, for otherwise it must be accounted one of the more tendentious pieces on the Cambodian situation to appear in recent months.

The writer deplored the recent "assault on border camps containing both non-communist guerrillas and thousands of civilian refugees." Now in the news columns of *The Age* and other newspapers emphasis has been given to attacks on Phnom Chat, one of the principal hard-core military bases of the Pol Pot faction, where there are no "non-communist" guerrillas and few innocent civilian refugees.

Phnom Chat is part of the Khmer Rouge military organization rehabilitated since 1979 by Western and Chinese aid under cover of the refugee relief program, and it is no doubt from there that some of the sabotage teams have set forth to attack civilian supply trains and to mine roads within Cambodia. Phnom Chat has also been considered as on the Cambodian side of the border, which raises an interesting question about the international legality of the Thai napalm raids reported in *The Age* of April 6.

Your editorial then said the West "must attach immediate importance to ... convincing the Kampuchean People's National Liberation Front (indeed non-communist) to stop basing its guerilla group at the border camps ... (where) innocent civilians ... are ... held political hostage".

That suggestion is ridiculously naive, if not hypocritical. The KPNLF has been deliberately built up by the West as a non-communist military presence on the border, and because the food, medicine, and other non-military supplies they require must be distributed together with genuine refugee relief they can only exist near the refugee camps. Moreover, KPNLF self-support to the extent that it exists, as well as much personal profit for some of the leaders, depends on cross-border trade which could not be conducted in any other location.

On the third point, aid to Thailand to care for Kampuchean refugees, it must be pointed out that over the past two years the Thai authorities have blocked all serious attempts to return to Cambodia the thousands, perhaps even tens of thousands of refugees who would choose that course under UN auspices. They have insisted rather that those Cambodians should move to the border camps in order to swell the forces and civilian base of the guerilla groups working against Phnom Penh.

I cannot help wondering if the editorial writer has been influenced by some of the comment in Michael Barnard's column of March 15, in particular the 'revelations' reported from Elizabeth Becker's *Washington Post* articles.<sup>344</sup>

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<sup>343</sup> Michael Vickery, sent on 6 April and was published in *The Age*, 14 April 1983, p.12, as "Kampuchea's Border Brutality", with deletion of the first paragraph.

<sup>344</sup> My critique of Becker's articles is presented above, pp. 166, ff.

I would like to emphasize here that the archives in Phnom Penh, to which Michael Barnard citing Becker refers, have been open to qualified western researchers for three years, that Becker is unqualified to draw any independent conclusions from them, that they do not “strengthen evidence that the ... regime of Heng Samrin in Phnom Penh is inextricably linked with the genocidal excesses of the butcher Pol Pot”, nor reveal a “propaganda cover-up”, and that the real Pol Pot killers are not in Phnom Penh, as Becker and Barnard allege, but in the western-supported guerilla groups on the Thai border.

Elizabeth Becker came to my attention again when she published a review of my *Cambodia 1975-1982* and Craig Etcheson's *The Rise and Demise of Democratic Kampuchea* in *Problems of Communism*, May-June 1985.<sup>345</sup> I did not respond at once, but then urged on by a fellow Cambodia specialist who thought Becker should not be allowed to get away with what she had written, and further inspired by another exhibition of vicious US regime propaganda, the State Department's Elliot Abrams on TV, smirkingly telling about the evils of the Leninist Sandinistas and the altruistic fledgling democrat Nicaraguan contras, I wrote the following letter to *Problems of Communism* in October, 1985.

#### Becker and *Problems of Communism* (1985)<sup>346</sup>

To: *Problems of Communism*, Washington, D.C.

By choosing to place her pique at current Cambodia scholarship in a US government propaganda bulletin, *Problems of Communism (ProbComm)*, rather than in a real media organ, Elizabeth Becker has duplicated the ideological leaps of So'n Ngoc Thanh and Pol Pot, from sympathizer of leftist liberation wars to anti-Vietnamese chauvinist, to supporter of loathsome American regimes.<sup>347</sup>

Becker's article is in part a comment on the field of American Cambodia studies in general, and through her we now have the official regime view of who's who in ANZUS Cambodia scholarship.

Michael Barnard was one of the most insistent far right political writers on *The Age*. His article on 15 March 1983 was “Vietnam a vital text for Labor”, which had just won the Australian parliamentary election and which, with Minister for Foreign Affairs Bill Hayden had a conciliatory policy toward Viet Nam and Cambodia.

<sup>345</sup> Becker, “Cambodian Tragedy”, *Problems of Communism*, May-June 1985, pp. 70-73.

<sup>346</sup> Michael Vickery, unpublished letter to *Problems of Communism*, 24 October 1985. Footnotes have been added.

<sup>347</sup> Becker's sympathy for leftist liberation wars is seen in her pre-1975 reportage from Phnom Penh (Elizabeth Becker, *Washington Post* 10 March 1974, “Who are the Khmer Rouge”, reprinted in *Indochina Today*, March 1974), and in the trip to DK in December 1978 with Richard Dudman and Malcolm Caldwell. On So'n Ngoc Thanh see *Cambodia 1975-1982*, pp. 253-56, 289.

As a review it contrasts two books which, according to her (and indeed) represent two extremes in current writing on Cambodia: the newcomer, innocent of direct experience with the country in question, who plugs away at secondary sources, but does “an admirable, if flawed job”, no doubt the sort of scholarship the people who pay the fees to *ProbComm* reviewers wish to encourage, and at the other extreme Michael Vickery, burdened with “top-notch” Ph.D. studies in the historical background (“building blocks of any scholarly field”), “a fluent Khmer speaker”, with several years’ experience in the country, yet who unaccountably seems bitter about what has happened to Cambodia and the way certain others have written about it.

Elizabeth generously attributes some blame for this aberration to general problems of Cambodia scholarship in the US, a question to which I shall return. First, however, since this is written as a response to her review of my book, I shall deal with that.

*Cambodia 1975-1982*, she says, is a “melange of scholarship, memoirs, and polemics”, and on that point she is absolutely correct. I appreciate that she accurately transmitted my intentions to potential readers whose attention may have been drawn to my book by her review. I also appreciate that as a professional journalist Elizabeth complimented me on my eloquence “when using journalistic methods”.

Perhaps this means that when academic funds really dry up I can move successfully into her field; that is, if I can package my stuff for market requirements (the egregious Patrick Honey, on the other hand, himself an academic, criticized me for writing like one, and thought my book bore too much resemblance to a Ph.D. dissertation, which perhaps only reflects his own chagrin at not having produced one).<sup>348</sup>

Elizabeth is right in saying I have “written a personal book filled with rage”. She also saw correctly that I had a two-part thesis about the Democratic Kampuchea (DK) [her ‘Khmer Rouge’] regime, that its record in its first two years is more nuanced than described in the press of the time, and that it was worst in the last year-and-a-half, when it began to attract positive attention, and to some extent a whitewashing, from certain US government circles.<sup>349</sup>

Elizabeth seems to disagree, although herself adding considerable comment that would support my case; and she objects that I have unfairly attacked other “writers, experts, and journalists who have argued to the contrary”. In fact no experts argue any more to the contrary, and as more first-hand material about

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<sup>348</sup> See *Times Education Supplement*, 16 November 1984.

<sup>349</sup> See my “Democratic Kampuchea – CIA to the Rescue”.



Cambodia appears, my thesis about temporal and regional variations within DK finds increasing support.<sup>350</sup>

Moreover, when I took on an ‘expert’ I did it thoroughly, in great detail, and in a scholarly manner, devoting nearly 20 pages to the dissection of a writer’s arguments over a series of his publications.<sup>351</sup>

As for the others, Elizabeth only regrets by name “the wrong-headed and inaccurate attacks on ... François Ponchaud”. Well, Elizabeth could have made a contribution by demonstrating that my criticism of Ponchaud was inaccurate; but at least she implicitly accepts my much more severe remarks about the Barron and Paul show and the lucubration of William Shawcross, whom ‘respectable’ press organs like the *New York Review of Books* protect from corrections of the lies which some of his writings contain.<sup>352</sup>

Thus the single criticism of the content of my book which Elizabeth raises, but is unable to support, concerns the accuracy of my regional analysis, in particular with respect to the East Zone, and to which she particularly objects because of its utility to the People’s Republic of Kampuchea (PRK) whom she rejects but whom I support relatively in comparison to the other current feasible choices. To be fair, her objections deserve a more detailed answer than I shall present here, and which I would have presented had her review appeared in an honest scholarly or journalistic organ, rather than in Washington’s equivalent of Moscow’s *Socialism: Theory and Practice*.

The East Zone (her ‘East Region’) thesis does help to present the PRK “as the best alternative for Cambodia”, and my regional analysis of DK may be particularly embarrassing for Elizabeth in that she traveled across the East right up to the Vietnamese border just after the worst massacres, under the guidance of DK special honcho for foreign journalists Thiounn Prasith, without seeing anything wrong; something which, if I chose to write as a propagandist rather than as a scholar, I could lift as evidence that the East, and DK in general, was even better than my own sources indicated.<sup>353</sup>

I do not know whether Becker is correct in stating that the East Zone thesis “first appeared during the trial of the ‘Pol Pot-Ieng Sary clique’” in 1979. For me it appeared from the raw data of refugees whom I interviewed in the Khao I Dang camp in Thailand in 1980, at a time when I had not yet read the record of that trial nor even the work of Stephen Heder and Ben Kiernan on that subject.

<sup>350</sup> See Martin Stuart-Fox and Bunheang Ung, *The Murderous Revolution*, Chippendale, Australia, 1985.

<sup>351</sup> *Cambodia 1975-1982*, pp. 194-199, 212-226, 248-251.

<sup>352</sup> Barron and Paul, *Murder of a Gentle Land*; on Shawcross see *passim.*, above and below.

<sup>353</sup> Becker, together with Richard Dudman and Malcom Caldwell, traveled in Democratic Kampuchea in December 1978. This was the occasion on which Caldwell was murdered.

All told I am happy with Elizabeth's review. She has complimented me both as a journalist and as a user of the language, and in spite of hoping to do a hatchet job she was unable to demonstrate any serious error in my choice of sources, their use, or my conclusions, or even in the details of my "wrong-headed" attacks on other writers.

She has also written a review that is sure to sell copies, no doubt among a non-specialist public who might not otherwise have heard of *Cambodia 1975-1982*, and it comes at the right time, when the first printing is sold out and the publishers are preparing a second. So thanks, Liz.

As Elizabeth concluded her review with a remark that it would be coy of her not to notice my attacks on her articles of 1983, so it would be coy of me to ignore this point here. I indeed wrote a long polemical critique of her no less polemical February-March 1983 Washington Post articles on Cambodia (or are we to be instructed that it is a priori non-polemical to follow the US regime line?), which naturally went unnoticed by Ben Bradlee's non-political Washington Post [see p.179], and I repeated some of the points in the final "Postscript" of Cambodia.

In the original letter to Washington Post on her articles I made a couple of mistakes, which I realized later, and which I shall correct in due course in a forthcoming publication.<sup>354</sup> Elizabeth could have taken the occasion in her review to point out my errors, if she herself is aware of them, although this might be a trifle sticky since it would open up the whole issue of non-publication of the much more important valid portion of my critique.

In addition to its function as a book review, Elizabeth's *ProbComm* article addresses the problem of exotic area studies in the US (in particular Cambodia), which is a subject of perennial interest to me, and on some aspects of which I am in agreement with her.

I was among those who received government support to complete my Ph.D., though not for language study, for I had done that on my own time in Cambodia and Laos beginning in 1960. Unfortunately, starting about 1969, government funds to universities for exotic area studies were cut back, followed by closure of most university Southeast Asia programs, and scholars, as Elizabeth said, went into other fields or were brain-drained away to other countries.

I for one have since 1970 lived on "various grants and temporary teaching positions", first for two years in Cambodia and Thailand on dissertation research, then in Penang for six years, and since 1979 in Australia.<sup>355</sup> This has been the

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<sup>354</sup> This was corrected in my *Kampuchea: Politics, Economics and Society*, note 13 to chapter 10, p. 197; and see note 331 above.

<sup>355</sup> I remained in Australia until 1988, then returned to Penang, Malaysia until 1998, when I moved to Chiang Mai, Thailand, until the present. In 1999-2002 I taught Cambodian history, in Khmer, in the Archaeological Faculty of the Royal University of Fine Arts, Phnom Penh.

environment which, according to Elizabeth, has worked “against sustained, serious scholarship”, resulting in “books [which] reflect the vacuum in the United States for serious studies of Cambodia”.

If Elizabeth were really concerned about scholarly neglect of Cambodia, she could have used her professional and personal connections with a major newspaper to call attention to what has been produced. She might have reviewed my book in that newspaper when it was newly published rather than in *ProbComm* when it was no longer easy to find on the market.

She could also have called attention to work by some of her approved scholars by reviewing the volume of essays edited by David Chandler and Ben Kiernan (*Revolution and its Aftermath in Kampuchea*), incidentally a project in which Timothy Carney and Stephen Heder [her most approved Cambodia scholars] declined participation; and she could have reviewed, or at least mentioned, Ben Kiernan’s *How Pol Pot Came to Power*, a scholarly, non-polemical work, but which, no doubt significantly, does not push a line congenial to the *ProbComm* crowd.

Elizabeth seems to imply that if I had been offered a cushy tenured position in some US university ten or twelve years ago I could have been bought off. Well, perhaps. Who knows, I am as fond of booze, broads, and riotous living as the next bloke. Certainly had I been favored with a US teaching job I would not have had the opportunity to research *Cambodia 1975-1982*, which is perhaps the point Elizabeth wished to impress on the *ProbComm* crowd and the regime behind them.

Neither would I have had time to produce much of my other work – several long articles on problems of source criticism in early Thai history, and in the past two years, in addition to continuing work on modern Cambodia, a forthcoming article on a reinterpretation of the Angkorean 11th century, and another forthcoming article on the Cambodian 8th century. All of this work represents, to use Elizabeth’s terminology, ‘building blocks’ for building blocks (“monographs about selected issues”), to permit monographers, those latte men of the next downstream-integrative step in the history production process, to get on with their monography.<sup>356</sup>

This is no doubt the sort of Southeast Asian history work which the *ProbComm* crowd in the widest sense would like. I am sure that scholars of

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<sup>356</sup> Those two articles appeared (1) “The Reign of Sūryavarman I and Royal Factionalism at Angkor”, *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, September 1985, 226-244; and (2) “Some Remarks on Early State Formation in Cambodia”, in *Southeast Asia in the 9th to 14th Centuries*, edited by David G. Marr and A.C. Milner, Research School of Pacific Studies, Australian National University, Canberra, and Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore, 1986, pp. 95-115.

A later publication on early Cambodian history was a book, *Society, Economics and Politics in Pre-Angkor Cambodia: The 7th-8th Centuries*. Tokyo. The Centre for East Asian Cultural Studies for UNESCO, The Toyo Bunko, 1998.

Southeast Asia will take interest in the methodological message which Elizabeth, in her new role as regime spokesperson for Cambodia scholarship, has chosen to deliver.

I recall, incidentally, that around 1969 or 1970, when I was in my 'building-block' phase and was going through the application procedures for a Foreign Area Fellowship for overseas dissertation research, I got word that my project, a study of sources for the 14th-16th centuries in Cambodia and Thailand, was viewed with relief by foundation authorities (as opposed to sticky things related to the Viet Nam war).

If I have given up monography for polemics in the last few years, it is not because of the lack of academic employment in the US, although that situation is true enough, but because of the shameful behavior of the US government in those parts of the world which I study. I wish I could, with a clear conscience, just continue to read old stones.

## Chapter 4: the late 1980s

By this time I had made two more trips to Cambodia, in 1984 and 1986, as well as short annual visits to the border refugee camps until 1985, after which I ignored them. These experiences reinforced the views which I had expressed in my earlier interventions, and together with ongoing research in the Cambodian press which I collected on each visit, contributed to my second book, *Kampuchea: Politics, Economics, and Society*, published by Frances Pinter, London, in 1986.

### Elizabeth Becker and Nayan Chanda

In 1986 both Elizabeth Becker and Nayan Chanda published books on Cambodia, respectively *After the War Was Over* and *Brother Enemy*. Ben Kiernan passed along an invitation from *The Guardian* (New York) to write a joint review, which was attractive because it included free copies. I produced the short review they requested, but it was never published, for reasons I was unable to discover, but which may have been ideological. That is, I was too sympathetic to the PRK, while *The Guardian* (not to be confused with the one in England) still supported DK.

Two years later, when in Passau to give a couple of lectures on Cambodia, Professor Bernhard Dahm, together with a survey article on Cambodia in 1988, published the joint review of Becker's and Chanda's books in *Asien*, journal of the German Association for Asian Studies, Hamburg.

### Review of *When the War Was Over* and *Brother Enemy* (1988)<sup>357</sup>

Elizabeth Becker, *When the War Was Over The Voices of Cambodia's Revolution and its People*. New York, Simon and Schuster, 1986; and Nayan Chanda, *Brother Enemy, the War After the War*. San Diego, New York, London, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Publishers, 1986.

Both of these books are too late, with too little that has not already appeared in several works by specialist scholars.

Becker's "attempt to tell the full story of the Khmer Rouge" pretends to be based largely "on original research" (p. 14); while Chanda's history of contemporary Indochina, inevitably centered on Cambodia, is much more a history of diplomatic relations than a treatment of events within the country; and his claim to originality is in the interviews with "all the protagonists and many of the foreign observers" (p. x).

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<sup>357</sup> *ASIEN*, Nr. 28 (July 1988), pp. 118-121. The survey article was "Cambodia 1988", *ASIEN* (German Association for Asian Studies, Hamburg), Nr. 28, July 1988, pp. 1-19. Citations from Becker and page number references are from the first edition, and some have been changed in the second. Footnotes inserted here were not in the original.

In spite of their claims, both writers rely very heavily on their academic predecessors – Becker sometimes raiding their work without acknowledgement, while Chanda is careful not to depend on work which he does not wish to cite.<sup>358</sup>

As historians they have neglected the first task, source criticism, and have stumbled into some strange positions and inconsistencies.

Becker, for instance, has adopted the Pol Pot line on the formation of a party, at a ‘First Congress’ in 1960 (pp. 87, 104), while Chanda recognizes that three national parties were really set up in 1951 (57), and that the meeting in 1960 was “a clandestine party congress”, not the founding (59).

The trouble with the Becker line (following Pol Pot and Stephen Heder) is that Cambodian communists believed they had a party in the 1950s; when Ith Sarin, whom Becker cites favorably (155-7), wrote about his sojourn with the communists in 1972 he learned that the party had been founded in 1951, and that date was not challenged within the party until 1976, when the Pol Pot faction wished to obliterate early links with Vietnam. As Thiounn Mum said, “we switched to the 1960 date in order to disconnect ourselves from the ICP [Indochina Communist Party]”, a strictly political move.<sup>359</sup>

Becker’s purpose is to show that there was never a serious split between Pol Potists and another group more favorably disposed toward Vietnam; that when the Pol Pot group was taking control in the 1960s they were at one with Hanoi, and that the break between Viet Nam and Cambodia in the 1970s was because of legitimate Cambodian nationalist fear of Vietnamese domination, which has now been realized with the PRK. Its leaders, this way, are just Pol Potists who had to

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<sup>358</sup> Becker, pp. 52-53, should have cited Vickery, “Looking Back”; Becker, pp. 54-55 also depends both on *ibid.* and on Ben Kiernan, *How Pol Pot*; Becker p. 74, “... Sar joined others in trying to push the Democrats toward a bold, leftist position ...”, needs reference to Vickery, *Cambodia 1975-1982*, pp. 198-99; Becker p. 82, Saloth Sar “liaison between the Pracheachon Party and the Democratic Party”, and “helping write statutes ... for the Pracheachon”, etc., seems a direct steal from Vickery, *Cambodia*, p. 199.

If not, it needs clear citation from some other source, and, as David Chandler indicated in his review of Becker (“Requiem for the 1970s: Elizabeth Becker’s *When the War Was Over*”, *Indo-China Issues*, 1986), on pp. 109, 134, 250, 254 (first edition) she “appears to be paraphrasing” the work of Vickery. There Chandler also criticized Becker for ‘quoting’ from Khmer-language sources which she could not read.

Later, as Chandler’s position moved toward what is treated in these pages as the ‘Vietnam syndrome’ he found Becker’s book, along with Etcheson’s *Rise and Demise*, which Becker (above, p. 187) found to be a “flawed job” and Ponchaud’s *Year Zero* (see Vickery, *Cambodia*, chapter 2), to be one of “the best general accounts of the Khmer Rouge period”, a “persuasive analysis”, and the only one among the books on Democratic Kampuchea “which makes extended use of the S-21 archive” (David Chandler, *Voices from S-21*, Chiang Mai, Silkworm Books, 2000, pp. 161, 177; and *Brother*, first edition, p. 238, second edition, p. 246.)

<sup>359</sup> Ith [It] Sarin, *Sranoh Proleung Khmer* [‘Regrets for the Khmer Soul’], p. 73; Becker, p. 269, Chanda, p. 82. Thiounn Mum in Becker, p. 301,

save their skins at the last minute, and who have now become puppets of Vietnam.

Thus East Zone chief So Phim, who as Chanda says “maintained a close relationship with the Vietnamese Communists” and “was suspect for keeping the East Zone relatively prosperous” (Chanda 250-2), must be charged with “fighting the Vietnamese too zealously” in 1976 (Becker 275). “Nowhere”, she alleges, “in the record is there a hint of [his] being a close friend of Vietnam” (307), nor of his dissent from the Pol Pot line.

Although he “doubted the seriousness of ... [a] Vietnamese threat” (315), and refused to execute suspected traitors who “were his trusted lieutenants” in 1977 (315) when such doubt would have signaled not just dissent but high treason, he was just “Machiavellian”, accepting “Center policy direction and demands” to avoid interference (306). Becker admits he was late “in adopting communal eating and in some areas resisted orders to abolish the concept of private property” (307), which constituted dissidence, and might be seen as admiration for Vietnamese methods, a view she will not countenance, preferring to claim that for this he was “accused of being too slavish an admirer of the Chinese model of cooperatives”.

Chanda has not been embarrassed to note real conflicts in Democratic Kampuchea, and he blames the Pol Pot line for the increasing hostility to Viet Nam which split the Cambodian party down the middle. Still he feels obliged to throw a sop to those who would tar the PRK with the Pol Pot brush and this leads him too into confusion, centered on Heng Samrin, whom PRK enemies charge with fleeing only because he was in trouble for incompetent soldiering.

Following variously Stephen Heder, Ben Kiernan, and unnamed sources, Chanda has Heng Samrin in late 1977, inferentially for good work against the Vietnamese, promoted to chairman of “Route 7 Battlefront”, bordering Vietnam, “effectively ... deputy chairman of the Eastern Region military staff” (197) and commander of the 4th Division under the Center (206), which person was allegedly shot by a Pol Pot loyalist after the December 1977 attack (213), while “Commander of the 4th Division Heng Samrin ... with about a thousand of his loyal troops ... headed for the jungle” after the May 1978 conflict between East and Center (253).

Hun Sen had already fled after refusing to participate in the September 1977 attack on Vietnam, and a brother of Heng Samrin, also a division commander, was among those officers from the East Zone rounded up and killed in April-May 1978 (197, 251). On this subject Chanda seems to have had trouble getting his note cards into good order.

The climax of both books, and a main focus of Chanda's, are in the international relationships when Cambodia and Viet Nam were fighting while the US entered into negotiations with Viet Nam and China.

While Becker's treatment is anti-Vietnamese, Chanda indicates that Viet Nam was unjustifiably provoked by Cambodia and unreasonably attacked by China.

He considers that the change of government in 1979 brought improvement to Cambodia, while Becker (444) retails lies about Vietnamization in that country;<sup>360</sup> and Chanda has more sympathy for those Americans, such as Holbrooke and Vance, who wanted normalization of relations with Vietnam, than for the Brzezinski group who wanted to line China up against the Soviet Union.

The reader who wishes to be informed about these matters will ignore Becker for Chanda – but perhaps would do even better with the more academic treatments. For Chanda's contribution to history is too often name-dropping dressed up with the devices of second rate fiction – "Darkness fell like fate on Saigon" (1), "Oksenberg "sat silently with a scowl on his face" (265) during negotiations at which Chanda was not present – little more than anecdotal froth obscuring rather than illuminating the factual picture. Chanda even seems to have pulled back when the interview technique might have elicited something new, but dicey.

Thus, US-Vietnamese negotiations got off to a good start in 1977, and again looked promising in the fall of 1978, but it was too late. One of the reasons they had been frozen for 10 months was theft (for Viet Nam) of State Department cables by Ronald Humphrey, which led to expulsion of the Vietnamese ambassador to the UN in February 1978.

When the Woodcock mission was making good progress in Hanoi in March 1977, Kenneth Quinn, a long-time analyst of Cambodian communism, told Woodcock that another member of the team had left a fiancée behind in Saigon, and Woodcock interceded successfully with the Vietnamese (141-2).<sup>[361]</sup>

Quinn unaccountably took a similar case, that of Ronald Humphrey, to the Swedish Embassy in Hanoi, not the best place, one would think, for American diplomats to ask favors (155). A little later "in the summer" (155-6) Quinn tipped off the FBI that a spy might be at work for Vietnam, and he suspected Humphrey. Following this, apparently, during the May-June negotiations with the Vietnamese in Paris, Holbrooke, warned by the FBI was worried, in Quinn's words, that they "may well have seen our negotiating instructions" (153-4); and Holbrooke appeared cooler to the Vietnamese than usual.

The cables which Humphrey and David Truong allegedly stole, Chanda finally tells us, were "Of limited importance ... some not classified at all" (268),

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<sup>360</sup> This was in Becker's first edition. By the time of the second edition her views of post-1979 Cambodia had changed and the dishonest treatment of 'Vietnamization' was removed. See the very different "Epilogues" in the two editions.

<sup>361</sup> Quinn's reputation among academics is based on, Kenneth M. Quinn, "Political Change in Wartime: the Khmer Kraham Revolution in Southern Cambodia, 1970-74," *Naval War College Review*, Spring 1976, based on research completed in 1974. When I first wrote this in 1988 he was number 2 in the US embassy in Manila. In December 1995 Quinn was named US Ambassador to Cambodia.



thus they had not given the Vietnamese an edge in negotiating, and the chronology of events, contrary to Chanda's step-by-step presentation, makes clear that US authorities had known that at the time.

The work of Becker discussed above exhibits clearly the 'tilt' of US official sympathies toward Democratic Kampuchea because of antipathy toward Viet Nam; and her writing was much appreciated in those circles.

Thus, in Congressional hearings in 1983, following some regime-line ignorance by John C. Monjo, and just as Carlyle Thayer was about to speak with some sympathy for the PRK, chairman Solarz interjected "Well, when Elizabeth Becker's book on Cambodia comes out, the definitive account of the last decade will be available for you and others and will make the record of these hearings pale by comparison, I am sure ...".<sup>362</sup>

I did not write a detailed review of Becker's *After the War Was Over*, but soon after its appearance I did write one on Chanda's *Brother Enemy*, which has never been published, in part because of the length.<sup>363</sup>

#### Review Essay: *Brother Enemy*, by Nayan Chanda (1988)<sup>364</sup>

*Brother Enemy*, by Nayan Chanda. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Publishers, 1986.

"Darkness fell like fate on Saigon" – this opening line which might not seem out of place in a French colonial opium and sex novel, say Jean Hougron's *Soleil au ventre*, would be reason enough to snap shut and fling into the nearest wastebasket any book pretending to be a serious work of history, if there were not extenuating circumstances. But this is Nayan Chanda's *Brother Enemy*, 'hailed' by its publisher as the "most brilliant history" of the past decade in Indochina", and judged even by serious professionals as "by far the best account of the Third Indochina War" (George Mc.T. Kahin).

That was the author's intention: to write "the story of the historic struggle in Indochina and the big-power diplomacy that surrounded it" (p. 7). He started his "Acknowledgments" with reference to E.H. Carr's "commonsense definition of history as a body of ascertained facts", which could not be followed in this case because he is "too close to the events to attempt a historian's objectivity in seeking facts". Instead, Chanda has the advantage of having interviewed many of

<sup>362</sup> Hearing, Committee on Foreign Affairs, subcommittee on Asian and Pacific Affairs, 98<sup>th</sup> Congress, first session on H.Con.Res.176, 15/9, 6 and 18/10, 1983, printed 1983.

<sup>363</sup> After I had written the review which follows here, I received an invitation from Marvin Gettleman to do a review of Chanda for *Science and Society*, but even after cutting my text in half it was too long for that journal, and I did not wish to cut it further.

<sup>364</sup> Michael Vickery, unpublished review, 1988. Footnotes added later.

the first and lower level participants in the action and decision-making over some 15 years, which gives him “a certain advantage over future historians”.

*Brother Enemy* may thus serve as a test case in the argument between journalists writing history and academic historians trying journalism, in which academics find that journalists shoot from the hip to make sensational points, while journalists seem to object that working historians too often refuse to accept sources, written or oral, at face value.

For the problem is not what Chanda seems to think, that in this case Communist governments may offer only “self-serving selections of confidential documents”, and “are unlikely to open their archives to independent historians” (ix).<sup>365</sup>

Oral interview material, and not just from ‘communists’, may be equally self-serving. Anonymous interviews (even accepting that anonymity cannot always be avoided) have a historical evidential value equivalent to self-serving archival selections, and the historian’s duty is to subject them to the same sort of source criticism that would be given written documents.

This is the crux of the difference between journalists and historians. Journalists rarely do engage in source criticism, if only because of the demands of their work (historians, I admit, too often do not either, but then they are not acting like historians).<sup>366</sup>

By training and experience Chanda is among the best fitted to bridge the gulf between the two vocations – a card-carrying academic whose study was in the area, Southeast Asia, in which he has since specialized as journalist, and his journalistic production, at least until he moved from Southeast Asia and Hong Kong to Washington in 1984, deserved the encomiums which have been bestowed on his work as a historian.<sup>367</sup>

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<sup>365</sup> Within a few years of Chanda’s writing, this assessment, like most right-wing American views of the impossibility of change in Communist systems, was proven wrong. See Thomas Engelbert and Christopher E. Goscha, *Falling Out of Touch: A Study on Vietnamese Communist Policy Towards an Emerging Cambodian Communist Movement, 1930-1975*, Centre of Southeast Asian Studies, Monash University, Australia, 1995.

A major publishing defect in this excellent study is the total lack of attention to correct Vietnamese orthography (no diacritics) in the numerous citations in that language. Given the facilities of modern word-processing, that is now inexcusable in scholarly publications. One of the authors, Goscha, who is fluent in Vietnamese, told me that this was forced on them by their publisher, who did not wish to make the small extra effort to do a good job.

<sup>366</sup> See my comments on this in *Cambodia a Political Survey*, Phnom Penh, Funan Press, 2007, pp. 8-9.

<sup>367</sup> Chanda was in Washington 1984-1989, and was first listed as Washington correspondent for *FEER* in its issue of 16 February 1984.

They are now, however, exaggerated, which is not to say right off that *Brother Enemy* is not a good book, but because there are too few historical accounts of the Third Indochina War for 'best' to have much significance.

The comparison which immediately comes to mind is Elizabeth Becker's *When the War Was Over*, which was published nearly simultaneously. There is no doubt that Chanda's is the superior work, although they are minimally comparable, for Becker gave most attention to Cambodian domestic developments, a minor aspect of Chanda's book, and its weakest [see my short joint review of the two books above].

One entirely comparable academic treatment, *Red Brotherhood at War*, by Grant Evans and Kelvin Rowley, has been perversely ignored, even by Chanda himself, although his title was probably suggested by it, and he should have had the courtesy to acknowledge use he made of it, at least in places where he follows it nearly line by line and from the same sources.<sup>368</sup>

The reason Evans and Rowley, Australian sociologist and economist, may never have been reviewed in the US, and not often in Australia, is perhaps only because they were overtly leftist politically, but their book would in any case cause discomfort because they refuse to just take all information as given, whether in interviews, official documents, or standard histories.

Unlike Chanda, Evans and Rowley based their work mainly on written sources, including Chanda's reportage in *Far Eastern Economic Review*; the writing is straightforward, solid scholarly prose, not decked out with tricky devices of journalistic pizzazz or cheap fiction. Their interpretations, and criticisms of earlier interpretations, are influenced by experience in the field, in Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam.

Particularly noteworthy, in comparison with Chanda, is their reasoned treatment of the international legal aspects of the post-1975 Indochina conflicts. After reading *Red Brotherhood* one has a picture of the Third Indochina War which is clearly set forth and argued.

This is what should be expected of a history of the Third Indochina War and its diplomacy: a clear, chronologically coherent story outline for the reader who needs to be informed, together with a chronologically ordered interweaving of the more complex details of background and inferential explanation.

This is not what one finds in *Brother Enemy*. The story is there, but not in clear chronological or topical arrangement, and the reader seeking more than entertainment is forced to refer back and forth between chapters, or even to prepare his own synopsis arranging related details from different chapters in significant order.

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<sup>368</sup> Chanda pp. 237-9; Evans and Rowley, (first edition), pp. 50-3, (second edition), pp. 48-50.

Unfortunately it was more important for Chanda to drop names and serve up pseudo-intimate details than to tell a straight story, and his interviews too often provide little more than anecdotal froth for the factual picture which the reader should already have acquired elsewhere in order to follow Chanda. He has not helped matters by overloading his text with the slick devices expected in fiction or semi-reportage in second-rate publications ranging from *Ladies Home Journal*, at one extreme, to *Soldier of Fortune* at the other.

No opportunity for a cliché has been resisted. Bombs “hug undercarriages” (222); dispatches are “pounded out” (3). Every subject is introduced with some pseudo-evocation of on-the-spot news gathering: not long after “Darkness fell like fate”, “as a calm dawn broke over the emerald-green island”, “boyish black-clad soldiers” captured the Mayaguez (9); “Back at the green-baize table” Americans and Vietnamese negotiated (140); and Hanoi “dusted off a proposal” (257), the dust having accumulated perhaps because Hanoi is an “inward-looking city”, “at the best of times”, moreover (46), whenever that means, presumably long before Nayan Chanda had visited it.

In introducing personalities this touch becomes amusing. Hua Guofeng is a “burly Hunanese” (37), Lon Nol “paraplegic” (38), Pham Van Ba is a “short and stocky Vietnamese” (58), Sandor Gyorgi a “lank and gaunt Hungarian” (192). At least Chanda has seen them, but what about So Phim, “a pudgy, round-faced peasant” (250), whom no western researcher ever saw.<sup>369</sup>

And how does Chanda know that Oksenberg “sat silently with a scowl on his face” during a conference with Nguyen Co Thach “dressed in a blue suit” (265), even if he may naturally assume that they met with “brisk handshakes” and of course they also sat around a “green-baize table”; *de rigueur*, it seems, in embassies as in poolhalls.

The beginning of chapter 8 is faked in the same way (231). “It seemed the beginning of yet another uneventful day in ... Ho Chi Minh City. As the sun peeped from behind the trees”, and an “old lady on the corner ... started setting up her noodle stand.”<sup>370</sup>

Nayan Chanda was hundreds of miles away. Given the geographical latitude he was probably right about the weather, but it is irrelevant, for the “military style operation” which interrupted the peaceful scene on March 24, 1978 was not directed at the street corner of Chanda’s description but at Chinese businesses in Cholon, several miles away.

Sometimes the remarks seem designed to exhibit a pseudo-technical proficiency beloved of writers in those magazines for frustrated green berets – “Jolly Green Giant and Knife helicopters” in the American invasion of the

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<sup>369</sup> Kiernan, *The Pol Pot Regime*, pp. 89-90, cites Chanda, and includes more details of Phim’s appearance, apparently from an interview with Heng Samrin.

<sup>370</sup> As noted below at the end of this review, this is redolent of a certain type of Washington script writing.

Cambodian coast in May 1979 (9), or the “Voyager backchannel” (332, which in the 1990s sounds like something to avoid in safe sex) for diplomatic messages during the Sino-American negotiations of 1978.

In its very organization the book bears some resemblance to a work of fiction. The end of the Second Indochina War in 1975 and beginning of new conflicts in 1976 are followed by a flashback to ancient history (10th century to 1960s), after which there is a return to changes in China in 1976-1977, then more ancient history (3rd century, 15th century), then on to the 1954 Geneva Conference, and the early 1970s.

After this comes the meat of the book, US-Vietnamese negotiations in 1977 (“Window to the West”), Vietnamese-Chinese-Soviet relations 1976-1977 (“East Wind Prevails”), not entirely accurate because it includes the Vietnamese efforts to increase their independence from Moscow in 1975-76, details which should have preceded the story of negotiations with the US.

Then the reader is lifted back to the events which conditioned much of what was in the preceding chapters, Cambodian-Vietnamese conflict 1975-1978 (“Calm Before the Storm”). Finally in more logical order are events of 1978 (“Road to War”), US negotiations with Viet Nam and China (“Yankee come Home!”), the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia and Chinese attack on Viet Nam in 1979 (“A Red Christmas”), and (“Indochina: War forever?”).

These chapters are interspersed with four intermezzos devoted to reminiscences by Prince Norodom Sihanouk and called “The Victory” – 1975; “The Retreat”, Sihanouk’s return to Phnom Penh in 1976; “The Cage”, his house arrest in Phnom Penh, 1977-1979; and “The Survivor”, after he emerged from Cambodia in 1979.

This artificial arrangement, particularly the Sihanouk vignettes, diminishes *Brother Enemy*’s value as a work of history. The Sihanouk chapters also reveal the case Chanda wishes to make – that Sihanouk is essential to the survival of Cambodia – but it detracts from the announced subject, for Sihanouk is not a major factor in the history of the Third Indochina War. It is no doubt only a coincidence that Chanda’s position at the time of publication was also the line of the US regime.

One might also query Chanda’s historical judgement, writing in 1985, in cutting off his story, except for an epilogue, in 1979, as though it marked the end of a coherent historical period.

In a narrow sense of course the Third Indochina War was that between Viet Nam and Democratic Kampuchea between 1977 and January 1979, and which ended then, with the Peoples Republic of Kampuchea established in Phnom Penh as a result of the Vietnamese victory and Chinese inability to reverse it. That is indeed where Chanda’s final chapter, except for an epilogue update, leaves us, but with the question “Indochina: War Forever?”.

But in a wider sense, and what most people mean by ‘Third Indochina War’, is the political, occasionally military, conflict which erupted unexpectedly

among communist allies in 1975 and continues [1994], with intervention by a number of outside powers, with a view to reversing the outcome of the real war which ended in 1979.

The post-1979 continuation struggle, and the frantic diplomatic scramble by the enemies of the Peoples Republic of Kampuchea to secure by other means what they could not preserve for themselves on the battlefield would have been the perfect field for Chanda's talents, wide contacts, and *modus operandi*.

Perhaps a better question is why it took so long to publish a book which ends in 1979, and which was obviously nearly finished by 1984. One result, to which I shall return, is that information about internal developments in Cambodia is cut off in 1980-81, providing a false picture of the Peoples Republic for readers after 1985.<sup>371</sup>

Within Indochina hostility between Cambodia and Viet Nam in the form of brief border skirmishes began almost as soon as each had won its internal war, and the hostility escalated until a true war situation was reached by mid-1977. Laos, the third Indochina country, stayed out of the conflict, maintaining very friendly relations with Vietnam, and correct diplomatic relations with Cambodia.

The facts of this true Indochina conflict have been described many times, and there is no longer much doubt about the facts. The single serious controversy, which side was responsible for initiating and maintaining the war, seems now to have been resolved with agreement that it was the Cambodian side which initiated and kept up armed attacks (Chanda, chapter 7).

Further study of the matter is concerned with the reasons for such hostility between two parties who had appeared as long-term allies in the struggle to eliminate foreign domination of Indochina and establish socialist states. Three different reasons have been alleged, (1) ancient Vietnamese-Khmer cultural and political enmity which was hidden during the periods of foreign domination, (2) the different types of revolution followed after 1975, (3) interference of a foreign power, namely China, which deliberately built up Cambodia as an enemy of Vietnam.

The second and third lead to further questions. Why did the communist leaders of the two countries choose radically different models for revolution, and if Cambodian policy was formed under Chinese influence, why did China make this choice?

The extreme formulation of number 3, at times put forth by Viet Nam and the PRK, is that the DK system was a Chinese creation for the purpose of securing Chinese domination of Indochina. Chanda gives adequate attention to evidence that the Chinese, even while supporting DK diplomatically and militarily, did not approve of the path taken by the Cambodian revolution, at least once Mao had

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<sup>371</sup> One may reasonably surmise that this was influenced by Chanda's five years, 1984-1989, in Washington,

died and the Gang of Four had been eliminated in 1976, just when the extremist policies under Pol Pot were really taking off (Chanda, 79-80, 209-11).

With respect to (1) and (2) Chanda makes far too much of continuation of ancient attitudes and policies over hundreds of years – the alleged ancient hostility between Cambodians and Vietnamese, the age-old Chinese drive to subjugate Vietnam, and a traditional Chinese policy of keeping Southeast Asia fragmented and weak.

The best published antidote to this form of explanation is by Evans and Rowley, who argue against the popular tendency to explain a “clash between modern nation-states ... in terms of traditional cultural differences”, particularly when China supported ‘Indic’ Cambodia against ‘Sinitic’ Vietnam, and by pointing out that in the course of the ancient struggles Thailand absorbed as much territory from Cambodia, and more from Laos, than Viet Nam did, something that is generally forgotten in modern propaganda.<sup>372</sup>

Here Chanda has just followed the pack, inserting (50) a map of “The Stages of Vietnamese Expansion” such as is found in standard textbooks, which never have an equivalent map of Thai expansion.

That the cultural explanation of modern enmity is popular among peoples of the countries involved is not an excuse for its adoption by historians writing from the outside. As Evans and Rowley aptly comment, “triumphant nationalists ... like to see history written in terms that show the justice and inevitability of their victory, and the correctness of their political line ... nationalism uses history as a legitimating myth”.

And they quote Barrington Moore, “the assumption that cultural and social continuity do not require explanation obliterates the fact that both have to be created anew in each generation ... To speak of cultural inertia is to overlook the concrete interests and privileges that are served by ... the entire complicated process of transmitting culture from one generation to the next”.<sup>373</sup>

This is especially true with respect to Cambodia-Viet Nam relations, or to the ‘ancient’ Thai-Vietnamese hostility now brought forward to explain aspects of the Third Indochina Continuation War.

The facts are that there was little Cambodian-Vietnamese contact at all before mid-17th century. The first Vietnamese intervention in Cambodia was at the invitation of the latter, for help against the Cham and a Cambodian Muslim king in 1658. Subsequent interventions, simultaneously by Vietnamese and Thai,

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<sup>372</sup> Evans and Rowley, pp. 2-6; and see other references to this above and below.

<sup>373</sup> Evans and Rowley, pp. 3-4; from Barrington Moore, *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*, London 1967, pp. 486-87.

were because of internal conflict among royal Cambodian factions depending on support from their neighbors.<sup>374</sup>

This internecine strife ended in 1846 with the total defeat of the pro-Vietnamese side of the Cambodian polity, and subsequent Cambodian history has been written by the descendents of the pro-Thai faction, who have inculcated their view of history and cultural continuity, in Moore's words, by means of "human beings ... punched, sent to jail ... cajoled, bribed, made into heroes, encouraged to read newspapers, stood up against a wall and shot ...", all methods common in Sihanouk's Cambodia during 1955-1970.<sup>375</sup>

Chanda seems to base the peculiarities of the Cambodian revolution on the preordained hostility to Vietnam, and he devotes little space to the internal history of Cambodia, which could have suggested other explanations.

Indeed, Chanda's book is a history of the diplomatic relations around Cambodia, not a history of events within the country. He attributes too much of present difficulties to a potted version of ancient history, virulent nationalism resulting from a centuries-long Vietnamese push towards the south.

The colonial canard that the "French protectorate in 1863 saved Cambodia from being carved up any more by Viet Nam and Thailand" (54) is dutifully trotted out, forgetting, as have most of Chanda's predecessors, that by 1863 French conquests in southern Viet Nam had forestalled further Vietnamese encroachment in Cambodia, while Thailand's economic and political changes under British pressure were undercutting that country's ability to engage in expansion.

The real advantage for the Cambodian monarchy of the 1863 agreement with the French was protection from a rebellion led by rival princes against an unpopular king.<sup>376</sup> This would probably have been an unwelcome topic for Chanda, for that king was the great-grandfather of Norodom Sihanouk, who, if anyone, emerges from Chanda's treatment as a hero and potential savior of his country.

Chanda's historical treatment makes an almost clean jump from 1863 to the revolution, with no discussion of the effect on Cambodian political development of the colonial period, or 1941-45, nor the domestic political history of Cambodia from 1946 to 1970, except for a very brief sketch of the formation of the Communist movement (56-62), and an excellent summary, unfortunately squirreled away in the middle of a chapter on ancient history, of the cogent

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<sup>374</sup> The most detailed history of the 17th century is Mak Phoeun, *Histoire du Cambodge de la fin du XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle au début du XVIII<sup>e</sup>*, Paris, École Française d'Extrême-Orient, 1995, See pp. 251, 296-7, and my review in *BEFEO* 83 (1996), pp. 405-15.

<sup>375</sup> Quotation in Evans and Rowley, p. 4.

<sup>376</sup> See above, page 9 text with notes 30-31.



arguments against the allegation of a long-standing communist Vietnamese goal of an 'Indo-China Federation' (118-122).

This includes a clear statement of US efforts to subvert Viet Nam via Laos and with Thai connivance even before the Second Indochina War (the same thing was happening vis-à-vis Cambodia).

No notice, however, is accorded the growth of Cambodian parliamentary activity in 1946-1953, crucial to what happened there in the 1960s, nor the concomitant rural success of the revolutionary forces, nor the post-Geneva phony parliamentarism after the right wing under Sihanouk stole the election of 1955. Again, these subjects cannot be discussed without putting Sihanouk in the dock.<sup>377</sup>

Perhaps, honestly, Chanda in long listening sessions – I doubt if one could say dialogues – has come to accept Sihanouk's version of the events of those years, and he simply discounts the more critical treatments written by others.

Reluctance to undercut his positive assessment of Sihanouk may also explain his inconsistency in describing the pre-1970 coup situation, when "right-wing politicians and generals" (63), Lon Nol in particular, had opposed Sihanouk's hostile policy toward the US in the 1960s; but when Sihanouk sought rapprochement with the US in 1968-69 his "newfound respect for American power only helped to confirm for General Lon Nol and Prince Sirik Matak ... that their criticism of Sihanouk had been right all along" (64).

Here Chanda has totally suspended disbelief, swallowing whole Sihanouk's own explanations, however inconsistent, while totally ignoring what historians have written about the 1960s. Since Lon Nol and Sirik Matak were pro-American, how would a pro-American shift by Sihanouk "confirm ... their criticism" of him, made when he appeared to be moving leftward?<sup>378</sup>

Except for the needless excursion into ancient history to 'explain' traditional Chinese-Vietnamese enmity (110-17), Chanda chronicles accurately enough the deteriorating relations between Democratic Kampuchea and Viet Nam after April 1975, and the Chinese diplomatic moves in relation to that conflict.

One issue which Chanda's contacts with participants has not resolved is the reason for China's various moves in the Cambodia-Viet Nam conflict. Crude attempts to link DK policies directly to Maoism, then to the Cultural Revolution, or to the Gang of Four, or even to Deng Xiaoping, often based mainly on the political line of the commentator at the moment, have been found wanting.

Pol Potism was not Maoism, nor the Cultural Revolution; the Gang of Four, who may have been viewed sympathetically by Phnom Penh, were arrested before Pol Potism flew off into its wildest excesses (Chanda 74, 80), and nothing

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<sup>377</sup> Vickery, "Looking Back"; Vickery, *Cambodia 1975-1982*, Chapter 1; Chandler, *Tragedy*.

<sup>378</sup> For another interpretation see above, p. 36, text with note 103.

Deng Xiaoping has ever said or done in China suggests that he would have approved the domestic policies of Democratic Kampuchea.<sup>379</sup>

Chanda shows clear evidence that in 1977 the new Chinese leadership was unenthusiastic about DK (79-80). Moreover, the Vietnamese also felt that the end of Mao and the Gang of Four and the reemergence of Deng heralded improvements in the situation (87-88). Nevertheless, by September 1977 Pol Pot was received in Peking and promised support against Viet Nam (98-100).

Why then did China give its full support to an Indochina regime which was ideologically unsound, and was destroying itself from within, against another Indochina entity whose leadership shared the ideological objectives of the post-1976 Chinese? The answer must not be sought in ancient history, as Chanda seems to think (133-5), but in the intricacies of the Sino-Soviet-Indochina relationships.

Since the 1960s China had considered its main threat to come from the Soviet Union, even though both supported Viet Nam against the United States during the Second Indochina War. Viet Nam itself had always tried to stay aloof from the Sino-Soviet conflict, maintaining correct relations with both great powers.

As soon as the war was over in 1975 Viet Nam set out to map its own international course independent of either China or the Soviet Union. Viet Nam laid claims to the strategic Spratley and Paracel islands, also claimed by China, and in 1975 Le Duan, in Peking, refused to join the Chinese anti-Soviet crusade (24-6, 134). Contrary to Chanda (135) this could not have been, nor been viewed by China as, simply Vietnamese support for Moscow, for Viet Nam was resisting Moscow's request for bases, and in 1976 Pham Van Dong crudely snubbed the Soviet ambassador at a reception in Hanoi (171).

The snub, moreover, was not to indicate a leaning toward China, but toward the West, and this was just at the time when Viet Nam was formulating its post-war development plan which depended on large inputs of western aid, in particular the \$4.7 billion promised by Richard Nixon in 1973.

As Chanda admits in another context, as late as 1977 "Hanoi was clearly not ready to abandon support for revolutionary struggle in Asian countries in order to help the Soviets to draw the 'reactionary' regimes into a plan of encircling China" (179), and his Vietnamese informant claimed the Soviets had gone soft, wanting détente with the US to produce more consumer goods.

What is apparent, even from Chanda's presentation in which the crucial details are widely scattered, is a competition among China, the Soviet Union, and Vietnam, complicated by their own mutual antagonisms, for improved relations with, and economic aid from, the United States. For China at that time Vietnamese hegemony in Indochina did not necessarily represent an opening to the Soviet Union. The Chinese must also have been worried by the prospect of

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<sup>379</sup> See discussion pp. 258 ff.

the US-Vietnamese rapprochement sought by Vietnam, and by US business interests eyeing, for example, Vietnam's oil potential (144-5, 150).

Now we come to the great hole in Chanda's data base, or at least in the spread of interview material which he chose to use, "in choosing facts from a plethora of events" (ix). While showing off his wide contacts with Chinese, Vietnamese, European, and ASEAN players, his narrative is organized in a way that disguises the lack of hard questioning put to US personnel, in spite of his presumed close contacts in Washington starting in 1984.

It seems, in fact, that Chanda has bought the official US line, that "not long after the spring of 1975 ... Washington developed amnesia about Indochina", that there was a "lack of interest in Indochina", "Indochina sank below the horizon of American consciousness" (142). And his book, which begins with the 1975 American exit, ends with a plea for their return, so it is unlikely that he ever tried to pin down American responsibility for any of what happened in between.

American 'amnesia' is belied at the same time by the revelation that the US "froze \$150 million of Vietnamese assets in the United States and slapped a trade embargo on Cambodia and Vietnam" (142). That is not the act of a great nation which is forgetting a smaller, weak one. Neither was the US veto to keep Viet Nam out of the United Nations (144).

What then was the US interest in Viet Nam and Cambodia, since its actions cannot be explained by amnesia? Was it simply a bloody-minded desire for revenge? The answers are not in Chanda, though he does provide some hints toward an explanation not generally given attention and missed by Evans and Rowley.

We must recall the situation in Southeast Asia in the 1970s, and the US position there. The three Indochina countries were on their way to winning revolutionary wars which would lead to 'socialism', something the US had fought to prevent for over 20 years. And Thailand had overthrown its most pro-American military dictators in 1973, had insisted on the US military getting out of Thailand, allowed domestic expressions of sympathy for socialism, and in 1975 had quickly moved to recognize the new Indochina governments.

From Washington it must have looked as though Indochina was not only 'lost', but that the most crucial domino was not just falling, but throwing itself down in enthusiasm.

The first objective of US policy must have been to prevent wider attraction to the Indochina solution, and to weaken Indochina. The communist bloodbath was evoked, but soon proved untrue for Vietnam, and to the extent it was true in Cambodia was willfully exaggerated. Economic pressure was exerted on Thailand, in the form of what some observers have called an 'investment strike',

while the lack of US moral support for Thai democracy [1973-1976] was palpable.<sup>380</sup>

In spite of economic measures against Viet Nam taken in 1975, by September 1976 Viet Nam was admitted to the International Monetary Fund, and after a World Bank team visited Viet Nam in January 1977 their confidential report “praised the Vietnamese government’s efforts to mobilize its resources and tap its vast potential” (151). The World Bank urged donors to give substantial assistance on concessional terms.

This moreover was at a time when Thailand, even after overthrowing its experiment in democracy in October 1976 and getting back into the US-preferred type of dictatorial regime, was doing very badly, as the World Bank revealed two years later (*Far Eastern Economic Review* 1 Dec 1978).

For Washington this was disastrous. Communist Viet Nam was being praised by international capitalist institutions, while US-favored capitalist Thailand was wallowing in economic incompetence and unjustifiable exploitation of the poor by the rich. If Viet Nam was allowed to take off as the IMF and World Bank thought possible, its example could not fail to attract the peoples of Thailand, and elsewhere in Southeast Asia.

Viet Nam was moreover trying to make a good impression on the capitalist world. Hanoi had refused to join COMECON, and was reducing the level of relations with the USSR, which complained about losing Viet Nam to the capitalist world (184).

But they were also trying to insist that the US honor Nixon’s promise to give aid for reconstruction, and their development plans depended on this (149). As Evans and Rowley wrote, “as Le Duan put it ... ‘accumulation from internal sources is non-existent’, the whole strategy [for development] depended on an influx of foreign aid to finance investment”.<sup>381</sup>

This then, is part of the setting for the US actions in 1977-1978, the necessary background to study of negotiations over ‘normalization’. It was not just the question of Chinese relations being more important, or ‘amnesia’ about Indochina. The real problem was the danger that Viet Nam might make an economic success of socialism, and this had to be stopped.

Because of Vietnam’s own efforts to effect an opening to the west, even at the expense of close ties with the Soviet Union, the US could not avoid negotiations, but at each step, as Viet Nam conceded on important points, new obstacles were thrown up until an accord was preempted by other circumstances. This can be read from *Brother Enemy* even though Chanda apparently did not see it himself; or, if he did, chose not to give it emphasis.

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<sup>380</sup> For example, soon after the 1973 ousting of their military dictators, US ambassador Leonard Unger chided the Thai for being too concerned with democracy, when they should be worrying about the dangers of communism.

<sup>381</sup> Evans and Rowley, p. 38.

This is not to say that all Americans involved had a hidden goal of crippling Vietnam's progress. Leonard Woodcock's mission to Hanoi in March 1977 got off to a good start. The MIA issue, which, amnesia to the contrary, had been hoked up by US enemies of normalization in 1976, was defused by a formulation accepting the fullest possible accounting, rather than a full accounting (144, 146).<sup>382</sup>

Secretary of State Cyrus Vance and Assistant Secretary Richard Holbrooke wanted normalization with Vietnam, and Chanda's account is more sympathetic to them than to the Brzezinski group who wanted to line China up against the Soviet Union.

Nevertheless, negotiations had foundered by December 1977 over the issue of US aid for reconstruction as promised by Nixon in 1973 (149-59), and Vietnam's disappointment came just at a time of intense debate in Hanoi on domestic and foreign policy, with the failure of negotiations strengthening the faction opposed to liberalization at home, and in favor of close ties with the Soviet Union (159).

Thus, US refusal to keep its promises, which Chanda, along with even good guys Holbrooke and Vance, found unobjectionable (149-50), pushed Viet Nam toward that position which China was already accusing it of occupying. Further negotiations were then blocked by alleged Vietnamese espionage and the expulsion of the Vietnamese ambassador to the United Nations in February 1978 (see p. 196).

There was still hope, however. After a ten-month break, new meetings began in September 1978, and Viet Nam dropped all demands for aid, thereby meeting US preconditions to date (266). By this time, the Brzezinski group were prevailing with their view that China came first and that Viet Nam was just a proxy of the Soviet Union.

In October Viet Nam was told that there were new conditions – "Vietnamese hostility toward Cambodia, Soviet-Vietnamese ties, and the increasing number of boat people coming out of Vietnam" (290), all problems to which US actions over the previous 3 years had contributed. Chanda here puts his finger on American *post facto* hypocrisy, the explanation that it was "Vietnam's treaty with Moscow and its invasion of Cambodia and the surge of boat people" which made diplomatic relations impossible.

In fact, President Carter decided on October 11, 1978 not to normalize relations with Vietnam, while the Vietnamese-Soviet treaty and invasion of Cambodia came later, and even the "boat people exodus reached crisis proportions only in the summer of 1979" (291).

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<sup>382</sup> On MIAs see H. Bruce Franklin, *M.I.A. or Mythmaking in America*, New York, Lawrence Hill Books, 1992.

But Chanda could have done more with some of the reasons for the long break in negotiations in 1977-1978 which delayed matters until several crises coincided.

[Excision to avoid repetition. See joint review of Becker and Chanda, p. 193, ff.]

US intelligence certainly knew the circumstances of “Vietnamese hostility toward Cambodia”, one of the new October 1978 impediments to normalization. Indeed, Elizabeth Becker wrote that “the US government knew by May [1978] that Viet Nam planned to invade Cambodia”. But no American expert in 1978 was predicting full-scale war between Viet Nam and Cambodia; at most, only a Vietnamese push into eastern Cambodia in response to the Cambodian attacks, something justifiable in international law and not a cause for suspending US-Viet Nam normalization (Becker, 396, 409). Yet Viet Nam was being blamed for hostility, not Cambodia for attacking Viet Nam.

The Vietnamese ‘threat’ to Southeast Asia, as seen from Washington, had been contained. Economic development which might have made Viet Nam a socialist model had been blocked, and Viet Nam was soon to become an ‘aggressor’. Here we see the emergence of Pol Pot’s Democratic Kampuchea as a useful and favored tool of US policy against Vietnam.

By 1977 US intelligence had decided to downplay the Cambodian bloodbath which they had found useful in 1975.<sup>383</sup> The Pol Pot regime were aware of this and responded in kind. Confessions that have been preserved from their archives show that complicity with Viet Nam, rather than with the CIA, was becoming the favorite accusation thrown at suspected traitors.

An intriguing example of their change of heart is visible in a photograph made by Swedish sympathizers who visited Cambodia in December 1978. In a communal hall in eastern Cambodia they photographed a current slogan painted in large letters on the wall. “Sweep away the CIA and running dog agents who have wormed their way inside until they have been completely cleaned up”, was the original text, but then ‘CIA’ had been covered over with black paint, not heavily enough, however, to prevent the lettering from showing through.<sup>384</sup>

US coddling of Pol Pot became more evident after his overthrow in January 1979, as can be read from Chanda’s final chapter, “Indochina: War Forever?”

Sihanouk, taken from house arrest in Phnom Penh to China in January 1979, went to New York accompanied by DK security agents to attend the United Nations session. There he fled from his bodyguard and threw himself on the mercy of the US government, intending to defect from Democratic Kampuchea.

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<sup>383</sup> Michael Vickery, “Democratic Kampuchea – CIA to the Rescue”.

<sup>384</sup> The photograph was taken by Hedda Eckerwald who gave me a copy.

Instead of being welcomed as an ally in the search for a peaceful and legitimate alternative to the DK horror, Sihanouk became a “hot potato in the hands of the State Department”. They paid the \$15,000 for his and Monique’s medical checkup (368), which, contrary to ethics, bought them access to the medical records.<sup>385</sup>

But the US government did not want Sihanouk hanging around. They were worried about the “chilling effect US asylum ... could have on the newly established Sino-American ties”. Andrew Young, Holbrooke, and Frank Tatu asked him, “why don’t you think it over?”; a defector “loses his identity ... his usefulness as a political leader” (366-7).

He was even told he could not go back to Cambodia anyway, something which Chanda’s own research has shown untrue. Already in October 1978 Sihanouk’s son Ranariddh had been informed that Sihanouk would be welcome to “play a leading role” in the overthrow of DK (335-6), and while in New York “Hanoi sent him a message ... that he would be welcome to return to Phnom Penh as head of the Vietnamese-installed regime”.

Chanda, now evidently writing in his post-1984 Washington mode, editorializes that this third choice “was scarcely more attractive” than “life as a penniless and stateless exile or as a pampered representative of a murderous regime” (368). In the end the American government did its part to obstruct the third choice, which would have immediately ended the Cambodia conflict, and instead pressured Sihanouk into remaining as the representative of a murderous regime. [Note again the ‘tilt’ in 1975 described by Chandler, p. 125, above.]

In his last 20 pages summing up post-1979 events even-handedness disappears from Chanda’s treatment, and the Washington influence shows through in point after point. In describing Cambodia in early 1979, he imputes the plundering of Phnom Penh to the Vietnamese army, and terms it “a large blot on the Vietnamese role as ‘savior’ of Cambodia” (371). He offers no source, and has simply followed a line popular in anti-PRK circles.

The earlier line, from 1975-1976, was that Pol Pot forces had done the plundering, which careful questioning of refugees showed to have not generally been true, either. There may have been some Vietnamese plundering, but again careful research fails to substantiate it as general policy.

Something else which was going on at the time was scavenging by Cambodian “returnees ... who managed to enter [Phnom Penh] ... hunting for movable goods” (371). My informants, both among refugees and people still living in Phnom Penh, indicate that most of the looting resulted from the anarchy of a propertyless floating population in the early months of 1979.<sup>386</sup>

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<sup>385</sup> This information is from a private source who had good State Department contacts and whom I trust on this point.

<sup>386</sup> Vickery, *Cambodia 1975-1982*, pp. 173-74, 234. One of the anti-Vietnamese lines concerned damage in the National Library, about which an accurate statement is in a

The new slant permeates his description of the new government. “Hanoi’s major effort was focused on consolidating its hold over the country by creating a new Khmer state, government, and party institutions” (372), although the alleged

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letter to the *PPP*, 4/4, 24 Feb-9 March, 1995, p. 8, by George Smith, Consulting Fellow to the National Library. When writing *Cambodia 1975-1982* my information about the library, pp. 173, 234, was incomplete, and only in 1993 did I learn in a chance encounter with one of the first persons assigned to clean up the library in 1979 that during the DK period the main building had been used as a storeroom for dishes (not a pig pen as colorful propaganda alleged), while the books were removed to the archive building behind the main library. See also above, note 287.

Another probable canard, devised for an anti-Vietnamese implication, is in Chandler, *Tragedy*, p. 91, “the copies of [the “relatively free” 1950s newspapers] held in Cambodia’s National Library were pulped and recycled in 1979”, referred in footnote 13 to Justin Corfield, who “has interviewed a Cambodian hired by the Vietnamese [really Vietnamese or PRK Khmer, whom their local enemies like to call ‘Vietnamese’?] in 1979 to assist with the pulping”. This source is unreliable.

Remember all the ‘eyewitness’ stories about what DK was supposed to have done to the library. It is necessary to know when and where Corfield interviewed the person, and to hear his description of conditions in the library when he and the ‘Vietnamese’ entered it in 1979. If there was pulping, was it because the newspapers were already destroyed by storage in poor conditions, or was it simply destruction? In fact I doubt the story. From my acquaintances who were involved with cleaning up official buildings (including the library) in Phnom Penh in 1979, Vietnamese were not involved, except in reorganizing the books after the cleanup. Did Corfield’s informant mean by ‘Vietnamese’ officials of the PRK?

And it is clear that many documents disappeared through carelessness and theft because of lack of supervision. In the early 1979 anarchy ordinary people stole newspapers for personal use in wrapping market goods, but when in the late 1980s the library was reorganized, it was found that large quantities of the old collections had been preserved. Chandler just tries to make the post-1979 government look bad, ‘suppressing information’. It will not work in this case, because most of the newspapers in question would have been supportive of the way the post-1979 PRK wished to write history. [See a list of the most important in Kiernan, *How Pol Pot*, pp. 179-80.]

Short, *Pol Pot*, p. 284 footnote, avoiding any political inference repeats the canard from Chandler without, however, sourcing it, and with a purportedly rational explanation, “a stopgap measure at a time of acute shortage of paper”. The quantity of newsprint involved, and even less the quantity really found to be missing, would not have served that purpose usefully. Another remark in Chandler’s note 13 is even more peculiar, “See U.S. Embassy Phnom Penh’s 328, March 13, 1957 [sic!], on pulping”, which no one has claimed to have occurred until 1979.

With respect to Corfield, in order to take this seriously one would have to know when Corfield met his source, and who the source was. It is not safe now, nor was it in the 1990s, to accept what everyone said about what they saw or did in 1979 and the early 80s. Many have adjusted their personal histories to fit current tendencies and prejudices. Uncritical use of such sourcing is characteristic of Chandler’s *Tragedy* and Evan Gottesman, *Cambodia After the Khmer Rouge Inside the Politics of Nation Building*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 2003, on which see Vickery, “Wrong on Gottesman” [review by Luke Hunt, *PPP* 13/27, Dec 31, 2004-Jan 13, 2005], *PPP* 14/2, Jan 28-Feb 10, 2005.



goal would have been better attained by direct Vietnamese administration. Chanda can only get away with this through limiting himself to obsolete 1979-81 data, although writing in 1985.

Using a 1981 paper by Stephen Heder, an overt PRK enemy, Chanda says that 80% of the Central Committee members are “former ... [Khmer Issarak] allied with the Vietnamese” (453, n. 8), terminology required by Heder’s eccentric position on the history of Cambodian communism.<sup>387</sup> The percentages, however, are close enough for 1981, but by 1985 the old group close to Viet Nam had become a minority, replaced by new young intellectuals and technocrats without any pre-1970 Vietnamese or communist background.

Chanda also keeps obsolete statistics on the Vietnamese presence, “the 180,000-strong Vietnamese army”, which was no longer true even at the 1983 date to which Chanda refers. A US government expert had by then acknowledged the truth of the first Vietnamese partial withdrawal, leaving 150,000, and another source which Chanda quotes for statistics on Vietnamese civilians in Cambodia, suggested 160,000 military.<sup>388</sup>

Worse than this is Chanda’s reliance on a real propaganda rag, the Singapore-based *Indochina Report*, for Hanoi’s intention to create “an economically integrated unit in which to achieve ‘gradual implementation of labor distribution’” among the three Indochina countries; in other words settlement of “sparsely-populated” Cambodia by Vietnamese surplus population (375).<sup>389</sup>

<sup>387</sup> ‘Khmer Issarak’, or ‘Free Khmer’ refers to those armed groups, many local, ad hoc, and of very diverse political tendencies, who took up arms against the French in 1945 or even earlier, before the end of World War II. Most students of the period distinguish them from those who fought along with the Vietnamese to achieve independence plus socialist revolution, and who pursued the same goals as Cambodian units after 1951, although there was always some overlap between Issarak and communists.

Heder’s insistence on using ‘Khmer Issarak’ for the Cambodian communists who worked together with the Vietnamese is an obfuscation in order to support the Pol Pot line that there was no Cambodian communist party until his group organized one in 1960. The best description of Issaraks and early Cambodian communists is in Ben Kiernan, *How Pol Pot*.

<sup>388</sup> Vickery, *Cambodia*, p. 291; and Stewart E. Fraser, “Vietnam’s Struggles with Exploding Population”, *Indochina Issues* 57, May 1985, cited by Chanda, p. 453, n. 17.

<sup>389</sup> *Indochina Report* is an allegedly private newsletter devoted to anticommunist writing, much of it anonymous or by well-known reactionaries. Chanda cited its first pre-publication issue of October 1984, “The Vietnamisation of Kampuchea: A New Model of Colonialism”, anonymous. Attentive observers believe it was set up and financed by the Singapore government, and its mode of presentation is designed to mislead the public that it is part of the Institute for Southeast Asian Studies, a genuine academic body.

The propaganda line cited here is based on the fantasy, shared by most Cambodians, of the country’s great natural wealth. In fact its agricultural land is among the poorest, and produces little surplus. Most of the Vietnamese who have settled in Cambodia since 1979 went to the towns as skilled workers, not into agriculture. On *Indochina Report* see further below, nn. 535, 555.

By the time Chanda was going to press this was observably untrue, as was his assertion that “with every passing year the Vietnamese grip over Cambodia increased” (405). On the contrary, from 1981 it became clearer each year that a truly Khmer regime was being built, and after 1983 there could be no doubt that the Vietnamese were gradually withdrawing their forces.<sup>390</sup>

The anti-PRK slant continues in Chanda’s summary of international maneuvers around Cambodia. After describing how the Non-Aligned Summit in 1979 decided to keep its Cambodia seat vacant pending resolution of the dispute, Chanda tells us “similar tricks were not possible at the United Nations” (376-7), where the US swings considerably more political and economic weight to be used against countries who vote the wrong way. Apparently Chanda would agree with Vernon Walters that such tactics are not ‘tricks’ [Walters was the John Bolton equivalent of the 1980s.]

The key player in the post-1979 reaction was Thailand, without whose cooperation no effective anti-PRK campaign could be set up. Thai cooperation was easily secured because “the drama of the Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia” (not, we will note, ‘the Vietnamese rescue of Cambodia from Pol Pot’) “was a replay of Nguyễn dynasty expansion in the early part of the nineteenth century” (380).

Perhaps some Thai saw it that way, but there is no excuse for foreign journalists and historians to swallow the same line. In the 19th century the Thai had been as aggressive as the Vietnamese, and in the 20th century the “anti-Communist Khmer Serei movement in Cambodia” which they supported in “the post-Geneva period” (380) had been first of all anti-Sihanouk at a time when there was no Vietnamese threat to Cambodia, let alone to Thailand.

Considerable great-power effort went into getting the Thai on side after 1979. The Chinese effort, and the profits for Thai military and businessmen which went with it, are recorded by Chanda (349, 381).

But a glaring absence in Chanda’s treatment is the lack of any comment on the US role, whereas Elizabeth Becker reported “Brzezinski himself claims that he concocted the idea of persuading Thailand to cooperate fully with China in its efforts to rebuild the Khmer Rouge” (Becker, 440). There is not even an interview with Ambassador Morton Abramowitz, whose pressure on the Thais was given ample attention in the press at the time.

General Kriangsak Chomanan was the Thai Prime Minister who made the agreement to allow transport of Chinese aid across Thailand to the Pol Pot forces on the border. This represented something of a change of attitude, for Kriangsak had come to power in 1977 as part of a reaction against the rigid anti-communism of his predecessor, and he adopted a policy of detente toward the

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<sup>390</sup> Details of the gradual withdrawal are in Vickery, *Cambodia: A Political Survey*, pp. 20-30.5

Indochina regimes. Moreover, throughout 1979 Kriangsak allowed sales of Thai rice and corn to the Soviet Union, which was shipping at least part of it to Viet Nam and Cambodia, thereby providing enough famine relief to enable them to resist western aid efforts that were perceived as politically unattractive. In March 1979 Kriangsak even visited Moscow and gave permission for Russian aid flights across Thailand to Vietnam.

Domestic problems, however, were undercutting Kriangsak's authority, and it became increasingly dangerous to risk accusation of lack of vigilance against communism. Even more than from the Chinese, Kriangsak was under pressure from the US, in the person of Ambassador Abramowitz, who was particularly insistent toward the end of 1979 on opening the enormous refugee camp system designed to drain Cambodia of surviving qualified people.<sup>391</sup>

Chanda's refusal to treat any of this seriously detracts from his claim to be providing a story based on "a glimpse of the secret calculations and behind-the-scene maneuvers". With respect to possible American responsibility for what has happened to Cambodia since 1979 Chanda's problem has not been lack of "enough relevant information to choose from", but that he has tendentiously exercised "subjective judgement in choosing facts" (ix-x).

Given the several examples of Chanda's obeisance to the US regime line, the stylistic flourishes so much at variance with his previous journalistic writing may signal something more than an attempt to flog his book on the lower middle-brow public.

This occurred to me when I read a quotation from former Turkey CIA station chief Paul Henze's 'Bulgarian Connection' propaganda: "The sun had just set, bringing to an end a cool, bright autumn day when I stepped off the bus near the central square of Malatya ... I had come to probe Mehmet Ali Agca's background". Did Chanda and Henze share the same rewrite specialist, or, since the style is not out of line with Henze's other writing, has Henze become an editorial adviser to young journalists whom Washington wishes to turn?<sup>392</sup>

The problems with Chanda's writing which I have signaled above, and which are found in so much recent 'historical' writing, especially about Cambodia, result from an effort to write for sale rather than to supply the most sober and objective treatment of their subject, as one should expect from first-generation studies. There is a striving for literariness, or pseudo-literariness, seen also in the trendy titles to excite readers and increase sales in Kiernan's *Pol Pot Regime*, and to a lesser extent in Chandler's *Tragedy*.

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<sup>391</sup> See Vickery, "Refugee Politics: The Khmer Camp system in Thailand".

<sup>392</sup> Compare Chanda, above, note 370, and text. From Henze's *The Plot to Kill the Pope*, New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1985, quoted in Edward S. Herman and Frank Brodhead, *The Rise and Fall of the Bulgarian Connection*, New York, Sheridan Square Publications, Inc., 1986, p. 147. For Henze's style, see also his *Ethiopian Journeys: Travels in Ethiopia, 1969-72*, Benn, 1977.

Instead of an attempt to achieve historical objectivity, their treatments show that they started from a position of ‘knowing’ what happened and why, and imposed on it the values of their milieu—what I called the ‘STV’. See Kiernan, “Wiping the Slate Clean”, “Writing on the Slate”, “The Slate Crumbles”, “Thunder Without Rain”; and Chandler, “Inside the Typhoon” (*Tragedy*, chapter 8), or even *Tragedy of Cambodian History*.

Such ‘sexing up of the dossier’ is often the work of editors who are interested exclusively in sales and not at all in historical objectivity. This is particularly true in writing by Cambodians who were children at the time, and whose ‘sexed-up dossiers’ were certainly encouraged by western editors.

Even an adult intellectual, writing of a situation in which he was an expert, Benny Widyono, has acknowledged to me that his rather silly and irrelevant title, “Dancing in Shadows” was not his own, but was imposed by an editor (see also p. 544)

Chanda, Chandler and Kiernan, however, are all talented writers perfectly capable of composing what they wished without any imposition by editors. Their misplaced attention to literariness is entirely their own.

At its worst, then, in its post-1979 summing up, *Brother Enemy* is USIA history – at its best ‘journo-hist’ entertainment to place on the coffee table. It’s great if you want to know how star players dressed and eyeballed each other, or which foreign minister barfed in his limo after lunch with Sihanouk (395). But if you want to learn about the Third Indochina War, start with Evans and Rowley.

#### Postscript on Chanda (2010)

Chanda’s book illustrates a phenomenon noted at least as early as I.F. Stone. A talented young journalist with a somewhat critical sense, as Chanda’s early articles in *Far Eastern Economic Review* showed, is invited or assigned to a tour in Washington, as Chanda was from 1984 to 1989. He is cultivated and flattered by some of the government elite, and emerges with a largely uncritical position on US policy.

Besides what appeared above, this is seen in Chanda’s references to Ambassador Kenneth Quinn as ‘Ken’ Quinn, a key signal noted later in the controversy over a Thai journalist accused of being on the take. As it was put in the Thai press, “by the very nature of their job, members of the press hobnob with politicians and influential business people ... which can blur the border between their role as public watchdog and conflict of interest ... senior journalists are on a first-name basis with politicians, wealthy businessmen and civil servants”.<sup>393</sup>

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<sup>393</sup> “Snapping at the heels of the watchdog”, Editorial, *The Nation*, 19 February 1999, p. A4.

When Nayan Chanda was reporting on Asia for *FEER* he acquired a reputation as a reliable journalist with academic training in the history of his area, something rare in foreign newsmen in Southeast Asia. His reports usually showed an admirable objectivity and refusal to depend on handouts from the anonymous ‘western diplomats’ who pepper most dispatches, especially those about countries whose regimes are out of favor in Washington. This type of objectivity was even rarer among Chanda’s colleagues than was a background of knowledge about the area they were covering.

In 1984 Chanda was transferred to become *FEER*’s correspondent in Washington, and the quality of *FEER* reporting on Indochina quickly slipped. This could have been predicted, but a compensating quality in dispatches from Washington, which the *FEER* editor claimed was the goal, did not materialize. There were soon signs that Chanda was being co-opted, as I.F. Stone said bright young journalists often were.<sup>394</sup>

Not long after assuming his new duties, an article about Afghanistan appeared, from Washington, by Chanda (30 May 1985). Aside from the peculiar circumstance that an Asian-based magazine would turn to Washington as source for an article about Afghanistan by a correspondent without experience there, *FEER* was peddling the US regime line on an issue in which that regime was involved in a controversial manner.

A second example, even less excusable (since Afghanistan, it could be reasonably argued, was too far away and too exotic to be fully understood), came in 1987, after the attempted coup against President Aquino by the Honasan group of army officers. Without any comment Chanda quoted Assistant Secretary of Defense Karl Jackson – who before leaving academia for regime service had been known for extreme right-wing views – to the effect that the young Philippine army officers were idealists with the best interests of their country at heart.

This in spite of the fact that an expert on the Philippines, Prof. Alfred McCoy, went on Australian television to describe the Honasan group of young army officers as sadist butchers who if in power would institute a regime far bloodier than anything seen in the worst days of Pinochet or the Argentine military.

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<sup>394</sup> As Myra MacPherson wrote in *All Governments Lie: The Life and Times of Rebel Journalist I.F. Stone*, Scribner, 2006, Stone told her, “You’ve really got to wear a chastity belt in Washington to preserve your journalistic virginity. Once the secretary of state invites you to lunch and asks your opinion, you’re sunk”. Says MacPherson, he “gave me some terse advice: Don’t go to briefings. Don’t have lunch with people in power”; the private dinner, the special briefing, are all devices for “managing” the news, as are the special organizations of privileged citizens gathered in by State and Defense Departments for those sessions at which highly confidential (and one-sided) information is ladled out to a flattered ‘elite’.

McCoy's statement was not picked up by *FEER*, nor by any other press organ that I saw.<sup>395</sup>

It seems impossible that Chanda, and the regime in Washington, could not have known that the most competent American Philippine expert, Alfred McCoy, had declared that those officers were psychopathic sadists and enthusiastic torturers, and he knew this from hours of interviews with them spread over several years. No wonder some Filipinos have believed that the US was playing a two-track game with Manila – officially support Acquino, but encourage a coup by some other group who might be expected to continue business as usual.

Another indicator of this, and which links the Philippines and Cambodia, and involves Chanda, was the appointment in 1988 of Kenneth Quinn as no. 2 in the US Embassy in Manila.<sup>396</sup>

Kenneth Quinn was known to Cambodia hands as an early US government researcher on Cambodian politics, based in Vietnam, in the late 1960s, and his published reports from that time have been valuable in reconstituting the history of the Cambodian communists before 1975.

Of course Quinn was not just a researcher. His major published article, in the *US Naval War College Review*, identified him as an “employee of the executive branch of the US government”, often a transparent code for you know what; and I think no one doubted that Quinn had been part of the effort to destabilize Cambodia in the 1960s and line it up in support of the US position in Vietnam.<sup>397</sup>

Quinn later produced a Ph.D. thesis on the Cambodian revolution for the University of Maryland. A peculiar feature of it is its reliance, for information about conditions inside Cambodia, on Barron and Paul, rather than on his own publicly-known research, while they thank Kenneth Quinn as one of the people who provided them with valuable background information on Cambodia. That is, Quinn unloaded his research privately on Barron and Paul, then took it up again

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<sup>395</sup> Nayan Chanda, *FEER* 24 September 1987, p. 14. At the Australian Asian Studies Conference in February 1988, McCoy confirmed for me what he had said on television, and also said that there did not seem to be any interest in the media to report that side of the story. On 22 December 1989, after the second Honasan affair (see John McBeth, “Gunning for Cory”, *FEER* 14 December 1989, pp. 12-14), I wrote to Philip Bowring at *FEER* suggesting that he invite McCoy to do a “5th Column” piece on the Honasan RAM group.

<sup>396</sup> James Clad “US smoulders over ‘pay up or get out’ tactics: Patience wears thin” *FEER*, “deputy US chief of mission Kenneth Quinn”, quoted as saying that the US bases would be of no more use if ships carrying nuclear weapons were excluded.

<sup>397</sup> Kenneth Michael Quinn, “Political Change in Wartime: the Khmer Kraham Revolution in Southern Cambodia”, *US Naval War College Review*, Spring 1976.

from them for his thesis, a procedure which I think might have disqualified him had he been writing for a real university.<sup>398</sup>

‘Ken’ Quinn also comes forth as a major character in Chanda’s book, and one cannot avoid the thought that he (like Henze? – see above) was given the task of guiding the young Chanda around the Washington maze, and if possible coopting him, a task which he appears to have carried out successfully.

One more indication of Chanda’s turning was signaled by David Roberts, writing of the pressure exerted by George Shultz on ASEAN and Australian Foreign Minister Bill Hayden to prevent them from making any proposal which Viet Nam might accept. Roberts playfully notes that “the nature of this event [Shultz’s bullying] was disguised elsewhere ... Nayan Chanda [later in 1989] claimed that ASEAN ‘had difficulty persuading [Shultz] to support’ the regional attempt at reconciliation”.<sup>399</sup>

The final result was Chanda’s positions in the 1990s as editor and executive editor of *Far Eastern Economic Review*, at a time when that journal, which had once been a fairly decent news magazine with articles by Chanda on Indochina which all (except possibly old warmongers in Washington) admired, sank to its lowest as a right-wing business rag after being taken over by Dow Jones, with articles on Cambodia, especially by Nate Thayer, that violate all standards of decent journalism.<sup>400</sup>

### Australia, Cambodia, and the Propaganda Mill (2010)

Much of my own journalism during that time, while in Adelaide from 1979 through 1987, consisted of efforts to correct false information emanating from writers on the far right of Australian politics.

I contributed several short pieces to the Australian and Bangkok press, including articles reporting new observations following trips to Cambodia in

<sup>398</sup> Later, in the 1990s, as ambassador in Cambodia, Quinn redeemed himself in that country by refusing to support the machinations of the anti-Vietnamese right-wing Sam Rainsy, supported by the International Republican Institute and other US reactionaries, against the legitimate Cambodian government, a position which I have heard damaged his subsequent career.

<sup>399</sup> Roberts, *Political Transition in Cambodia*, p. 15 and note 37, p. 217, citing Chanda, “Civil War in Cambodia?”, *Foreign Policy* no. 76, Fall 1989, p. 38. See also Ben Kiernan, “The Inclusion of the Khmer Rouge in the Cambodian Peace Process: Causes and Consequences”, in *Genocide and Democracy in Cambodia: the Khmer Rouge, the United Nations and the International Community*, New Haven, Yale, 1993, p.253, n.58.

<sup>400</sup> Nate Thayer, “A Khmer Ruse”, *FEER*, 7 March 1991, pp. 25-26. On another occasion, at the Foreign Correspondents’ Association in Bangkok, Thayer has been reported as saying that “the truth is the Khmer Rouge are hated more in this room than in Cambodia” (Jari Lindholm, in *Sanomalehtimies/Journalisten* [‘The Journalist’], (Helsinki), 17 January 1991, p. 14, sent to me by Hannu Reime of Finnish Radio. See also below, pp 374 ff.

1984 and 1986. My second book, *Kampuchea, Politics, Economics and Society*, was written there in 1985-86.

In 1983 the Australian press revived the issue of Yellow Rain, which elsewhere had fizzled out; generally discredited to the extent that many no longer recalled what was at issue.

‘Yellow Rain’ was the name given by American propagandists to an allegedly new chemical or biological weapon which they charged the Vietnamese, with Soviet support, were using in Laos and Cambodia on the guerrilla forces operating against the existing governments. By 1983 so much evidence had been produced to discredit it that the Yellow Rain campaign in the rest of the world was tapering off.

The attempt to revive it in Australia, using American journalistic conduits, in particular *Commentary* and Michael Ledeen (see below), seemed to have been related to American, ASEAN and conservative Australian efforts, noted above, to get rid of Labor Party Foreign Minister Bill Hayden, who was manifesting ideas about conflict resolution in Indochina which were not to the liking of those circles.

Hayden’s projects were discredited and he was eventually replaced as Foreign Minister by Gareth Evans, a more acquiescent follower of US Indochina policy, and sponsor of an American-Australian document which developed into the Paris Agreement on Cambodia of October 1991.

Besides short letters to the newspapers concerned, I wrote a longer article, never published in its entirety, although parts appeared in publication combined with other material.

#### The Propaganda Mill (1983)<sup>401</sup>

For several days following the announcement at the beginning of this month that Australia would not co-sponsor the ASEAN resolution on Cambodia at the UN this year, the Australian press gave attention to the adverse reaction from ASEAN countries.

One of the reasons why Mr. Hayden was not satisfied with the language of that resolution seems to be its inclusion of statements about alleged acts of Vietnamese oppression in Cambodia; and his position apparently reflects a

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<sup>401</sup> Michael Vickery, unpublished, 14 October 1983. Parts of this article appeared in “Recent Propaganda on Kampuchea”, published in *Vietnam Today* (Canberra), No.25, May 1983. It combined the letter to *The Age* on “Kampuchea’s Border Brutality” (above, text with n. 343), some of my critique of Elizabeth Becker (above, pp. 166, ff.), the letter to *FEER* on Soviet aid to Cambodia (p.180), and the letters to *The Australian* about Adelia Bernard (below, pp. 221, ff.).



Foreign Affairs Department assessment of the situation different from that of ASEAN.<sup>402</sup>

In those circumstances one could not help but be struck by the appearance in *The Australian* [Sydney, a Murdoch paper] on the 10th and 12th of October 1983 of two apparent news items which seemed orchestrated to undermine Mr. Hayden's position through new and shocking revelations of alleged Vietnamese and Soviet atrocities against the Cambodian people.

Both articles were credited to an Australian journalist based in Washington, D.C., Peter Samuel. In the first, headlined "UN accused of covering up Soviet atrocities", Samuel presented seemingly fantastic accusations that "UN-controlled" doctors refuse, for political reasons, to treat Yellow Rain victims on the Thai-Cambodian border, and that the UN since April 1982 has acknowledged, but has destroyed evidence on, "grisly Nazi-style chemical and biological warfare experimentation on children" conducted by the Vietnamese and Soviets in Cambodia.

As amazing as the allegations themselves was the circuit through which they had passed before reaching the eyes of the Australian public. Samuel cited the New York magazine *Commentary* which was said to have republished material from an Italian journalist in Milan (Lucio Lami), who had in turn received the information from one Adelia Bernard, a resident of Melbourne.

Now although such assertions may easily be assimilated by a public fed on anti-Vietnamese stories for several years, they are truly mind-boggling for anyone who, like myself, worked among Cambodian refugees in Thailand and along the Thai-Cambodian border in 1980, who has visited those refugee camps each year since [until 1985], and who during that period annually had contact with those "doctors working under UN control", UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) officials in Bangkok, and Dr. Amos Townsend, the American 'Yellow Rain' investigator.

The assertions were not so astounding, however, for anyone who had noticed Mrs. Bernard's earlier allegation in *The Age*, 19 March 1983. I found them equally fantastic at the time and tried without success to initiate a discussion in *The Age*; and they impelled me, when in Thailand in August-September of this year, to make some inquiries about Mrs. Bernard's activities near the Cambodian border.

[Excision to avoid repetition – see letter to *Commentary*, p. 224 ff.]

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<sup>402</sup> The annual votes on Cambodia in the UN in the 1980s were designed to discredit the Phnom Penh government and Vietnam, and to implicitly support the tripartite coalition of Democratic Kampuchea ('Khmer Rouge'), FUNCINPEC royalists, and KPNLF on the Thai border. After the Australian Labor Party election victory in 1983, Foreign Minister Bill Hayden apparently wished to use Australian influence to change the international hostility to Vietnam and Cambodia.

Yellow Rain was also the subject of the second *Australian* article by Peter Samuel who, under the title “Viet defector gives details of ‘Yellow rain’ warfare” reported some apparently new and startling information about Vietnamese use of toxic chemicals in Cambodia, the source of which is a former “Vietnamese Group Commander for Chemical Warfare, Nguyen Quan”, “who surrendered to Kampuchean guerrillas earlier this year” and who “is one of the most important communist military officers to come under Western control”.

Now, for attentive Cambodia-watchers Nguyen Quan is an old acquaintance. His first public performance was under the patronage of the Thai Supreme Command at a press conference in Bangkok on 9 July, 1981 (*Bangkok Post* 10 July 1981), at which time it was revealed that he had defected 18 months earlier, that is in January 1980, or more than three and one-half years ago [written in 1983].

At that press conference he identified himself as a former Captain with sixteen years service attached to the 28th Artillery Battalion of the 5th Division stationed in Mongkolborei, Battambang, northwestern Cambodia, and he indeed ‘revealed’ that the Vietnamese had used ‘poison gas’ in Cambodia. He did not supply the technical details found in Samuel’s article, nor claim to have been himself a trained chemical officer. He merely stated that “poison gas has been used” in Cambodia in the form of artillery shells.

As interesting as his testimony itself was the way it was handled by the *Bangkok Post*. The headline was “Vietnam army ‘facing crisis’“, with a sub-heading “Defector tells of low morale and meager rations”.

The ‘Yellow Rain’ campaign had not yet been fully activated, and what the Thai Supreme Command and the press were then concerned about were other issues on which Nguyen Quan supplied information: disintegration of the Vietnamese military forces, starvation in Vietnam, and theft by the Vietnamese army of international relief supplies in Cambodia, all matters about which we now know he was not telling the truth.

Indeed, having defected at the beginning of 1980, and then been held by the Thai authorities, it is difficult to imagine how he knew anything about conditions and behavior of Vietnamese troops in Cambodia in mid-1981; but the alleged misappropriation of foreign aid in Cambodia was one of the propaganda lines being pushed by certain governments and media at that time.

Once Nguyen Quan had been revealed to the public, two earlier Bangkok news items took on added significance.

In April 1980 Seth Mydans, under the headline “Hanoi defector spills the beans”, wrote of an unnamed 16-year veteran Vietnamese artillery officer and recent defector who had asserted that 65% of international aid rice in Cambodia was appropriated by the Vietnamese. The Vietnamese officer also said that non-lethal chemical warheads, some left over from US supplies in Vietnam, were being used in Cambodia; but non-lethal gas has become standard military equipment, thus not interesting for the press, and the ‘beans’ being spilled were the

information about stolen aid rice, not chemical warfare (*Bangkok Post* 28 April 1980).

A couple of days later Alan Dawson, “Vietnam and the poison gas issue,” citing an unnamed Vietnamese Captain who had recently defected, wrote that non-toxic gas was being used in attacks on the Cambodian ‘resistance’, Dawson’s point being that evidence for **poison** gas had not yet been produced (*Bangkok Post* 30 April 1980).

Even though Mydans’ and Dawson’s informant was not named, it was clearly our Nguyen Quan, whose stories have grown with the demand for anti-Vietnamese propaganda.

Dr. Amos Townsend, the indefatigable American ‘Yellow Rain’ investigator, told me regretfully in 1982 that Quan’s information had not been picked up earlier in his interrogations by American or Thai intelligence personnel – obviously, I should say, because he did not have such information to provide until prompted.

Dr. Townsend also told me that one of Quan’s first attempts to buy favor after changing sides was an allegation that in 1980 the Vietnamese were planning a large-scale three-division invasion of Thailand. That of course did not occur, and intelligence gathered at the time of the small-scale incursion in June 1980 revealed that it had not even been contemplated.<sup>403</sup>

Such is the credibility of “the most important communist military officer to come under Western control”, and who, along with Melbourne activist Adelia Bernard, is being used to dirty the Vietnamese ‘slate’ at a time when Australia’s foreign policy appears to be undergoing a shift in that country’s favor.<sup>404</sup>

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After writing the above in answer to *The Australian*, I sent copies to *Commentary*, and requested a copy of Lami’s article, which had not yet reached Adelaide.

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<sup>403</sup> Conversation with Dr. Amos Townsend in Bangkok, 17 August 1982. For some details of the 1980 incident see my “Refugee Politics: The Khmer Camp System in Thailand”.

[(Added in 1987) It would seem that Nguyen Quan was being set up to become another Jan Sejna, the Czechoslovak Stalinist general rescued by the CIA from prosecution by the Dubcek government in 1968. Sejna has repaid the favor by allowing himself to be used as witness to Czech, and Soviet, involvement in any matter which is brought forth for Cold War propaganda, for example Yellow Rain, and organized terrorism, even though he apparently had forgotten to mention them back in 1968. See Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent*, p. 159 and references.

In 1986, re-labeled Mr. Jan Sejna, rather than General, he was dragged out again to explain how “Khrushchev ‘plotted drug war on West’”, by our friend Peter Samuel, *The Australian*, 24 December 1986, p. 5, based on an article by Sejna “in conjunction with ... a northern Virginia security consultant”. Yes indeed.]

<sup>404</sup> This information on Nguyen Quan was published in “‘Yellow Rain’ and the Propaganda Mill”, an article which I prepared for *Vietnam Today*, Canberra, the Australia-Vietnam Society, No. 27, November 1983.

In my letter (written in October 1983) I added that "It might be of interest to *Commentary* that among the 'doctors working under UN control', who are allegedly depriving people of needed treatment for political reasons, would have been the medical teams of the International Rescue Committee, whose Leo Cherne, with whom you are no doubt acquainted, might have some interesting comments on the allegations"; and it may have been this which impelled them to give my letter some consideration.

Their Associate Editor, Brenda Brown answered in a letter dated 18 October 1983, "I enclose a copy of the original article by Lucio Lami ... If you wish to write a letter to the editor commenting on the article we would be happy to publish it".

After I sent my letter, printed below, Ms. Brown acknowledged it in a letter dated 8 December, 1983, in which she said, " ... we will make every effort to publish [it], if possible in full, in our correspondence columns, together with a reply by Mr. Lami." Certain crucial sections were, however, cut.

#### The 'Yellow Rain' Conspiracy (1983) <sup>405</sup>

There is only one point in Lucio Lami, "Yellow Rain: The Conspiracy of Closed Mouths" (*Commentary*, Oct 1983), with which I would agree; and that is that the evidence on the subject of Yellow Rain, and its mode of presentation, do indeed suggest a conspiracy, but not that which is troubling Lami.

*It will be useful here to take up the argument indirectly, with reference to some Yellow Rain (YR) evidence not touched on by Lami. His article was translated by Michael Ledeen, identified in an earlier contribution to **Commentary** as a member of the Georgetown University Center for Strategic and International Studies, and he had already attracted my attention when he was cited in that capacity as the source of information which appeared in **The Australian** (Sydney), 12 Oct 1983, under the title, "Vietnamese defector gives details of 'Yellow Rain' warfare," by one Peter Samuel [see p. 221].*

*Ledeen was alleged to have said that a recent ("earlier this year") defector from the Vietnamese forces in Cambodia, a "Group Commander for Chemical Warfare", named Nguyen Quan, "was one of the most important communist military officers to come under Western control", and had provided startling new revelations about Yellow Rain and other chemical warfare activities in Southeast Asia.*

*Now for the experienced Cambodia watcher Nguyen Quan is an old acquaintance. His first public performance was under the patronage of Thai Supreme Command at a press conference in Bangkok on 9 July 1981, at which it*

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<sup>405</sup> Michael Vickery. Letter to *Commentary*, written 23 November 1983, published with deletions in *Commentary*, Volume 77, Number 2, February 1984, pp. 4-8. The sections omitted in *Commentary*'s publication are printed in italics.

was revealed that he had defected 18 months earlier, that is in January 1980, or more than three and one-half years ago (**Bangkok Post** 10 July 1981).

At that press conference he was identified as an ordinary artillery officer, not one trained in chemical warfare, and although he said “poison gas has been used” in Cambodia, delivered in artillery shells, he offered no further technical details, and the allegation was treated as a mere peripheral detail, since what the Thai military and the press of the time found of interest were his revelations about the disintegration of the Vietnamese military forces, starvation in Vietnam, and theft by the Vietnamese army of international relief supplies in Cambodia, all matters about which we now know he was not telling the truth.

Perhaps the lack of attention then to his ‘poison gas’ claim was the awareness of the press that earlier, when he had first defected in 1980, Nguyen Quan had denied the use of poison gas, saying that so far as he knew, Vietnamese forces in Cambodia were only using non-lethal/non-toxic gas, much of it left over from US supplies.<sup>406</sup>

Thus Nguyen Quan’s original unrehearsed information was the opposite of what he is now ‘revealing’, and everything with which he has since been associated has been disinformative.

If not prompted in his revelations, he has at least been astute enough to understand what his listeners wished to hear; and Dr. Amos Townsend, the indefatigable American Yellow Rain investigator, cited admiringly by Lami, once noted regretfully to me in 1982 that Quan’s information had not been picked up earlier in his interrogations by American and Thai intelligence personnel. Not long afterward, however, Townsend realized that he had been conned by Quan and that he no longer knew “which information by Quan is truth and which is fiction”.<sup>407</sup>

Surely these details of Quan’s background cannot be unknown to Ledeen, and it is no wonder that some people believe in the existence of a Yellow Rain conspiracy, but not the one alleged by Lami. One might also ask whether Ledeen just happened to be perusing an obscure Italian newspaper and stumbled on Lami, or whether he had reason to believe he might find something suitable for his own Yellow Rain campaign.

The whole operation reminds us of another story, by a certain Paola Brianti, laundered through another obscure Italian publication a few years ago, designed to prove that the Pol Pot leadership admitted killing a couple of million

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406 Seth Mydans and Alan Dawson, *Bangkok Post*, respectively 28 and 30 April 1980; Grant Evans, *The Yellow Rainmakers*, Verso Editions, 1983 p.77).

407 My conversation with Dr. Amos Townsend, in Bangkok, 17 August 1982; Grant Evans, *The Yellow Rainmakers*, pp. 80-81.

people in their first years in power. Is Lucio Lami perhaps really Paola Brianti in drag? [<sup>408</sup>]

Lami claims both that evidence for the use of chemical weapons is overwhelmingly plentiful and that it has been suppressed by the UN with the aid of some Western journalists. How such censorship could be exercised by the UN organizations, when the US government, using evidence gathered by its own personnel along the Thai-Cambodian and Thai-Lao borders, has published its own reports and otherwise trumpeted its story to the world, is not made clear.

Indeed, Lami seems quite unaware of those US government documents, which for all their weaknesses are far superior to Lami's documentation, and which show, with respect to Lami's first general point, that the evidence, apart from scatter-gun allegations, is pitifully scarce and weak, and becomes progressively weaker as new information about the natural occurrences of mycotoxins, the alleged new Yellow Rain poisons, is discovered.

On the subject of such evidence, and its collection, I can do no better than recommend Grant Evans's *The Yellow Rainmakers*, which demonstrated in great detail how the stories from Laos are most probably mass hysteria plus some disinformation, while the apparently genuine instances of mycotoxin poisoning in Cambodia are probably of natural origin.

Particular attention should be given to Evans's demolition of the story of one star Hmong Yellow Rain witness, a man who when Evans interviewed him had given his story 13 times to various Western organizations and journalists.<sup>409</sup>

<sup>408</sup> The Italian journal in question was *Famiglia Cristiana*, Sept 1976. For details of this incident see Chomsky and Herman, *After the Cataclysm*, pp. 173-178; and further on Ledeen see, Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent*, pp. 28, 157-61, 165-66, and references. *Famiglia Cristiana* has now emerged again as a purveyor of strange things about Cambodia, as seen in *PPP*, no. 7/18, August 21 - September 3, 1998, Giorgio Fabretti, Italian journalist and founder of the "Save Pol Pot" fund, "Why should Anyone be Sorry for Pol Pot?"

Ledeen seems to be a recognized specialist in funneling spooky documents through Italian channels to be re-directed to the US press and intelligence services. In an interview with Ian Masters, aired on the Los Angeles public radio KPFK on April 3, 2005, then posted on AlterNet, April 7, 2005 with the title "Who Forged the Niger Documents?", Vincent Cannistraro, one of the six ranking CIA operatives who savaged George Tenet's book (*At the Center of the Storm*, New York, Harper Collins, 2007) agreed that Ledeen may have been the author of the report on Niger uranium which was sent back from Italian intelligence to the US.

<sup>409</sup> Evans, *The Yellow Rainmakers*, pp. 58, ff.

[Note that by 2002 Evans seemed to regret his earlier enthusiasm for exposing the yellow rain hoax. In his *Short History of Laos* (Chiang Mai, Silkworm Books, 2002), in which he has dramatically switched sides from his earlier work such as *Red Brotherhood at War*, he still acknowledges that the claims of yellow rain, "promoted by hawks in the USA, were never substantiated", but that, p. 186, the campaign by Lao and Vietnamese forces against the Hmong in 1977 included "perhaps even the use of chemical agents", and his book *The Yellow Rainmakers* is not included in his bibliography. As in other

I have no doubt that Lami heard allegations of gas attacks on the Cambodian and Lao borders, and by their very nature and presentation there is no way to disprove them, but Evans's book demonstrates the care such claims require. It is not permissible to simply accept someone's assertion that he was hit by 'poison gas', and still less to accept that as evidence for a new generation of chemical weapons being used by the Vietnamese.

Although Lami's story of the two Son Sann soldiers whom he met at Ban Sangae cannot be disproved, Dr. Amos Townsend's report of 19 August 1983, of which I have a copy, indicates the carelessness with which evidence from those alleged gas attacks of January 1983 has been collected and assessed. Townsend, referring to one case in which the autopsy of a soldier killed in an assumed gas attack had indicated "toxic hepatitis" as the cause of death, hinted that the medical analysis must have been incompetent or dishonest.

Townsend also described his encounter, at Ban Sangae in August 1983, with an alleged victim of a January incident, who claimed to have previously been healthy and who in August showed symptoms consistent with respiratory infection and dengue. Townsend expressed some reservation about the man's reliability, but "believe that he needs further study".

Unaccountably, Townsend then departed from Ban Sangae and left the collection of blood samples to Adelia Bernard (see below). In his report he expressed the hope of finding the man again at a later date, although he knows full well the great difficulty in retrieving people in the confused conditions of the border camps. No doubt we shall eventually see that soldier as a Yellow Rain statistic in some US government report.

One of Lami's stories, the storage of "chemical weapons in the former house of the oblates" in Ban Huey Sai, is of a type discounted even by Townsend and his associates. In a report of 25 August 1983 one of the latter described how a self-proclaimed Thai secret agent in a border town tried to sell them some chemical warfare liquid recently stolen from storage in the "Lao President's government office in Vientiane".

They of course refused his offer; and one of the things distinguishing the serious Yellow Rain spooks, even if they are misguided, from the madhatters is that they know the Vietnamese, or Soviet, chemical corpsmen would keep their poisons in proper storage facilities, not in odd places like a former seminary or the President's office.

Lami's story of a Vietnamese gas mask, even if true, means nothing, since gas masks are standard equipment in all armies; and the detail of the West German embassy secretly negotiating to acquire it from the "Khmer Blancs" (a

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contexts in his *Short History*, Evans does not offer a correction of his previous interpretation, based, say, legitimately, on new evidence, but just seems to be changing sides.]

meaningless term illustrating Lami's ignorance of the area) tends to discredit the story entirely.

It is certainly not true that all the embassies in Bangkok consider the evidence irrefutable, and this has been one of the difficulties in the US government campaign. Indeed last year the Australian and British governments announced that Yellow Rain samples sent to them for analysis were fakes.<sup>410</sup>

There is even some doubt that the US government still believes its own propaganda. On 7 April 1983, Professor Robert L. Rau of the US Naval Academy's Political Science Department, on a US-government sponsored lecture tour, told the staff of Adelaide University's Centre for Asian Studies that "no one" in Washington, except for a small corner of the State Department, any longer took the Yellow Rain stories seriously.

Moreover, Dr. Amos Townsend's Yellow Rain research efforts lack funds, and the two Bangkok embassy officers who were most energetic in assisting Townsend have been routinely transferred and replaced by new men who have indicated to Townsend that they will not exert the same efforts in Yellow Rain research.<sup>411</sup>

Also of interest is that one person involved in the early collection of Yellow Rain evidence, State Department officer Timothy Carney, told me in 1982 that he considered the Pol Pot people quite capable of feeding toxin to their own soldiers in order to make an anti-Vietnamese case, something consistent with the circumstance that the most potent of the alleged mycotoxins could be made by any literate person or bought wholesale.<sup>412</sup>

Neither is there agreement among medical personnel in the camps about the reality of Yellow Rain, or other kinds of new CBW (chemical and biological warfare). The medical evidence is inconclusive, most of the alleged 'gassing' symptoms could just as well have other causes, and where mycotoxins have really been found, in some Cambodian patients, their behavior has been inconsistent with dissemination by weapons and more reasonably explained by natural occurrence in contaminated food.<sup>413</sup>

This inconsistency of opinion within medical circles also comes through clearly in the aforementioned report of Amos Townsend, with Townsend hinting at political motivations of those doctors who do not support the Yellow Rain cause.

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<sup>410</sup> Grant Evans, *The Yellow Rainmakers*, pp. 101-02, and parliamentary question to Senator Gareth Evans, cited below, p. 259. on the Australian case.

<sup>411</sup> Conversation with Townsend.

<sup>412</sup> Evans, *The Yellow Rainmakers*, p. 101.

<sup>413</sup> Evans, pp. 92-93, 95, 98-100, 117-18, 122-23; and Lee Torrey, "Yellow rain: is it really a weapon?", *New Scientist*, 4 Aug 1983, pp. 350-351).



No doubt political considerations are relevant, but the political preconceptions of those who support Yellow Rain charges lead them to assume the truth of ‘gas attacks’, etc., and to devise circular explanations to accommodate the most diverse symptoms, while medical personnel not politically predisposed to accept Yellow Rain, or at least honest in their work, seen impelled to adopt the scientifically more acceptable methodology of proceeding from the observed symptoms and laboratory analyses to indications of the causes.

Certainly there is no evidence, though, of a political cover-up by doctors of the Red Cross or other agencies working for the UN. If there were the slightest truth in this it would have appeared in the US government reports and in the reports of Amos Townsend, several of which I have read, and which provide much of the material on which the US government documents are based.

In this connection Lami should tell us just how he knows what went on in Red Cross meetings and what was allegedly deleted from the transcripts. Townsend has not complained that the Red Cross denies assistance to gas victims, and his alleged complaint about suppressed result of an autopsy on a Cambodian woman killed at the border and transported to Khao I Dang in November 1982 is directly contradicted by his report of 19 Aug 1983.

There he noted that he had just recently obtained permission from Task Force 80, the Thai military unit in overall control of the refugee camps, to bring possible CBW victims to Khao I Dang for study and treatment, but he had “not ‘tested the system as yet’”.

It is not true that the medical organizations in the refugee and border camps “are under UN control” with respect to medical practice, or that “they have adapted to these methods and deny help to gas victims”. The medical work in the camps is undertaken by private voluntary groups, mostly from the United States, France, Germany, Thailand, and the United Kingdom, with international personnel of diverse nationalities and backgrounds.

The UN could not, even if it wished, order them to refuse necessary treatment. Some of the medical teams belong to devout Christian organizations which are strongly anti-Communist, believe firmly in Yellow Rain, and would not fail to complain loudly of any UN interference with their medical ethics.

If there were really a conspiracy on the border to suppress information about Yellow Rain or to turn away patients suffering from its effects, the conspiracy would have to include not only the UN and voluntary agencies, but the Bangkok US Embassy, the CIA, and the Thai military, all of whom have agents patrolling the border areas, as well as the Pol Pot-Son Sann-Sihanouk Coalition, which in all of its most exaggerated propaganda have never claimed that international medical teams refused treatment nor that the UN was suppressing evidence.

Lami probably got such fanciful stories from Adelia Bernard, whom he expressly credits as the source of his last, and most fantastic tale, and who

seemed to believe that all of the above-mentioned institutions and groups were hiding evidence in order to support Viet Nam.

Adelia Bernard is a resident of Melbourne, Australia, who has spent some time working with a Thai Catholic organization, COERR (Catholic Office for Emergency Relief and Refugees), in the refugee camps, and she has purveyed a certain amount of lurid anti-Vietnamese material to the Australian press.<sup>414</sup>

Being familiar with her name and convictions, I made inquiries about her activities during my latest trip to Thailand in August-September 1983, in particular at UNHCR (UN High Commissioner for Refugees) in Bangkok, where there are several people whom I have known, and met annually or semi-annually, since 1980 when I also worked in the Cambodian refugee camps, and where one key employee has been my acquaintance for over 10 years.

Although it is logically impossible to prove a negative, that is to prove that Mrs. Bernard has never sneaked into Cambodia, no one familiar with the border or the interior of Cambodia gives credence to her story of travelling clandestinely to Phnom Penh, a story which stripped of the lurid details imparted to Lami is otherwise well known and treated as a joke. All agree on the utter impossibility of such a trip.

Even more stupefying is the claim to have brought a corpse, in tropical heat, from Phnom Penh to the border (a two-day trip in the best, non-clandestine circumstances), negotiated it through the multiple Khmer and Thai checkpoints at the border, taken it to Bangkok (another day), and finally dragged it up to Mark Brown's office on the crowded third floor of the UN building, where all visitors have to sign in at a security desk and where packages are examined.

Had anything like that ever occurred, it is certain that there would have been a major scandal both within the UN building and Thai security services, Mrs. Bernard might well have found herself detained for violation of several laws, and I would not have been able to converse with UNHCR acquaintances during 2-3 days without hearing of the incident.

It is also worth asking why Adelia Bernard, on 13 April 1983, in a talk before the Community Aid Abroad group in Melbourne, boasted of her 'secret' trip to Phnom Penh, but did not relate any of the lurid adventures reported by Lami, why she equally failed to mention them in her atrocity-mongering interview with *The Age* (19 March 1983), and why she did not report them to Dr. Townsend when she met him at the Ban Sangae camp on the Thai-Cambodian border on 11 August 1983.<sup>415</sup>

If she had really acquired evidence of Vietnamese or Soviet CBW atrocities in Cambodia the logical person to approach would have been Townsend, already known then as a activist in the Yellow Rain cause and who could have organized

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<sup>414</sup> For example, in *The Age*, Melbourne, 19 March 1983.

<sup>415</sup> The meeting was recorded by Townsend in his report of 19 August 1983.

medical examination of the evidence, not Mark Brown, who was neither administratively concerned with medical matters nor of sufficient authority to effect a scientific investigation. Brown could not possibly have dismissed Adelia Bernard's corpse and apparatus, but would have had to refer the case to his superiors.

*Dragging Brown into the story destroys whatever credibility it might otherwise have inspired, and it reveals much about Adelia Bernard's state of mind and her approach to questions of evidence and propaganda. It is curious that there is an earlier version of the Mark Brown and baby episode, and it may reveal Mrs. Bernard's reason for trying to blacken Brown's reputation.*

*In my conversations with UNHCR personnel about Mrs. Bernard's activities I heard an admittedly apocryphal, but circumstantially more credible, anecdote which would have occurred late in 1979 or early in 1980, when Mark Brown was UNHCR Field Officer at the large Khao I Dang refugee camp and when many Cambodians were arriving ill and malnourished at the border, sometimes in numbers greater than could immediately be treated by the available medical personnel.*

*Adelia Bernard is supposed to have picked up a moribund child, carried it to Brown and asked him what he was going to do about it. Apparently an impatient response, that he knew quite well that babies were dying from lack of adequate care, has caused her to carry an animus against him ever since. Treblinka indeed, Mr. Lami, Bedlam is a more accurate metaphor.*

Whatever the whole truth behind the diverse Yellow Rain and CBW stories may be, Lucio Lami's article is a tissue of wild rumors and lies, and he shows total ignorance of even the official US statements on the question. It should be clear that I do not believe that the Vietnamese are using 'Yellow Rain' or any other mysterious new CBW agents in Laos and Cambodia, but I would agree that all of the evidence is not in, and that further careful, objective, scientific investigations are required.

*The credibility of the charges so far, contrary to Lami's citation of the **Washington Post**, has not been placed in doubt because "the gathering of evidence has been entrusted to the American secret services." Whatever evidence those agencies may have gathered has not been revealed, and has thus had no influence on the debate.*

*The charges have been placed in doubt, I would say discredited, by the sloppy way in which evidence has been gathered and presented by presumably qualified medical personnel like Dr. Amos Townsend, refugee hangers-on like Adelia Bernard, hack researchers like Michael Ledeen, and journalists like Lucio Lami.*

### Postscripts (1984)

Lucio Lami responded at length in the same issue of *Commentary*. A short letter from Michael Ledeen, although not, ostensibly, in answer to my letter, was also published.

Ledeen said his purpose was to apologize for and correct an error in his translation of Lami's article in Italian concerning the date of the alleged encounter between Adelia Bernard and Mark Brown. "It should have been given as April 1980", not in 1982. Ledeen said, "This typographical error in fact was printed in *Il Giornale Nuovo* when the story first appeared, but Mr. Lami quickly caught and corrected it in a letter to the editor two days later. I translated from the original text and missed the correction".

Interestingly, Lami, in his response, also redated the incident, but in a different way, making no mention of a typographical error or his quick effort to correct it. Rather, he said, "The Brown case. The story of Adelia Bernard exists as an official document, in the official record of the Australian government (*Hansard*) for May 1981".

I wrote to *Commentary* Associate Editor Brenda Brown about this as follows (29 February 1984):

"... you have made dishonest cuts in order to give assistance to Lami's shaky case. Thus he was still able to use the 'authority' of Nguyen Quan whose dubious background I had revealed in the beginning of my letter.

"You also, interestingly, removed my paragraph about a possible encounter between Adelia Bernard and Mark Brown in 1979-1980, while Lami and Ledeen have 'rectified' their story to place her adventure in precisely that period. Of course, if the Bernard-Lami-Ledeen story is placed in 1980, it cannot be the same story as that attributed to 1982, and careful readers will realize that the latter has been surreptitiously withdrawn.

"I have tried, unsuccessfully, to find the Adelia Bernard report in the Australian *Hansard* for May 1981 ... There is no name index in *Hansard*, and I was forced to go through likely subject headings – 'Foreign Affairs', 'Kampuchea', 'refugees', 'UN'. Although several long discussions on Indochina and refugees are there, none of them made reference to that subject. If Lami can provide a precise reference, I shall be happy to read it carefully."

There may, however, have been a mention of Mrs. Bernard in *Hansard* which I missed, for on 21 May 1981 *The Age* (Melbourne) published a short article on her testimony before a Senate inquiry.<sup>416</sup> There was apparently no mention of a clandestine trip to Phnom Penh or a meeting with Mark Brown.

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<sup>416</sup> Mark Lawrence, "Kampuchean gassed, Senate inquiry told", *The Age* (Melbourne), 21 May 1981.

Needless to say, the information I requested never came, only a blustery ‘how dare you accuse us of dishonesty’ letter (8 March 1984) from Brenda Brown. Although I have never had the opportunity to check it, it is likely that the typographical error in the date in *Il Giornale Nuovo*, and its correction, are as mythical as the *Hansard* record of Mrs. Bernard’s meeting with Mark Brown.

Mrs. Bernard’s name came up again in parliament in another month of May, 1984, when in answer to a question, Senator Gareth Evans, the Acting Minister for Foreign Affairs, answered “Yes” to a question whether “... Mrs. Adelia Bernard [has] claimed that in 1982 she was instructed to obtain evidence of [chemical] warfare by and for the Australian Government”.

In answer to a further question about action taken on evidence supplied by Mrs. Bernard he said, “The material supplied ... was analysed by the Defence Materials Research Laboratories ... who were unable to find evidence of any toxicity”.<sup>417</sup>

Thus the period in which there is indubitable evidence that Mrs. Bernard was engaged in a search for toxic material was that in which Lami, quoting her, first dated the fictitious incident – which further highlights the dishonesty of Lami’s and Ledeen’s ‘corrections’.

Eventually, *Commentary* (April 1984, p. 16) was forced to make a retraction, of sorts. A short notice, “To Our Readers” and signed “Ed.”, announced:

“... Mr. Brown categorically denies that this meeting [with Adelia Bernard] ever took place ... Although Mrs. Bernard has continued to insist that her story is true, she recalls a different place and time for the alleged meeting from that given in Mr. Lami’s original article [1982] or in a correction [1980] we later published. Mrs. Bernard has also told us the name of a man who, she says, was present at her meeting with Mr. Brown. This man, like Mr. Brown, says that he knows of no such meeting ... Mr. Lami acknowledges that his report ... rested on the uncorroborated word of Mrs. Bernard and so far as he knows, it remains unsupported by any other evidence”.

Finally, in a letter to me dated 27 April, 1984 from Aranyaprathet, Thailand, Adelia Bernard, reaffirmed her conviction that the Yellow Rain accusations were true, downgraded the seriousness and honesty of Dr. Townsend, repeated her accusations that “UN agencies” were covering up evidence of chemical warfare, claiming even that a UNHCR person “made threats on my life in the presence of

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<sup>417</sup> This parliamentary exchange was published in the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs “Backgrounder”, No 446, 5 September 1984, p. xi, from which I have taken it. In a parliamentary debate on 19 March 1985, Foreign Minister Bill Hayden revealed that the Australian Department of Defense had discovered faked ‘Yellow Rain’ samples from Laos as early as 1982, but the government of the time, under the pro-American Liberal party, had not revealed it (*Australian Hansard*, 19 March 1985, p. xvii).

many people”, and, of course, attacked me personally for my left-wing pro-Vietnamese position.

More interesting, however, was her statement concerning “the Lami article”. She wrote that “the contents were the result of my confidences to another journalist, a friend, and printed a year earlier in Europe [place, date, title not cited]. Lami followed it up and it snowballed ... Mr. Lami paid more attention to the story and omitted such detail as dates, places, etc. He was also wrong about other personal details”.

On her contact with Mark Brown she said “I visited Mark Brown in KID [Khao-I-Dang refugee camp], not Bangkok”. Moreover, “I was not fully convinced that the information I was given about the origin of the corpse of the little boy was correct”, thus, apparently negating the story of carrying it herself from Phnom Penh.

The other journalist, a friend, was probably Clara Falcone, but Mrs. Bernard herself, in an interview, had been responsible two years earlier, 1982, for an article published on Yellow Rain, “Tod im ‘Gelben Regen’ ein blutiges Kapitel im Leben der Hmong” (‘Death in Yellow Rain, a bloody chapter in the life of the Hmong’), in the Roman Catholic publication “**Mission aktuell**” (the German official magazine of ‘MISSIO’, the Roman Catholic **mission ...**), 4/82, München, July/August 1982, pp. 4-6, signed Ingelore Schmitz. Mrs. Bernard’s interview is on p. 6.

In this interview Mrs. Bernard claimed that as an “ordinary woman” and “private individual” she was able to go along the Mekong in the region of Savannakhet where she discovered “three camps with chemical weapon material” stored in “underground bunkers” beneath “military barracks or officers’ houses” under the authority of a special Vietnamese unit trained by Russian officers [as above, stored under a seminary or in the Lao President’s office].

She claimed that she and her colleagues had been able to smuggle rockets for carrying the chemicals out of Laos, but that they were empty, although later they had obtained explosive warheads ready for use and bearing Russian writing, although there is no claim that they contained chemicals. This was probably the activity of Mrs. Bernard to which Gareth Evans was referring as noted above.

Evidence on the credulity, and indirectly on the credibility, of Adelia Bernard is the following: from the website [www.oneheart.info/site.htm](http://www.oneheart.info/site.htm), undated:

“This very Australian farm scene, above and below, at the Brockman River is where Our Lady, accompanied by archangels and saints, visits on the first Saturday of every month. The site is 14.7 kilometres from Bullsbrook along Chittering Road. The image above was taken on 6 December 2003. Mary hovers over the water while communicating with **Adelia Bernard**, at centre, and Ann Thornberry kneeling at the shrine. ... Our Lady’s appearances often last about 20 minutes”.

In the accompanying photographs I was unable to discern any humanoid or angelic figures except those of the women kneeling in worship. Another illustration accompanying the article was of ‘Our Lady’ as she had appeared in Thailand.

### Assorted Journalism

After my second trip, of five weeks, to the PRK in October 1984, I was able to place one article in the *Guardian* (England), and two in the local Australian press).<sup>418</sup>

#### Where Defence is Still the Priority (1985)<sup>419</sup>

“KRASO”, “Kraso,” shouted the two grinning boys on a bicycle which veered close to me as I stepped off the curb on my first day back in Phnom Penh. I was mystified, for the word was certainly not Khmer, but I answered “Suosdei,” to which they respond, “Russie cheh khmaer” (‘the Russian knows Khmer’). Then I understood. They had been trying to say “khorosho” (good), which has replaced the “Hey you” and “Number one” of other times. European faces on Phnom Penh streets are now assumed to be Russian.

The Soviet presence has greatly increased since my last visit in 1981. Now it is the most salient foreign influence in Phnom Penh. If the removal of the Party Secretary, Pen Sovann, in December 1981 was to counter Russian influence, as some journalists have speculated, it was not effective.<sup>[420]</sup>

The reasons are easy to see. The Soviet Union has been the main provider of aid – in projects of clear utility for the country’s redevelopment. The Kampuchea-Soviet Technical Institute has taken up the work it began originally under Sihanouk in the 1960s, and the 84 Soviet teachers there are developing an important segment of Kampuchea’s future technical elite.

There are also over 1,500 Kampuchean students in five-year University or four-year technical school courses in the Soviet Union. The first graduates should begin returning next year. In November I attended the inauguration of a Soviet-built electricity plant which will increase Phnom Penh’s power supply significantly, alleviating one of the main industrial deficiencies – the other is lack of crucial raw materials.

<sup>418</sup> *The Age* (Melbourne) tried to renege on payment, offering A\$300 when they proposed that I write for them, but trying to get away with A\$150 after receiving it, and only paying up in full when I threatened to take the case to the Journalists’ Association.

<sup>419</sup> Michael Vickery, *The Guardian* (England), 8 January 1985. A French translation, by Serge Thion, appeared as, “Phnom Penh, décembre 1984”, in *Cambodge histoire et enjeux: 1945-1985*, L’Harmattan, Paris, 1985.

<sup>420</sup> See discussion in Vickery, *Cambodia 1975-1982*, pp. 242-43; and *Kampuchea Politics, Economics and Society*, pp. 45-47.

The Vietnamese presence in Phnom Penh is less evident than three years ago, although there are more Vietnamese civilians, in particular pre-war residents, often natives, who have now returned to their original homes. They have settled in their old neighborhoods, along with some new legal arrivals, and are more assimilated, thus less noticeable, than in 1981.

There is also a small floating population of illegal Vietnamese who move back and forth along the rivers to trade, dodge the draft, or simply to enjoy the easier life in Kampuchea. They are out of favor with both governments, but control is hampered by Kampuchea's lack of an identity card system, and their removal at present would involve a Pol Pot-type of discipline which the authorities eschew.

Vietnamese soldiers have almost disappeared from the city and most are apparently concentrated in the North and Northwest. There is thus no evidence in Phnom Penh of the alleged Vietnamese colonization. Neither is there in the areas accessible to Western aid workers, who have traveled all over two border provinces, Svay Rieng and Takeo, and have significant experience in Prey Veng.

In a hastily arranged, thus unprepared, trip to a pre-Angkor temple in Takeo just 12 km north of the border, in an area where one might have expected Vietnamese, I actually found new Khmer settlers in a government scheme to develop agriculture where insecurity had prevented cultivation in the 1960s and 1970s. Some parts of the country are now clearly safer for honest peasants than at any time since the second world war.

The school system is not being Vietnamized, nor is the Vietnamese language forced on Kampuchean pupils to the detriment of Khmer. In fact, no foreign languages are regularly taught in primary or secondary schools. The syllabus calls for instruction of four hours a week in Russian, German and Vietnamese, in that order, in the last three years of secondary school, but lack of teachers has prevented its implementation. Possibly the first classes will start in the current academic year. For the moment, the schools are more thoroughly Khmer than at any time in the past century.

The relative priorities of the languages are in line with the relative importance of the three countries in the provision of tertiary level training for Kampuchean students. A similar picture emerges from the syllabus of the Language Institute, a post-secondary institution to prepare students for study abroad and to train interpreters for government departments in Russian, Vietnamese, German, and Spanish (because of Cuban aid).

Most of the students, who follow a one-year course before going abroad, are destined for the Soviet Union. Most of those studying Vietnamese are training as interpreters, a two-year course in each language followed by respectively ten months in the USSR, five months in the German Democratic Republic and three months in Vietnam.

The studies in Viet Nam are generally short-term courses of immediate practical application. As the Minister of Education, Pen Navuth, emphasized to



me in an interview, Vietnamese is not a world language like Russian or German. It is merely a language of communication with neighbors, and thus its study in Kampuchea will never be as important as that of the European languages.

The lack of official courses in English or French is explained as the result of the break in contact with those countries, but their importance is recognized. In all parts of the capital, private English courses flourish under teachers who, for a few hours each evening, are able to earn several times their state salaries. Although such courses are unauthorized, they are not clandestine, and are even tacitly encouraged.

When I met the Industry Minister, Meas Samnang, one of the old Viet Nam hands among the present leadership, he praised a young aide for conducting English courses, thereby spreading valuable knowledge while contributing to his own family's support.

The last point is a vital issue for nearly everyone. Even though state salaries, now 140-500 *riel* a month, have risen since 1981 more than the prices of most basic commodities, no one considers that it is possible to exist on salary alone.

The most frequent complaints about the present state of affairs do not relate to foreign influence or political oppression, of which there seems to be little, but to low income levels and the impossibility of acquiring the desirable consumer items familiar to urban residents before 1975. Most complainants are from the pre-war middle class and they have trouble, particularly the older ones, adjusting to the fact that state employment is no longer an automatic road to social prestige and relative wealth.

Living conditions for most people, as well as industrial and agricultural production, have improved in the past three years, but slowly. The reasons, apart from the unusually frequent natural disasters in agriculture, are to be found in the military campaign by the Democratic Kampuchea Coalition on the Thai Border, increasingly bolstered and encouraged by ASEAN, the United States and China.

National defence takes priority over almost everything else, and this means low incomes, slow economic recovery, strict security measures, particularly in the north and north-west, and mobilization of the population for onerous tasks.

The first of these is recruitment for an expanding army to fight alongside and eventually replace the Vietnamese.

A country already lacking in manpower after the Pol Pot years can ill afford to take large numbers of young men out of production. Even more onerous is the draft of civilians for two-month periods of forest clearing near the Thai border. The task is viewed with distaste, and for some smacks too much of the forced population movements of the Pol Pot years.

Sihanouk to go home as an honored senior citizen? (1985) <sup>421</sup>

“We just aren’t giving attention to the Sihanouk period at the moment,” answered the teacher of the Year 7 *Politics* course in a Phnom Penh high school. I had been intrigued by the syllabus, which jumped from “The Struggle against French Colonialism” to that against “American Imperialism and the Traitorous Lon Nol Clique” with no reference to the intervening 16 years (1954-1970) when Sihanouk ran Kampuchea.

This is astonishing, since the people who now lead the People’s Republic of Kampuchea (PRK), whether old revolutionaries or the technocrats who comprise the second level of leadership, have good reason to reject Sihanouk. They must find ironic his call for internationally-supervised free elections, since a previous exercise of this kind, undertaken under Sihanouk in 1955, proved fraudulent. One would expect, in PRK textbooks, to find a lesson on “The Struggle against Sihanouk’s Reactionary Regime”.

But throughout my month-long stay I observed a marked decrease in anti-Sihanouk propaganda in comparison to the situation a few years ago, and this gives some support to the view that the PRK would like to draw Sihanouk away from the Democratic Kampuchea (DK) Coalition-in-exile and bring him back to Phnom Penh as an honored, if politically impotent, senior citizen.

This tactic is less for any domestic legitimacy which Sihanouk might lend the PRK than for his international prestige. Well over half the Kampuchean population are too young to have any memory of Sihanouk’s rule and have grown up on a diet of anti-Sihanouk propaganda under Lon Nol, Pol Pot, and at first the PRK.

The rather pluralistic composition of the PRK could easily find a niche to accommodate Sihanouk. Among the perhaps only 1,000-strong Communist Party members who staff most of the highest posts there are two recognizable factions—those who spent 1954-1970 in Viet Nam and the pre-1978 Pol Pot cadres without such Vietnamese experience. There are also two powerful individuals who did not go to Vietnam, who split with Pol Pot before 1975, and who are moreover non-Khmer: Bou Thang, the Minister of Defence and member of a small northeastern ethnic minority, and Say Phouthang, an ethnic Thai from the Southwest who heads the key Organization Committee of the Party.

There are also hundreds of PRK administrators, technicians and intellectuals who served Sihanouk and Lon Nol, including four ministers – Education, Health, Agriculture, and Information and Culture. Many of this group have definite anti-communist pasts, which are known, including one who was trained by and worked for US and South Vietnamese intelligence during the 1970-75 war.

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<sup>421</sup> Michael Vickery, *Sydney Morning Herald* (Sydney, Australia), 1 March 1985, p. 11

In Phnom Penh, Sihanouk would also find a female cousin who is a deputy general secretary of a State executive organ, the Solidarity Front for Construction and Defence of the Nation, and Mrs. Phlek Pirun, a pillar of Phnom Penh society in the 1960s who now, as then, is president of the Kampuchean Red Cross.

These cadres and State employees of such disparate background have shown unexpected solidarity in organizing the recovery of Kampuchea since 1979 and there has been palpable yearly progress, even if slowed by frightening deficiencies in trained personnel, essential supplies and finance, and by an international campaign to impede the recovery.

A PRK Khmer administration has been implanted throughout the country, enabling Vietnamese advisers and experts, mostly essential technicians, to gradually withdraw. In their relations with authority the Khmer population now deals with Khmer officials. A Vietnamese presence seems minimal, except in the north and north-west where defence against infiltration from the Thai border is still largely undertaken by the Vietnamese Army.

[Excision to avoid repetition of paragraphs on the Russian and Vietnamese presence in Phnom Penh. See the preceding article]

In spite of Kampuchea's dependence on foreign aid and expertise in the first years after 1979, cultural revival is resolutely Khmer.

One of the most important aspects of this after the Pol Pot experience has been the revival of Buddhism. Temples have been reopened and repaired, monks ordained, and traditional festivals are again organized.

Education has also been revived after the bleak Pol Pot years and the schools are more thoroughly Khmer than at any time in the past century. In the 10-year primary and secondary school syllabus much time is devoted to Khmer language and literature, and no foreign language instruction had yet been introduced. Although English and French are not in the school syllabus, their importance is recognized and in all neighborhoods of the capital private English courses flourish under teachers who for a few hours each evening are able to earn several times their State salaries.

Even though State salaries, now 140-500 *riel* a month, have since 1981 risen more than the prices of most basic commodities, no one considers that it is possible to exist on salary alone. The economically advantaged groups in Kampuchea today are the free-market traders, independent artisans, and farmers in the better agricultural areas. Taxes, termed "patriotic contributions", were finally introduced in 1983 and affect traders, private artisans, farmers and semi-private concerns such as restaurants.

The otherwise optimistic picture is marred by the necessity to divert enormous resources to national defence, and this means low incomes, slow

economic growth, strict security measures, and mobilization of the population for onerous tasks. These are recruitment for an expanding army to fight beside and eventually replace the Vietnamese as well as the draft of civilians to build roads and clear security zones near the Thai border.

There is little else the Government can do so long as their enemies' well-endowed backers, China, ASEAN, and the US, keep upping the ante. Thus multi-party negotiations to end the conflict are essential, but it would be unrealistic to expect that the PRK could be displaced.

### Cambodia's long road to recovery (1985) <sup>422</sup>

Just a few kilometers outside Phnom Penh on Highway I, the road to Saigon, we saw a woman seated beneath her traditional stilt-supported house at a hand loom and stopped to inquire about her work. She was making the red and white checkered *krama*, a sarong-type cloth which all Cambodians use variously for head covering, bathing sarongs, or for wrapping possession on trips.

She told us this was her full time occupation, and after calculating the prices of her raw materials, the number of pieces she wove in a day and their price, it turned out that her monthly income was 1800 *riel*. This is \$120 at the official rate of exchange or \$36 in the free market, but the real significance of the figure is that it is more than three times the highest state salary and will buy 360 kilograms of rice, enough to feed 24 people for a month, or 40 kilograms of beef, or 90 kilograms of sugar.

A paradox in this officially socialist society in which the state lays claim to all land, all dwellings, and even all cars, is that the economically favored are not state functionaries existing on salaries, but private traders and artisans, and probably farmers in the better agricultural areas.

In April 1980 a new Cambodian *riel* currency was introduced with the first money in circulation being salaries paid to state employees and state purchases of food and other local goods. The *riel* quickly supplanted the Vietnamese *đồng* and Thai *baht* which had held sway during 1979, and it is now used for all transactions among Cambodians, although foreigners must pay hotel bills in foreign currency.

Salaries were originally set very low, undoubtedly for the dual purpose of checking inflation, given the penury of goods, and to demonstrate that People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK) officials, unlike those of Lon Nol or Sihanouk, were not meant to accumulate wealth solely by virtue of their positions. Since 1980 salaries have been raised twice and are now between 140 and 500 *riel*.

They have risen faster than the prices of most basic commodities, but are still so low that all agree it is impossible to live on them. Restaurant prices for

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<sup>422</sup> Michael Vickery, *The Age* (Melbourne), 20 March 1985.

example, are about the *riel* equivalent of 1960s prices, whereas salaries are one 10th of the earlier level.

The low salaries emphasize one of the important points made in the frequent political education sessions which all state employees must attend. They are considered as cadres who are to serve the people and the country, not use their places in the system to become a privileged class. Thus the spread in pay between experienced workers and their bosses is small, and the director of a pharmaceutical factory told me his skilled employees with bonuses and family allowance may take home more pay than he does.

The ideological point is well made in a country with Cambodia's past, but there may be some sacrifice in efficiency, since everyone must engage in extra-income producing activity, even if it is only resale on the free market of part of their subsidized rations of kerosene, cigarettes, soap, rice, condensed milk and sugar. Nearly all officials also maintain personal vegetable gardens, as do schools and Buddhist temples, worked by pupils and monks, and these, in addition to supplying cheap food, serve to keep urban inhabitants aware of rural realities.

There is as yet no state-operated market, and Phnom Penh's former central market stands newly painted but empty, awaiting the day when the Government feels confident of controlling commerce, which may be years in the future. At present the city is served by four large private markets in which the only local goods are food, traditional textiles and pre-war secondhand books.

The most important market function is to supply foreign products, most of which are smuggled across the Thai border, and in Phnom Penh's markets one can find nearly everything that would be available in well stocked Bangkok stores, from household wares to medicines to late-model tape recorders stereos and radios.

Such private activity, including the smuggling at the border, is tolerated because Cambodia is unable to produce many essentials, and the poor relations with Western neighbors make state-organized import unfeasible.

The markets, for example, supply medicines, one of the country's most serious deficiencies. A doctor at one of the largest hospitals told me that they often have to send patients to the markets for prescribed drugs instead of supplying them free, even though the quality is uncontrollable and counterfeit drugs have occasionally caused deaths.

Of course many unessential, even frivolous, items come in along with the essentials, but any attempt to exert more control would generate discontent which the country can ill afford and would also cut off the more essential items.

Indeed, the PRK often seems reluctant to impose even ordinary measures of authority for fear of alienating a population sickened by authoritarian regimes over the past 20 years. This has been a boon for one large sector of the Phnom Penh market trade, the dealers in secondhand books, who in large measure are retailing stolen goods taken from libraries and archives when population flowed

back into the city during the transition from Pol Pot to the PRK in 1979. The Government does not attempt to reclaim even those volumes stamped as ministerial property.

One side-effect of the reliance on the free market for foreign consumer goods is a very large degree of freedom to travel toward the Thai border, which makes escape very easy for those who wish to defect and become refugees in Thailand. The continuing necessity for cross-border trade indicates that the construction of barriers and roads along the Thai border is probably more for defence against infiltration of enemy forces than to contain the population in the manner of the Berlin wall.

Only in 1983 did the Government begin to exert some direct control over the market by the introduction of taxes, termed “patriotic contributions”, levied on traders, private artisans, farmers and semi-private concerns such as restaurants. Each market stall pays a daily two-*riel* municipal fee destined for the upkeep of the markets, and since 1981 there has been a noticeable improvement in organization and neatness.

In addition, the state collects taxes ranging from 90 *riel* a month for bookstalls to 180 for rice dealers, with wealthy silver and gold shops paying 320 and 1000 *riel* respectively.

After the war of 1970-75 and the destructive Pol Pot period (1975-79) nearly everything must be rebuilt or repaired and skilled artisans have virtually unlimited opportunities. The streets are filled with all manner of repair shops for old watches, radios, cameras and tape recorders. Refrigerators, pump motors and electrical tools are refurbished; and a recent development is shops to make new upholstery, rebuild old engines and smooth out the dented bodies of automobiles which escaped total destruction and are now being recovered and pieced together again.

Although there is no right of private ownership, possession and use, like other infringements of regulations, are tolerated. One proud survivor I saw was a 1960s Lancia, the recently beaten-out dents still faintly visible, being fitted with number plates on a Phnom Penh street.

One artisanal activity particularly important within Cambodia’s culture, and for which there is a special demand after the suppression of religion during 1975-79 is the making of Buddha images for installation in temples.

In the courtyard of a Phnom Penh temple I found a group of 13 private artisans turning out molded concrete images of the Buddha in several sizes and traditional poses. The images are sold, generally to private persons who donate them to temples, and the prices range from 400-700 *riel*, more than a high level monthly state salary. Taxes are 130-160 *riel* monthly, less than half the price of the least expensive product.

When the PRK came to power in 1979 one of its promises was the restoration of Buddhism, a promise which has been kept. Temples have been reopened and repaired, monks ordained and traditional festivals revived.

My visit coincided with the *kathen* month, during which congregations present new robes and other necessities to monks or contribute to construction and repair of temples. All over Phnom Penh groups of private citizens set up colorful stalls to collect cash contributions to *kathen* funds and in three localities outside Phnom Penh I witnessed the arrival of *kathen* groups at temples where the festivities were just as in pre-war times. One difference in line with PRK priorities is that the *kathen* festivals are advertised as donations for construction of schools in temple precincts rather than for strictly religious activities.

There are also some limits due to the country's precarious economic situation. Men under 50 are not supposed to be ordained, as they are needed in productive work, but exceptions are seen. Where several temples are clustered in wealthy neighborhoods only one now functions, and temples which once held 20-30 monks are limited to four or five.

Traditional Cambodia is slowly recovering with considerable relaxation of socialist regulations, which reflects the influence of Vietnamese pragmatism and the need for the PRK leadership to gain the confidence of a population which viewed them with suspicion before 1979.

Late in 1986 important personnel changes occurred in the Phnom Penh government, which indicated once and for all that the PRK would not become merely a satellite of Vietnam, but would evolve as an independent Cambodian state. I wrote the article below, and sent a shorter version, minus the paragraphs on Kremlinology, entitled "Power Shifts in Kampuchea" to ten newspapers in Australia, Thailand and the United States. Only the *Canberra Times* published it on 5 January 1987 under the tendentious title, "Kampuchea edges away from Hanoi".

Richard Gott of *The Guardian* (UK) wrote me (letter 6 January 1987) that he "thought [the article] was one of the most perceptive and farsighted pieces I have read about Phnom Penh politics in recent weeks", but because he had a "cast of thousands [sic!] of *Guardian* correspondents in that area", he could not "contemplate any more about Indochina at the moment".

His numerous correspondents, however, did not touch this subject; and one of them, Nick Cummings-Bruce, was clearly more comfortable with the US-backed anti-Phnom Penh line.<sup>423</sup> The *Bangkok Post*, at least, showed a sense of humor in answering (letter 12 January 1987) that "we also have our own Indochina correspondent, Jacques Bekaert".

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<sup>423</sup> Cummings-Bruce remained more comfortable with the straight anti-Phnom Penh line, even after it was no longer certain that it was the US regime line. See below, pp. 507, 509.

### Kremlinology and Cambodia (December, 1986) <sup>424</sup>

On 10-11 December 1986 Radio Phnom Penh announced changes in top level government personnel. In contrast to media treatment of Gorbachev's new appointees or the shifts among Vietnamese leaders following the recent Sixth Party Congress, there had been no Kremlinological speculation about imminent changes in Cambodia, and students of the country were no doubt taken by surprise.

The new appointments in Phnom Penh, however, may be as indicative of important trends in the Peoples Republic of Cambodia as the better-known developments in the two big-brother socialist countries. Three very prominent Phnom Penh personalities were replaced in some of their main functions.

Hun Sen, Foreign Minister since 1979, and also Prime Minister since January 1985, has given up the first portfolio as well as his Chairmanship of the Party Central Committee's Foreign Relations Commission.

Bou Thang, of northeastern ethnic minority origin who spent 1954-1970 in Vietnam, a revolutionary military commander during the 1970-75 war who then broke with Pol Pot and went into dissidence, emerging as an important Party figure in 1979, and who in early 1982 became Defence Minister, lost that post but remains a Vice-Chairman of the Council of Ministers.

Chea Soth, also in Viet Nam from 1954 to the 1970s, and Minister of Planning since 1980, has been removed from that job, but also continues as a Vice-Chairman of the Council of Ministers.

Kremlinology, the study of relatively closed regimes through analysis of the positioning, advancement, demotion, retirement or clique alliances of leading personnel, is supposed to aid in the identification and prediction of trends according to what is known of those persons' backgrounds, views, and group membership.

The utility of the technique is proven, but it must be applied honestly; without doctoring the inputs, and allowing the political chips to fall where they may. Evidence of change, say real liberalization in a Soviet-bloc country, must be given full weight, not dismissed with silly remarks about "Mr. Gorbachev's cherubic smile" hiding a "set of iron teeth", as I read in a recent article. <sup>425</sup>

Kremlinology has not been much in evidence in studies of revolutionary Cambodia. Before 1979 this was for the good reason that too little was known

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<sup>424</sup> Michael Vickery, 1987. A shortened version of this piece was published in the *Canberra Times*, 5 January 1987, under the title "Kampuchea edges away from Hanoi". A French version, entitled "La kremlinologie face au Cambodge", translated by Marie-Claire Orioux, was published in *Affaires cambodgiennes 1979-1989, Asie-Débat-5*, Paris, Éditions l'Harmattan, 1989, pp. 129-35. This full English version has not previously been published.

<sup>425</sup> William Lowther in *The Age* (Melbourne), 3 Jan 1987, a dispatch from Washington, D.C.



about the background of leading state personnel. But since 1979, it has been for the bad reason that except for a handful of specialists, Cambodia was put firmly in the pigeon hole ‘Vietnamese puppet regime’, with Kremlinological study of leading Cambodian personnel made superfluous by definition. Whenever Kremlinology might have weakened that preconception, the rules were changed to preserve fixed ideas unshaken.

Thus Pen Sovann, a Cambodian revolutionary who had spent the years 1954-1972 in Vietnam, emerged after 1979 as regime strongman, holding concurrently the posts of Vice-President, Minister of Defense, and Secretary-General of the Party; and foreign Cambodia-watchers considered him Hanoi’s pro-consul in Phnom Penh and proof of the puppet quality of that regime, which one Cambodia specialist even termed in print the ‘Pen Sovann Regime’.<sup>426</sup>

When Sovann was – as it appeared from the outside – suddenly and unceremoniously dumped in December 1981 and replaced by individuals with less obtrusive Vietnamese connections (in particular Heng Samrin, who had no Vietnamese background, as Party Secretary), the Kremlinologists refused to accept that there might be internal pressures to increasingly Khmerize the regime.

They instead rewrote the original script to make Pen Sovann Moscow’s man in Phnom Penh, overthrown by the Vietnamese because of an attempt to steer Cambodia away from Viet Nam toward the Soviet Union. In fact close retrospective attention to the local press and official announcements reveals that Pen Sovann was being gradually eased out for several months, and that there was no drop in contacts with the Soviets after his fall.<sup>427</sup>

When the Peoples Republic of Kampuchea was formed in 1979, two ‘factions’ could be recognized as its leadership was made public during 1979-1980.

One comprised those who had been active in the independence struggle of 1946-54 and had then gone to Viet Nam until the war of 1970-75. The other was made up of communists who had remained in Cambodia and participated in the Pol Pot administration before going into dissidence, including some who had never been involved in the earlier Khmer-Vietnamese war against French colonialism.

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<sup>426</sup> This was Stephen Heder in his “From Pol Pot to Pen Sovann to the Villages”, paper presented at the International Conference on Indochina and Problems of Security in Southeast Asia, Bangkok, Chulalongkorn University, June 1980, pp. 57-69; and in his statement before the Subcommittee on Asian and Pacific Affairs, US Congress, Washington, D.C., 21 October 1981, in which he strongly advocated US military support for the KPNLF against the PRK.

<sup>427</sup> For details and sources see Vickery, *Kampuchea Politics, Economics, and Society*, pp. 45-46 and notes.

By the time the ruling Kampuchean Peoples Revolutionary Council had been fleshed out in mid-1980, twelve Viet Nam veterans against five former Pol Pot personnel could be identified. The second group included President Heng Samrin, Foreign Minister Hun Sen, and Interior Minister Chea Sim, none of whom had figured prominently in information about the years 1975-79.

Pen Sovann, Chea Soth, and all other ministers except those for Agriculture, Justice, and Education were veterans of the long exile in Vietnam. Chan Ven in Education was the lone figure with no pre-war communist background, a former teacher who had spent the Pol Pot years as one of the disfavored 'new people', the urban population forced to become poor agricultural workers under constant threat of hunger and violent death.

In 1981 the state structure was changed from Revolutionary Council to executive State Council plus Council of Ministers and National Assembly, while the Party held its Fourth Congress and revealed the membership in its leading organs.

Although most of the Revolutionary Council ministers remained in equivalent posts in the new structure, in terms of the two 'factions' noted above, the balance began to shift away from Viet Nam veterans. After May 1981 there were 11 of them, with 8 former Pol Pot cadres, but the most significant change was in the number of non-revolutionaries, up to five: Chan Ven, moved from Education to Secretary General of the State Council; Pen Navuth, another former teacher, as new Minister for Education; US-educated Kong Samol in Agriculture, plus two more in Health and Culture/Information.

The predominance of the Viet Nam veteran group was reduced by Pen Sovann's removal at the end of that year, and then again by the death of Pen Sovann's successor as Prime Minister, Chan Si, in late 1984, and the elevation of Hun Sen to Prime Minister, retaining his previous post of Foreign Minister.

The same evolution in factional tendencies is even clearer in the Peoples Revolutionary Party. In 1981 eleven full members of the Central Committee and one alternate were of the Viet Nam group, with Pen Sovann as Secretary-General, and 7 had served in the DK administration. The disappearance of Pen Sovann, replaced as Party Secretary by Heng Samrin, and of Chan Si, here also weakened the Viet Nam group, while new people enlarged the other factions.

Then, following the 5th Party Conference of October 1985 the Central Committee was increased to 31 full and 14 alternate members, only 5 of whom were of the Viet Nam group, while 9-10 were Pol Pot cadres, and at least 20 were young professionals who neither went to Viet Nam nor joined Pol Pot.

That is, they were students, teachers, technicians, or civil servants under Sihanouk and Lon Nol, who were considered class enemies after 1975, and who had chosen to work for the PRK since 1979.

They come from those elements of Cambodian society least likely to be enthusiastically pro-Vietnamese, and as exploited third-class citizens under Pol Pot they are strongly against that type of regime. They can be expected to

represent a genuine current of Cambodian nationalism, but one which, unlike the ideologies of Pol Pot, Sihanouk, or Son Sann, does not define such nationalism as first of all anti-Vietnamese chauvinism, and which seeks to live in peaceful cooperation with Cambodia's eastern neighbor.

Further gains by this last group occurred in 1986. Nay Pena took over the powerful Ministry of Interior from Viet Nam veteran Khang Sarin, and Ms. Ho Non, a pre-war-trained engineer, replaced another Viet Nam veteran as Minister of Trade. At Deputy-Ministerial and Provincial level they have also become predominant, even if only because neither of the old revolutionary groups had sufficient cadres to occupy the posts which needed to be filled.

The veteran communists could, however, have filled, at least jointly, the ministerial and top Party posts, and the recently announced changes show further erosion of their authority in favor of pre-war intellectuals and technocrats who have chosen to help build Cambodian socialism, but are beholden neither to Viet Nam nor to Pol Pot.

Of those advanced in the recent shuffle, the new Foreign Affairs Minister Kong Korm was a teacher who remained in a communist zone after 1973, but in 1975 was demoted to the precarious status of 'new person'.<sup>428</sup> Both he and Yos Son, another pre-1975 intellectual who has taken over Hun Sen's function in the Party Foreign Relations Committee, have been working under Hun Sen in the Foreign Ministry since 1979, and they were among the unexpected additions to the Central Committee in late 1985.

Although little detail is known about them, new Planning Minister Chea Chanto, Defence Minister Koy Buntha, and Deputy Defence Minister and Chief of Staff Kae Kim Yan have similar pre-1979 backgrounds. Interestingly, the last two made their post-1979 careers in the administration of the Thai border province of Battambang, Kae Kim Yan in 1985 as both Party and administration chief after the displacement of old Viet Nam hand Lay Samon in 1984.

Thus, the Cambodian military establishment is now to be run by officials who have matured at the centre of the armed conflict between the PRK and its enemies. Outgoing Defence Minister Bou Thang's combat career was in the Northeast, and until 1985 the Defence Ministry appeared dominated by northerners and men with a Viet Nam background.

If the surprising emergence of this new leadership group is to be linked to any single regime personality, it is probably to Hun Sen, the youngest of the top level

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<sup>428</sup> Kong Korm did not live up to expectations, and the Foreign Ministry was reoccupied by Hun Sen in 1987 until given to Hor Nam Hong in 1989. Or perhaps, one should search for a very obscure, and, I would say this time, mistaken, Kremlinological signal. When Sam Rainsy formed his own Khmer Nation political party in 1995 with an extreme anti-Vietnamese plank in its programme, Kong Korm, having split with the CPP, appeared on its executive committee saying he had always disliked the pro-Vietnamese policy of the PRK.

figures, born in 1951, a combatant during 1970-75, then Pol Pot cadre until 1977, and whom some observers see as the most aggressively nationalistic of the top leadership.

The trend of personnel changes in the PRK leadership since 1981 indicates that if the new Cambodian regime was ever a mere creation of Vietnam, its Khmer nationalist credentials have increased yearly until the state is close to being taken over by pre-war educated intellectuals and administrators, few who had past close association with Vietnam, or are tainted by collaboration with Pol Pot.

These little-noticed changes in Cambodia mean that the eight-point peace plan devised by Phnom Penh's enemies early this year and offering to place the Peoples Republic on a par with each of the three Coalition partners was too little, too late, and addressed to the wrong people. It is attractive to no constituency within the country, where the leaders are increasingly credible as a Cambodian government and cannot be delivered by Viet Nam in negotiations with their enemies.<sup>429</sup>

ASEAN, and China, and other powers wishing to be involved in a Cambodian settlement can no longer pretend that the government of Cambodia sits in a collection of jungle camps of three inherently incompatible factions along the Thai border, or that the conflict is something to be settled among foreign powers acting as proxies for their various Cambodian favorites.

Indeed, the evolving image of the Peoples Republic might well be attractive enough to undermine the ASEAN-supported tripartite Coalition, particularly if the Kremlinological evidence for a break-up of the Pol Pot group after his death proves accurate, and enables Phnom Penh to end the conflict largely on its own terms.<sup>[430]</sup>

Early in 1987 I received an invitation from the Department of Sociology of Michigan State University to participate in a conference on the subject of state organized terror. After I accepted, a further letter dated 16 June 1987 said, "The paper you suggested presenting [tentative title 'The Nature and Genesis of Terrorism in Kampuchea'] ... has been judged likely to make one of the most significant contributions to the proceedings".<sup>431</sup>

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<sup>429</sup> *Plus ça change*. This was the mistake made by Kissinger in 1973.

[added in 2007) For the eight points see MacAlister Brown and Joseph J. Zasloff, *Cambodia Confronts the Peacemakers 1979-1998*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1998, p. 33].

<sup>430</sup> For further description of personnel changes up to 1993 see Vickery, "The Cambodian People's Party: Where has it come from, Where is it Going?", in *Southeast Asian Affairs 1994*, Singapore, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (1994), pp. 102-20.

<sup>431</sup> That letter was signed by Vlademir Shlapentokh, Chris Vanderpool, Richard Hellie (University of Chicago), and P. Timothy Bushnell.

The paper I wrote with the final title “Violence in Democratic Kampuchea: Some Problems of Explanation” was sent to them. I was unable to attend the conference, held on 2-5 November 1988, and heard no more from the conference organizers for several months. On 31 July 1989 I wrote to ask about the status of my paper, and finally received a letter from Professor Vanderpool dated 26 December 1989 saying, “we must tell you that your paper will not be included” in the conference proceedings.

### Violence in Democratic Kampuchea: Some Problems of Explanation (1988)<sup>432</sup>

‘Democratic Kampuchea’ (DK), ‘Khmer Rouge’, ‘Pol Pot’ have become terms in a kind of code jargon to symbolize murderous violence by a regime against its own population.

This usage began in circles so ideologically opposed to what a revolutionary regime in Indochina was believed to represent that any concern for factual truth was superseded, and this characterization of violence was spread far and wide before there was sufficient evidence to justify it.<sup>433</sup>

As evidence accumulated not only did the people taking that view consider their predictions vindicated, but now even among the residual sympathizers of DK, there is consensus that its policies led to an unacceptable level of violence against its own population, even if the true number of victims seems to have been under one million, rather than the 3 million which was formerly given prominence in the world’s press.<sup>434</sup>

Still more piquant is the circumstance that those regimes which most damned the ‘Khmer Rouge’ when they were in power, and refused to recognize them as government of Cambodia, immediately on their overthrow organized a rehabilitation plan for them on the Thai border and then exerted no small effort to maintain them as Cambodia’s representatives in the United Nations.

<sup>432</sup> Michael Vickery unpublished paper, prepared by invitation for *Conference on State Organized Terror*, Department of Sociology, Michigan State University, 2-5 November 1988.

<sup>433</sup> For example, John Barron and Anthony Paul, *Murder of a Gentle Land*,

<sup>434</sup> For example, the European-Kampuchea friendship groups which sympathize with the position of Democratic Kampuchea against the Peoples Republic. An example is the ‘Vänskapsföreningen Sverige-Kampuchea’ (Sweden-Kampuchea Friendship Society) and its publication *Kampuchea*, edited by Hedda Eckerwald.

[(added later) Since 1988, when I became acquainted with them, and the period of reference in this note, they have moved even farther from their original supportive position with respect to Democratic Kampuchea. The latest step is the return to Cambodia of one of the group who visited DK in 1978, along with Eckerwald and Jan Myrdal, Gunnar Bergstrom, who arrived for a visit of humble apology in November 2008 (*PPP*, 18 November 2008, p. 1)]

Now, all is forgiven; the US leads a campaign of the world's right-wing regimes, plus China, to insist that the 'Khmer Rouge' must find a place within a new government to be forced on Cambodia. US regime intellectuals, who ten to fifteen years ago concentrated on scooping up evidence of Communist iniquity in the Khmer Rouge movement, now argue that they are not so bad compared to the Vietnamese influence behind the government in Phnom Penh, or, on another tack, try to tar the Phnom Penh leadership with the Khmer Rouge brush in the interest of destroying both.<sup>435</sup>

There is still, however, much disagreement on the reasons for such a high level of violence.

It must first be understood that with respect to number of deaths in excess of a normal peacetime rate, DK was not uniquely murderous in the 20th century. World War II death rates in Yugoslavia and Poland were equally high within a similar length of time, and DK violence pales before the crimes of the Nazis and the horrors inflicted by American bombing on not only Cambodia, but on Viet Nam and earlier on Korea, not to mention the estimated 6 million victims of CIA instigated terror since the 1940s.<sup>436</sup>

If it be argued that not all of these situations are comparable, being violence wrought on one country by another, in Yugoslavia at least, atrocities in intra-Yugoslav conflict were as numerous and as horrible as anything which happened in Cambodia. No one out of Cambodia has come up with a tale to equal the

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<sup>435</sup> Karl D. Jackson, ed., *Cambodia 1975-1978 Rendezvous with Death*, Princeton University Press, 1989, in which four of the six contributors are present or former officers of the US State or Defense Departments, and another is François Ponchaud; William Shawcross [see below]; Elizabeth Becker [see above, pp. 166, ff.].

<sup>436</sup> This was the claim made by a group of ex-CIA officers who in 1987 formed an organization, Association for Responsible Dissent, to work for reforms of CIA excesses. Reported by Aurelio Rojas (UPI), *The Nation* (Bangkok), 30 October, 1987; James Ridgeway, "The Moving Target", *Village Voice*, 8 December, 1987; Coleman McCarthy, "Excesses of the CIA", *The Guardian Weekly*, 20 December 1987. Since then they have vanished.

A specific case of CIA creation of violence in a 'Leninist' state (see below, pp. 287, ff., Friedman), is described in *In Search of Enemies*, New York, W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1978, by one of the founding members of the Association cited above, John Stockwell, an ex-CIA officer horrified by what the agency was doing in Angola. Others prominent in that association were Philip Agee, Philip Roettinger, David MacMichael.

[added 2007] Except for MacMichael, this seems to be a quite different group from the six who in 2007 denounced former CIA director George Tenet, not because they finally objected to CIA crimes, but because they feared that the bloopers of the Bush regime would discredit the spookdom in which they still believed (Phil Giraldi, Ray McGovern, Larry Johnson, Jim Marcinkowski, Vince Cannistraro and David MacMichael).

basket of Serbian eyes which Croatian leader Ante Pavelic showed Curzio Malaparte.<sup>437</sup>

More recently and relevantly the highly praised Indonesian anti-communist massacres of 1965 (500,000, although out of a much larger population, within a much shorter time) may be evoked, while the human destruction wrought by capitalist development in Brazil is even more frightening.<sup>438</sup>

Possibly Greece in its post-1945 Civil War might also compare with DK, both in numbers and quality of violence. I recall an acquaintance whose father had been police chief of a city in northern Greece, and who had regularly exposed the heads of captured 'Communists' in the town square. Later the son, on a visit to Czechoslovakia, met Greek refugees, some of whom had perhaps been the children of his father's victims.

No, the uniqueness of the DK experience is not in numbers killed, nor the cruelty which accompanied the killings. The DK experience was first of all unique as a lower-class revolution which totally displaced middle and upper classes with whom major western societies, and some neighboring Asian ruling groups, identified.

It occurred just when the United States, and its ally and Cambodia's neighbor Thailand, were in particular need of a propaganda device to retrospectively justify the recently-ended US intervention in Indochina and to discredit socialism within Southeast Asian milieus which might have been sympathetic to it.<sup>439</sup>

In Thailand a 'fledgling democracy', brought about by student revolt in 1973, was under increasingly violent attack from powerful entrenched enemies. It had not been accepted gracefully by the US, whose ambassador, Leonard Unger, scolded the Thais for being too concerned with democracy rather than with 'communist' threats from their eastern neighbors.

Peasant, worker, and student agitation, as well as the results of the 1975 election showed a growing interest in 'socialism'; together with the violent right-wing reaction to destroy such groups, something was necessary to discredit 'socialism' among people who might have found it attractive.

<sup>437</sup> Described in Curzio Malaparte's *Kaputt*. [Remember, I was writing in 1988 about 1940s Yugoslavia. These horrors have been repeated in former Yugoslavia in the 1990s.]

<sup>438</sup> *Time*, 15 July 1966 praised the massacres in Indonesia. *Time*, 11 September 1978, pp. 14-15, reported that one-third of Brazilian youth "are growing up in circumstances so deprived that they are unlikely ever to play a useful role in modern society", and within 20 years Brazil "will be burdened with millions of adults so undernourished, unskilled and uneducated that they will be impervious to any kind of civilizing process". For other Brazilian horrors see Noam Chomsky, *World Orders Old and New*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1991, 1996, pp. 137-28. For comparisons I made with Democratic Kampuchea see my *Cambodia 1975-1982*, p. 184.

<sup>439</sup> The DK experience might have been a dangerous 'virus', of the type described by Noam Chomsky in *Rethinking Camelot*, Boston, South End Press, 1993, "Introduction".

By the time of the 1976 election, the most violent campaign ever, the Thai press had been able to feature the horrors of socialism as experienced across the border. Although the results among urban middle classes may have been what was hoped, Thai peasants might have thought wistfully of what their brothers were carrying out in Cambodia.

In DK most of the victims were of relatively privileged urban groups, victimized by previously low-class peasants. A 'normal' world had been overturned. This was obviously what many survivors considered to be the real atrocity: being forced to take orders, and to fear for their lives, from their social inferiors.

One of my former students [in the 1960s] whom I met in the Khao-I-Dang refugee camp in 1980, in a letter which he wrote to UNHCR asking for speedy transfer to a third country, described Pol Pot as "worse than Hitler, because Hitler only killed Jews". I explained gently that that was not the way to make a good impression on UNHCR officials.

Unlike Hitler, who gave ample clues to his personality before 1939, none of the DK intellectual leadership provided such evidence in their writings, and surviving acquaintances state emphatically that they were not like that. Qualities ascribed to Pol Pot, 'trustworthy', 'courteous', 'kind', sound like the Boy Scout code.

There is thus no evidence permitting inference that DK violence was encouraged by psychopathic tendencies among its leadership, and an early attempt by the CIA and associated journalists to erect such a theory was too crude to find favor even in ideologically sympathetic circles.<sup>440</sup>

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<sup>440</sup> This is the theory put out by John Barron and Anthony Paul about Khieu Samphan's alleged impotence leading to a propensity for violence. See *Murder of a Gentle Land*, p. 47.

[(added 2008) Unfortunately, later specialist studies of Pol Pot and his period are far too dependent on such speculative psychologizing as an explanatory device. See the utter silliness in Chandler, *Brother Number One*, first edition, p. 11, second edition, p. 10, "It is easy to imagine Saloth Sar ... watching the masked and powdered dancers ... perhaps including his sister and his brother's wife ..."; first and second editions, p. 12, "It is impossible to say which impressions of the palace prevailed among Saloth Sar's memories once he came to power ... He may have been thinking of his own uprooted childhood in a potentially hostile city ..."; and first edition, p. 39, second edition, p. 37, the attribution of Saloth Sar's anti-royalist ferocity in an article written in Paris to his "childhood spent among palace dancers exploited by the king and perhaps suffering from venereal infection".

Nothing we know about the young Saloth Sar suggests that his childhood was 'uprooted' or that he would then have seen Phnom Penh as a "potentially hostile city", certainly not with his family connections to palace life; and Chandler's allusion to venereal infection among the dancers, without specific sourcing, is sick orientalism. See review by Louis Paulsen, [www.marxmail.org/archives/june98/cambodia.htm](http://www.marxmail.org/archives/june98/cambodia.htm)]



But as Georges Sorel remarked long ago, even “optimists, idealists, and sensitive men” “may lead ... country into the worst disasters ... finding out that social transformations are not brought about with the ease that [they] had counted on; [they] then suppos[e] that this is the fault of ... contemporaries, instead of explaining what actually happens by historical necessities; [they are] tempted to get rid of people whose obstinacy seems to [them] to be so dangerous to the happiness of all”.<sup>441</sup>

Before discussing causes of the violence, let us recall again what happened.

Very soon after the victorious revolutionary troops entered Phnom Penh on 17 April 1975 the entire population was ordered to evacuate the city; the same measure was carried out in other urban centers and large towns. One of the alleged reasons was that the Americans were likely to bomb the towns captured by the communists.

This in itself was a cruel measure, and must have been the direct cause of thousands of deaths, but it was not an unusual measure in Indochina, other than that it was city folk being displaced by peasants rather than the reverse. However cruel objectively, the evacuation, particularly of Phnom Penh, was also grounded in objectively valid reasons, whether the economic or political aspect is emphasized.

As American officials had predicted before the war ended and the nature of the outcome realized, Cambodia had been so badly destroyed that a million deaths could easily occur as a result of social disintegration.<sup>442</sup> There was no way of getting sufficient food to Phnom Penh, and people had to be moved out to where the food was, and to start producing more.

If the measures taken to effect this were crude, the US experts just mentioned had indicated why crude measures were inevitable. Even though American bombing of the city in communist hands may never have been considered, it was perfectly reasonable after the Viet Nam war experience, when the city of Ben Tre was destroyed to save it to assume that such might occur.<sup>443</sup>

Or, if the ‘real’ reason was to dismantle potential networks of resistance, what was wrong with that in terms of standard international practice? Every side in

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<sup>441</sup> Georges Sorel, *Reflections on Violence*, Collier books, pp. 32-33.

<sup>442</sup> Mentioned in Hildebrand and Porter, *Cambodia: Starvation and Revolution*, and based on official US documents.

<sup>443</sup> [(added December 2006)] In fact, such bombing may have been considered. David Hume Kennerly, President Ford’s personal photographer has written that in a meeting of Ford with his National Security Council on 14 May 1975 (at which Kennerly was present) to discuss the Mayaguez incident one of the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended “a B-52 strike on Phnom Penh”, which Ford immediately rejected. Suppose Nixon had still been president. (David Hume Kennerly, “Gerald Ford Becoming President”, *International Herald Tribune* 29 December 2006, p.4)]

combat or in victory seeks to identify real and potential enemies and put them out of action.

In Indochina in particular forcible population transfers to realize that objective had already been established as a norm. In Cambodia during the first Indochina War (1946-1954) entire districts of peasants had been forcibly resettled by the French, and in southern Viet Nam other thousands of peasants had been forced into strategic hamlets, while American strategic intellectuals were calling for bombing and defoliation to displace entire districts of rural population to the cities to deprive the other side of a population base.<sup>444</sup>

These measures against peasants by city people and their hired guns never provoked the same high decibel outcry that followed the population displacements in Cambodia.

At the same time massacres occurred in a number of places. In general they were focused on the military and highest level civilian officials of the Khmer Republic, and with the exception of the roundups in Phnom Penh and Battambang of central government personnel and military officers they appear to have been local outbursts of anger rather than centrally organized.

Whether or not that supposition is entirely true, no more than a glance at the way the war had been run from Phnom Penh and Washington is required to understand how that level of rage had accumulated in the Cambodian countryside.<sup>[445]</sup> There were also throughout 1975 selective arrests of former regime officials, businessmen, and intellectuals, nearly all of whom were accused of contacts with the CIA.

This first period of intentional mass violence tapered off during 1975, and 1976 was a year of relative calm and relative agricultural recovery in traditional farming areas. There was, however, still a large measure of objective violence in the organization of labor in certain areas.

In particular where groups of displaced urban folk were settled in hitherto uncultivated areas with the task of creating fields and planting first crops, large death rates, sometimes over 50%, resulted from overwork, lack of food, and illness. They were unfamiliar with and incapable of performing such tasks, and the food they were supposed to receive pending first harvests did not arrive.

Violence also resulted from policies to refashion society through abolition of religious practices, traditional ceremonies, normal educational possibilities, and simply freedom of movement or in personal relationships. Such measures most affected the urban evacuees, and there is no doubt that the majority base peasants were less subject to such harassments, and with some glee participated in their enforcement on their class enemies.

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<sup>444</sup> See Vickery, *Cambodia 1975-1982*, pp. 16-17.

<sup>445</sup> See Ben Kiernan, "The American Bombardment of Kampuchea, 1969-1973", *Vietnam Generation*, Winter 1989, pp. 4-41. Discussed further below.

By 1977 the second wave of intentional violence, more centrally planned, began. It appears to have been a result of the failures in planned production and distribution which had already caused many deaths among urban evacuees without the production increases which had been expected. Instead of rethinking their ideology and planning, the DK leadership blamed the failures on conscious sabotage and treason.

The arrests and executions which now occurred were first among cadres and officials, particularly in those areas in which largely urban evacuees had failed to perform as expected (note Sorel above). Such arrests occurred whether or not the cadres in question had behaved leniently or harshly toward their subject populations.

As failures continued, circles of arrests widened, the projected treason behind the failures was blamed on Vietnamese influence, and by late 1977 (and more violently during 1978), anti-Vietnamese policies were instituted, while executions spread from suspect cadres to large population groups in the areas they had administered, particularly the East Zone. Extant records show that accusations of CIA contact were less frequent, while collaboration with Viet Nam was becoming the favorite allegation.

By late 1977 the domestic violence had escalated to international violence with attacks across the border into Viet Nam. The violence had also spread so far into peasant circles which were once DK regime supporters that when foreign invasion came at the end of 1978 and early 1979 it was felt as a relief. Little resistance was offered by the populace who welcomed the complete turn-around in policies instituted by the new People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK) with Vietnamese encouragement and support.

In searching for explanations it must be remembered that there were several different patterns of violence, at different times and in different places, with different groups as main victims. No single explanation for all is likely to be satisfactory. In general the reasons so far offered have not taken sufficient account of this, and they are as numerous and varied as their authors, whose ideological propensities they reflect as much as the facts of the Cambodian situation.

Because of this a sociology of explanations is as necessary as further direct historical study of the events in DK. At least the pattern of those events is now clear, even if further detail into the experiences of specific groups is still of value.

William Shawcross first offered an explanation that the violence of US bombing had so maddened surviving DK soldiers that they took revenge on compatriots who had been on the other side. This view did not find favor with many other western writers, and was quickly dropped by Shawcross himself

when, after 1975, there was rapid and massive shift of academic and journalistic opinion on Indochina from criticism of US policy to apologies for it.<sup>446</sup>

The simplest explanation was to ascribe the violence to ‘Marxism-Leninism’, or just ‘Communism’. This is what would have been expected from US regime figures, but it was eagerly taken up by those formerly anti-Viet Nam War journalists and academics, and Maoist intellectuals, who began to see the advantages of mainstream respectability.

This is the path ultimately chosen by Shawcross, who turned from a sympathetic observer of the Indochinese victims of US aggression to sympathetic participant in a new wave of indirect US aggression after 1979; in one article even casting doubt on the reality of the Tuol Sleng execution center, and who having once compared DK with Nazism, switched to insistence that comparison with Nazi practices was unsuitable, apparently only because it distracted from blaming communism. [(added later) In his latest manifestation Shawcross has denied himself, claiming that *Sideshow* was written to expose the evil of the Khmer Rouge.<sup>447</sup>]

Within the PRK, Vietnam, and now the DK rump itself, external interference in Cambodian affairs has been favored as explanation. For the two former groups the cause of DK violence was Chinese influence on DK, while for the latter, it resulted from Vietnamese infiltration and sabotage.

Chinese demons also found favor for a time among foreign supporters of the PRK, although their precise identity and manner of influence were difficult to establish convincingly.

When Maoism was still in vogue in western leftist circles, sympathetic students of the Cambodian revolution believed that the Cambodian left were unified and “mostly sympathetic to the Cultural Revolution in China”, a remark intended as a sympathetic assessment.<sup>448</sup>

Later, when it was recognized that the Cambodian left had not been at all united in the 1960s, that the ‘bad guys’, Pol Pot, Ieng Sary, and Son Sen, had followed a line quite different from ‘good guys’ Hou Yuon and Hu Nim, and that the two latter had not been part of the top leadership as we had all earlier imagined, an analysis positing three main factions was proposed: (1) the Pol Pot group with Pol Pot, Ieng Sary, their wives, and Nuon Chea; (2) a group

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<sup>446</sup> Contrast William Shawcross, *Sideshow*, with Shawcross, *The Quality of Mercy*, DD Books, Bangkok, pp. 48-50, where any connection between bombing and DK violence has been carefully expunged.

<sup>447</sup> See below, “Shawcross in the 90s”. Shawcross was able to get away with distortions and lies about the PRK because of the protection afforded by the *New York Review of Books*, which refused to print critical refutations, and even permitted Shawcross to censor critics of his “The End of Cambodia”, *NYRB* 24 Jan 1980, and “The Burial of Cambodia”, *NYRB* 10 May 1984. See comment on these pieces above.

<sup>448</sup> Ben Kiernan, “The Samlaut Rebellion and its Aftermath”, Part I, p.1.

following the old Indochina Communist Party line, and comprising the Khmer communists who had gone to Hanoi in 1954, the Pracheachon activists, and the DK survivors, mainly from the East Zone, who are in the PRK leadership; and (3) a smaller Cultural Revolution group, in which Hu Nim, Phouk Chhay, Tiv Ol, and many of the students and teachers who had joined the struggle in the 1960s and 1970s were included.

The last was in fact merely a residual category for ‘good guys’ who had never had any association with the ICP or Pracheachon, and who around 1967-1968 were producing pro-Cultural Revolution publicity in Phnom Penh. Hou Yuon and Khieu Samphan were viewed as standing between pairs of the three groups.<sup>449</sup>

Note that in this second interpretation of 1980, Cultural Revolution linkage is still regarded positively, and pains were taken to show that Pol Pot was not following the Chinese Cultural Revolution example.

Of course, while the Cultural Revolution was still in favor, Deng Xiaoping and his reforms were not viewed with sympathy, and there was thus speculation that Pol Pot might have conferred with Deng and Liu Shaoqi in 1965, just before his anti-Vietnamese policy solidified, and hints that Deng may have been responsible for Pol Pot and his policies.<sup>450</sup>

There was also a further suggestion that the defeat of the Cultural Revolution radicals by Deng contributed directly to the serious escalation of the Cambodia-Viet Nam conflict, a hypothesis very much at odds with what is known of the ideologies and policy views of the four parties concerned. Temporally this position is closer to the mark since the real take-off of Polpotism began after the death of Mao, and continued after the defeat of the Cultural Revolution; but temporal coincidence does not prove causality.

Interestingly this position, although intended as sympathetic to the PRK, is at odds with their views which treat the Pol Pot regime as an offshoot of Maoism and the Cultural Revolution.

Now that the Cultural Revolution has been thoroughly discredited, and Deng is accepted as a progressive reformer, a change in slant is noticeable in the speculations. Pol Pot in Peking in 1965 “is likely to have been asked by the Chinese, as by the Vietnamese, to refrain from ... rebellion against Sihanouk”, but “probably did receive encouragement for his adoption of a hostile posture toward Sihanouk” [emphasis added]. The argument is based on “Chinese policy interests [which] lay in alienating the Kampuchean Party from the Vietnamese”.<sup>451</sup>

<sup>449</sup> Ben Kiernan, “Conflict in the Kampuchean Communist Movement”, *JCA* 10, 1/2 (1980).

<sup>450</sup> Kiernan, “Conflict”, pp. 27, 52. [There is now, since 1993, more information on Pol Pot’s trip to China and whom he met there. See pp. 436 ff., below].

<sup>451</sup> Ben Kiernan, *How Pol Pot*, p. 223.

In 1965? – when Viet Nam was not an issue in the Sino-Soviet dispute, and when China was resolutely anti-American?

If the Chinese were cultivating Pol Pot against Sihanouk at that time, it would more likely have been because they saw him as an anti-American ally in case Sihanouk wavered, as Marxists might have predicted, and as he did four years later; not because of Pol Pot's enmity toward Viet Nam, which the Chinese might not yet have perceived. After all, there was close Vietnamese-Chinese cooperation in training Cambodian cadres.<sup>452</sup>

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A further shift is now apparent among those who, like the US regime, favor Deng but oppose the PRK. An example which merits close attention is China specialist Edward Friedman, who has produced several authoritative works on traditional peasant rebellion, the Chinese revolution, and communist theory, and has written intriguingly about Cambodia, as well as sympathetically both about Asian revolutions threatened by the US and the US threatened by Asian revolutions (although, of course, at different times).<sup>453</sup>

Friedman has gone back to Mao and the Cultural Revolution for his *daemon ex machina* in Cambodia, for as an ardent admirer of Deng Xiaoping and his reforms he can hardly make a connection between them and a Cambodian regime he excoriates. His position thus puts him on the same side of the argument as the PRK, which has in fact instituted Deng-ism even if imitated from other sources.

Friedman cannot acknowledge this, for like Shawcross, he has seen the advantages of changing his image from friend of revolution to supporter of the US regime line, which means that it is OK to support Deng, but not equivalent policies in countries which have not received US regime certificates of good behavior.

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<sup>452</sup> See Vickery, *Kampuchea, Politics, Economics, and Society*, chapter 3, for more discussion.

<sup>453</sup> See Edward Friedman, *Backward Toward Revolution*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1974; "Three Leninist Paths Within a Socialist Conundrum", in *Three Visions of Chinese Socialism*, ed. by Dorothy J. Solinger, pp. 11-46, cited further as "Conundrum"; "After Mao: Maoism and Post-Mao China", in *Telos* no. 65, Fall 1985, cited further as "After"; Friedman and Mark Selden, *America's Asia: Dissenting Essays on Asian-American Relations*, Vintage, 1973.

[This paper, recall, was written in 1988. Friedman's views on Deng Xiaoping and his reforms have changed since 1989 and the Tian An Men incident, as seen in his "Democratization and Re-Stalinization in China", *Telos* 80 (Summer 1989, pp. 27-36)].

Thus Friedman, like Deng's China, supports the Pol Pot group in exile against the PRK, while the latter follow Deng-type policies domestically and agree with Friedman that Maoism was responsible for DK policies before 1979.<sup>454</sup>

For Friedman DK represents a malignant outgrowth of Maoism. "Pol Pot-ism is the logical extension of Maoism", an example of "malignant Maoist rule". "Pol Pot's Cambodian Communist Party ... chose to use the Leninist state organs of coercion to force people on the Maoist path toward the solidaristic egalitarianism seen as the essence of Marx's communism";<sup>455</sup> DK was the "unfettered use of force to realize its Maoist notions of a socialist transition ... [but] Leninist state action to implement Maoism is like launching a war on society ...".<sup>456</sup>

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<sup>454</sup> In April 1984, at an Asian Studies conference in Adelaide, Australia, to which Friedman had come at US government expense, he told some of us that the DK group on the Thai border, which he had just visited, deserved to be considered as a possible government in Cambodia because they had now renounced communism and would put into effect the same moderate policies being followed by the PRK, but unlike the latter would not be subservient to the Vietnamese invaders. Note here also the US 'tilt' against Viet Nam, and in favor of the Khmer Rouge.

Friedman also claimed to have been given, while working with US government figures on the Thai border, secret information proving that Yellow Rain was real. This was at a time when the Yellow Rain propaganda was almost thoroughly discredited; and indeed within a few months it had been given up for good. At that time Friedman had apparently allowed himself to become an 'asset' for one section of the executive branch of the US government, like David Horowitz and Peter Collier, former New Leftists and collaborators on *Ramparts* magazine, who noisily switched to Reagan in the 1980s.

[added later] See Kathy Deacon, "Red Diaper Crybabies", *The Nation* (New York), 17 February 1997, pp. 30-32.] Taking a close look, one wonders if *Ramparts* was not one of that special category of apparently liberal or intellectual journals financed by a branch of the US government for covert purposes. Besides Horowitz and Collier, another leading light of the old *Ramparts* was making strange statements in Finland, where he had been appointed ambassador, in 1995. Under the title "USA-ambassadören vill bli också glassimportör" ("the US ambassador wants to be an ice cream importer too"), Helsinki's Swedish-language *Huvudstadsbladet*, 17 March 1995, reported on a talk entitled "The American Dream" by Derek Shearer, an old *Ramparts* hand, now "a convinced market economist", to students of the Swedish-language Economics College.

He boasted of such economic successes as the sale of Coca-Cola in Romania, which has stimulated private enterprise there in the form of small soft drink stands. "Coca-Cola is subversive", he said. "The climate in the USA has always been less ideological than in Europe, and business as such was not questioned. Every young American has had his corner drink stand or sold Girl Scout Cookies" as a stage in developing the entrepreneurial spirit. Then, as prime examples of how things should go, Shearer cited Ben and Jerry's ice cream, whose shops hand out brochures on "Caring Capitalism", and he said he wanted to start importing it to Finland.]

<sup>455</sup> "After", 24; "Conundrum", 35; "After", 33. I admit it is unfair to dredge up the last quote out of its context where it does not sound quite so silly as standing alone.

<sup>456</sup> "Conundrum", 20.

The arguments behind these remarks depend on facile ‘Leninist’ links through the world’s Marxist or quasi-Marxist regimes, all of which are versions of the ‘Leninist’ state. This state is never clearly defined in opposition to other types of state system, and the only reason which may be inferred for Friedman’s insistence on ‘Leninist’ rather than ‘Marxist’ is that some reformers in, or in exile from, some of the countries in question, have used Leninism as a positive concept in their search for progressive transformations of Soviet-bloc states, an intellectual current holding no little danger for official American attitudes toward those countries.<sup>457</sup>

Friedman’s Leninism is a catalogue of undesirable features, and the states claiming to be socialist are bad because they all show some combination of those traits. Thus the Leninist state is a “privileged Party-state whose officials enjoy what the populace views as illegitimate perquisites”, and “is found by its citizens to be a stratified system of corruption, personal networks and nepotism ... ‘feudal socialism’”, in which “privilege and corruption” mean that the benefits of the system are awarded “for personal loyalty and not for work performance”. It is a “Party-state structured in tiers”.<sup>458</sup>

It includes a number of institutions adopted from preceding regimes: a modern army, “a pervasive secret police apparatus taken from Czarist Russia and transferred ... not only to Soviet clients in East Europe and to Stalinist regimes such as Albania, pre-1949 Yugoslavia, Viet Nam and North Korea, but also to the whole variety of Third-World Leninist Party-states which at one time or another have sought Soviet-bloc aid ... China and Cuba, Nicaragua, Afghanistan and Angola”.

Thus apparently because of what happened in DK we should all have supported Reagan’s and Bush’s contras in Nicaragua.

If indeed so many traits are inherited from the past, from pre-Leninist regimes, as any historian might suspect, then this is the genre of analysis required for explaining their differences, and the category of ‘Leninist State’ loses much of its significance. We might note here that Korea, already in the 19th century, was described by westerners as a xenophobic hermit kingdom.

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<sup>457</sup> Remember the Sonnenfeldt doctrine on the danger for the ‘Free World’ of communist regimes with human faces (*Time* 12 April 1976; Vickery, “Looking Back”, p. 111, Chomsky and Herman, *After the Cataclysm*, p. 218). An example of it in action was the rescue by the US of Stalinist General Jan Sejna from prosecution by the Dubcek government in 1968 (see note 403 above). Note in “Conundrum”, 18, Friedman’s rejection of Bahro, *The Alternative in Eastern Europe*, one of the reformers within a Leninist tradition.

[(added later) Others were the Hungarians, George Konrad and Ivan Szelényi, *The Intellectuals on the Road to Class Power*. The first reactions to Gorbachev were typical: “Mr. Gorbachev’s cherubic smile” hiding a “set of iron teeth” (see n. 425)].

<sup>458</sup> “Conundrum”, 13-14.



It is easy to see why this trend of thought is unacceptable to Friedman or the US government. It undermines anti-Communist crusades. The most rigid of Leninist states may have to struggle with a particularly heavy hereditary burden, against which some of them measure rather well by democratic or western welfare state standards, while countries like Nicaragua and the PRK would have to be credited with immense achievements following unusually oppressive regimes.

In Cambodia DK “revealed itself as a typical Leninist Party-state” because it was “very hierarchized”, “position could carry considerable privilege”, a power-holder “had many daughters who married rising political and military cadres”, and children of top leaders attended special schools, “[i]n sum, the system was one of ‘feudal fascism’”<sup>459</sup>.

These traits are all cited from my *Cambodia 1975-1982*, and Friedman, note 38, finds his case strengthened because I argued that DK was “not rooted in Leninism or Maoism”, and “the evidence from [this] ... book showing that the Cambodian government’s policies were Leninist with a Maoist trajectory is the more persuasive because it exists despite the intentions of” the author.

What this more convincingly illustrates is Friedman’s peculiar fashion of arguing from unconnected phrases rather than coherent structures, as though hierarchy, privilege, political marriages, and special schools had never existed, and could not exist, except in a Leninist state. As for ‘feudal fascism’, I thought I was using it in a clearly sarcastic reference to the work of another writer, but I apparently misjudged the literacy of my readership.<sup>460</sup>

In Cambodia most of these traits were normal aspects of traditional society, not attributable to revolution, but persevering in spite of it. An exception might be ‘feudal fascism’, which I find meaningless, but which for people who like it might better fit the last Sihanouk years. Indeed all of Friedman’s ‘Leninist’ traits are shared by many regimes noted for their anti-communism, and thus in no way specially Leninist.

The legitimacy of Friedman’s ‘Leninism’ is at least dubious, and the notable common feature of all his Leninist states is that they are disliked by the US government, in the case of the smaller ones outside Europe simply because they have refused to become US clients. When some of Friedman’s examples, even for himself, seem to get too far from core ‘Leninism’, such as Nicaragua, Afghanistan and Angola, he slides off into an even fuzzier notion, the “autonomous state”.

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459 “Conundrum”, 27; Chandler, *A History*, resorted to similar word mongering, third edition p. 245, fourth edition, p. 296, “the Leninist politics [Pol Pot] favored... can be seen in part as reflecting time-honored ideas of political behavior”. Does that mean kings of Angkor were Leninist before the fact?

460 Vickery, *Cambodia 1975-1982*, p. 250, where I was discussing Stephen Heder’s use of ‘feudal fascism’ in his “From Pol Pot to Pen Sovann to the Villages”.

In this connection he does take brief note of some non-Leninist autonomous states, “giving full reign to coercive instruments”, such as ‘East Pakistan’ (now Bangladesh), Uganda, Iran, Guatemala, Argentina, but he plainly does not consider them as serious a problem, and the one he singles out for juxtaposition with DK is Ayatollah Komeini’s Iran, likewise no friend of the US.<sup>461</sup>

But as was pointed out by another Edward Friedman, together with Mark Selden, “One of the striking features of American Asian scholarship has been its reiteration of Cold War myths”.<sup>462</sup> Friedman thoroughly disapproves of Shawcross’ bombing theory, which he attributes to Kiernan, and he finds it “a most dangerous approach to the issue, one that makes future Pol Pots more likely ... as with Sendero Luminoso in Peru”.<sup>463</sup>

Now how a misreading by intellectuals of the effects of bombing in Cambodia or elsewhere could promote the rise of more such regimes is difficult to fathom. Does this prefigure support for more such US atrocities, and absolution in advance for any social disasters which may result?<sup>464</sup>

Friedman’s DK resulted from conscious imitation by its leaders of Maoism, but what neither Friedman’s ‘Leninism’ nor his Maoism can explain is why DK should have been more malignant than real Maoism. Friedman moreover recognizes this. The difference between “Pol Pot’s malignant Maoist rule in Cambodia” and more benign developments out of the ‘Leninist’ state elsewhere “cries out for analytic categories capable of distinguishing between such palpably different political systems”.<sup>465</sup>

<sup>461</sup>“Conundrum”, 35.

<sup>462</sup> Friedman and Selden, p. x.

<sup>463</sup> Friedman, “After”, p. 24. Note that Shawcross himself now rejects it. There is an example here of the peculiar way in which Friedman has read his sources, prying words and details out of context to cobble together to fit his argument. Against the bombing theory he cites Ben Kiernan’s *How Pol Pot* to the effect that “eastern Cambodia, where most of the bombs fell, was least receptive to Pol Pot’s policies” (f.n. 7), ‘proving’ that Pol Pot brutality was not provoked by bombing.

This ignores, and it must be deliberate, that there were two separate bombing campaigns, the so-called secret bombing of 1969-1970, which was mostly in the East and close to the border with Viet Nam, and the much more massive bombing of the central plains, including part of the East, in 1973, which is the bombing in question.

Incidentally the attribution of Shawcross’ bombing theory to Kiernan, must be to avoid embarrassing a now fellow US regime apologist with a theory which takes responsibility away from ‘communists’. See Kiernan’s further research on this subject (“The American Bombardment”) above, note 445, and below, p. 271.

<sup>464</sup> Friedman obviously wished to preserve what Noam Chomsky has called the ‘ideological serviceability’ of the DK brutality, “offering justification for US crimes in Indochina for 25 years and for others in process and in the works” (Chomsky, *Powers & Prospects*, chapter 3, “Writers and Intellectual Responsibility”, p. 57)

<sup>465</sup> “Conundrum”, 35

Well, such categories have been proposed, and serious students of the matter might have expected Friedman here either to discuss them or argue for their rejection. Instead, except for Kiernan who did not deal with this issue, he has quoted only second-hand or non-theoretical treatments of Cambodia.

Yet in “After Mao” he comes perilously close to the non-Leninist explanation for the DK phenomenon which I offered, with his “The Maoist language of opposition to commodity systems, wage grade structures, expertise and bourgeois rights was translated in peasant consciousness to legitimate anger against or hate for the urban, the intellectual and the fat cat bureaucrats who were all experienced at ripping-off hard-working, honest, loyal and patriotic peasants. Maoism heated up pre-existing, proto-populist, semi-fascist angers of poor, traditional, rural people who saw the army as their protector against urban wiles”.<sup>466</sup>

But still, why was DK more malignant than what had resulted from peasant anger in China? Perhaps because the Cambodian countryside had suffered more, as from bombing? But we shall leave that for now, and return to it below.

It would appear that Friedman may have hoped to find an evil genius behind the DK leadership, and that his choice fell on Franz Fanon, who, dead 20 years, was exhumed, if not in serious attempt to explain DK, at least to throw retrospective discredit on Fanon.

Third-World Leninists, in Friedman’s “Little Lessons in Leninism”, took Lenin’s logic “in a direction that Lenin himself never moved” (is it intellectually legitimate then to call them Leninists?). They concluded that liberation requires breaking the “bonds of the super-exploitative metropolis ... [l]iberation would be the work of the Third-World rural poor”.<sup>467</sup>

As Friedman ignores, although I have emphasized it in *Cambodia* which he had read, the theory of the peasant as the truly progressive revolutionary, or even reformist, class was not invented by Leninists, or by any other type of Marxist, but, especially in Eastern Europe, constituted a well-established non-, even anti-, Marxist political current.<sup>468</sup>

<sup>466</sup> “After”, 38. See Vickery, *Cambodia 1975-1982*, chapter 5.

<sup>467</sup> “Conundrum”, 26.

<sup>468</sup> See *Cambodia 1975-1982*, chapter 5; this view was also shared by the non-Marxist Russian peasant expert Alexander Chayanov. See Michael Heller, “Survivors from Utopia”, *SURVEY*, 21/3(96), Summer 1975 pp. 155-166, including, pp. 156-57, an assessment of fiction by Chayanov (pennname Ivan Kremnev), *The Journey of my Brother Alexei to the Land of the Peasant Utopia*, Moscow 1920.

In this story Chayanov starts with victory of the countryside; peasants first get equal voting rights, then seize power by parliamentary means; “In 1932, power is firmly in the hands of the peasant party. A decree is passed authorizing the destruction of the towns. In 1937, the towns ... organize an uprising, are defeated and ‘dissolve in the peasant sea’“. And in 1984 a peasant says “we had no need of any new principles [introduced into our

Nevertheless for Friedman it represented “hidden tendencies” “shared by Mao, Che, Pol Pot and ... explicated in France by people ... such as Frantz Fanon”.<sup>469</sup> And it was in France that David Hawk “found” [*sic!*] that “the leaders of the revolution, the avant-garde, had all studied ... and had developed their own hybrid versions of Marxism/Leninism/Stalinism”; and it was in France where “Shawcross described how in 1959 ... Khieu Samphan completed his Paris dissertation arguing ‘that the cities were parasitical’ which required ‘a transfer of the population out of the towns into productive work’”.<sup>470</sup>

Whatever Khieu Samphan did in France, he made no such suggestion in his thesis, and if Shawcross had written what Friedman alleged, he would be fully revealed for what his post-1979 writings have suggested: one of the crowd of hip-shooting journalistic hired guns who, having never looked at the single existing scholarly work by a member of the Cambodian leadership, any more than Friedman did, still pontificated about its contents.

As it was, however, Shawcross did slip up in saying that Samphan in his thesis had called for “a transfer of the population out of the towns into productive work, first in the fields ...”, but otherwise he demonstrated a careful reading of the dissertation, and acknowledged that the “methods this twenty-eight-year-old Marxist prescribed in 1959 for the transformation of his country were essentially moderate”, not a blueprint for what occurred after 1975.<sup>471</sup>

Samphan’s thesis is based more on the ideas of the 19th-century German nationalist economist Friedrich List than on Marxism-Leninism, and he argued in it for rapid development of independent capitalism in Cambodia, making full use of the indigenous Chinese, as well as Khmer, bourgeoisie.

“We are not proposing”, he wrote, to eliminate the classes having the highest incomes ... structural reform which we are proposing does not tend to eliminate the contributive capacity of these groups ... we believe ways and means can and must be found to bring out their contributive potential by attempting to transform these landlords, retailers, and usurers into a class of industrial or agrarian capitalist entrepreneurs”; and “[i]n the city, an effort will be made to transfer capital from the hyperactive commercial sector into more directly productive sectors”.<sup>472</sup>

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social and economic life] at all; our task consisted in affirming the age-old principles which have served as the basis of the peasant economy from time immemorial”.

<sup>469</sup> “Conundrum”, 26.

<sup>470</sup> “After”, 34, nn. 31, 30. Hawk found nothing of the sort himself in France, but acquired such information from the work of Cambodia scholars whom Friedman does not wish to acknowledge.

<sup>471</sup> Shawcross, *Sideshow*, pp. 240-243, quotation p. 240.

<sup>472</sup> See Khieu Samphan, “Cambodia’s Economy and Industrial Development”, trans. by Laura Summers, Cornell Southeast Asia Program, Data Paper 111, March 1979; see especially pp. 74-75.

Friedman's use of Fanon is just one more instance of his peculiar tendencies toward empty word-grubbing, in this case doing violence even to the work of Shawcross with whom he sympathizes, and the most blatant example of which appears precisely in connection with Fanon, alleged to have held "that only peasants, not city workers, should be trusted as revolutionaries".<sup>473</sup>

This is purportedly cited from a biography of Fanon by Irene Gendzier, where however we find that it was a remark made by Ben Bella, and that a journalist named François Bondy, reporting on Ben Bella, added "this is pure Fanonism", something which Fanon's biographer Gendzier takes pains to deny.<sup>474</sup>

It is easy, moreover, to show that when Fanon, as well as Pol Pot and Khieu Samphan, were all students in France in the 1950s, not only was it extremely unlikely that they ever met, but Fanon was then intent on pursuit of a medical career and had not undertaken any of the revolutionary writing for which he was to gain fame, and that moreover what he advocated in his writings later is quite different from what was carried out in DK. Perhaps the only interesting parallel between Fanon and Pol Pot is that both were being viewed with positive interest by the CIA at the ends of their careers.<sup>475</sup>

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The sole influential ideologue whose programme foreshadows DK policies in almost precise detail is Ivan Illich, whom no one so far has proposed as Pol Pot's mentor. Quite rightly, of course, but not because Illich is a nice, quite non-violent chap, but because there is no reason to believe that the DK leadership had ever heard of him. At least, he was unknown in their formative periods.

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<sup>473</sup> "Conundrum", 27. Note again Edward Herman's remark, above, on the use of the Khmer Rouge to discredit all socialisms, seen in Elizabeth Becker's throwaway lines on Franz Fanon (Becker, p. 278).

<sup>474</sup> Irene Gendzier, *Franz Fanon*, 220.

<sup>475</sup> For Fanon see Gendzier; for positive CIA interest in DK see Vickery, "Democratic Kampuchea: CIA to the Rescue", and comments above, passim., on the US 'tilt' toward DK. Even had the future Cambodian revolutionaries been familiar with Fanon's ideas, it is unlikely that they would have accepted guidance from an African.

This question was investigated in more detail by Sacha Sher in his Ph.D. thesis, "Le parcours politique des 'Khmers rouges' : formation, édification, projet et pratiques, 1945-1978", l'Université Nanterre Paris-X, 2002, where, p. 89, n. 294, noting that another practitioner of reverse intellectual history, Karl. D. Jackson, in *Cambodia 1975-1978*, pp.246-248, had tried to adduce influence from Fanon on DK, Sher actually asked one of them, Ieng Sary's close associate Suong Sikoeun, who answered Sher in writing on 20 February 2001, that « Je peux vous affirmer que personne n'avait lu "les Damnés de la Terre" (' I can assure you that no one [in the Paris Cercle Marxiste-Léniniste of Khmer students] had read "les Damnés de la Terre['Wretched of the Earth']")", which first appeared in 1961 when most of them had already left Paris.

Illich's programme, de-schooling, de-medicine, etc., is in retrospect a DK blueprint; and there is a Pol Pot-Illich relationship. Both are middle-class intellectuals with such a romantic, idealized sympathy for the poor that they did not imagine rapid, radical restructuring of society in their favor would lead to such intolerable violence. That the actions of nice guys pursuing noble goals could have horrible results has long been known, and was illustrated in an Indochinese situation by Graham Greene.<sup>476</sup>

In the search for origins of intellectual/political currents, or the derivation of one from another, entire structures must be demonstrated, not just isolated features like violence which may occur with equal furor in any number of unrelated societies. Thus the emptying of the towns, which was the first step in DK violence, is better explained as a type of traditional peasant violence against cities than as an effort to emulate China, where such a step was never contemplated.

Some colleagues have suggested 'Stalinism' as an appropriate epithet for DK, but again the structure, squeezing the rural areas in order to build industrial cities was the very opposite of Pol Potism.<sup>477</sup>

But what about the procedures at Tuol Sleng? Surely the interminable confessions, the constructing of networks of saboteurs from them, the dossiers with photos, these must have been learned from the NKVD.

Unfortunately it was not necessary for the Cambodians to go so far afield. One need only evoke the spirit of traditional Cambodian society, in which the greatest crime, punishable by the severest penalties was disloyalty to the state represented by its officials.<sup>478</sup>

Of equal interest and relevance here, but so far the object of too little attention, is the French colonial heritage with which Cambodian bureaucracy, courts, and police were permeated. I believe everyone is sufficiently familiar

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<sup>476</sup> Ivan Illich, *Deschooling Society*, Penguin Books, 1976 (first published 1970), and *Limits to Medicine, Medical Nemesis: The Expropriation of Health*, Penguin Books, 1977 (first published 1976). Graham Greene, *The Quiet American*, Hammonds Worth, Middlesex, Penguin, 1962.

I did not think to include Illich in my discussion of the nature of the Cambodian revolution in *Cambodia*, chapter 5. Then in Phnom Penh in 1986 I met Herman Schwember, a Chilean engineer who had fled his country after Allende's overthrow, and who had worked for a time in Sandinista Nicaragua. He had read my book, and his first comment when he met me was that the DK program was "pure Illichism". [Comment on Illich is included in the new introduction to the second edition of *Cambodia 1975-1982*, Chiang Mai, Silkworm books, 1999.]

<sup>477</sup> My point is not affected by the question of the economic rationality or success of the Stalinist program with which I am not concerned here.

<sup>478</sup> Evoked clearly in the dénouement of the popular classical novel Tum Teav. Even Chandler, in his *History*, fourth edition, p.244, notes that under Sihanouk "hundreds of dissidents disappeared ... and are presumed ... assassinated".

with the literature on arbitrary and unjust, if legal, procedures which were commonly used in Indochina against suspected revolutionaries, or even nationalists.

What may be less familiar is the book by a Cambodian political prisoner which I have cited before to the effect that in Indochinese political prisons it was in particular the Cambodians who were known as trusties, spies, and torturers.<sup>479</sup> In post-1975 witch-hunts police spies may have been even more sought after than army officers.

Independent Cambodia inherited all of this baggage, no doubt including former Sureté torturers and police spies who continued in the Sihanoukist services, and Sihanouk was all too ready to use and encourage them. Such continuity was particularly easy because of the convergence of the colonial legal burden with attitudes and practices handed down from traditional Cambodian society. Few Cambodians of my acquaintance in the 1960s seemed to realize that such practices were anomalous in the modern developed world. [And of course now, in 2008, the leader of the ‘modern developed world’ has taken the lead in such practices.]

A Cambodian acquaintance has related that in 1968 he was arrested on a political charge, held secretly for a month before his family was informed, and during interrogation shown albums of photographs, including some of his acquaintances, which his interrogators said represented uncooperative prisoners whom they had killed, and did he want to share their fate? No, the DK security organs did not need advice from abroad to set up the Tuol Sleng system.

This type of police and judicial apparatus had old pre-communist roots in France, the foreign country, not China, nor the USSR, which had most deeply

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<sup>479</sup> Bun Chan Mol, *Kuk niyobay* [‘Political prison’], quoted in *Cambodia 1975-1982*, 14, n. 39. And from whom did the US-backed Republic of Vietnam police learn how to use ‘tiger cages’ to confine political prisoners – a method very similar to the shackles employed in DK prisons? And after an insurrection in southern Viet Nam in 1940 “over five thousand people were arrested ... jail cells, handcuffs and chains were all in short supply, but the French improvised, packing ‘prisoners into dry-docked ships floating in the Saigon river. For want of chains and handcuffs, wires piercing the hands and heels of prisoners were used to hold them in one place’” (Marilyn B. Young, *The Vietnam Wars 1945-1990*, New York, Harper Perennial, 1991, p. 5).

Enforced evacuation and resettlement could also have been observed from American actions in Viet Nam – although not of urban folk, but of poor peasants, the Americans’ enemies. They oversaw “a forced resettlement of peasants into an area designed as a completely integrated community ... [where, however] security was the only consideration ... [p]easants were transported from their regular homesteads to a new place, where, often far from their rice fields, they were expected to re-establish their lives, with only minimal assistance from the government” (William R. Corson, *The Betrayal*, New York, Ace Boks, 1968, p. 47).

See also comment on French colonial ‘tutorials’ in Lewis, *Dragon Apparent*, pp. 99-100, 144-145.

influenced the DK leadership; and these methods were particularly prevalent in French Indochina.

As Sorel wrote, “[o]ne of the fundamental ideas of the Old Regime had been the employment of the penal procedure to ruin any power which was an obstacle to the monarchy”; the “Inquisition furnished a model for courts which, set in motion on very slight pretexts, prosecuted people who embarrassed authority”; and the “essential aim was not justice, but the welfare of the State”.<sup>480</sup>

Because of this there was a proliferation of lawyers who served the Ancient Regime, and who formed a majority of the Third Estate in the Constituent Assembly in 1793.

“The Revolution piously gathered up this tradition, gave an importance to imaginary crimes which was all the greater because its political courts of law carried on their operations in the midst of a populace maddened by the seriousness of the peril [remember DK?]; it seemed quite natural to explain the defeats of generals by criminal intentions, and to guillotine people who had not been able to realize hopes fostered by a public opinion that had returned to the superstitions of childhood”.

The professed return to natural law in 18th-century philosophy “happened to render these methods still more formidable”. After a long period of corruption of humanity by selfish people, “the true means of returning to the principles of primitive goodness ... had at last been discovered”, and “all opposition ... was the most criminal act imaginable”. The evil influences had to be destroyed, “[i]ndulgence was a culpable weakness”, toward people “who gave proof of an incomprehensible obstinacy, who refused to recognize evidence, and only lived on lies”.<sup>481</sup>

All of this fits, to the extent it has been reported, the personality of Deuch/Duch, the director of Tuol Sleng, himself a product of a semi-intellectual milieu like the 18th-century lawyers – hastily turned out teachers from lower middle class backgrounds, formed by the Cambodian state for the purpose of inculcating the state’s values in succeeding generations, and permeated with similar rigid respect for petty regulations. Deuch, according to one person whom he interrogated, was obsessed by the ‘lies’ of his enemies.<sup>482</sup>

Having brought out this perhaps unexpected background, let us not now be distracted by the inevitable objection that all European 19th-century thought, in particular Marxism and Leninism, was influenced by the French Revolution, and

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<sup>480</sup> Sorel, 107.

<sup>481</sup> Sorel, 108-109.

<sup>482</sup> From *Le Portail*, Paris, La Table Ronde, 2000, p. 167, English translation *The Gate*, New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 2003, pp. 114-115, by François Bizot who was captured by the Khmer Rouge in 1970 and interrogated personally by Deuch.



that by the time the French Revolutionary current had reached Cambodia it had become Leninism.

This would only illustrate that in the modern world we all carry mixed and interrelated intellectual heritages, and that in terms of intellectual genealogies both Friedman and I may be second cousins of Pol Pot; but the Cambodians, in particular, were more directly exposed to French thought and traditions than Soviet.<sup>483</sup>

All former colonial countries, whether those which have claimed to be following a bourgeois democratic path, or those overtly more statist, are burdened by the 'democracy' inherited from those western models of democratic society, Britain and France, who in their liberal use of anti-democratic methods to maintain control have discredited democracy in Asia and permitted the hypocritical use of the term by their successors.

This perversion of 'democracy' by the major western democracies has been continued, and amplified, by the US since the end of World War II, until almost any horror can be justified by recourse to 'democracy'.<sup>484</sup>

Serious study of revolutions, and the societies which produced them, must begin with those societies, not with meaningless word-grubbing to prove invidious relationships in the interest of satisfying current propaganda. In more scholarly terms we need deeper investigations into autonomous development rather than superficial diffusionism, a change in emphasis which has become common in most of the social sciences and has led to important advances in the last 30 years or so.<sup>485</sup>

We may then begin to discover matters of real historical, sociological and political-economic interest, for example, possibilities of convergent political and social evolution out of similar backgrounds, which for example, is the only way to account for the apparent similarities between DK and the programme of Sendero Luminoso.

<sup>483</sup> Short, *Pol Pot*, p. 47, has made the same point, interestingly in almost identical language. See also his pp. 72-73 for the influence of the French Revolution on the future DK intellectuals when they were studying in Paris. And one should not forget that the French Revolution, from which much of modern democratic practice is held to have evolved, committed genocide (elimination of entire classes – royalty, aristocracy), destruction of religion, and eventually execution of many of its original leaders, just as occurred in Pol Pot's Democratic Kampuchea.

<sup>484</sup> In fact in the mouths of major US regime figures the very terms 'democracy', 'freedom', and 'human rights' have become obscenities. [Note that this was written in 1988, and is even more apposite now (2010). The Internal Security Acts which in Malaysia and Singapore permit arrest and years of incarceration without trial are relics of British 'democracy'].

<sup>485</sup> But as Friedman (should I say Friedman phase I?) and Selden, *op. cit.*, p. x, noted nearly 20 years ago, American Asian scholarship may lag behind other intellectual fields.

I have argued elsewhere in some detail why responsibility for DK cannot be laid to Maoism, even if some of the DK leaders thought they were emulating Maoism and carrying it further than the founder. Moreover, I suspect that Pol Pot, no more than Ivan Illich, either planned, or expected, what occurred, and I have argued that the violence of DK was first of all because it was such a complete peasantist revolution, with the victorious revolutionaries doing what peasant rebels have always wanted to do to their urban enemies.

It is an argument which has not appealed to either left or right, for it demoralizes peasants and does not help in evocation of any kind of 'Marxist' demon, for Marx and Lenin took the same critical view of peasant rebels, and even Mao never tried to eliminate cities and the proletariat.<sup>486</sup>

Friedman, who knows something about traditional peasant rebels,<sup>487</sup> hinted at this but then shied away from it, and it requires more than just citing a similarity, for no anti-urban peasant ideologue whose ideas are on record ever proposed the extremes which occurred in DK.<sup>488</sup>

This shows once again the importance of careful investigation within the society concerned. The Cambodian peasants did not win their war and take their vengeance in a social and political vacuum, and it is here that the utility of Shawcross's first explanation, now fleshed out with further evidence from Ben Kiernan, becomes helpful.

Having evoked Shawcross in so many unpleasant ways, I am now happy to rehabilitate his first theory about the Cambodian revolution, and help him, if he still wishes, defend himself against those critics even farther to the extreme right who so bitterly attacked him for blaming Pol Pot on the US.<sup>489</sup>

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<sup>486</sup> See my discussion of this in *Cambodia 1975-1982*, chapter 5. An interesting case of fear of what peasant rebels might do was Tsar Nicholas II. Although he considered serfdom evil, he feared the example of Pugachev (1770s), which "proved how far popular rage can go"; throughout his reign he feared two different kinds of revolution, (1) the danger of the gentry obtaining a constitution if the government tried to free serfs, (2) "On the other hand, an elemental, popular uprising might also be unleashed by such a major shock to the established order as the coveted emancipation" (from Nicholas V. Riasanovsky, *A History of Russia*, third edition, New York, Oxford University Press, 1977, p. 363).

<sup>487</sup> See his *Backward Toward Revolution*.

<sup>488</sup> Perhaps Chayanov, cited above, n. 468, was an exception.

<sup>489</sup> Charles Horner, "From Nixon to Pol Pot" [a review of *Sideshow*], *Commentary*, August 1979, pp. 62-66; Peter W. Rodman, "Sideswipe: Kissinger, Shawcross and the Responsibility for Cambodia", *The American Spectator*, Vol. 14, No. 3 (March 1981), pp. 1-15; George F. Will, "Bringing down the Curtain on Shawcross' 'Sideshow'", *Washington Post*, 26 February 1981; and Shawcross' effective reply in William Shawcross, "Shawcross Swipes Again in hot pursuit of Peter Rodman", *The American Spectator*, Vol. 14, No. 7, July 1981, pp. 7-13.

[added 2007] Certainly now Shawcross does not want any such help, for he has now joined his "critics even farther to the extreme right", in fact the most severe, Peter

In a recent study Kiernan has provided details from interviews with survivors of the American bombing which provide ample proof of what in Shawcross' work was still a hypothesis. Much of the Cambodian countryside was driven mad by US bombing, moderate leaders were discredited, and the rage was transferred from the US to the local enemies calling for US help – Lon Nol's army and the urban civilian population. There can no longer be doubt that the effects postulated by Shawcross were all too real.<sup>490</sup>

There is really nothing new in the idea of violence by foreign invaders promoting violent revolutionary movements. It was an important theme of Chalmers Johnson, in a "sophisticated brief for the techniques of Special War which the United States was then initiating in South Vietnam", who argued, "in his influential study of the Chinese Communist resistance", that "insurgent movements may be created and legitimized by an unexpected ally – the foreign invader".

In the case in question, Japanese invasion of China 1937, "the brutality and dislocation produced by the onslaught of the invasion inadvertently mobilized the peasant population for resistance", and "the windfall of peasant nationalism springing from war-induced crisis lies behind the success of revolutionary nationalist movements".<sup>491</sup>

Recent discoveries among another group of soldiers on the opposite side of the Indochina War may be interestingly compared. For the American army in Viet Nam it "was a war fought mainly by the poor, but it was also perhaps our first war fought by adolescents ... average age ... 19.2 years, compared with 26 in world War II". They were "still in their formative years, ... particularly susceptible to the traumatic, terror-filled 'imprinting' many of them were later found to have undergone".

As a result, coupled with their often troubled social origins, they saw Viet Nam as "a kind of free-fire zone of the mind", they "didn't just fantasize killing a father or mother, they did it", and engaged in such atrocities that "the therapist's ability to hear them out without feeling revulsion has become an issue in the psychiatric literature about Viet Nam veterans".<sup>492</sup>

Rodman, in "To Understand What US Defeat in Iraq Will Mean, Look at Indochina". See discussion below, p. 530.]

<sup>490</sup> See Kiernan, "American Bombardment".

[Several years after writing the above, I met a Dutch doctor who had been investigating psychological trauma among villagers in the region of Kompong Speu, west of Phnom Penh, and who found that many of them recalled the bombing as their time of terror, to which the Khmer Rouge victory in 1975 brought relief]

<sup>491</sup> Cited from Friedman & Selden, op. cit., pp. 358-9,385; Chalmers Johnson, *Peasant Nationalism and Communist Power: The Emergence of Revolutionary China, 1937-1945*, Stanford, 1962.

<sup>492</sup> *Newsweek*, 29 August 1988, pp. 46-48, "Treating War's Psychic Wounds". See also Marilyn B. Young, *The Vietnam Wars*, "Epilogue.

Fortunately for the US population, the army of dangerous psychotics we unleashed on Viet Nam did not return to govern at home [which is not to say that the US has not been governed in recent years, in particular since 2001, by dangerous psychotics, who did not even require battle experience to become quite mad].

Most analyses of the DK wartime army have emphasized the youth of the troops; although stories of vast numbers of child soldiers are exaggerated, there can be no doubt that DK forces, like those of Lon Nol, paid little attention to any lower age limit for recruits, and their average age may have been even lower than the 19 years of the American forces, which were subject to a lower limit of 17. There were probably many 15 and 16 year-olds in the Khmer forces on both sides.

Unlike the Americans, probably few of the Khmer youth were dangerous psychotics to start with, but their war experiences constituted an even more “terror-filled ‘imprinting’” than suffered by the Americans, and when the war ended their “free-fire zone of the mind” became the crowds of urban snobs who were perceived as having called in the American planes.<sup>493</sup>

Moreover, unlike the American soldiers who committed such horrible crimes that psychiatrists have difficulty listening to them, on personal and cultural strangers belonging to a country about which most of them had never heard before being drafted, the young Khmer survivors were given control of people whom they knew, at least as a class, and in the case of higher officers and officials, often as individuals blamed for specific incidents of brutality or injustice against villagers before, or during, the war.

This is enough to explain the first violence, the sudden, spontaneous mass killings in the first months after April 1975. It may also make more convincing the suggestion that the DK leadership felt itself pulled toward peasantist goals, as I have argued in *Cambodia 1975-1982*.

Given the accumulated fury of the preceding five years, it would have been impossible to hold the support of their peasant army if Phnom Penh had been allowed to continue living at what in the eyes of peasant soldiers would have appeared as a privileged level of existence, if a normal administration, which would inevitably have been staffed by holdovers from Lon Nol, even if loyal, had been maintained, as was done in the Soviet Union after 1917, and if the Lon Nol army, police, and pro-American officials had not been punished.

The reason so many such people remained in Phnom Penh until the end may have been because they expected the new revolutionary regime could not exist without them, and that they would be able to insert themselves into and transform it.

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<sup>493</sup> On perceptions of urban snobbery see again Vickery. *Cambodia*, chapter 1.

If the initial DK violence evolved from old peasant dislike of townsfolk fueled by externally-induced violence imputed by the peasants to their enemies in Phnom Penh, while the second wave of purges may be imputed to disappointed idealism of the leadership, which if not a human universal may have derived from their exposure to French thought (classical, not 1960s), the extension of the violence across their eastern border, which was their undoing, was strictly an effect of the traditional Khmer chauvinism so assiduously cultivated under Sihanouk and Lon Nol.

None of this is Leninism or even Maoism. Indeed the anti-Vietnamese chauvinism, which the KR leadership had learned in non-Marxist schools, and which may have caused more deaths by execution than anything else, is the reason why the DK regime in exile has been revived and nurtured since 1979 by joint efforts of the US, China, and ASEAN. While crying crocodile tears about the sufferings of the poor Cambodian people under Pol Pot, the US regime has rewarded him for his worst excesses.

### Postscript 2010

In the *International Herald Tribune*, 7 July 2010, p. 9, James Carroll, in “Post-Traumatic Nation”, wrote that “It belongs to every U.S. citizen to have in mind what the nation’s present wars are doing – not only to U.S. troops, Iraqis and Afghans ... but to the American character ... A psycho-medical diagnosis – post-traumatic stress syndrome – has gained legitimacy for individuals, but what about whole societies? Can war’s dire and lingering effects on war-waging nations be measured ... to include aftermath wounds to society that, while undiagnosed, are as related to civic responsibility for state violence as one veteran’s recurring nightmare is to a morally ambiguous firefight?”

“The U.S. Civil War did not end in 1865. Its unleashed spirit of total destruction went West ... and savaged the remnant native peoples ... World War I was only the beginning of industrialized nihilism...coming in train with the civilizational suicides of the Somme and Verdun. The extremities of World War II generated a pathological paranoia in the Soviet Union and a debilitating American insecurity... that spawned a garrison state. After Vietnam, citizens of all stripes proved permanently unable to trust their government ... America’s wars left moral wreckage in their wakes. The chop continues ...

“... psychiatrist Jonathan Shay cites an official definition [of PTSD] ... characteristics include ‘a hostile or mistrustful attitude toward the world; social withdrawal; ... feelings of emptiness or hopelessness; a chronic feeling of being ‘on the edge’, as if constantly threatened’ ... The catastrophic experience of war, to put it most simply, can completely change the personality”.

Carroll continued, “it is impossible to read that catalogue of symptoms belonging to traumatized persons and not recognize notes of the contemporary scene in the United States”.<sup>494</sup>

If this is at all true for the United States, which of all the modern western nations has suffered the least from war – no fighting at all on U.S. soil – what about the effects of societal PTSD on the young rural Cambodians? Their quiet villages were torn apart during 1970-1975 in a class-based civil war that pit them against a U.S. supplied and encouraged state, direct U.S. involvement in bombing large areas of the country, and invasions by U.S. troops and those of both North and South Vietnam. Because of those events, they suffered horrific personnel losses and endured lack of food and medical care.

Is it strange that when they gained control after 1975 the ‘unleashed spirit of total destruction’ of 1970-1975 was taken out on the perceived enemies who then came under their control?

Considered in this way one can perhaps understand the Democratic Kampuchea regime as rather moderate. It is also useful to compare stories told by survivors among the ‘New People’ with reports collected by Eric Hobsbawm from German war prisoners returned later from post-war Soviet labor camps.

“They [the Russians] did not treat us worse than themselves. It was simply that they were physically so much tougher than we were. They could stand the cold better. That scared us, when we were at the front, and we suffered from it as prisoners. They would dump us on a central-Asian plain in winter and say: build a camp. Start digging’.” (Hobsbawm, *Interesting Times, A Twentieth-Century Life*, p. 179).

Although cold was not a problem in Cambodia, it is clear from most of the honest testimonies of life under DK that the work to which the ‘New People’ were subjected was the same work that villagers engaged in year after year. They were simply tougher than the former urbanites and often considered the weaknesses of the latter to constitute slacking.

Among the evil Leninist states condemned by Friedman in his work cited above was Nicaragua, relevant in this discussion of Cambodia not only because of the close diplomatic relations between the post-1979 governments in both countries, but because of structural similarities in their situations. By the mid-1980s US treatment of Nicaragua was drawing criticism from sources usually sympathetic to US policies, and I took advantage of one instance, in the *Bangkok Post*, to highlight the similarities.

The *Post*, on June 30, 1986, published an editorial in support of the World Court’s condemnation of US actions in Nicaragua “as being in direct violation of international law”, and it emphasized the actions of the ‘Contras’ supported in neighboring

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<sup>494</sup> James Carrol, *International Herald Tribune*, 7 July 2010, p. 9, “Post-Traumatic Nation”.

countries to attack Nicaragua. I answered quoting liberally from their text, inserting 'Kampuchea' and other relevant areal terms as required. The insertions are in parentheses below.

### Kampuchean Contras (1986)<sup>495</sup>

Sir: In your excellent editorial of June 30 on the American aggression against Nicaragua, you failed to note still another tiny nation, and one of much more direct relevance to Thailand, which President Reagan (and previous presidents) have "taken on ... to reap political dividends."

Kampuchea "is a sovereign nation ... a very small country ... (with) a major task merely restructuring its society and economy after the devastation of (the Lon Nol and Pol Pot) years."

Like Nicaragua, Kampuchea takes "help from any quarter it can find;" and Soviet aid in particular, with its very large component for education, health, and economic reconstruction puts the West to shame, and is in contrast to recent US treatment of its allies in certain economic areas. "The United States should not be too dismayed that (Kampuchea) is receiving weapons (and men) from the Soviet Union (and Viet Nam) to defend itself ... With no other sources of supply, in the face of a foreign-funded invasion, the alternative would be to lie down and play dead."

Denial of PRK sovereignty and legitimacy, always founded on gross hypocrisy, is less convincing each year. The PRK has now lasted longer than either Lon Nol's Khmer Republic, which after overthrowing Sihanouk with great public support, saw itself in turn destroyed with equal popular enthusiasm by the Khmer Rouge, who then so disgusted their own people that a new faction was received with open arms, even though backed by a "traditional enemy."

The Kampuchean "Contras," the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea, are also "a motley crew," and we need go no further than the columns of the *Bangkok Post* reporting abuses of their own camp populations and Thai border villagers to see that they also can only be termed "freedom fighter" in ironical quotes. They are the remnants of those three earlier regimes which all in the end thoroughly discredited themselves among their own population.

Nicaragua and Kampuchea recognize one another diplomatically, and consider themselves allies in the struggle against US led reaction and denial of the rights of small countries to choose their own form of government and economic reconstruction.

In Kampuchea as well as in Nicaragua, scarce resources which should go into reconstruction, health care, and food production must be devoted to defense.

In spite of this, the PRK has an excellent record in restoring a purely Khmer 10 year-educational system, has in spite of its official commitment to socialism,

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<sup>495</sup> Michael Vickery, the *Bangkok Post*, 'Postbag' (letters), 7 July 1986.

maintained free markets and increased opportunities for private entrepreneurial activities, and since its 5th Party Congress last year has given nearly half its Central Committee places (at least 20 out of 45) to young technocrats and intellectuals who before 1979 had neither a communist background nor association with Vietnam.

Similar people also fill many ministerial, deputy ministerial and provincial leadership posts; while the former prominence of those Khmers who spent 1954-1970 in Viet Nam, like the number of Vietnamese advisers, rapidly diminishes. If there was ever legitimate doubt abroad about PRK Khmerness, there can no longer be any, and if it once may have seemed that the PRK government might turn into a Vietnamese puppet, they have now clearly proved the contrary.

The *Post's* lucid view of the Nicaraguan situation could well be extended to Kampuchea, where the opportunism of US policy, rejecting one ASEAN proposal which excluded the Khmer Rouge, and now another ostensibly because they were included, is probably best revealed by George Shultz's 1985 warning to ASEAN against formulating proposals which Viet Nam might accept.<sup>496</sup>

Other foreign supporters of the CGDK need to revise their thinking about Kampuchea and to realize that it is in no one's interest to continue the harassment of this country which has suffered so much for so long. Perhaps, as in the case of Nicaragua, an election in another country will provide some impetus for change.

The concluding remark was in reference both to the conclusion of the *Post's* editorial, which proved to be a false hope concerning Nicaragua, and to a coming election in Thailand, with a happier result, though only temporary.

The *Post* had written, "The only relief for the Nicaraguans would appear to be the United States' electoral process. If the Nicaraguans can hold out for two more years, Mr. Reagan ... will retire to his ranch. Then, perhaps, his successor ... will accede to the United Nations and the World Court and desist from further support to the Contras". That did not happen. The optimism of the *Post* was misplaced.

The Thai election of 1988, however, opened the way to a new policy on Cambodia. Chatichai Choonhavan became the first elected Prime Minister since 1976, immediately called for changes in relations with Cambodia, saying Indochina should change from a battlefield to a market-place, and in 1989 he invited Hun Sen to Bangkok. The new policy was destroyed by the 1991 military coup.<sup>497</sup>

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<sup>496</sup> The first ASEAN proposal was in 1981; in 1985 ASEAN was showing new interest in a negotiating process with Vietnam. Shultz was quoted in the *Bangkok Post*, 13 July 1985. See above, p. 45, text with note 124.

<sup>497</sup> See further on Nicaragua and Cambodia below, pp. 304 ff.



## The Human Rights Bugbear (2010)

In the campaign by the United States, China and ASEAN to undermine the PRK, the lurid propaganda schemes collapsed, and the contra Coalition was only preserved by increasing foreign aid. While able to blow up bridges, attack civilian trains, and murder a few people here and there, their military success was never impressive.

The confidence of the PRK side was shown by the annual withdrawals of Vietnamese troops, an increasingly Khmer administration, particularly after the 5th Party Congress in 1985, and gradual, even if limited, political relaxation within Cambodia.<sup>498</sup>

In the face of this a new weapon was brought out by the Great Power Coalition behind the triple Khmer Coalition. This was ‘human rights’.

Little was said about this when the Khmer Rouge rescue operation was mounted in 1979, or when the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea was put together in 1982. Then suddenly in late 1984 a body in the US calling itself the Lawyers’ Committee for International Human Rights sent a team to the Thai-Cambodia border to investigate the human rights situation ‘in Cambodia’.

They included one real Cambodia scholar, Stephen Heder, who had worked for the US government on the border in 1979-81, and who in 1981 had presented a strong submission to a Congressional Committee urging US military intervention to back the KPNLF.<sup>499</sup>

In a follow-up mission in January 1985 Raymond Bonner, having learned his lesson and lost a good job with *The New York Times* for reporting sympathetic to the people of El Salvador (who faced massive human rights abuses from their US-backed government), lent his prestige to the Lawyers’ Committee operation

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<sup>498</sup> Developments within the PRK at that time have been described in my *Kampuchea Politics, Economics, and Society*; and details of Vietnamese withdrawals and their treatment in US regime literature are in Vickery, *Cambodia: A Political Survey*, pp. 20-30.

<sup>499</sup> “Statement by Stephen R. Heder, Ph.D. Candidate, Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University”, before the Subcommittee on Asian and Pacific Affairs, on “US Policy in the Indochina Region Since Vietnam’s Occupation of Kampuchea”, 21 October 1981 (see also text above with note 426). At the time Heder enjoyed the reputation of a leftist, even perhaps far-leftist (John Pilger once called him a ‘State Department Maoist’). This reputation may have been undeserved.

In re-reading what he wrote in those years, not to speak of what he has done subsequently, I find nothing that is particularly ‘left’, in fact nothing that could not have been written by an ambitious young employee of the Rand Corporation. In a way, Heder’s post-1979 trajectory is reminiscent of Horowitz and Collier (above and below, notes 454 and 609). When, in 1979, it became impossible to make a career as a ‘Cambodian’ leftist, Heder decided to make his way back into respectability by supporting US-regime positions.

in support of US-backed contras against a government and people trying to recuperate from years of US-backed war and a misconceived revolution.<sup>500</sup>

When the Lawyers' "Preliminary Summary of Findings and Conclusions, Kampuchea Mission", was issued in November 1984, I wrote a critique which was eventually published, although not in time to influence further work in that direction.<sup>501</sup> In August 1985 they issued their final report, *Kampuchea: After the Worst*. It expanded the material from 20 to 250 pages, but contained the same faults as their preliminary treatment.

After that Stephen Heder moved to Amnesty International whose Cambodia reports over the next three years reflected the same propaganda goals as the work of the Lawyers' Committee. First there was "File on Torture", released in September 1986 to have maximum impact on the annual UN vote on Cambodia.

Then, in early June 1987, with an internationally coordinated press campaign, Amnesty released an 89-page special report: "Kampuchea Political Imprisonment and Torture". Like the earlier 'File on Torture', the new report was obviously timed for effect – just before an international NGO conference in Brussels.

Fortunately I was able to obtain a copy immediately, in time to write a critique and send it to acquaintances among the delegates to the Brussels conference, where, I have been told, it was useful to those NGOs who wished to continue work in, and increase aid to, Cambodia.

These productions of the Lawyers' Committee and Amnesty were precursors of the spineless acquiescence of much mainstream journalism in the backward slide of the US in the area of democracy and human rights criticized, for example, by Kishore Mahbubani in "Sermons of moral cowardice", *The Guardian Weekly*, April 4-10, 2008, p. 19. Mahbubani should be reminded, however, that in the 1980s, when he was a senior Singapore diplomat, he was active in a similar cabal supporting revival of the Khmer Rouge against post-DK Cambodia (see note 557).

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<sup>500</sup> Peter Rothberg, review of Robert Parry, *Fooling America*, *Z Magazine*, May 1993, p. 59; Lawyers' Committee for Human Rights, *Kampuchea: After the Worst*, New York 1985, p. ii. I met Bonner once during his visit to the Khmer camps.

<sup>501</sup> Michael Vickery, "Kampuchea isn't a 'Human-Rights Horror'", *AWSJ*, 22 April 1985, a letter in answer to a summary of their report by Abrams and Orentlicher in *AWSJ*, 18 March 1985, p. 9, also published in the *New York Wall Street Journal*, 8 April 1985, p. 17. They responded to my letter in "Punishing Cambodia Again", *Washington Post*, 23 August 1985. My full critique was, "A Critique of the Lawyers' Committee for International Human Rights, Kampuchea Mission of November 1984", *JCA*, Vol. 18 No. 1 (1988), pp. 108-116.

### Amnesty International and the War Against Kampuchea (1990) <sup>502</sup>

During 1975-1979 'Democratic Kampuchea', under Pol Pot, was governed by a regime which many have called 'worse than Hitler's' and which has become a paradigm for oppression, arbitrary imprisonment, torture and murder by a state of its own citizens. An international campaign is now being organized to bring its former leaders to trial for genocide.

Even earlier, between 1970 and 1975, under the Khmer Republic of General Lon Nol, all guarantees of civil rights, fair trial, and freedom from arbitrary police harassment were de facto suspended, justification, if any, being the state of war prevailing in the country.

Even during Kampuchea's best peace-time years under Prince Sihanouk before 1970 the right to a quick, fair trial without risk of torture during preliminary police investigation was not guaranteed in practice; and political suspects could be judicially murdered in widely publicized executions. <sup>503</sup>

Adopting the methodology of the latest Amnesty International Report, it may be said that under Sihanouk in the 1960s, people inferentially suspected of harboring anti-regime thoughts were regularly subject to clandestine arrest, (without notification to their families), long secret incarceration, and threat of torture during interrogation, including exhibits of albums of photographs which the police presented as earlier victims of their repression, saying 'do you want this to happen to you?'. <sup>504</sup>

Even in those best years there was little protest locally, not only because such protest itself would have been viewed as anti-regime activity, but because Kampucheans in general did not fully realize that standards in the rest of the world might be different.

At the end of Kampuchea's nearly decade-long decline into madness, and state brutality for its own sake, the war which Pol Pot's 'Democratic Kampuchea' had started with its neighbor Viet Nam resulted in the overthrow of DK and its replacement by the Peoples Republic of Kampuchea (PRK) which is still in place.

Almost overnight there was a full swing of the pendulum with respect to civil and human rights – freedom of movement, family and choice of work were immediately acknowledged, the normal infrastructures of society (administration, education, health, markets, currency) began gradually to be reconstructed

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<sup>502</sup> Michael Vickery, 1990, draft extending an original text of June 1987 published in an abridged Swedish translation, "Amnesty International och kriget mot Kampuchea", in the journal *Kommentar* (Stockholm), Nr 8/1988, pp. 33-39.

<sup>503</sup> See *FEER*, 21 May 1987, pp.6-7.

<sup>504</sup> I in fact know only one person who claims first-hand experience with all of the practices listed, but Kampucheans whom I knew at the time believed such was standard operating procedure of the police, just as Amnesty's sources for its new "Kampuchea Political Imprisonment and Torture" believe their evidence may be widely generalized.

and recreated, with great difficulty given the near total destruction of material – including documentation and archives – and trained personnel, which began with the war in 1970 and increased with tacit regime encouragement after 1975.

Among the institutions which had to be recreated from zero were legal and judicial systems, in a situation in which no one had experienced normal legal procedures for at least nine years, often longer (or never), in which written laws no longer existed, in which only a handful of trained legal personnel survived, and in which persons with police experience may never have heard of the rights of accused.

Beginning in 1980 with laws on criminal offenses, new law codes have gradually been developed, culminating in 1986 with a detailed law on arrest, search, temporary detention, and treatment of arrested persons which is not inferior to similar laws promulgated by the capitalist regimes of ASEAN. Perhaps for the first time in the country's history, police training involves formal instruction against the use of torture.<sup>505</sup>

The dismantling of the DK regime and its replacement by a new government which not only declared its intention to reestablish a normal society, but whose actions from the beginning proved its sincerity, was greeted with dismay by most of those western countries, led by the United States, who had been shedding crocodile tears over DK.

With the full support of China, and the acquiescence of ASEAN, particularly Thailand, a huge international campaign was developed to block the peaceful development of the PRK, if possible to destroy it, no matter who might replace it. This effort has included the physical rehabilitation, military supply, and encouragement of the remnants of Pol Pot's DK regime, who have also been allowed to retain Kampuchea's UN seat.

In the propaganda field the anti-PRK campaign has meant refusal to acknowledge improvement, while giving publicity to all real or imagined defects, and continued characterization of the PRK as nothing but a puppet of Vietnam, while most organs of the western press refuse even to print news which would counter that description.

The significance of instruction against torture in the PRK is minimized by those who report it, and a major news outlet on Indochina, the Washington D.C.-based *Indochina Issues*, refused to print a short description, which they had commissioned, of the contents of the new PRK law on arrest.<sup>506</sup>

Among the international institutions working for the destruction of the PRK is Amnesty International, which has just (3 June 1987 in Australia) released, with

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<sup>505</sup> Amnesty report, "Kampuchea Political Imprisonment and Torture", p. 36. See my translation of the 1986 law, in "Criminal Law in the Peoples Republic of Kampuchea", *JCA*, Vol. 17, No. 4 (1987), 508-518.

<sup>506</sup> I wrote the article at the invitation of Murray Hiebert for the issue of *Indochina Issues* published in September 1986. It was then rejected by William Goodfellow.

an internationally coordinated press campaign, an 89-page special report, “Kampuchea Political Imprisonment and Torture”.

The manner in which this publication has been put together and released indicates that Amnesty has gone far beyond its official purpose of simply working for “release of prisoners of conscience”, “fair and prompt trials” and opposition to “the death penalty and torture” (inside cover of report), without “grad[ing] governments according to their record”.

The report is a deliberate move in the international political game being played around Kampuchea, with Amnesty’s prestige as a hitherto objective humanitarian body utilized as cover for partisan propaganda. For this to be clear the process which has culminated in this report must be reviewed.

### **The Lawyers’ Committee**

The beginning was in research in 1984 for the Lawyers’ Committee for International Human Rights, whose Cambodia expert, and in fact, whether officially or not, principal investigator, is also Amnesty’s Cambodia expert and editor of their Cambodia reports, Stephen Heder.

When the Lawyers’ “Preliminary Summary of Findings and Conclusions, Kampuchea Mission”, was issued in November 1984, I criticized it for:

- (1) pretending to conduct investigations within Cambodia, when they had only been at the border,
- (2) slanting their language against the PRK,
- (3) propaganda statements about conditions in Cambodia not justified by their own evidence, nor grounded in any other research,
- (4) careless – to give the benefit of the doubt – use of their own research in order to exaggerate the degree of human rights violations within Cambodia,
- (5) palpable favoritism for the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea, including the Pol Pot remnants, encamped on the Thai border.

Although they wrote that “persons detained [in the PRK] ... are routinely tortured”, only 5 certain distinct cases could be discerned behind their obfuscatory facade.

In August 1985 they issued their final report, *Kampuchea: After the Worst*. It expanded the material from 20 to 250 pages, and gave slightly more relative attention to human rights violations on the CGDK side, but it is hardly an improvement. The same faults I found with their first effort are still blatant.

Authorship is claimed, p. i, by Floyd Abrams and Diane Orentlicher, “based upon two fact-finding missions ... to areas on both sides of the Thai-Kampuchean border”, the first during 30 October-14 November 1984, by Abrams,

Orentlicher, and Stephen Heder, “an experienced observer of recent Kampuchean politics who speaks Khmer”.<sup>507</sup>

The second mission, p. ii, was by Raymond Bonner visiting evacuation sites and one refugee camp during 28 January – 6 February 1985. There were apparently no other inputs of information. “Altogether the delegates conducted in-depth interviews of over 150 persons in Kampuchea and Thailand”, a geographic formulation which, like the claim in their preliminary report, is in itself partisan propaganda, since the extent of their ‘Kampuchea’ was the KPNLF or DK camps along the Thai-Kampuchean border.<sup>508</sup>

The same propaganda method of presentation dominates the final report, with scatter-gun accusations, and conclusions dumped on the reader before presentation of evidence.

Examples are, p. vi, “... the numerous reports we received from throughout the country depict a pervasive pattern of officially-sanctioned torture, inhumane treatment ...”; p. 10, there is ... “systematic practice of arbitrary arrest, brutal torture, and indefinite detention under degrading conditions ...”; “Persons taken into custody for political offenses typically [my emphasis-MV] are subjected to sustained and ruthless torture ...”; p. 11, “Citizens of the PRK do not enjoy even a theoretical right to be free from torture”, a statement repeated verbatim on p. 50; p. 12, “Our evidence suggests that a pattern of arbitrary arrest, torture and indefinite detention may be the most typical experience of such persons”; p. 26, “Beatings are commonplace, and more sophisticated forms of torture usual”.

Although they say, p.v, that only testimony judged reliable was included, and “any doubts ... were resolved against inclusion”, if they had wished this report to be accepted as a serious piece of research they would have set forth clearly in the beginning:

- number of cases on which the conclusions were based;
- number interviewed by Heder;
- number interviewed by Bonner;
- number interviewed by any other persons;
- number of people interviewed by both Heder and Bonner, and whether their information differed in any way from one interview to the other;

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<sup>507</sup> In 1998 Floyd Abrams was featured again in the press in the attacks on April Oliver’s material on an alleged American assassination mission against US defectors in the Vietnam war. Among other encomiums Abrams was called a ‘First Amendment Lawyer’. His work on Cambodia, however, putting a US regime spin on the available information, rather adds credence to Oliver’s material. Perhaps ‘First Amendment Lawyer’ means one who works for freedom to spin regime propaganda without being called to account. For Oliver’s defense see Oliver, “Did the US use sarin in Laos?”, *The Nation* (Bangkok), 24 July 1998, reprinted from *Washington Post*.

<sup>508</sup> On the refugee camps at that time see Michael Vickery, “Refugee Politics: The Khmer Camp system in Thailand”,

- number of persons interviewed and judged unreliable; and in which group of the above were they found;
- a table showing dates of arrest and period of detention of those interviewees deemed reliable.
- some description of the types of testimony considered unreliable.

Instead of presenting the basic quantitative material clearly, the editors have done their best to disguise it, and the only such ‘statistical’ summary, offered in advance of the evidence, p. 6, is that “the chilling description” of one person “typified those of dozens of other former prisoners whom we interviewed on the Thai-Kampuchean border”. This in itself is sufficient to discredit their effort. If they had an honest case to make, they would not have had to rely on stratagem.

Throughout the book there are 30 contexts in which incidents of alleged physical torture are reported, on pages 6, 35, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42 (2), 45, 46 (2), 47, 48, 49, 61 (2), 62, 64, 66, 68, 69 (2), 86, 91, 94, 95, 96, 112, 114 (2).

Some of these, however, are repeated accounts of the same individuals. This has not always been signaled to the reader by the editors, and even when it has, the notice has sometimes been confined to footnotes, leaving in the text an impression of more incidents than in fact were reported. The cases may be matched by date, place and sequence of events.

### **Torture cases**

(1) Page 6: “One former prisoner” who, from the details related, seems to be Vin Savann, named p. 37, arrested in 1980 carrying rice home to Battambang from the border. He was confined to TK-1 for 3 years, 8 months (p.38), and is mentioned further on pp. 45, 68, 70 (where his confinement is described as September 1980-May 1984), and 114.<sup>509</sup>

(2) This case has really been milked for all it was worth. A man named But Chanrathana, pp. 33-34, was arrested in Prey Veng in April 1981. Then, p. 35, there is an anonymous account of a “former prisoner’s arrest in January 1984, in Phnom Penh, by “six Vietnamese ‘experts’ from 7708, two underground Khmer police, one regular precinct *nokorbal* (‘police’) agent and four Khmer members of the Supreme Military Command of Phnom Penh”.

The reason for anonymity was that the second, different, story also concerned But Chanrathana, whose identity is made clear on p.39, where we find that he was arrested a ‘second time’ in January 1984. On pp. 46-47, it says again that he had two arrests, 1981 and 1984, with no mention of how he was released after the first arrest. “As previously noted ... he was arrested a second time in January 1984 by a combined force that included six Vietnamese ‘experts’ from 7708”, as on p. 35. Then he was taken to the prison of Sras Chak. The second arrest is

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<sup>509</sup> Note that below local place names have been preserved as in the original text, and may not agree with current official orthography.

mentioned further on pp. 62, 77-78; and on p. 84 anonymously, "As previously noted", "A former prisoner" was detained at Sras Chak in January 1984; and he is mentioned again by name on p. 85.

(3) The anonymous case on pp. 40-42, interrogated by a police official named Van Sen, and taken to T-3 for 30 months, is certainly the same as p. 49 "A third witness" arrested in Phnom Penh in September 1980 (and this is noted in the report); and he is also the case on p. 96 arrested in Phnom Penh in September 1980, beaten during interrogation, shackled 6 months in a dark cell in T-3, detained 30 months without legal process.

(4) A case from November 1980, footnote pp. 42-43, "One former prisoner", who is most likely the person arrested, pp. 60-62, 66, in November 1980; and also the same as the person, p. 93, employed at 17 April hospital until arrest in November 1980. It is apparently the same case as p. 38, anonymous, "One former prisoner from Phnom Penh" confessed opposition activities, but refused to name others and was tortured.

(5) Page 45, Kithan Vath, arrested June 1983 in Siem Reap by Vietnamese, beaten to confess to cooperation with Pol Pot. Also mentioned p. 91, with reasons for arrest.

(6) Pages 45-46, Krin Mon, arrested January 1982, in Siem Reap; also mentioned pp. 115, 168.

(7) Page 46, note, Chou Veth, arrested February 1982, in Mongkolborei; also mentioned p. 115.

(8) Page 48, Prak Savann, arrested 1982 in Bovel, Battambang; also pp. 67, 118.

(9) Page 48, anonymous, arrested August 1981 in Koh Thom, tortured, imprisoned in Saang. He is apparently Hong Saroeun, pp. 64-65, who was first taken to the "city hall at Koh Thom district", beaten for two days, transferred to a "provincial hall", tortured there for three days.

Hong Saroeun is mentioned again in note p. 71, arrested August 1981, spent 13 months in a small dark cell in a prison in Kandal province and another 22 months in a big cell there; and he must be the same as, p. 95 "prisoner, who had been a subdistrict chairman in Kandal province ... 'organized against the Yuon by underground elements' from the KPRLF border bases in 1981". He was "detained indefinitely in a succession of prisons until his escape, in June 1984, from Ta Khmav, the Kandal provincial jail ... had spent the first 13 months of his 26 months there in a 'dark cell'".

(10) Page 68, Ly Mav, arrested in Pursat in January 1981; "particularly brutal torture", then shackled confinement. Then on p. 72 Ly Mav was "arrested while trying to escape to the border in 1984", placed in Bakan district prison in Pursat, "brief, mild period of interrogation"; p. 73 courses of political study in Bakan; p. 77 detained several months in 1984 in Bakan for trying to flee to the western



border. He was “not beaten himself”. On p. 91 he was detained 1 1/2 years in Pursat beginning 1981, accused of taking rice to the ‘Pol Pots’, “alleges he was beaten when he refused to confess”.

(11) Page 69, “One prisoner” beaten for “looking at [the guard’s] face too close”; “he ripped open the skin on my chin”; his shirt then covered with blood, accused of hiding it to later prove mistreatment, then shackled and told “would undergo disciplining for ten days”.

(12) Pages 69-70, Ouch Samat, a case mentioned again on pp.90, 156, 157.

(13) Page 86, (hearsay) Peang Chhuth, Battambang; report via Prak Virak, a medic who treated him. Compare also pp. 36, 79.

(14) Pages 103-04, “one prisoner” arrested in Svay in late 1981 because he refused to give a bribe. He had lived in a KPRLF camp for a year, and the soldiers who stopped him asked for 2 of 3 *damlung* of gold he was carrying. He was trying to reach his family in Kompong Cham. After torture he confessed to being a Sereika agent, and was kept in the main Battambang prison for 7 months, and detained until March 1984.

This is apparently the same case as p. 114, “one former prisoner” went to the border for relief assistance, returned to Svay “for his wife and children in December 1981”, was arrested, accused of being a Sereika agent, kept 7 months in a dark cell followed by 2 years in the Battambang provincial jail. He is also apparently the same person as p. 158 “The other former prisoner who told us he had received a trial” was arrested in Svay, accused of being a Sereika network agent. “When he refused to give the soldiers two of the three *damlung* of gold” he had.

(15) Page 112, Ngeum Pen (f), captured fleeing west, beaten for 10 days in Svay, jailed for 3 months; also mentioned p.168.

(16) Page 71, Chhien Yon, whose case is mentioned twice more on pp. 84 and 116.

### **Non-torture cases**

These are cases in which the report notes that the person interviewed had not alleged torture, or where the report refers to “one prisoner” reporting on some other matter, without any mention of torture, and that reference cannot be collated with any of the torture cases.

(1) Pages 43-44, Sameth Sim, a medic, was imprisoned June 1980-October 1982 for treating alleged Khmer Serei spies in hospital. He signed a confession for fear of torture, and spent the final year of detention in Kompong Cham province where he received political instruction.

On p. 100 he is described as a medic at the 17 April hospital, arrested June 1980, 3 months after he protested the removal from hospital by Vietnamese

soldiers of a wounded Heng Samrin soldier who they said was Khmer Serei. Then he was accused of opposing the Vietnamese, and of taking care of the enemy, and working for the opposition. Fearing torture, he signed a confession and was held in a dark cell for 6 months, altogether 28 months. Page 128 informs us again that he was detained in T-3 during June 1980-October 1982, but did not leave Phnom Penh until June 1984, and did not state that political persecution was the reason for his flight.

(2) Page 64, “One prisoner” was arrested in Svay 29 December 1980, held there 3 days, then 3 days interrogation in Battambang, then sent to the main prison. He is possibly the same “One prisoner”, p. 71, who was detained at TK-1 in Battambang from 1980 until 1982, and who described his work there as digging canals and ponds, and planting fields.

(3) Page 71, “Another prisoner in Battambang from 1982 to 1983, also cited for work description.

(4) Page 72, “A third prisoner” in Battambang, in 1983, described work.

(5) “Still another prisoner”, p. 72, in Battambang, 1983-1984, described work.

(6) and (7) Two prisoners who described work conditions in Phnom Penh prison.

(8) Prak Virak, a “41 year-old physician from Takev province”, arrested November 1983 (p. 157); detained for trying to escape to border, gave no report of torture to himself, pp. 36, 73, 79.

(9) Duong Buneng, p. 83, in prison in Phnom Penh 1979-1981, not mentioned in any other context.

(10) “One prisoner” released from Battambang prison in March 1984.

(11) Sao Sun Li, pp. 44, 101, “another medic at the 17 April Hospital”, Phnom Penh, arrested June 1980, “was not beaten”, and he confessed ““because I heard that anyone who refuses is given only a small amount of rice”“.

Thus of the “dozens” of former prisoners whose experiences were “typified” by one “chilling description” of brutal treatment, the Lawyers have chosen to demonstrate only just under a dozen and a half, plus another short dozen cases deemed reliable who did not allege that they had been tortured.

Does that mean that over 120 of the 150 in-depth interviewees on whose information this report has been based were deemed unreliable? If so, we have a right to be much less sanguine than the Lawyers about the possibility of conducting reliable research into such matters at the border, and the skepticism I expressed about this in my critique of their preliminary report seems more than justified. If some of the apparently non-torture cases listed above were really the same persons whose torture had been noted in other contexts, it would mean that even more of the original interviews had been deemed unreliable.

Four of the stories presented, two claiming torture and two who did not, show cause for skepticism about their reliability; at least more information is required about the interview procedure, and the investigators' reasons for accepting them.

One of the torture victims, case (2) above, whose story was spaced out over at least six contexts between pages 33 and 85, suffered two arrests, in April 1981 in Prey Veng and in January 1984 in Phnom Penh. The report does not say how long the person was detained either time, nor when or how he was released. This would be particularly interesting information about the first occasion, for it would no doubt reveal something worth knowing about the police or judicial system, and it is a real defect of the report not to have included it.

Or perhaps, as the organization of the details suggests, he told the story of one arrest to Heder and the other to Bonner, and they did not realize there was a problem until the information was collated. If so, the selective revelations should call for caution in accepting the testimony.

A similar case was no. 10, also arrested in 1981 (January) and then again in 1984, the total story similarly spread over several contexts, with no explanation of his release after the first term of incarceration. Interestingly his treatment during the second term of arrest was mild, without torture, even though it was his second arrest after a first term of 1 1/2 years in prison for taking food to enemy troops. This could reasonably be interpreted to mean improvement within the PRK judicial and prison system.

One story of a medical worker who was not tortured deserves attention for another reason (p. 101). He claimed he was accused of "taking care of [the resistance] in the hospital", which seems suspect, since in a large hospital like the one where he worked in Phnom Penh a medic would have little say in who was admitted, and would treat whoever was assigned him by his superiors. One reason why medics may have been arrested, however, is for engaging in the lucrative resale of medicines, a problem which hospital authorities do not hesitate to admit.

Another medical worker who did not suffer torture also claimed that he was arrested for "treating Khmer Serei spies in the hospital", "taking care of the enemy", and being "part of the resistance" (p. 43). In more detail (p. 100), he was treating a wounded soldier brought to the hospital by Khmer soldiers, and he protested when some Vietnamese soldiers came to take the wounded man away, saying he was a spy.

This story is suspect for the same reason: careful control, especially in the military, of entry to hospitals. Other details suggest interviews with two different persons. He is said to have "been imprisoned in Phnom Penh from June 1980 until October 1982" (p. 43), "Altogether ... 28 months" (p. 100), but of his "two years and four months" of detention (p. 44), the last year was at a "correction facility" in Kompong Cham where he received political instruction.

One of the purposes of the Lawyers' work, in addition to blackening the PRK, was to place as much as possible of the blame on Vietnam, wherever possible

making Vietnamese responsible for poor conditions and brutal treatment. One aspect of this was the administrative designation of prisons.

Thus the Lawyers' preliminary report said a "striking indication of Vietnamese involvement is the designation of several prisons by the letter 'T', followed by a number ... [which] We later learned ... stood for '*trai*' a conventional Vietnamese communist party term for '(prison) camp'"; and they had then heard of T-3, T-4, T-5, located respectively in Phnom Penh, near Phnom Penh, and in Kompong Cham. The last two, they said, were administered by "the Phnom Penh police" and the "Ministry of the Interior", and the latter was "reportedly guarded by Vietnamese as well as Kampuchean".

Curiously none of the ex-prisoners knew what 'T' stood for, nor did even "recent defectors from the Phnom Penh police force" ('prelim', p. 8). Even more curious was that although the largest group of ex-prisoners available for interviews had been imprisoned in Battambang, the preliminary report gave no designation for the prison there.

When I attempted to check on some of the details in February 1985, I found two of the former Battambang detainees who had spoken to the Lawyers' group. One told me that the Battambang prison had a 'T' designation, but that it was 'TK', or rather a term pronounced te-ka, for he had never seen it written; and he said that even though the prison had been run at first by Vietnamese, it had been taken over by a Khmer administration in July 1981.

The second man claimed that 'TK' was written in large Roman letters over the prison's front gate, plainly a serious discrepancy, and one casting some doubt on his testimony. At the time I criticized the Lawyers' account, noting that the authors on different occasions had given conflicting explanations for 'T', and that the "'T' presentation in the report is extremely shaky".

When the Lawyers' final report appeared I was flattered to find that the 'TK' detail, included in my first critique to illustrate what I considered inaccurate propaganda, had been taken up by the Lawyers. The first victim mentioned (see above) "was confined at TK-1, the Main prison in Battambang province" (p.38); and he said "that 'the Vietnamese had named the jail'", a surprising revelation after the total mystification of the preliminary report. The name, say the Lawyers, 'possibly' means "Trai Khu, Vietnamese for 'Zonal [Prison] Camp'". Possibly, but the prison in Kompong Cham province, equally 'zonal', is 'T-5', not 'TK'.

More new information is the discovery of "a series of five prisons designated by the letter 'T' followed by a number from one to five", not including 'TK-1'. The location of 'T-2' was unknown, although possibly in a suburb of Phnom Penh, while 'T-1' "is near the site now known as 'Tuol Sleng'", which I learned during a visit to Phnom Penh in May 1986, before seeing the final Lawyers' report, was the Central Military Prison.

Although some kind of 'T' designations may really have existed, the attempt to use them as evidence for Vietnamese misdeeds in Cambodia has misfired, and

of the six locations to which 'T' or 'TK' designations have been attributed, at least five (all but the hypothetical T-2) were by 1985, so far as had been determined even by the Lawyers who no longer emphasize the Vietnamese role, directly under Khmer control.

A final example of the calculated tendentiousness of the Lawyers' work is in their treatment of PRK jurisprudence and judiciary. The PRK is castigated for not having, from the day after its formation, and notwithstanding the very difficult special conditions obtaining in Kampuchea, a complete judicial apparatus manned by fully qualified trained jurists, and based on a law code satisfying all the needs of a modern state.

If the first PRK decrees on torture were concerned with those persons most in danger at the moment, former DK cadres facing vengeance by the population, the Lawyers accuse the PRK of deliberately not making the measures more general in order to facilitate torture of everyone else (pp. 51-53); and when the PRK continues to publicize a policy of leniency designed to encourage return of those who fled to enemy territory, this is interpreted as "necessarily imply[ing] that such abuse is permissible with respect to those not included in the protected category" (54), that is the rest of the population.

The Lawyers refuse even to allow any credit for efforts to improve the situation; and when evidence is presented of punishment for abuse of the population, they insist that it must be exceptional and unworthy of consideration in the general picture of life in the PRK (59).

#### Amnesty International "File on Torture, Kampuchea (Cambodia)" (1986)

The next shot in the apparent joint Lawyers-Amnesty propaganda war against the PRK was a 4-page special "Amnesty International File on Torture" in Kampuchea, issued in September 1986, just in time for maximum potential influence on the annual UN vote on seating Kampuchea.

If it were just an honest Amnesty publication it would not have been justified unless considerable new information, not in the Lawyers' final report, or the Amnesty annual report, had been discovered, for if Amnesty had merely wished to repeat under its own name and for its own readership, the information which its Kampuchea expert had helped the Lawyers gather, the suitable vehicle would have been the annual report for the year 1985 due out just one month later in October 1986.

No doubt in recognition of this, the "File" made some claim to novelty in its introductory paragraph. Amnesty International "has recently [emphasis added] received reports that people arrested on political grounds who do not admit to allegations made against them have been routinely tortured".

Most of them requested anonymity, but Amnesty "has information on hundreds of named current or former political detainees, many of whom are

reported to have been tortured”, quantitatively just as vague as the Lawyers’ report.

The “File” contains excerpts from undated testimony of six former prisoners who were tortured, and none can with any certainty be identified with any case reported in the Lawyers’ Report. Otherwise the information about interrogation centers, conditions, and methods is identical to the earlier publication, and the additional quantity does not justify the special publication.

There is moreover reason to doubt that the information was new, and to consider most of it simply rewritten from what the Lawyers had published. Unlike the latter, methods of collection of information are not revealed, and Heder told reliable persons on a trip to Thailand in early 1986 that he had not conducted further research on that subject at the border since the Lawyers’ mission. When I telephoned Heder about the “File” on 29 September 1986 from Thailand, he acknowledged that some of the information was old, but refused more comment than that, claiming that it was all “privileged information”.

Although there are good reasons for Amnesty to protect sources, the deliberate propaganda activity that has emanated from the CGDK at the border prohibits the acceptance of derogatory information about the PRK unless collection by a reliable researcher can be assured. Certainly a western expert has no need to refuse to say whether or not he collected information, unless the goal is obfuscation.

In 1987 an Amnesty representative in Australia who had seen relevant records agreed that the “File” as a whole seemed to be based on information gathered in 1984, and in his opinion one purpose in issuing “File” was to influence the 1986 UN vote.

### **Amnesty International Report 1986**

A look at this annual publication issued in October 1986 to cover events in 128 countries during 1985 reveals why something else was necessary to influence international opinion against Kampuchea.

In their annual report Amnesty were only willing, for the time period covered by the Lawyers’ work in which an Amnesty Kampuchea specialist participated, to express concern “about violations of the human rights of people under the ... (PRK)”, some of whom were reported to have been “imprisoned without trial and tortured or ill-treated” (230).

They had received information corroborating reports of violations of human rights in 1984 and earlier; but for 1985 information available “was insufficient to allow [Amnesty] to ascertain the precise extent to which such human rights violations continued” (231). This would seem to have indicated an apparent improvement of the PRK situation, in spite of the flamboyant performances of the Lawyers – posing a danger of influence on UN opinion in the wrong direction if something else were not produced to distract attention from the annual report.

Moreover, in this regular major publication in which Amnesty puts its credibility on the line, the section on Kampuchea for 1985 appears no worse, perhaps even not so bad, as those for its ASEAN capitalist neighbors, Malaysia (pp.241-2) and Thailand (263-5).

### Kampuchea Political Imprisonment and Torture (1987) <sup>510</sup>

This latest effort contains a considerable amount of padding, no doubt reflecting the compilers' own awareness of their lack of new relevant detail. Pages 14-21 are a summary history of Kampuchea from the Angkor period (10th-14th centuries) to the present, without relevance to the question of PRK prison conditions, and it carefully avoids any historical detail which might help understand conditions today.

There are, however, statements of interest for contemporary historiography. In 1960, (p. 15) "communist leaders ... restructured an underground party organization", a formulation more in line with historians' consensus than the founding of a new party at its first congress, the Pol Pot line which journalists like Elizabeth Becker (*When the War Was Over*, pp. 87,107-8) have taken up and propagated.

Of equal interest is that the files of the Tuol Sleng prison are "now publicly available" for research (p. 17), giving the lie to Elizabeth Becker (*Washington Post*, 1 March 1983, p. A12) and William Shawcross (*New York Review of Books*, 10 May 1984, p. 19).

Another 10 pages (24-34) are devoted to description of the offenses categorized in PRK laws on treason, the agencies which according to PRK law have authority to arrest, the role of Vietnamese experts, and the legal provisions for temporary detention for investigation. Unless Amnesty intends to instruct all nations that they must have laws made in London, the comment here is out of place.

Even where the content is relevant to the subject, there is much repetition, large sections of pages 2-4 and 12 are found repeated on, respectively, pages 39-40, 37-38, 35, 41, 23, 25, 26, 25, 27, 23.

Still more of the content, even if pertinent, has been seriously twisted to present a biased, rather than objective descriptive picture.

There is too much reliance on allegation. Although since 1986 legislation prohibiting torture exists, "the practice allegedly continues" (p. 3). Such allegations will continue as long as there are factions engaged in war, but if Amnesty does not have a case which it feels credible enough to constitute documentation it has no business repeating such allegations.

The further charge that "no PRK legislation prohibits Kampuchean judicial bodies from considering 'confessions' obtained under torture" (p. 3) is

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<sup>510</sup> Michael Vickery, unpublished essay, 10 June 1987.

mischievous, for PRK legislators no doubt felt that if torture is prohibited, then courts cannot accept results of torture in evidence. Amnesty has no business dwelling on this until there is evidence that PRK courts have tried to use it as a loophole. Amnesty's legitimate business is chronicling abuses, not telling governments how to draft laws.

Five pages (6, 57-60) discuss "misled persons", a category resulting from Kampuchea's recent unusual political experience. The category comprises people who in the confusion of forcible removal from one place to another under DK and then the confusion of 1979 fled to the Thai border or to camps under control of opponents of the PRK, and who now have voluntarily returned to their homes.

By all accounts PRK treatment of such people has been lenient and forgiving of those who worked with the opposition, rather than vengeance against all who did not immediately choose the PRK side in 1979. Amnesty, however, has chosen to represent this attempt to separate enemies from friends and permit the latter to integrate easily into their communities, as improper denial of freedom.

The discussion of the PRK law on treason, which Amnesty prefers to call 'political offenses', concludes that it "facilitates imprisoning people for their non-violent political activities" (27), but the law is in fact rather lenient, and not out of line with other countries' laws on treason, which in itself is a highly subjective category. If Amnesty thinks, as I do, that treason should be decriminalized, they should say so.

A particular example of the effort to discredit the PRK whatever the true situation is in "Amnesty International's Recommendations" (p.9). They have "urged the PRK ... to investigate reports of torture and to review interrogation and detention procedures ... adopt safeguards against torture which include limits on incommunicado detention, detention only in publicly recognized places, and prompt provision of information about detainee's whereabouts to relatives and legal counsel".

In fact, in its new law promulgated in 1986, and to which the report selectively refers (pages 29, 33, 43), the PRK has started to fulfil precisely those recommendations, and as I noted in my article which the directorate of *Indochina Issues* censored, the new law was prompted in part by realization that there were defects in the previous system, that is they had undertaken "to review interrogation and detention procedures" and found them wanting. Perhaps the new law will prove ineffective, but it is premature for Amnesty to charge the PRK with not doing what they have in fact started to do.

The substance of the report, extracted from all the padding and irrelevancies, is not impressive, particularly given that the only justification for such a special publication would be a deterioration of conditions, or increase in violations, over what was reported in previous Amnesty publications. This is not shown by the report, indeed the detail presented suggests the contrary, that there may have been a significant decrease in ascertainable cases.



In the section on “Sources and Methodology”, the report describes the “main source of information” (11) as Kampuchean who have fled to the camps on the Thai border. The number of credible cases is difficult to determine from the report (remember Heder and the Lawyers in early 1985 claimed 150 full interviews producing 16 credible cases of torture).

On page 2 Amnesty claims to have “received information on more than 160 cases” of torture; page 35 says the “data includes 34 testimonies of torture from former political prisoners and more than 130 reports from other sources”. The latter number is perhaps included, on p. 12, in what is called “recordings or transcripts of some 160 interviews conducted during 1985 and 1986 by researchers not affiliated to Amnesty”, thus not part of the data which went into the Lawyers’ report.

Amnesty, however, “does not cite these interviews”, only “examined the data for corroboration of the primary source information obtained by its own research”, which latter, it would seem, should have been the basis for Amnesty reports. Again, the precise number of cases obtained by Amnesty’s own research is nowhere stated, and on p. 13 we are told that Amnesty “bases its conclusions on a comprehensive synthesis of the data obtained from all sources”.

Interesting is the admission that “a large part of the data [as I indicated above in reference to earlier publications] ... addresses events that occurred in 1984 or earlier”, restated on p.35 as “Most reports of torture, ill-treatment, and deaths in detention documented by Amnesty International detail incidents which occurred between 1979 and 1984”; and for the present Amnesty is only able to say that “most current information available reveals that the organization’s conclusions and concerns have continuing relevance” (p.13), a conclusion much too vague to serve as a basis for condemnation of a country trying to revive from near total destruction in the face of opposition from the world’s most populous and most powerful states.

This vagueness pervades in particular the only quantitative statements about new information. In 1986 (p.11) Amnesty “obtained some 60 testimonies, mostly focused on [emphasis added] PRK human rights practices”. ‘Focused on’, of course, since that was the subject under investigation; but how many of them were allegations of first-hand experience with torture, and of those how many did expert investigators find credible?

Apparently not many, for another context (p. 35) tells us that “Amnesty International has received ... detailed information on the treatment of four political prisoners arrested in 1986, all of whom reportedly suffered torture”, wording which does not suggest that the information came from Amnesty’s own researchers.

Four cases is still less than the six implicitly 1986 cases cited in “File”, and the careful reader may well conclude that with time the reliable evidence for a case against the PRK is tending to diminish.

The “case summaries” at the end (78-82) are no more illuminating. There are 24 cases, of “political prisoners believed to be currently held”, thus not direct testimony gathered by Amnesty investigators. In 20 of the cases torture is alleged, in the other four harsh conditions of imprisonment. All dates of arrest except one in 1986 were before 1984, suggesting again a decrease in arbitrary police measures, rather than an increase which would have justified this report.

One more statistical detail is only amusing. On page 8 PRK tribunals are said to “have sentenced five defendants to death since 1979 ... after trials which apparently lacked internationally recognized safeguards”.

On page 69 it is revealed that two of them were Pol Pot and Ieng Sary, sentenced in absentia in 1979 for genocide. Although one can agree with Amnesty’s call to abolish the death penalty everywhere, this is a cheap shot against a poor victimized country whose record of death sentences, at most five in eight years, is hardly a matter for international condemnation.

On one ancillary point, the new Amnesty report tacitly admits defeat in one of the goals of Heder’s first joint efforts with the Lawyers – pinning blame for PRK prisons on Viet Nam. The new treatment of ‘T’-prison designations indicates that I was probably right when I suggested in 1985 that they were a propaganda gimmick.

Although ‘T3’ is still used for the central prison in Phnom Penh (22, 25, 26, etc.), and there is reliable independent information from Phnom Penh that this is genuine local terminology (although possibly not official), Heder is no longer certain that it is Vietnamese. It may be, but it may equally well be “the Khmer abbreviation ‘Da-3’, which identifies an adjacent lathe works” (51).

On most of the other ‘T’ names the report is strangely silent. The earlier alleged T-4 is just “the other [Phnom Penh]” “reform office” “in Prey Sa” (41); what was two years ago called ‘T-5’ is now simply the “reform office ... located in Trapeang Phlong”, Kompong Cham (22, 41); and the Phnom Penh military prison, which I identified above, is no longer called ‘T-1’ (40-41). The old designation ‘TK-1’ is still attached to the Battambang prison (37, 41, 53,), but there is much less certainty about its attribution – it is “believed to be the designation of Vietnamese security forces” (53), a belief, it would seem, difficult to sustain in view of the fate of the other ‘T’ designations.<sup>511</sup>

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<sup>511</sup> Having demonstrated that Heder and the Lawyers did not know what they were talking about and were pulling propaganda tricks out of the air, I must now confess to having learned, in trips to Cambodia in 1991 and 1992, that they may in fact have been correct about the Vietnamese origin of the ‘T’ designations. At least, my Khmer acquaintances in Phnom Penh thought that ‘T’ and ‘TK’ had been Vietnamese administrative designations, but they did not know for certain, nor if so, did they know what Vietnamese terms lay behind the abbreviation. This was particularly true for ‘TK’, but none of those I was able to ask was familiar with Battambang.

## Conclusions

*Kampuchea Political Imprisonment and Torture* is a shoddy piece of pseudo-research and analysis presented in a manner to give the unwary reader a more negative impression of the PRK than the evidence warrants. The real evidence is that the PRK in 1979 replaced a truly murderous regime with one under which most of the population could start to rebuild normal lives.

During the extremely difficult post-1979 reorganization there were no doubt instances of police activity and judicial practice which would not be acceptable in peacetime conditions in the affluent west, but by even the Amnesty figures the scope of such abuses is small for a country in which modern western legal traditions were never fully developed, and which has been forced to defend itself against 'contras' supplied and encouraged by China, the United States and ASEAN.

The real evidence, including that accumulated by Amnesty, shows that the alleged police and judicial abuses have probably decreased since 1984 (that is during the time when the Lawyers and Amnesty have tried to use them to indict the PRK), and that the decrease is directly related to official PRK concern with the problem.

In all fairness the PRK deserves at least cautious commendation, not an Amnesty spanking.

This specious treatment cannot be dismissed as a result of incompetence on the part of the researchers and writers who have worked on the Lawyers' and Amnesty's material. Experienced lawyers such as Orentlicher and Abrams must, by their professional training and experience, be expert in the dissection and logical ordering of intractable evidence (of course lawyers are also experts in building a case),

Raymond Bonner has published work on another situation of revolutionary and civil conflict which has won critical praise, and Heder is recognized as expert in eliciting information from Khmer sources and has showed in the past intellectual skills sufficient to secure admission to a Ph.D. program in a major university.

The defects of the Lawyers' and Amnesty reports are not due to incompetence. They are there because skilled operatives decided to make a case. This is not to attack their sincerity in making the case they did. They may all be convinced that the PRK is the worst possible solution to the problems of Kampuchea, and that all sincere sympathizers with that country should work for its overthrow.

I shall not even try here to argue that their case is mistaken, although I think it is. Such a case, however, should not be smuggled into publications which pretend to be strictly humanitarian efforts to publicize abuses of human rights.

The case-building aspect is most flagrant in the latest work by Amnesty, for the evidence, if examined with any objectivity, shows progress, although slow, within the PRK to improve its legal system and diminish police abuses to the

extent that the precarious political and internal security situation permits. Amnesty's report is a panic reaction to these signs of progress, a last attempt to put derogatory material before the public before it is too late.

Claims by the Lawyers and Amnesty to merely report human rights abuses wherever they may occur without passing comparative judgements on any party, and without needing to consider the historical background or political environment of any situation cannot be accepted.

If there were not at least an ideal standard which was implicitly held up as a model for all to follow, the mere description of cases of imprisonment, interrogation, torture and executions would have no meaning. Covertly, at least, comparison and judgment are inherent in the very idea of an Amnesty report; and the ideal against which the situations reported are compared is the theoretical ideal western liberal capitalist judicial system.

Even though Amnesty's literature shows failures of western capitalist regimes to live up to their own standards, the claim not to "grade governments according to their records" does not stand up to examination. The 'grading' may not be overt. But if it is simply reported that countries X and Y each imprisoned 50 people without trial for non-criminal political reasons in a given year, the two countries are implicitly placed at the same level of relative iniquity.

Yet if this was a sudden new development in country X after years of impeccable judicial conduct, while in country Y the preceding years had seen hundreds of arbitrary incarcerations, secret killings by the armed forces, and a civil war out of which a new government was attempting to restore relatively democratic conditions, the degree of human rights abuse in the two countries should be seen in quite different ways.

Country X merits particular humanitarian concern and special reports to alert the world to what has happened, while the regime in country Y deserves praise and international sympathy, and a special report detailing only its 50 arrests without trial would constitute unfair, politically motivated interference. Comparison and 'grading' cannot be avoided in the presentation of such studies, and their denial permits covert political partisanship rather than pure humanitarian concern.

Derogatory Amnesty reports have a much greater political impact on some countries than on others. No matter how much injustice is detailed about the United Kingdom or the United States, it will not affect the recognition of those states by other countries, nor their ability to engage in international trade, to obtain credit, or to impose policies on weaker countries.

For Kampuchea, as the Lawyers and Amnesty are well aware, a negative human rights report may have immediate political, economic, and diplomatic repercussions, and may directly impede the country's recovery.

The latest Amnesty report on Kampuchea, like the related Lawyers' Committee reports which preceded it, represents covert grading in the worst sense: to develop an impression contrary to the relatively even-handed

presentation of the Amnesty annual reports. It constitutes an attempt to play politics with Kampuchea in a manner which Amnesty's declared principles would seem to forbid.

This is the end of the original draft written 10 June 1987. I added the material below about later Amnesty material as it was published.

#### Amnesty Strikes Again (1988) <sup>512</sup>

In a bulletin released in April 1988 Amnesty International has continued its campaign against the Peoples Republic of Kampuchea, taken over from the Lawyers' Committee. The latest onslaught is entitled "Kampuchea, officially reported political arrests and allegations of torture and arbitrary detention". <sup>513</sup>

Like Amnesty's earlier propaganda efforts against Kampuchea, this latest one also utilizes the ad-man technique of starting off with sweeping claims, which are then not backed up when one looks for the supporting details. The earlier work, for example, alleged thousands of cases but then was able to list hardly more than two dozen, not all even certain evidence of atrocities. Ongoing atrocities were claimed, but the evidence was two years old, implicitly suggesting that the situation had improved.

Now Amnesty, the new bulletin says, "has learned of a number of political arrests in Kampuchea during 1987 from official news media reports it received recently. The news media announced "126 arrests in the relatively insecure province of Siem Reap-Utdar Meanchey ... [and] Twenty-two political arrests in Prey Veng province were officially admitted". In addition, Amnesty "knows of three men seized and detained on political grounds in June 1987 in Kratie province", but apparently not announced in the PRK media.

Thus, Amnesty claims the PRK authorities have admitted to arresting people on political grounds, suggests there are doubts that the PRK judicial system can permit fair trials, and urges the PRK government to provide more information, and "facilitate regular visits by appropriate international bodies and other independent observers to all places of political detention" (p.2).

When we take a look at what the PRK media actually announced, the situation appears somewhat different. On 2 August 1987 the radio station *Voice of the Kampuchean People* said "'126 enemy agents who stealthily provided food supplies to the enemy were arrested' during the first six months of 1987".

Not only did the PRK not announce political arrests, but the charges against those arrested were not political in any commonly accepted sense of the word. They were people who during warfare, in an area regularly subject to attacks by

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<sup>512</sup> Michael Vickery, unpublished, April 1988.

<sup>513</sup> AI Index: ASA 23/01/88

the enemies of the government under which they live (“relatively insecure province ... where armed opposition groups of the tripartite Coalition government of Democratic Kampuchea [CGDK] have been active”, in Amnesty’s words [introduction]), were arrested for giving material aid to the enemy. They were not arrested “for their non-violent political beliefs”, Amnesty’s quite reasonable definition of a political prisoner (p.1).

Thus the persons arrested in Siem Reap were charged with providing food supplies to the enemy in what is in fact a combat zone, an activity not usually considered a mere political offense. Amnesty personnel may consider the cause of those 126 to be better than the government cause, and therefore their efforts in favor of the Coalition forces invading Cambodia legitimate, but that is not a legitimate position for Amnesty to take publicly in their reports.

Interestingly Amnesty admits (p. 2) that most of their ‘political prisoners’ are people charged with giving such aid to the enemy in wartime, but they attempt to weasel out of the contradiction by implying that because of “peace talks between PRK premier Hun Sen and Prince Sihanouk and invitations to the presidents of the Partie of Democratic Kampuchea and the KPNLF that they join the talks” it is wrong that “CGDK opposition groups are still officially characterized as ‘traitorous’”.

Amnesty seems to want to rewrite international law to establish that a war ends when the opponents begin to talk about the possibility of ending it. I wonder how successfully French farmers caught giving food to German soldiers in 1918 or 1944 could have appealed to French officers on this ground?

Of course those people arrested for giving aid and comfort to the enemy in wartime deserve fair treatment according to international standards of wartime military justice, but Amnesty has shown no evidence that they have not received that type of fair treatment, and Amnesty’s intervention in this case seems to be no more than an objection to the PRK arresting people working for their overthrow. Such an objection is ideological, is in violation of Amnesty’s own stated principles, and makes them unworthy of the credence which their accusations usually receive.

The other group of 22 arrests is in the same category, and in the end Amnesty can specify only 4 unnamed individuals reportedly arrested on arbitrary grounds and mistreated in 1987.

Amnesty is thus forced to attack the legal and judicial systems of the PRK, to show concern “about the legal competence and political independence of Kampuchea’s judiciary”, and to assert that “the PRK legal system may need to be reformed”, because members of courts “are not required to be properly trained and qualified” (“Summary”). Not a shred of evidence is adduced to show miscarriages of justice which may actually have occurred in those courts.

There can be no doubt that the courts have suffered from lack of trained personnel. As Amnesty well knows, only three legally-trained people returned to work in 1979. Would Amnesty argue that no courts be set up in such a situation,

that justice be rendered administratively by other government branches, or that the Vietnamese legal system and personnel be imported wholesale?

A rapid training program was instituted to create a new supply of legal personnel, but the process is certainly not yet complete. This could be a simple reason for the delay in inaugurating a Supreme Court (Page 4) – lack of qualified personnel.

Even if it should be true in these circumstances that “legislation does not specify that tribunal members must have appropriate training or qualifications in law”, resulting in “political trials being conducted by tribunals which are not independent of the government” (page 4), it is not Amnesty’s business to tell nations how to organize their judicial systems in the absence of evidence that trials have resulted in miscarriages of justice.

It would appear that Amnesty is telling Kampuchea that in order to receive Amnesty’s good conduct badge they must adopt a court system like that of Britain or the United States. Perhaps Amnesty is specifically objecting to the appointment of ‘Peoples Assessors’ to court benches, but would they also condemn Sweden for its similar system of trial court organization?

Without offering any evidence that the court system is unjust, Amnesty, abstracting from the adverse conditions in which Kampuchea had to be rebuilt after 1979, arrogantly criticizes the PRK judicial system for being less perfect than courts in the most advanced western countries.

Even the evidence of PRK concern about their own system, and their efforts to improve it, are distorted by Amnesty. The “Summary” page says “In 1987 and again this year government officials have admitted there are imperfections in the legal system and procedures”. This publicly stated concern about their own imperfections is then hypocritically used by Amnesty to suggest that they must be forced to change.

From pages 3 and 5 it appears that the source of that statement was Uk Sary of the Legislative Department of the Ministry of Justice, whom I also met in 1984 and 1986. Uk Sary is one of the 3 persons who returned to legal work in 1979, and his legal career goes back to the Sihanouk period in the 1960s.

His admission “that there was reason for concern about the legal competence” of the judiciary, that “not all judicial personnel have backgrounds in law” (page 3), and “that some legislation had not always been properly implemented” (page 5) represents real *glasnost* in the context of Kampuchean history since the 1950s. Uk Sary is well aware, and so is Amnesty’s Kampuchea expert, that in the 1960s under Sihanouk such an admission of state deficiency by a state employee would not have been tolerated.

In their report of 1987 Amnesty noted information that police personnel were instructed not to use torture, but that the instructions were reportedly ignored, and further reference to the same matter appears in the April 1988 report (pages ‘Summary’, and 4-5). In the PRK situation there are no doubt police personnel who violate official principles and standing orders, but I dare say that this is the

first time in Kampuchea's history that police are even instructed not to use torture.

If police personnel who survived to 1979 and returned to work were of low quality, they were in a long tradition going back to the French period, when Cambodians were known as trustees and torturers in Indochinese political prisons.<sup>514</sup> Independent Kampuchea inherited such traditions, which were willingly used by Sihanouk and Lon Nol, and are part of the difficult heritage of the PRK.

Rather than the petty carping represented by this 1988 Amnesty report, continuing the style of earlier Amnesty work on Kampuchea, the PRK deserves some praise for the improvement it has wrought under exceedingly difficult circumstances.

This latest Amnesty report is in fact a non-report, for it has scarcely any new information about matters which are the legitimate business of Amnesty, and in this aspect it continues the style of its predecessors which, when read carefully, testify to a steady improvement, at least statistically, in human rights in the PRK following the worst years, apparently 1983-1984.

Because of its lack of new relevant information, the political interventionist character of the 1988 report is even more prominent than in the Lawyers' and Amnesty reports of 1984, 1985, 1986, and 1987. It was hurriedly thrown together, and sprung on the public just when there seemed to be new moves toward a peaceful negotiated settlement of the Kampuchea conflict.

Of course these signs in early 1988 – Vietnamese announcement of full withdrawal in 1989 or 1990, awareness of the increasing solidity of the PRK, changes in Thai attitudes – all portended survival of the PRK as at least a leading member of any post-settlement coalition. Amnesty, along with China, the United States, and the DK coalition, seems to wish to impede that kind of settlement.

### Postscript (1995)

This Amnesty interventionist policy was clear again in a 1989 report, which was launched just when the switch in Thai policy signaled by Prime Minister Chatichai's invitation to Kampuchean Prime Minister Hun Sen pulled the rug from beneath the DK coalition, and gave further support for PRK survival.

A few years later it appeared that Amnesty had changed its position, or perhaps rather was inadvertently revealing that its policy on Cambodia before 1993 was as politically motivated as I had inferred, and deviated from the usual Amnesty position.

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<sup>514</sup> This was noted by a 1940s Cambodian political prisoner, Bun Chan Mol, in his book *Kuk Niyobay* ('Political Prison'), Phnom Penh, 1971. See Vickery, *Cambodia 1975-1982*, p. 14, and n. 39.



In *The Christian Science Monitor Weekly*, 15-21 April 1994, “The Problem With M[ost]F[avored]N[ation]”, William F. Schulz, executive director of Amnesty International USA, made some conciliatory and reasonable suggestions concerning pressure on China about Human Rights, insisting that ‘leeway’ should be given for what progress the Chinese were making on their own, quite contrary to the Lawyers’ and Heder’s Amnesty work on Cambodia, to whom however he did not refer.

“Our approach to China”, he said, “must recognize that the Chinese themselves are divided over human rights. Often this division is identified with an ideological split, but it is actually more complex”, and the US focus has “embroiled the US in an internal political struggle between pro- and anti-communist forces, in which the dissidents are a lightning rod”. The “US must show the Chinese government ... that its concerns are identical with many of those expressed by respected ‘mainline’ figures within China itself.

For example, in 1991 an article in the *People’s Public Security News* condemned torture to extract confessions as “a stubborn illness that has not yet seen a recovery”; and in 1989 a criminologist wrote in the *Political and Law Journal*, that “There are quite a lot of legal scholars who think that the system of shelter and investigation [a type of detention] should be abolished [because] the Criminal Procedure Law has not given the Public Security organs the authority to exercise this power”.

Building on critiques such as these, Mr. Schulz continued, the US government should press the Chinese to abolish torture because torture is prohibited in Chinese law, and “no government can lose face by enforcing its own laws and international obligations ... Indeed the Chinese government would receive universal acclaim if it were to end this malicious abuse of power by local – often corrupt – police and prison officials [*sic!*, emphasis added]”.

This is precisely the type of reasoning Amnesty rejected in its work on Cambodia. Had Mr. Schulz been active then, and consistent with his views on China, he would have taken the new PRK law on criminal procedure promulgated in 1986, and the 1988 *Kampuchea* article on cases pending before the courts as evidence for internal Cambodian pressure to improve human rights which deserved encouragement, not petty carping and contempt.<sup>515</sup>

In *Phnom Penh Post* I used these statements by Mr. Schulz in an article critical of Amnesty and Heder’s work. Heder’s response was peculiar, saying that the views of a mere executive director like Mr. Schulz did not necessarily represent Amnesty policy, and that “the personal views of one Amnesty official now” were not relevant for judging what Amnesty reported in the 1980s.<sup>516</sup>

<sup>515</sup> See below, p. 325, on the *Kampuchea* article.

<sup>516</sup> Michael Vickery, “The debate to apportion blame”, *PPP*, 4/16, 11-24 August 1995, p. 7; and Stephen Heder, “Paranoia, genocide, and the history books”, *PPP*, 4/22, 3-16 November 1995, p. 16.

## Chapter 5: lead-up to the peace process

In 1988 and 1989 the efforts of the anti-PRK Coalition and their backers became more desperate, and their propaganda more intense, as it was ever more certain that their policies were proving sterile. The end of that phase was the Vietnamese withdrawal in 1989, a year before their previous self-imposed deadline, revealing that the PRK was viable on its own.

Following the annual UN vote on Cambodia in 1988 I wrote the first sections of the following article, which has remained unpublished, although elements of it have gone into other published pieces, and I have continued it with some analysis of military affairs into 1989.<sup>517</sup>

### Thoughts on Cambodia (1988-1989)<sup>518</sup>

Once again the UN vote on Kampuchea in October 1988 extended the farce that the government of that country sits in a collection of brutal totalitarian (DK-Pol Pot) or equally cruel but anarchic (KPRLF-Son San) camps along the Thai border rather than in the country's capital Phnom Penh.

One hopes that the comedy will not play as long as the US-sponsored charade from 1949 to 1971 about the government of China residing in Taiwan, while the 'Peiping Regime' was relegated to the back of the moon. Recently there have been some hopeful signals that it will not.<sup>519</sup>

According to Kremlinological doctrine actors on the international scene send out more-or-less cryptic signals which those in the know interpret according to their ideological code books. That the interpretations are indeed ideological has never been shown with greater clarity than in the warnings that Gorbachev's reforms did not change significantly the danger of the Soviet Union for the 'democratic' West, unless it was the egregious Angleton's (James Jesus Angleton of the CIA) conviction that the Sino-Soviet split was a hoax to deceive the 'Free World'.

The interpretation of the Kampuchea issue which has produced such scandalous votes in the UN is first based on a number of falsifications of the situation within that country, and in the interest of maintaining the hold of such falsifications a number of signals have been studiously ignored.

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<sup>517</sup> See for example "Cambodia 1988" in *ASIEN*, German Association for Asian Studies, Hamburg, Nr. 28, April 1988, Hamburg, pp. 1-19, although most of the content of that article was different.

<sup>518</sup> Michael Vickery, unpublished, 1989.

<sup>519</sup> Obviously my projection of a change in 1988 was misplaced.

The propaganda line of the anti-Phnom Penh forces, and their very *raison d'être*, depend on the depiction of the PRK as a puppet regime imposed and maintained by a Vietnamese occupation of the country, which is resulting in destruction of Khmer culture, occupation of the land by Vietnamese immigrants, and deprivation for the Khmer people. These extreme views have been propagated most assiduously by the three anti-Phnom Penh Khmer Coalition groups, their ASEAN supporters in Thailand and Singapore, and the US.

China, the Coalition's other major supporter, has not notably argued those issues, insisting simply that DK is still the legitimate government, illegally overthrown by Vietnam.

Signals tending to undermine this position have flowed out of Phnom Penh for several years, but have been ignored both by enemies of the PRK, and by the major media who pander to them. These signals have consisted in large-scale changes in leading government and party personnel, involving most notably removal of figures with long Vietnamese association and rapid advancement of a younger generation, not only without close Vietnamese contact, but without even a pre-1975 revolutionary or leftist background.<sup>520</sup>

The argument made in anti-PRK circles that in order to be appointed such people would have to be vetted by Hanoi, though no doubt true, is silly if it is intended to deny the significance of the changes and the 'signals' they emit. Hanoi could have influenced the changes in other directions or insisted on the maintenance in place of the old Viet Nam veterans, but instead accepted the advancement of an entire generation whose pre-war background was bourgeois and nationalist.<sup>521</sup>

These new people could easily have fled in 1979-1980, and most of them would easily have been accepted for third-country settlement. They have chosen to remain in Kampuchea and to work for the new government because as well-educated Khmer nationalists they consider the PRK to represent the best choice among the currently feasible alternatives.

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<sup>520</sup> See "Kremlinology and Cambodia", above, pp. 244 ff.

<sup>521</sup> This argument appeared not only "in anti-PRK circles". See Grant Evans, *FEER*, Vol. 137, No. 32, 6 Aug 1987, p. 4, Letters to the Editor, "Vickery's claims for Cambodian freedom of action rest on 'the rapid promotion of persons with no pre-1975 revolutionary background to leadership positions.' This, he suggests, implies that their accession to power is independent of Vietnamese patronage, whereas the realities of Vietnamese influence in Cambodia since 1979 demonstrates the opposite".

My argument was that the promotions of those people showed that conventional wisdom about "the realities of Vietnamese influence" required revision. [Evans here seemed to be starting the shift which led, by 2002, to his complete ideological flipflop in *Laos A Short History*, and by 2006 to an utterly reactionary defense of the Thai monarchy in his review of Paul Handley's *The King Never Smiles*, in *FEER*, September 2006, pp. 58-62]

Since China's interest in DK, at least since the changes which began in 1976, has been not ideological, but geo-political, linked to the Sino-Soviet dispute, it would be expected that changes in Sino-Soviet relations would be reflected in Chinese policy toward Kampuchea, and that 'signals' would be emitted.

An early signal from China, discussed below, was ignored by the international press, and I did not chance on it for over a year. Perhaps the refusal to acknowledge it 'signals' to us the refusal of international relations experts to receive 'signals' incompatible with their ideology. The *Far Eastern Economic Review*, which used to be a fairly reliable repository of Asian news, both mainstream and exotic, was one of the media organs which blocked out this signal, only to let it slip through a year and a half later in an article designed to present a diametrically opposite ideological picture.

That is, in *FEER* of 9 July 1987, p. 28, Nayan Chanda, who since moving to Washington has transformed himself from a journalist into a mouthpiece for the US State and Defense Departments, placed an article entitled "The Managua Connection", in which China was linked with Ollie North as part of the secret network to supply the Nicaraguan contras.

Worse, for China, was that "China, like Taiwan, was a partner in the Reagan administration's anti-Nicaragua policy – but unlike Taipei, Peking profited from its cooperation". As a "carrot" in the negotiations between North and the Chinese, North said the contras, once in power, would switch recognition to Peking from Taipei, which had been the 'China' recognized by Somoza.

All of this took place in 1984. Then, having apparently told North what to do with his carrot, by "late summer of 1985 China suddenly stopped the sales without any explanation". Down at the end of the third column of the three-column article comes the signal which the *Review* had refused to report when it was emitted some 18 months earlier.

On 9 December 1985 "it was announced that China had established diplomatic relations with the Sandinista regime", and had "even offered it US \$20 million in aid", thus accounting for the change of heart on weapons supply to the contras. The *Review* thinks this was merely China's "pursuit of its independent foreign policy", for "Peking has made clear its reservations about Managua's close links with Moscow".

Then why choose that moment to make a switch on Nicaragua? No doubt there was supposed to be a signal here that China's attitude toward Moscow was changing, and, perhaps, a signal that China would change policy on Cambodia too. That is, soon after its own revolution Nicaragua was one of the first countries to recognize PRK Cambodia, on 15 September 1979, and close ties have been maintained through exchanges of visits ever since.<sup>522</sup>

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<sup>522</sup> *Kampuchea* (Phnom Penh newspaper) 7 August 1986, p. 16. Other dates of early PRK diplomatic relations were presentation of ambassadorial letters of accreditation,

Nicaraguan-Chinese discussions preceding the establishment of relations could not have failed to touch on Cambodia. Presumably the Nicaraguans were satisfied on the subject of China's intentions toward Cambodia, and would have helped pass signals on to the latter country. Indeed, one of the Nicaraguan delegation to Peking, Henry Ruiz, described then as "member of the National Directorate of the Sandinista National Liberation Front" and leader of a "Nicaraguan party and government delegation" subsequently led a delegation to Phnom Penh at the end of July 1986.<sup>523</sup>

Part of his brief would no doubt have been to inform the Cambodians about impending developments in Nicaraguan-Chinese relations connected with the visit of President Daniel Ortega to Peking in September 1986.

On this trip Ortega first visited India (9-11 September), then China where he arrived on the 11th and stayed until the 14th. During the visit Zhao Ziyang said disputes between Nicaragua and the US should be solved through negotiations, not by force; and Ortega said Nicaragua hoped to expand its economic and diplomatic relations with China. Following China, Ortega went to Pyongyang.

Equally interesting is that just before arriving in Peking for the formalities on 5-9 December 1985, the Nicaraguan delegation led by Foreign Minister Miguel D'Escoto Brockman stopped in Australia on 26 November for meetings with his Australian counterpart Bill Hayden and Prime Minister Bob Hawke. No doubt there also, in one of the capitalist countries which has shown most sympathy toward the PRK, Cambodian affairs were evoked in the discussions and relevant signals communicated.<sup>524</sup>

Of course Chinese policy will not change overnight, and it may be expected that even as slight changes occur public pronouncements will for some time repeat the old lines; but the slightest changes in China, or in Chinese – Soviet relations will be closely watched by Thailand, where sensitivity to signals, real or imagined, is finely honed, and will be reflected in further signals emitted by the Thais.

In May 1987 Thai Foreign Minister Sitthi Savetsila visited the Soviet Union. Then in October it was announced that Army Commander Gen. Chavalit Yong-

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USSR 28 May 1979; Vietnam 24 December 1979; Cuba 29 November 1982; Laos 18 February 1983; India 13 September 1982.

<sup>523</sup> SWB FE/8129/A1/1-4, 9 December 1985, and *Kampuchea* (Phnom Penh) 7 August 1986, p. 16. If anyone scoffs that my reading of signals here is too exotic to believe, even in terms of old-fashioned Kremlinology, I would like to point them to a commentary by a leading US Soviet scholar, an experienced Kremlinologist, Jerry F. Hough. Hough sent this out by e-mail, on "Johnson's Russia List #22014, 12 January 1998, entitled "The breakup of the Soviet Union". There he said that President George Bush "In April 1991, ... changed policy towards Kashmir from plebiscite to referendum to signal that we did not favor independence for Lithuania". There is real Kremlinological signaling.

<sup>524</sup> SWB FE/8119/A1/2, 27 November 1985. Note again the Hayden position which, as described above, pp. 220 ff., so irritated the anti-Phnom Penh coalition.

chaiyudh would visit the Soviet Union in preparation for a later visit by Prime Minister Prem Tinsulanonda in early 1988. Chavalit's visit had to be postponed by bad weather, but was rescheduled for mid-November. Such a flurry of visits to Russia by high-level Thai personnel is unprecedented.<sup>525</sup>

Another Thai signal, since a blunder by Chavalit on such a matter is inconceivable, was his statement on 3 November that the Kampuchea problem was a civil war involving "mainly the dispute and fighting between two communist factions in Kampuchea", a position totally at variance with ASEAN policy, and with the public position of the Thai Foreign Ministry.<sup>526</sup>

Chavalit also added that in a civil war either side has the right to seek foreign assistance, although such foreign intervention "may not necessarily help resolve the conflict", and therefore a "complete military withdrawal of all foreign forces, especially Vietnamese troops" should be effected. He thus maintained the main ASEAN demand, but with a decidedly original nuance.

Both Bangkok English-language newspapers soon carried editorials criticizing Chavalit's statements, interestingly the usually more conservative and US-friendly *Bangkok Post* not until after two days. Although aides to General Chavalit said he had been misquoted, his disavowal was considerably weakened by statements in another context that "prime concern should be given to how to develop the Northeast, and not on military threat from Vietnam" and that "Viet Nam wouldn't have invaded Kampuchea had there been no dissident faction in Phnom Penh".<sup>527</sup>

The clear signal for the Thai public is that if a Vietnamese military threat is not of prime concern, Thailand's current Kampuchea policy is without justification. The second remark, about a dissident faction in Phnom Penh during the DK period, reiterates in other words the view of the Kampuchea problem as a civil war.

Certainly no accident either was the simultaneous announcement that the Thai government had given permission for the "Soviet Union to bring in ships, including hydrographic, supply and navy vessels, for repair in Thailand", the "first time that Thailand has granted permission on a permanent basis to a socialist country to repair its ships here"; something which has now occurred, according to the Foreign Ministry, "at a time when Thailand is more open to the Soviet Union and Eastern Bloc countries".

Negotiations toward this seem to have taken place during Siddhi's May visit to Moscow, where an agreement was signed to set up a joint Thai-Soviet trade commission; and it followed a policy statement last December in which Siddhi

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<sup>525</sup> *Nation* (Bangkok) 18 October 1987, pp.1-2; 30 October 1987, p.5.

<sup>526</sup> *Nation*, 4 November 1987, p.2; also *Bangkok Post*, same date, p.1).

<sup>527</sup> *Nation*, 5 November 1987, *Bangkok Post*, 6 November 1987; *Nation*, 8 November and 6 November 1987, p. 2, respectively.

said “Thailand would seek expanded economic ties with all countries ‘irrespective of differences in ideology and political and economic system’”.<sup>528</sup> There may be still another signal here, for in January 1987, “presumably under US pressure”, the Philippine government reversed a previous decision to allow Soviet merchant ships to be repaired in government shipyards.

Because of the secrecy surrounding all aspects of the conflict on all sides, and the tendentious news, if not outright disinformation indulged in, the student of current Cambodian affairs will often go astray using journalistic techniques of questioning participants or informed sources, and must resort to the academic historians’ techniques of analyzing – reading between the lines of recalcitrant documents or statements.

A case in point is the number of Vietnamese troops in Cambodia after 1979, and their partial withdrawals announced starting in 1982. It is a particularly interesting example of collaboration in disinformation between the US regime and the journalistic community which I have discussed in detail in *Cambodia: A Political Survey*, pp. 20-30.

As part of the 1988-1989 anti-PRK propaganda, a certain Dr. Esmeralda Luciulli of Medecins Sans Frontières published a book called *Le mur de bambou* [‘the bamboo wall’], Éditions Régine Deforges, Paris 1988. Expecting, because of the Medecins Sans Frontières connection, that it would be very influential in western milieus concerned with Cambodia, I immediately produced a review in January-March 1989. I never offered it for publication, however, for, contrary to my expectations, Luciulli’s book did not take off. Rather, it was ignored by the mainstream press, and my review would only have given it publicity which it could not acquire on its own.

Only in 1995 did I find an appropriate occasion to present most of the content of the review in a letter to the *Phnom Penh Post* in answer to another contribution which had recommended *Le mur de bambou* as a valuable study of Cambodia. In what follows there are also comments inserted relative to post-1989 developments.<sup>529</sup>

### Review of *Le Mur de Bambou* (1989)<sup>530</sup>

I feel compelled to write, as Soizick Crochet began her scolding of Chantou Boua, whose article I missed, but with whose views of PRK Cambodia I have been familiar (and which I largely share) since travelling with her and three others on my first post-DK trip to Cambodia in 1981.<sup>531</sup>

<sup>528</sup> *Nation*, 6 November 1987, pp.1-2.

<sup>529</sup> My inspiration was Soizick Crochet’s , “The ‘good ol’ days’”, in *PPP*, Vol. 4, No. 4, 24 Feb-9 March 1995, p. 6, criticizing Chantou Boua’s article in *PPP*, Vol. 3, No. 25, 16-19 December 1994.

<sup>530</sup> Michael Vickery, letter, *PPP*, Vol. 4, No. 8, 21 April-4 May, 1995, pp. 6, 19.

<sup>531</sup> See the articles written after that trip, above, pp. 133 ff.

Crochet's comments follow very closely the themes of *Le mur de bambou*, by Esmeralda Luciulli, and recommended by Crochet, a book which I thought had been deservedly forgotten, but about which *Phnom Penh Post* readers should now be warned. The warning should now, in 1995, be extended to a wider circle, since the current journalistic and semi-scholarly fashion is to revive the negative picture of the PRK.

*Le mur de bambou* ('the bamboo wall') is a peculiarly vicious book purveying a certain number of lies about the Peoples Republic of Kampuchea (PRK), many apocryphal anecdotes which might be true but are unacceptable without more precision of time and place, some truths which, apparently unknown to the author, represent continuity from the pre-1975 Cambodia which she professes to wish restored, and some less trivial accurate information about the present [1989] which, however, has been torn dramatically out of context in order to suggest situations which are not true.

The author, a doctor who worked in Cambodia for 15 months in 1984-1985, apparently blames the PRK exclusively for all the difficulties of life in Cambodia, as though there were no economic blockade by major western powers, no hostility by Southeast Asian neighbors, and no danger of attack from the rival Cambodian enemy forces armed and supported by them. The picture presented also demands that the reader bracket out the violent revolution of 1975-1979, and the war of the preceding 5 years.

Implicitly the only thing preventing a normal happy bourgeois life-style for all Cambodians is the malevolence and mischievousness of the PRK leadership. Indeed Luciulli explicitly charges the PRK with exaggerating the damage done by the Pol Pot regime. The "new regime attributes all responsibility to the person of Pol Pot, crystallizing around this name the very idea of evil" (138).

This is true, but the author shows her basic ignorance of Cambodia in falling victim to the same misapprehension in her (false) charge that the National Museum, "it seems", possesses a "limited number of art objects since 1975 because of destruction caused by the Khmer Rouge" (179); or in her repetition of the canard that "forced marriages were frequent, in particular [emphasis added] between Khmer Rouge soldiers, sometimes invalids, and young women of the 'new people'" (182).

In fact, the exhibits on view in the Museum are virtually unchanged from before 1975, with only very few minor pieces missing; and as I have shown elsewhere marriages between Pol Pot soldiers and 'new people' were explicitly forbidden by DK policy, and extremely rare.<sup>532</sup>

Luciulli's ideological standpoint is anti-communist, which implies approval of private business and a free market; but while acknowledging that considerable market freedom prevails, she charges the state with complicity in the economic

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<sup>532</sup> Vickery, *Cambodia 1975-1982*, pp. 44, 175.



inequalities which have inevitably arisen therefrom. Similarly there is strong criticism of alleged inequalities between cadres and ordinary citizens and privileges of the former, an unjustified criticism, for PRK policy, and practice, successfully minimized the social distances which had been part of old Cambodian culture.<sup>533</sup>

Nevertheless, and defying consistency, Luciulli, like a true child of the petty bourgeoisie, cannot bear the sight of cadres, that is intellectuals, professionals, or white-collar workers, being obliged to spend weeks or months at a time working at the grass roots, dressed like the citizens among whom they are working and in whom they are supposed to imbue new ideals (160-61).

The regime is abused for the rough health conditions in which civilians drafted for defense work must live (105-10, 114-5), which is factually accurate, but there is equal criticism for sending medical teams to the work sites to attempt to cope with the health problems (110-11, 150).<sup>534</sup>

In Luciulli's view the PRK is by definition wrong whatever it does, even if the measures concerned would be considered normal, or laudable, anywhere else in the world. The state insists on doing such horrible things as collecting taxes from merchants and shopkeepers (73-75), and conscripting young men to defend the country when the Vietnamese troops have gone.

Interesting here is Luciulli's claim, on the basis of hearsay, that the PRK army is 70,000 strong, larger than the usual western estimates, and intended by her as condemnation, a sign of oppression, rather than as evidence that the country may be able to handle its own defence (128).

Having observed that traditional music is very popular, with tapes recopied from those circulating in border camps openly on sale, Luciulli opines that "the authorities close their eyes", since it seems inconceivable for her that the PRK would desire the preservation of traditional music (183).

She is forced into this position because of the lie that the traditional classical ballet was terminated (179), and that in the Beaux-Arts School traditional art must give way to "production of works which conform to the party line ... especially paintings illustrating the liberation of Kampuchea by the Vietnamese" (179). Here Luciulli adds one of her clever little truths which projects a lie – "the only vestiges of tradition [are] paintings of Angkor Wat or *apsaras*, and some landscapes of the Cambodian countryside."

What does she think Beaux-Arts students traditionally produced before 1975? Precisely paintings of Angkor Wat, legendary celestial maidens, and idealized

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<sup>533</sup> In my 1995 letter to *Phnom Penh Post* I added that Luciulli and Crochet, unlike Chantou Boua, are totally unresponsive to the positive social policy of the PRK toward women, who could aspire to responsible positions quite out of their reach before 1975, and again since UNTAC.

<sup>534</sup> And which after 1991 have again been encouraged under the impact of UNTAC and the FUNCINPEC returnees.

rural landscapes; and today [1989], as in 1984 when Luciulli visited the place, the Beaux-Arts salesroom is stuffed with such traditional work to the extent that party-line illustrations would be hard to find.

There is some truth in “parties and dancing are considered inappropriate”, which contrasts with the refugee camps where there is often “dancing all night long for marriages and festivals”; and she heard somewhere the lament, “you know, before we danced a lot in Cambodia, but now ...” (181-2).

What is required here is first the reminder that in the non-Pol Pot refugee camps which Luciulli saw, few have to get up and go to work the next day, and in Phnom Penh there is a 9 P.M. curfew imposed because of danger of attack or sabotage by enemies supported by the refugee camp organization. Otherwise even the most casual visitor to Phnom Penh who was not totally blind could see that marriage festivals at least are not at all ‘inappropriate’ and are celebrated in the same way as before 1975.

As for dancing, there **was** a lot of it in the good old days, but not husbands with wives or young men and women of the same social stratum. Men went to night clubs where they danced with ‘taxi girls’, and at private functions girls from the nearest brothel were brought in to dance with male guests, while wives observed decorously from the sidelines.

It is perhaps such pre-socialist habits of the ‘traditional culture’ which have made the present regime uneasy about dancing, whereas in Luciulli’s favorite border camps the first institutions of the old society to be established after 1979 were officers’ clubs and brothels.

It is of course impossible to ignore the valiant efforts made to rebuild an educational system since 1979, and the facts are set forth accurately enough, but for Esmeralda it is only because “the Heng Samrin government recognized the revolutionary usefulness of schools” (193). If “in principle schooling is free ... parents are constantly asked for contributions” for registration, exams, books, and equipment (196). Well, if so, this is just like the Sihanouk days for which Esmeralda yearns; and indeed it is overt policy, quite reasonable in prevailing circumstances, that local communities contribute toward construction and equipment of schools.

According to Luciulli, “reading texts are ‘adapted’ to socialism’, the vocabulary of the old regimes of Lon Nol and Sihanouk is banned in favor of revolutionary language, and teachers must use the official terms, the same as under the Khmer Rouge” (198). Unless Luciulli can give precise illustrations, which she has not done, these statements can be dismissed as the most arrant nonsense. I also heard such things in the refugee camps in 1980, but then took the trouble to check them out.

The Ministry of Education since 1979 has been firmly in the hands of pre-1975 professional pedagogues, the school syllabus is very traditional and nationalist, reading texts are in general the same as in the old days, and to the extent that there have been linguistic innovations they are along lines developed before

1975 by a group of Khmerizing nationalist educationists (the *Khemarayeanakam* movement), most of whom perished under Pol Pot.

But Lucioli's intentions are made transparent by her complaint that the high moral standards demanded of school teachers represent oppression by the regime (197-8).

Perhaps a key to Lucioli's assault on PRK education, and to her attitude in general is "[f]ormerly classes were organized as in France, from twelfth [lowest] to [ ... third, second, first, and] terminal [end of lycée] ... [t]oday it is the school system of Viet Nam which serves as model and primary school has four levels [numbered 1 to 4]" (193). What horrors! The French system turned upside down; and this is presented seriously as an example of 'silent ethnocide', with credit for the term going to Marie Martin.<sup>535</sup>

Is this Esmeralda's only problem, a rage that Kampucheans wish to be Khmer (for the final product differs significantly from Vietnam, as from France), not brown Frenchmen?

There is less factual accuracy in her treatment of foreign language instruction, and again the facts which survive are reconstructed to support a false impression. Language instruction "is generally limited to ... Vietnamese, taught in secondary and higher [levels]", an inaccurate rendering, but made a bit truer with the additional remark, "but ... not always ... for lack of teachers", a statement true in itself. Still further on she says "study of other languages is limited to Russian, German, and Spanish (199).

The true situation in 1984-1985 when Lucioli was in Cambodia, and when I was able to check the details on the spot, was that no foreign languages were yet taught in secondary schools, although Russian, German, Vietnamese, and Spanish, in that order, were formally in the curriculum, and the reason given for absence of instruction in all of them was lack of teachers. At a higher level, all 4 languages were taught in the Language School which trained interpreters and prepared students for university studies abroad.<sup>536</sup>

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<sup>535</sup> Marie-Alexandrine Martin is a biologist and ethnologist, and a specialist in the Phnom Kravanh area of western Cambodia. She wrote several articles relatively favorable to DK, such as "La riziculture et la maîtrise de l'eau dans le Kampuchea démocratique", Paris, *Etudes rurales* 83 (1981), pp. 7-44; "L'Industrie dans le Kampuchea démocratique", Paris, *Etudes rurales* 89-91 (1983), pp. 77-110; "La politique alimentaire des Khmers rouges", Paris, *Etudes rurales* 99-100 (1985), pp. 347-365, and other articles very critical of the Vietnamese and the PRK, for example, "Vietnamised Cambodia. A Silent Ethnocide", in *Indochina Report* (Singapore), No. 7 (July-Sept 1986), on which see further below, note 537.

Two significant books by her are *Le mal cambodgien* Paris, Hachette, 1989, translated into English as *Cambodia: a Shattered Society*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1994, and *Les Khmer Daeum*, "*Khmers de l'Origine*", Paris, Presses de l'Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient, 1997.

<sup>536</sup> Vickery, *Kampuchea, Politics, Economics, Society*, pp. 157-9.

It was true until 1985, as she writes, that no history courses as such were taught, but the reason was not that Vietnamese advisers refused to allow the use of French and English sources, for the new textbooks which are now (since 1986) in use treat Cambodian history in a very traditionalist manner. Indeed members of the history textbook preparation committee told me in November 1988 that they had relied mainly on George Coedès, Adhémar Leclère, and Madelaine Giteau, just as pre-revolutionary school books did.

There is a difference, however, in the lesser emphasis on the accomplishments of royalty, and in attention to examples of inter-Indochina friendship, rather than the chauvinist prejudice which permeated pre-1975 education.

According to Luciulli French and English were 'forbidden' until 1985 (199), and it is true that they were not included in the secondary school curriculum, although private instruction was widespread and as Esmeralda in another context (66) acknowledges, by 1984, at least, tacitly encouraged by the state. Esmeralda's description of the use of French in the Medical School, however, is the opposite of the truth.

In 1985, she says, French was finally authorized, but only for first-year medical students, a concession obtained after years of negotiations in which the Vietnamese advisers tried to insist on their language for teaching. Although all medical books in Cambodia are in French, she remarks, and this is true, "up to 1985 beginning students did not speak a word of that language", a typical Luciullian quasi-truth (199).

The Medical School, which was spared serious damage during DK, was the first tertiary institution to reopen, almost immediately after the formation of the PRK in 1979. While hypothetical beginning students without any previous medical study might not have known French, the first medical students who resumed study again were survivors of the last pre-1975 classes, all of whom had the experience of studying medicine in French and who were familiar with the French textbooks which had also survived.

Because of this, the medical teachers sent from Viet Nam were also chosen from among the older generation for their knowledge of French, or where insufficient Francophones were available, French-speaking interpreters were provided for communication with the Kampuchean students.<sup>537</sup> As time goes on, however, the French-speaking groups on both sides will tend to disappear, and a new solution must be found.

Luciulli is correct in describing the low level of health care prevailing in Cambodia (239-260), but prefers to blame it on PRK malevolence rather than objective conditions. An interesting example of her perversity starts, as so often, with a truth, at least sort of.

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<sup>537</sup> See Andrea Panaritis, 'Cambodia: The Rough Road to Recovery', *Indochina Issues*, April 1985, particularly pp. 2-3.

When medical training was revived in 1979 the surviving doctors and administrators tried to “reproduce the only model they knew, medical care modeled on that of France thirty years ago”, that is the “training of numerous doctors rather than basic health care personnel, following the practice of occidental countries”, whereas what was needed in Cambodia was to “develop basic health care, hygiene, and preventive medicine”.

What she does not tell the reader is that to the extent the practices she approves were finally adopted, it was due to the Vietnamese influence in the medical school, which she castigated above, and which was resisted at first by Cambodian personnel simply because it was Vietnamese.

Or, because it reminded the former urban bourgeoisie of DK medical theory. When I was working in the Khao-I-Dang refugee camp in 1980, where health care was dominated by western aid organizations who emphasized prevention, hygiene and simple basic remedies over exotic medicines and complex treatments for conditions which should have been prevented, their efforts were often little appreciated by former Phnom Penhites addicted to “medical care modeled on that of France thirty years ago”.

Luciulli particularly condemns the time lost to political indoctrination of medical personnel, apparently without realizing, or refusing to recognize, that the changes in outlook which she acknowledges necessary are not strictly medical, but social and political, requiring ideological reindoctrination to make the medical reindoctrination acceptable.

Most observers have reacted positively to the full integration of the Islamic Cham minority into Kampuchean society after the abuse directed at them by DK and the prejudice against them in earlier times, but Luciulli manages to find fault with this too, because it demonstrates “in fact that the present government has chosen to encourage ethnic particularism, and moreover by means of it, divisiveness and resentment by certain groups against the Khmer majority” (191).

Why the PRK government, a group of Khmers, should want to encourage ethnic hostility against themselves, is beyond comprehension; but perhaps Luciulli is trying to encourage an impression that the PRK is not Khmer, something she dare no longer say, for by now it would so obviously be a lie.

But consistency is not Luciulli’s strong point, and on the next page she concludes on the subject of ethnicity that “recuperation of culture and religion [have been] for the benefit of imported ideological stereotypes” (liberalism toward the Cham?, divisiveness?), and this is “a way to destroy Khmer identity as surely as its prohibition ... like a [again the term] ‘silent ethnocide’” (192).

Luciulli’s chapter on internal security, police and prisons (211-38) does less violence to objectivity than the foregoing. There is no doubt that prison conditions were poor and police behavior not up to standards in the most advanced countries of Europe. Some people were arrested capriciously, some tortured, and some kept incarcerated arbitrarily without due process of law. But again,

Luciulli brackets out the particular Cambodian conditions which led to those circumstances – a history of anti-democratic and arbitrary police measures under the French, Sihanouk's dictatorial regime, Lon Nol's military justice, and the exile or disappearance of nearly all legally trained personnel by 1979; in addition to which the PRK has had to operate under wartime conditions, a circumstance which usually leads to suspension of legal and human rights anywhere in the world.<sup>538</sup>

Probably the years 1984-85, the period with which Luciulli is familiar, were the worst. Since then the PRK itself has become concerned about the defects of its legal and police systems, and has made significant efforts to remedy the defects, something which Luciulli's sources among the KPNLF and Sihanoukists would not have told her.

But even when telling the truth, *grosso modo*, Luciulli does not help her case by quoting a named informant who told her stories quite different from what he reported to the Lawyers' Committee for Human Rights. Sim Samith, a hospital medical worker, claimed to Luciulli that he was beaten to make him reveal subversive meetings he had attended and contacts with foreigners (218-9), while he had told the Lawyers that he had been arrested for allegedly giving treatment to enemy soldiers in the PRK government hospital in which he worked, a quite implausible story, and that he had not been tortured.<sup>539</sup>

Luciulli and Crochet speak as neo-colonialists in denying Cambodia the right to decide on admission of foreign organizations and to define the scope of their activities, and in her horror that the PRK did not at least allow foreign NGOs to take over Cambodia's educational and health services. In this she seems to have been encouraged by border-camp francophile FUNCINPEC-ists, from whom much of Luciulli's, at least, information was derived.

In 1990 I found another opportunity for a positive contribution defending the PRK against the charges of deculturalization and forced Vietnamization spread by Luciulli. The following article appeared in the journal *Cultural Survival Quarterly*.

### Cultural survival in language and literature in the State of Cambodia (1990)<sup>540</sup>

The Khmer language enjoys the longest actively flourishing written record of any Southeast Asian language; in hundreds of stone inscriptions from the 7th to

<sup>538</sup> Such as, since 2001, Guantanamo Bay, Abu Ghraib, extraordinary rendition, etc.

<sup>539</sup> Lawyers' Committee for Human Rights, *Kampuchea: After the Worst*, New York 1985, pp. 43, 100, 128. See above, p.285, 'Sameth Sim'.

<sup>540</sup> Michael Vickery, *Cultural Survival Quarterly*, Volume 14, Number 3 (1990), pp. 49-52.

early 14th centuries, more inscriptions during the 16th-18th centuries, and then written works in all genres in the 19th-20th centuries.<sup>541</sup>

Most of the content of the inscriptions is political, administrative and economic, not literary, and works of literature that can be dated earlier than the 19th century are extremely rare. A history of the language, however, is there whatever the subject matter.

Even though they could no longer read the old inscriptions, Cambodians have always been conscious that they had a long written tradition, to the extent that language came to epitomize national life and culture. Any perceived or imagined threat to Khmer language was a threat to the very roots of their Khmer existence. Although arising in a very different milieu, Khmer language romanticism is very much like that of Eastern Europe.

The school system established by the French emphasized the language of the colonizers. French instruction began in primary school, all higher secondary [*Lycée*] education was in French; and Khmerization of education was a constant demand of nationalists from the 1940s.

Perhaps the first modern urban protest movement against the French occurred in 1943 when their attempt to impose romanization on written Khmer met mass passive resistance and had to be abandoned, and the first modern political movement under So'n Ngoc Thanh gave prominence to the language issue in its newspaper *Nagaravatta* ('Angkor Wat'), the first independent Khmer-language newspaper, which appeared between 1936 and 1942.

Nevertheless, French education was so effective among the elite that many of them could not express themselves with equal facility in Khmer, and even after the administration had been officially Khmerized in the 1960s many official documents were circulated in French, or at least first composed in French and then translated. French was still essential for a successful administrative career above the lowest levels, and in fact represented a barrier against individuals of poor or rural origins who had been unable to acquire it.<sup>542</sup>

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<sup>541</sup> There are short inscriptions in Cham, Mon, and Pyu from before the 7th century, but the extant written record of those languages is poor compared to Khmer. The earliest record of Javanese is from the 8th century, Burmese from the 12th, Vietnamese from the 13th, and Thai from the 13th or 14th.

<sup>542</sup> Nevertheless, as a few nationalists recognized, a too hasty indigenization of the language of instruction in high schools and universities would also work to the disadvantage of the lower classes, and permit traditional elites to maintain a stranglehold on the upper levels of state service, or in any field where communication with the outside world was required, because their children would acquire the necessary foreign languages through private instruction. A good example is Malaysia where the language of instruction in high schools and universities was changed very quickly during 1975-76 from English to Malay, but where English is still essential for top positions both in the public and private sectors.

Traditional literature, apart from works of a mainly religious or didactic nature, took the form of long romances in verse recounting the adventures of royalty and high officials, with a strong admixture of the supernatural. Often they were adaptations of themes current also in Thai (or perhaps the Thai adapted them from the Khmer), and some were local versions of originally Indian tales like the *Ramayana*, the Khmer version of which, *Reamker*, may be the oldest extant Khmer literary work, ascribed to the 17th century.

Perhaps the most widely read of these verse tales, however, is the one which was thoroughly permeated with realism, *Tum Teav*, of which there are different versions composed in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. With powerful language it interweaves the very modern themes of passionate love, and moreover between a young monk and a girl of the rural elite, parental ambition and greed, official brutality, royal arbitrariness, and, as in all Khmer classical literature, Buddhist ideas of fatality.

Because of the morally ambiguous nature of royalty and officialdom which it portrays, *Tum Teav* in the 1950s and 1960s became a vehicle for progressive commentaries which were taken by Sihanouk to be anti-royalist, and by the mid-1960s any article featuring this classic was guaranteed to bring on closure of the offending newspaper, if not also prosecution of the writers.

After World War II, along with the various groups working for independence, there emerged a lively coterie of new prose writers offering short stories and novels on contemporary social themes, although occasionally set in traditional, even medieval surroundings.

In general their social positions were modernizing and their political views 'progressive', which although tolerated, sometimes even admired, by the French in Cambodia, proved to be too strong for Sihanouk; after independence in 1953-54 and the consolidation of Sihanouk's power in 1955 official displeasure, even censorship and harassment, contributed to a gradual decline in the quality of contemporary literary production.<sup>543</sup>

There was a brief revival during the first year of the Lon Nol regime after Sihanouk's overthrow, but then the adoption by Lon Nol of similar dictatorial tendencies combined with the tensions inherent in Phnom Penh's wartime situation was not conducive to intellectual production. And after the war ended in 1975 there were four years in which all literary activity, and even most basic schooling, was curtailed.

After the near-total interruption of education, publication and literacy under DK (1975-1979), schooling had to start again from zero; from the beginning noteworthy attention has been given to the revival and development of Khmer language and literature, both within the new school system, and in the press. This

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<sup>543</sup> For a sympathetic French survey of contemporary Khmer literature in the 1940s-1950s, see Pierre Bitard, "La littérature cambodgienne moderne", *France-Asie, Présence du Cambodge*, no. 114-115, Nov-Dec 1955, pp. 467-482.



concern with the national language, which is also the mother tongue of the overwhelming majority of the population, continues the linguistic theme within Khmer nationalism before 1970, and the PRK (SOC) leaders, in their language policy, are true heirs of those predecessors.

Because of the sensitivity of language for the Khmer, in the conditions prevailing right after the change of regime in 1979 it was an area in which particularly pernicious disinformation could be spread. Displaced or exiled Khmer were all too ready to believe the worst, and it was very difficult for non-Khmer outsiders to check on rumor and fact. The enemies of the PRK eagerly informed the world that the new government under Vietnamese influence was trying to wipe out Khmer culture and replace that language with Vietnamese.

As late as 1986, when there was no lack of evidence that it was patently untrue, Elizabeth Becker still claimed that “Vietnamese is becoming the second language in government offices”, and two years later Esmeralda Lucioli was asserting that foreign language instruction was generally limited to Vietnamese.<sup>544</sup>

Even when Vietnamese influence was not emphasized there were assertions that true Khmer was losing out to a Pol Pot jargon which did not represent the genuine language and was hardly comprehensible. Elizabeth Becker was led by her informants to believe that the Tuol Sleng prison records were written in a ‘Khmer Rouge’ language the translation of which “is nearly impossible for most Cambodians”, for “it requires a knowledge of the new vocabulary introduced by the Khmer Rouge once they came to power ... and phrases the Khmer Rouge used among themselves”.<sup>545</sup>

This ‘communist’ Khmer had allegedly been adopted by the PRK, and was adulterating and supplanting the pure pre-revolutionary Khmer.<sup>546</sup> In fact, the Tuol Sleng documents are written in straightforward Khmer which any literate Cambodian can understand, with some new vocabulary for political concepts which were not current outside of leftist circles before 1975, but which everyone who lived through the DK period learned.

The deficiencies faced in 1979 included dilapidated buildings and missing books, but the most serious was lack of teachers, for of the approximately 25,000 active before 1975 only about 7000 reappeared in 1979, and in 1984 only 5000 of those worked for the Ministry of Education.

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<sup>544</sup> Becker, *When the War Was Over* (first edition), p. 444. Becker, second edition, pp. 508-517, dropped the anti-Vietnamese distortions and treated SOC more favorably; Esmeralda Lucioli, *Le mur de bambou*, Paris 1988, p. 199.

<sup>545</sup> Becker, op. cit., p. 539.

<sup>546</sup> According to Lucioli, “reading texts are ‘adapted’ to socialism”, the vocabulary of the old regimes of Lon Nol and Sihanouk is banned in favor of revolutionary language, and teachers must use the official terms, the same as under the Khmer Rouge” (198)

Since 1979 the Ministry of Education has been in the hands of professional teachers, trained before 1970, and who were not associated before 1979 with any revolutionary faction. By 1984 new primary teachers had been trained in adequate numbers, and school enrollment was comparable to the best pre-war years.

Tertiary education has been limited. Of previously existing institutions, the Faculty of Medicine and Pharmacy was reopened at the end of 1979, and the Kampuchea-Soviet Technological Institute in 1981. Other branches which combine secondary and tertiary level training are teacher training institutions and the Language School, where instruction was provided for interpreters and students going abroad in Russian, German, Spanish, and Vietnamese, and since 1989 in English and French. Until 1988 all other tertiary education depended on sending students abroad and several thousand have been sent since 1979, most to the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe.

The school syllabus is quite traditional, with more time devoted to Khmer language and literature than previously, with no foreign language instruction below high school.

The last point requires emphasis because of the persistent propaganda about Vietnamization of Cambodian schools and the imposition of that language on Khmer students. Information elicited at all levels in visits to Cambodia in 1981, 1984, 1986, and 1988, from Education Minister Pen Navuth, to school teachers at work, and in private from students and parents met in chance encounters, confirmed the total falsity of this charge.<sup>547</sup>

The secondary level syllabus, as would be expected, calls for 4 hours of foreign language instruction per week, in Russian, German, or Vietnamese, in that order, but before 1986 it had not been implemented because of lack of teachers.

As in all cultures linguistic changes have occurred over time, and in Cambodia they were perhaps accelerated by the social and political upheavals of the 1970s. One change which has carried over from Democratic Kampuchea to the PRK, and which was also noticeable among refugees in Thailand, is the nearly universal substitution of simple verbs of action for a panoply of socially graded terms, such as the adoption of a term for 'eat' which used to be considered rude in place of separate verbs for eating by higher or lower class adults, children, or animals.

In this respect Khmer now resembles western languages such as English. In spite of its DK background, this development seems to have found its own roots among the post-DK population, and the former gradations are unlikely to be widely readopted, except for terms referring to Buddhist monks.

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<sup>547</sup> Also confirmed by information elicited from refugees in previous years. See Michael Vickery, *Cambodia 1975-1982*, pp. 232-233.

A new political vocabulary is developing, however, and in part it reflects another interesting linguistic change grounded in a deliberate policy set in motion by pre-1970 intellectual leaders. It requires a certain amount of re-education for older generations, and its origin has been wrongly attributed to Democratic Kampuchea, but in fact it has a solid nationalist pedigree and represents a type of re-Khmerization after centuries of gradual modification under the influence of neighboring languages, in particular Thai.

The new policy is the insistent and emphatic use of the common Khmer and Mon-Khmer procedure of infixation, insertion of elements in the middle of words, in order to expand meanings or form one category of term from another, such as nouns from verbs. A simple example is *kit* ‘to think’, *komnit* ‘thought’ (noun).

Probably the best-known new example of the procedure is the term for ‘report’ (noun), which rapidly achieved wide currency during the DK years. The old term was *sechkdei reayka*, literally ‘matter [of/for] to report’; while the new term is *robayka*, with insertion of the infix *b*.

In the current press there are literally dozens, perhaps scores or hundreds of newly infixed terms, some of them disconcerting at first sight, but the practice is not of ‘Pol Potist’, or even leftist, inspiration, but began in the 1960s as a means of enriching the language and providing new terms for an educational system which was just beginning to adopt Khmer in place of French for all subjects.

As described by the best-known Cambodian linguist, Saveros Lewitz [Pou], the grammatical procedure of infixation always remained part of the living Khmer language, even though it was not favored by Cambodian scholars strongly influenced by Pali studies or French, and was denied as a still active procedure by several foreign linguists.<sup>548</sup>

As Lewitz insisted, and as I can attest from my own experience in learning Khmer in a Cambodian milieu, infixation has always been a living aspect of the language. In 1967 it was given new intellectual emphasis when “it was decided to extend the [official] use of Cambodian beyond administrative affairs and make it the general language of education”, in place of French which until then had dominated most secondary education, and played a considerable role in primary.<sup>549</sup>

A committee was established to “systematize the creation of new words”, and the results were published in a new journal called *Khemarayeanakam*, which means literally ‘making the Khmer language a vehicle’. As Lewitz wrote, the committee, dominated by younger Khmer nationalist intellectuals, favored native Khmer linguistic procedures, in particular infixation, to form new terms for

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<sup>548</sup> Saveros Lewitz, “Note sur la dérivation par affixation en khmer moderne (Cambodgien)”, *Revue de l’École Nationale des Langues Orientales*, volume 5 (1968), pp. 117-127.

<sup>549</sup> Lewitz, p. 121.

subjects, such as sciences and mathematics, which had never been taught in Khmer, instead of terms based on Sanskrit or Pali, “which had always been the case”.<sup>550</sup>

Of course the new political terminology which was developing in politically conscious circles in the 1960s, and which was continued under DK, also followed these procedures; and the ideals of *Khemarayanakam*, under the direction of some of its original participants, have been incorporated in the PRK educational system.<sup>551</sup>

With respect to Khmer language, then, state policy within Cambodia has been a continuation of Khmer nationalist trends begun in the 1960s, and the Ministry of Education is under the supervision of some of the people active in the movement before 1970. In addition to Minister of Education Pen Navuth, another prominent pedagogue is Sar Kapoun, author of a popular novel of the 1950s, *Dechu kraham*, ‘The Red Dechu’ [a traditional rank title], which dealt with a nationalist theme in a medieval setting.

The literature textbooks which I have seen for grades 5-8 suggest that the classical verse romances are not being emphasized, no doubt because of their royalist bias and emphasis on the supernatural, although other types of verse are well represented. Among the traditional genres much attention is given to ‘folk’ literature, particularly the corpus known as “Ancient Tales”, with emphasis on their social content,<sup>552</sup> and the collections known as *Cbap*, compilations of moral instructions, are also featured. As would be expected, *Tum Teav* has been reprinted, and teachers will be free to draw anti-royal inferences from it without hindrance.

Since the textbooks on which I have based these remarks were published when the PRK was still insisting on its goal of eventual socialism, the moral and social lessons drawn from literature tended to emphasize class struggle, and the victory of workers and peasants over capitalists, bourgeois, and feudalists. And of course problems of class inequality, conflict and injustice were ever present in the lives of Cambodian writers of whatever epoch.

The explicit lesson of much of the old literature, however, was the futility of struggling against fate, determined in the Buddhist manner as the accumulation

<sup>550</sup> Lewitz, p. 122.

<sup>551</sup> I was first apprised of the de facto continuation of *Khemarayanakam* in the PRK, and of the identities of some of the personnel involved, by Dr. Ea Meng Try, a Cambodian pedagogue, former journalist and political activist, who now lives in Australia [and now, 2008, for several years, in Cambodia He is not the Ea Meng Try who has been active with DCCam (Documentation Center Cambodia) and the Khmer Rouge tribunal]. Dr. Meng Try also pointed out that the new Khmer grammar textbooks produced for PRK schools continue the pedagogical trends established in the 1960s.

<sup>552</sup> For an interesting treatment of some of these stories see Chandler, “Songs at the Edge of the Forest”, cited above, note 16.

of merit or non-merit in this and previous lives. One should accommodate to an invidious class position, not struggle against it; and the PRK project of using such works to encourage a spirit of class struggle and socialist progress would seem to represent a kind of deconstruction. It should perhaps be remarked that to the extent foreign socialist influence appears in these textbooks it is more Soviet and East European than Vietnamese.<sup>553</sup>

In addition to formal education in Khmer language and literature, the press plays an important role in the dissemination of new vocabulary, and as a vehicle for encouraging new writers.

Four Khmer-language newspapers are published in Cambodia: *Kampuchea*, organ of the Solidarity Front for Construction and Defence of the Motherland, and *Kong toap padivat* ('Revolutionary Army') both began in 1979; *Phnom Penh*, published by the Phnom Penh municipality, first appeared in 1980; and the Peoples Revolutionary Party has issued its own newspaper *Pracheachon* since October 1985. All of them began as weeklies. *Kampuchea* and *Revolutionary Army* have maintained that schedule, the former with a 16-page tabloid format; *Phnom Penh* increased to twice weekly in 1986, and *Pracheachon* to thrice weekly, but each with 4 pages only.

The important newspaper, in terms of general culture and language, is *Kampuchea*, under its energetic editor Khieu Kanharit, one of the pre-war intellectuals now prominent in Cambodia. Most issues contain an ongoing serial novel or short story by a local author, a Khmer translation of some contemporary foreign novel, and a page of poetry sent in by readers.

There are also frequent articles of general, not political, interest about Cambodia – the temples at Angkor, the non-Khmer tribal areas in the northeast, and descriptions of daily life, development of schools, living conditions in provinces distant from Phnom Penh, most written by Khieu Kanharit after his own visits to the areas concerned. If the army and party papers are mainly of interest to people concerned with military affairs and politics, *Kampuchea* quite literally has something for everyone, encouraging interest in reading while acquainting the readers with new technical and intellectual vocabulary which many of them may not have encountered in pre-1970 schools.

Although foreign languages were not introduced into schools until after 1986, they are essential in any small country such as Cambodia with a language not known elsewhere. The choices of foreign language for school instruction have been in relation to those countries which are politically important for the PRK, and also those which have provided aid in its development, including aid for the reconstruction of the educational system. This meant at first Russian and

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<sup>553</sup> These observations on PRK literature textbooks should be considered provisional, because the examples in my possession are few, policies may be changing rapidly, and because until asked to prepare this survey I had not devoted much attention to that aspect of PRK policies.

Vietnamese, although German and Spanish were also officially in the syllabus from the beginning.

Vietnamese educational aid was particularly important in teacher training and in the Medical Faculty, because of the common French language which the older generation of Vietnamese pedagogues and doctors shared with surviving Khmer teachers and medical students, and Vietnamese influence in the Medical School was apparently crucial in reorienting Cambodian medicine in accordance with modern principles.<sup>554</sup>

In the first years after 1979 all textbook printing had to be done in Viet Nam because there were no functioning presses in Cambodia.

Beginning in 1989 English and French were added to the official curriculum, although private instruction had been tolerated and even tacitly encouraged for years. Probably now these languages will be the most popular, but will not again assume the dominant role of French before 1970. The policies followed since 1979 have insured that Khmer will be dominant in all areas of intellectual and administrative activity, with foreign languages, whether European or Asian, serving as tools for relations with the outside world, not as an inter-class barrier within Cambodian society.

Of greater influence than *Le mur de bambou*, at least in Southeast Asia, was Lucioli's summary of her arguments in issue No. 15 (April-June 1988) of the Singapore *Indochina Report*, a journal meriting special treatment in itself.<sup>555</sup>

This was then quoted approvingly in "The Vietnamization of Kampuchea", *Bangkok Post*, 8 November 1988, by Alan Dawson, who, in contrast to his clear-eyed treatment of propagandists a few years earlier (see p.222 on Nguyen Quan), had, by 1988, joined them. I did offer an immediate answer to that, dated 12 November 1988, but the *Post* ignored it. Here it is.

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<sup>554</sup> See Andrea Panaritis, 'Cambodia: The Rough Road to Recovery', *Indochina Issues*, April 1985, particularly pp. 2-3. Here again Lucioli, *Mur de bambou*, p. 199, manages to disinform, claiming that the Vietnamese had tried to enforce the use of their language in the Medical School, and that French was only permitted after 1985

<sup>555</sup> The full title of Lucioli's article in *Indochina Report* was "Daily Life in Cambodia: A Personal Account", and its Part II, pp. 6-15 was "Vietnamisation Process". I wish to thank my colleague, Ramses Amer, for locating this article for me. See further below.

### The Lion of Lucy's Tiger (1988) <sup>556</sup>

The Lion of Lucy's Tiger Den roars again. If I didn't know that Esmeralda Luciulli and *Indochina Report* were real, I would have imagined that Dawson had been the victim of some special variety of Lucy's Tiger Balm, perhaps administered in the guise of hemorrhoid ointment.

If the international press did not immediately take up a story on Vietnamization of Kampuchea from *Indochina Report*, a "think tank" in Singapore, as Alan complained, there are good reasons. It is a mysterious occasional publication, and the shadowy 'tank' which thinks it up tries to make a respectable reputation by imitating the name of a real Singaporean institution, whose personnel are embarrassed when confronted with it. At least this time it has published something by an identifiable author, which has not always been true in the past. <sup>557</sup>

By now the international academic and journalistic communities know that publication in that *Indochina Report* is an indication of disinformation.

But the details. First one of Alan's own – "The Vietnamese must share the blame [for the Khmer Rouge problem] by mounting a 'rescue invasion' which seemed to ignore destruction of the KR establishment as a target". This is untrue. The KR establishment fled faster than the Vietnamese could catch them. As a group they were destroyed, but were rescued and rehabilitated by the joint efforts

<sup>556</sup> Michael Vickery, unpublished letter to the *Bangkok Post*, 12 November 1988. All footnotes and a final comment were added later. Lucy's Tiger Den was a bar in Bangkok's Patpong Road which Dawson in earlier columns had occasionally named as his watering hole.

<sup>557</sup> See note 389 above. A relevant example is their "Pre-Publication Issue", October 1984, consisting of a single anonymous article also entitled "The Vietnamisation of Kampuchea", subtitle "A New Model of Colonialism". This should not be confused with Luciulli's publication. Other articles on the same topic were No.3 (July-September 1985), "The Military Occupation of Kampuchea", attributed to "a team of analysts led by a prominent journalist based in Bangkok", and No. 7 (July-Sept 1986), "Vietnamised Cambodia. A Silent Ethnocide", by Marie Alexandrine Martin.

Like the Amnesty International reports during the 1980s (see above, pp. 279 ff.), the October 1984 issue at least was produced for the specific purpose of influencing a UN vote, and was described by Thailand's current (1998) Foreign Minister, Surin Pitsuwan in "The Report that forestalled Vietnam's ruse at the UN", *Bangkok Post*, 10 December 1984, p. 4. Before the UN debate on Cambodia that year, ASEAN diplomats, especially Singapore's Kishore Mahbubani, wished to counter Vietnam's "whispers and rumours of peace ... intended to deceive international opinion". They received 'unexpected' support "by the appearance of an unusual document known as the *Indochina Report* published by a private research group in Singapore", which Mr. Surin went on to summarize and praise.

of the USA, Thailand, and China. Without that rescue intervention there would be no KR problem today.<sup>558</sup>

As for Luciulli's story, I have not yet seen that issue of *Indochina Report*, and I rely on Dawson. Although Luciulli spent much time in Cambodia, her stories are not based on what she saw there, but what she has chosen to say in support of the coalition against Phnom Penh.

She did **not see**, as cited by Dawson, that Vietnamese advisers are in charge "throughout the country ... always"; she did **not see** that Vietnamese dominate all of economic life; she did **not observe** a shortage of fish, nor of good farm land to blame on Vietnamese; and the danger of Vietnamization of education and culture is so unobservable that such a tale could be printed only in *Indochina Report*. That canard has been too thoroughly demolished to get space anywhere else, except of course from the Guru of Lucy's.

If "Vietnamese language instruction is encouraged", then even in the propaganda-speak of Luciulli's mentors Vietnamization has decreased from a few years ago when they were claiming that instruction of Vietnamese was compulsory in Cambodian schools; and if learning the language of a neighboring country is encouraged, the policy is identical to that followed by every country in Western Europe, though unfortunately not by Southeast Asian nations.

Another lie is that 'capitalist' languages are frowned upon. They were not discouraged even when all instruction in them was limited to small-scale private tuition, before official instruction began in 1985.

As for the "not easily reversible" changes of the past 10 years which trouble Luciulli and Dawson, I should hope that only the Khmer Rouge leadership would like to reverse them.

Dawson also quoted Luciulli as predicting, "It is doubtful that Hanoi, even after a withdrawal of its troops, would accept a relatively independent neighbor on its western border", a prediction which has been contradicted by events.<sup>559</sup>

A few months later I managed to have an alternative view of the situation in Cambodia published in the other Bangkok English-language newspaper, *The Nation*.

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<sup>558</sup> The unexpected speed of the KR retreat and the Vietnamese advance was noted in Timothy Carney's presentation to the 1982 Princeton conference ("The Heng Samrin Armed Forces and the Military Balance in Cambodia", in *The Cambodian Agony*, pp. 180-212.); see Sihanouk's comments on destruction and revival of the KR in T.D. Allman, "Sihanouk's Sideshow", *Vanity Fair* (April 1990, pp. 151-60, 226-34), pp. 158-9, "In 1979 and 1980 ... I begged your government [the US] not to support the Khmer Rouge"; "To save Cambodia, all you [westerners] had to do was to let Pol Pot die", in 1979 "Pol Pot was dying and you brought him back to life".

<sup>559</sup> This last comment, obviously, has been added since the Vietnamese left Cambodia in 1989, and fully accepted the results of the UNTAC intervention and election in 1993.



### Recent Progress in Cambodia (1989)<sup>560</sup>

While attention has been focused on the international aspects of the Cambodia problem, equally interesting developments have been underway within the Peoples Republic of Kampuchea (PRK). An item in the Phnom Penh newspaper *Kampuchea*, no. 462 of 28 July 1988, may serve as an illustration.

On page 11, well down on a list of 61 lawsuits reported as pending in the courts is the case of a lady, who was named, filing suit against the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and a certain ambassador, who was not named, for having dismissed her from employment.<sup>561</sup>

Such an item in almost any country would excite curiosity about the precise circumstances, and a bit of questioning in Phnom Penh at the end of November revealed that it had indeed been a case in which ‘moral transgression’ was involved, probably in a Kampuchean embassy abroad, and the lady had been transferred to another state agency.

One of the traits which the PRK has inherited from its immediate predecessor, but not one of those sometimes wrongfully ascribed to it by the propagandists who have tried to assimilate the PRK leadership to that of Democratic Kampuchea (DK), is a degree of puritanism much stronger than prevalent before 1975.

Unlike punishment in such cases under Pol Pot, which was equivalent for both parties, and so far as can be determined was sometimes death, in the PRK nothing more severe than transfer to a less desirable post is imposed, but apparently only on female cadres, with the males going free, and not even named in the ensuing publicity.

Such is standard practice in Southeast Asia’s capitalist states, and is an unanticipated example of the PRK adhering to international norms, but I was informed by a former colleague of the woman that in meetings of their organizations Cambodian women are now protesting, and insisting that if such behavior is to be punished, both parties should be punished equally. Here is a new cause for western feminists – equal punishment, or equal rights, for extra-marital relationships in Kampuchea.

The 61 cases listed by *Kampuchea* range from the trivial, civil suits for libel and fraud, to the very serious – murder and torture by police agents. Included are

<sup>560</sup> Michael Vickery, published in *The Nation* as (part 1) “Cambodia Laying Some Groundwork”, 5 Feb 1989, and (part 2) “Economic Headway in Cambodia”, 12 Feb 1989.

<sup>561</sup> The distribution of these cases by year was: 1984-3, 1985-5, 1986-10, 1987-26, 1988-17 (up to July). In comparison with the capitalist countries of Southeast Asia, where accused often sit years in jail waiting for their cases to reach court, this is quite a commendable record. I cannot imagine a newspaper in Malaysia, Singapore, or Thailand complaining, or even considering it as a matter for complaint, that suits brought only in the current or preceding year had not yet been settled.

several cases of murder, rape, physical abuse, and non-payment of debts. One was a complaint by an individual against the police and provincial court of Kandal for having released 3 alleged murderers. It is clear that courts in the PRK are functioning according to laws, and that individuals willingly enter into litigation, even bringing charges against state organs.

The mere fact of such suits being brought in court, and reported in the press, illustrates a firm intention by the PRK to establish rule of law. It also counters the charges made by certain organizations that human rights are widely abused and judicial procedures neglected. Moreover, the *Kampuchea* article was an implicit complaint against the authorities that the cases had been 'stuck' in the courts too long, and was an example itself of increasing openness in the society.

When the PRK came to power in 1979 there were severe objective impediments to realization of rule of law. These included penury of surviving legally-trained personnel, destruction of archives and legal documentation, total absence of formal courts and legality under DK, preceded by neglect of such during the 1975-1979 war, and even in the best of times before 1970, police traditions which ignored such niceties as rights of the accused.

Added to this was the lack of any administrative infrastructure in 1979, a situation of anarchic population movement and disorganization, and increasing militarization to counter the threat of the rearmed DK and their allies on the Thai border. This situation inevitably gave rise to instances of rough military justice for malefactors, real or suspected, and it provided welcome ammunition for organizations ill-disposed to the PRK.

In a series of publications the New York-based Lawyers' Committee for International Human Rights (1984 and 1985), followed by Amnesty International (1986, 1987, 1988), have variously claimed that there was no law in the PRK, that this was the fault of Vietnamese control, that there were hundreds of systematic violations of human rights while listing few specifically, that few accused ever received trial, that complaints against abuses by authorities were not entertained, and that court cases were not reported in the media, indicating that trials were not being held.

As PRK officials willingly admit, legality in the first years was below the desired standard and police practices were not beyond reproach, but the promulgation of new laws, rapid training of new court officers and legal personnel, and insistence on implementation of the new regulations by police, all lend credence to the PRK authorities' claim that normal international legal standards are being reached.

The last formal step was the promulgation in early 1986 of a new detailed Decree-Law no. 27, which establishes procedures to be followed in arrest, detention, indictment, and search of person or domicile, which on paper provides

guarantees at least equivalent to those prevailing in Southeast Asian capitalist countries which enjoy international recognition.<sup>562</sup>

The list of cases published by *Kampuchea* shows that the provisions of Decree-Law 27 are being applied, and one plaintiff charged specifically that he had been arrested in circumstances which violated that law. Likewise in accordance with Decree-Law no. 27, three provincial or district police chiefs, I was informed, in Kompong Speu, Pursat, and Kandal have been dismissed and punished for physical abuse of prisoners.

In the last case the accused was tried before an open court with loudspeakers outside for people who could not fit into the courtroom, and was found guilty of torturing 9 prisoners and sentenced to 15 years imprisonment. Moreover, with each successive effort the Lawyers' Committee and Amnesty have been forced to back away from parts of their previous accusations.

By 1986 most of the specific instances of violations which could be cited dated to before 1985; in their last effort Amnesty International was forced to call people caught giving aid to the enemy in wartime 'political prisoners', and through lack of sufficient new cases, had to devote most of their attention to hypothetical situations in which human rights violations might occur, or to supposed defects in the organization of the PRK judicial system, not in themselves matters of proper concern to Amnesty (see pp. 297 ff.)

This improvement is confirmed by the files of another well-informed foreign group whose professional concern is with refugees, human rights, and the status of non-combatants in wartime, which seem to indicate that recent defectors across the border to Thailand are in general only able to provide stories of human rights violations before 1985.<sup>563</sup>

One legal area in which progress has been intriguingly slow is family and marriage, for which a law still has not been passed, although said to be imminent on each of my last visits in 1984, 1986, and in November this year (1988). Unofficial comment holds that it is the very question raised by the dismissed Foreign Affairs lady, equality of the sexes, which is difficult to resolve.

Before 1975 women, in law, were subordinate to their husbands, for whom polygamy was permitted and who were favored in divorce proceedings. Some women refused to have their marriages registered, because in local custom, contrary to the French-imposed law followed by the Sihanouk and Lon Nol regimes, a woman could divorce her husband at will. Now that post-Pol Pot demographic pressure, as well as socialist ideology, have pushed large numbers

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<sup>562</sup> English translation of the law by Michael Vickery, "Criminal Law in the Peoples Republic of Kampuchea", *JCA*, Vol. 17, No. 4 (1987), 508-518.

<sup>563</sup> This organization insisted that they not be named, in order to maintain their official position of neutrality.

of women into responsible official and managerial positions, they are unlikely to accept again any of the pre-1975 legal disadvantages.<sup>564</sup>

Another case among the 61 concerns the *Sereipheap* ('Liberty') restaurant which started operation in 1981 as a private, or semi-private, enterprise, and became very successful, in particular as the restaurant favored by the foreign community of diplomatic and aid personnel. Suddenly in 1985 it was closed by the authorities, but soon reopened as a state enterprise. It still prospers and is still popular with the foreign community, but faces increasing competition.

According to its present manager, conflict had arisen over demands for taxes from the *Sereipheap*, whose owner claimed his agreement with the state exempted him from taxation. His refusal to pay was answered with confiscation by the city government, but he no more accepted expropriation than would a businessman in a capitalist country, and has taken the Phnom Penh municipality to court.<sup>565</sup>

Although much small private enterprise was tolerated from 1979, in 1985 a private sector was formally legalized to encourage those with accumulated wealth to invest in productive activities, particularly in small-scale manufacture.

Two factories which I visited transform scrap metal into household utensils, and employ over 50 workers, paying them up to 5000 riel, 10 times the highest state salary. The owners appear satisfied with business conditions, although one complained bitterly about electricity failures which forced him to occasionally stop work. He said he had set up shop in 1979, and on his office wall were certificates of achievement from 1982, three years before such enterprises were strictly legal.<sup>566</sup>

In the state industrial sector some degree of decentralization has been introduced in planning and finance. At the Kompong Cham textile factory, originally built by Chinese aid in the 1960s, I was told that they plan their own annual output rather than receiving quotas from the state, and the managers of the Chhup rubber plantation and processing plant said they are now responsible for their own budgetary planning, although they still sell their entire output to

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<sup>564</sup> Contrary to my prognosis here, the UNTAC intervention in 1992-1993 with its enforced capitalist free-market society, and the reintroduction of contra political parties with reactionary social attitudes which ensued, brought to an end the progress in the situation of women seen under the PRK, until by the end of the 1990s it appeared that they might again be placed in the same situation as before 1975. In the last decade (1997-2007), however, young women have increasingly sought higher education in the new private educational institutions, are moving into work in offices, businesses, hotels, etc., and maintain increasingly independent lifestyles, including in the choice of husbands.

<sup>565</sup> This section of the text was also published as "The rule of Law in Cambodia", *Cultural Survival Quarterly*, Volume 14, Number 3 (1990), pp.82-83.

<sup>566</sup> This new indigenous grass-roots enterprise was destroyed after the international capitalist intervention along with UNTAC in 1992-1993, which opened the way for foreign capital, mostly from the Asian capitalist countries, to overwhelm Cambodia.

Kampexim, the state export-import organization, which exchanges most of it with the Soviet Union for diesel oil.

In another type of decentralization the two southwest coastal provinces, Koh Kong and Kompong Som, have been authorized to trade independently with Thailand and Singapore, which may in fact mean simply legalization of an already existing situation. Through this type of trade it seems Cambodia is becoming a middleman in the import of automobiles and other luxuries from the West to Vietnam.

According to government spokesmen, more economic freedom is planned, including laws regulating investment from overseas, first by Cambodians resident abroad, eventually by other foreigners. As with private factories, some overseas Cambodians are reportedly already investing, before it is strictly legal, in reconstruction of the huge riverfront Cambodiana Hotel, left uncompleted since 1970, and in the precious-stone mines in Pailin.

Certainly many groups of overseas Cambodian visitors are arriving to check out the situation for themselves, and money is easily transmitted from abroad to individuals through the banks at a rate close to the free market. Perhaps most significant symbolically is that the Central Market, state-run since 1979, is to be privatized early next year, in part because there was too little patronage by a population who preferred the greater variety of the private markets, in spite of the higher prices.

The relative success of PRK monetary policy, with the *riel* stable for the past 4 years, is no doubt confidence-inspiring for entrepreneurial Cambodians. To maintain this stability the government has gradually raised the official exchange rate to meet the free market, with the latest rise to 142= \$1 against 150-155 on the free market. This stability contrasts with Vietnam, and demonstrates an interesting degree of economic independence.

It is still impossible to ascertain the responsibility for the relatively successful economic planning. It should not be assumed that it was just the result of 'freedom'. Totally unplanned *laissez-faire* would have led to runaway inflation, gross class inequalities and mismanagement reminiscent of the Lon Nol years [as has occurred since the international intervention beginning in 1991].

In 1979 someone had to take a decision to allow measured market freedom, accompanied by a large degree of state ownership and strict control of public sector wages. In particular, as a measure against inflation, emission of the new *riel* currency introduced in 1980 had to be calculated and controlled, with continued careful planning year by year to prevent flooding the market with valueless paper. Planning Ministry officials have so far refused to divulge the nature of such planning or the identity of the planners, nor even where the currency is printed.

It may be assumed, however, that there were important inputs from both Viet Nam and the Soviet Union, and perhaps their reformers were able to experiment on the *tabula rasa* of post-Pol Pot Cambodia in ways which conservative

opposition inhibited in their own countries. Cambodia after 1979 had no body of entrenched cadre, old military, or sclerosed security apparatus to oppose measures which smacked of the heretical 'capitalist road'.

The combination of increased economic freedom and prosperity, greater access to justice, and more certain independence as the Vietnamese troops leave is producing an atmosphere of visibly cheerful confidence. There is no doubt in the minds of Cambodian citizens that the Vietnamese troops are leaving. While officially there is confidence that the PRK can defend itself; in private many people are worried, and count on international pressure to inhibit return of 'Pol Pot' who serves as a generic term for the tripartite Coalition.

Surprisingly there seemed to be near total disinterest in Sihanouk among all whom I met, from officials in formal interviews to ordinary people met alone and by chance, although I was told that among surviving aged traditionalists there was belief that Sihanouk's return would bring back the best days of the 1960s.

The new Cambodian confidence was reflected in Hun Sen's report to the nation, broadcast and published after his return from Paris on 20 November, taunting Sihanouk and Son San with being more concerned about Chinese opinion than the fate of the Cambodian people, and contrasting unfavorably Sihanouk's maneuvering for the internationally-supervised 1955 election after the First Indochina War with the conditions offered by the PRK to their opponents.

These conditions are cease-fire with the armed forces of all factions remaining in place, elections held under the auspices of the PRK and in the presence of international observers, then formation of a new mixed government in accordance with the election results.

There are however discomfiting signs that the legitimate confidence may crank up to the traditional unrealistic Khmer overconfidence. One official who should know better seemed to believe that with the Vietnamese soon gone Cambodia would be on the threshold of rapid economic takeoff based on hitherto unexploited mineral wealth and superior Khmer administrative and economic skills, evidenced by comparison of the Cambodian and Vietnamese economies over the past 10 years. Such unrealistic assessment of possibilities contributed significantly to the Lon Nol and Pol Pot disasters.

No major unexploited minerals are likely to be found, and the optimistic economic situation, relative to Vietnam, may be to a great extent the result of intelligent Vietnamese and Soviet aid policies and planning. The enthusiastic PRK officials are probably right that the PRK will not collapse when the Vietnamese are gone, and they may even have an army capable of defending most of

the country, but Cambodian progress, even in the best conditions, will inevitably be slow, and based on peasant agriculture and a few associated industries.<sup>567</sup>

The tasks of defence and reconstruction, however, should not be made more difficult by US and ASEAN support for the recognition and maintenance of the Khmer Rouge. As Peter Carey wrote, it is time for the West “to give substance to its statements on the ‘unacceptability’ of a Khmer Rouge return to power”.<sup>568</sup>

Among “practical steps” listed by Carey there is one which is striking by its absence: acceptance that a Khmer nationalist government sits in Phnom Penh with an administration covering nearly the entire country, a 10-year life span, and a better record than its opponents. From Carey’s article it is not clear that he is aware of this, for he finds it necessary to emphasize “Vietnam’s occupation of Cambodia”, and the “post-1979 Vietnamese order in Cambodia”.

The refusal to acknowledge the preeminence of the PRK, insistence on establishment of a new government of national unity and a “new Geneva conference” convened by a group of foreign powers with “the task of merging the existing ... Asean and French-sponsored peace processes”, and to result in “establishing Cambodia as a neutral state”, all without reference to the Cambodian government and people, are as dangerous to the peace process as the occupation of Cambodia’s UN seat by the Khmer Rouge.

Since no major press organs would take a detailed critique of Amnesty, their views went unchallenged and undoubtedly influenced significant segments of world opinion concerned with Cambodia. An example was an article published in 1990 by Ms. Sidney Jones of Asia Watch, an organization which, while criticizing human rights abuses, had a better record than Amnesty of sympathy for poor nations trying to rebuild.<sup>569</sup> Nevertheless, her article was also an illustration of the prevalent trend to turn everything about Cambodia into anti-PRK propaganda.

Ms. Jones mentioned me as the author of an article which “denounced” an Amnesty International report on Cambodia because “it played directly into the hands of the government’s opponents”. This was apparently hearsay on her part, for in the article in question I criticized Amnesty; not for the reason alleged, but because I considered Amnesty to be in error.<sup>570</sup>

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<sup>567</sup> Now (2007), however, it seems certain that Cambodia possesses offshore oil potential, and there is concern that the new wealth, as in some other countries, will be misused. Given the composition of Cambodian government and society since the UNTAC intervention in 1993, that is a real danger.

<sup>568</sup> *FEER*, 22 December 1988.

<sup>569</sup> Sidney Jones, “War and Human Rights in Cambodia”, *NYRB*, 19 July 1990, pp. 15, ff.

<sup>570</sup> Jones, note 6, in reference to my two-part article above, “Cambodia Laying Some Groundwork”, *The Nation* (Bangkok), 5 Feb 1989, and “Economic Headway in Cambodia”, *The Nation*, 12 Feb 1989.

Because of her reference to my work, I sent an answer to Ms. Jones' article to the *New York Review of Books* on 18 October of that year. What follows is abbreviated from the original. Ms Jones' positions are clear from my reactions.

### Reply to Sidney Jones / Asia Watch (1990) <sup>571</sup>

I was flattered to see my name mentioned as author of an article which "denounced" an Amnesty International report on Cambodia because "it played directly into the hands of the government's opponents". I did indeed criticize the Amnesty report, *Kampuchea: Political Imprisonment and Torture*; not for the reason alleged in Ms. Jones's article, but because I considered it to be in error (see pp. 289 ff.).

In my article which was cited, however, only one sentence was devoted to Amnesty International. Nearly the entire content concerned another matter mentioned by Ms. Jones, "a series of articles [in fact one main article] in the *Kampuchea Weekly* on how people were detained without trial for months at a time".

This would have been a more accurate and fair context in which to cite me, particularly since my article has been, so far as I can determine, the only press comment outside Cambodia (perhaps because the original material is in Khmer) on this first-hand and unbiased source relating to a subject in which Asia Watch claims to have a major interest.

I realize that intellectual honesty is not at a premium these days, but at least intellectuals, as most of Sidney Jones's team seem to be, could be expected to cite what a fellow 'academic' really wrote rather than what others may have said about it. The problem for Asia Watch was that the information about courts and trials which I cited, if read honestly, would not lend itself to the interpretation of a badly flawed judicial system.

Ms. Jones criticized alleged Cambodian official reluctance to provide human rights information. In contrast to Ms. Jones, and to most western observers, I do not find the Cambodian position surprising. Given the American record in Cambodia, no Cambodian regime owes any kind of accounting to any American institution or organization.

Nor should Cambodia, in the general context of Southeast Asia, including its capitalist countries, be singled out for opprobrium. If American human rights organizations want more cooperation from Cambodia, they should first pressure the US regime to clean up its act; until they do it is breathtakingly presumptuous to demand "frank discussion with [Cambodian] government officials of the problems of protecting human rights inside Cambodia".

Now for the factual errors, or questionable details, in Ms. Jones' text:

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<sup>571</sup> Michael Vickery, unpublished letter to *NYRB*, 18 October 1990.



(1) The “leeway” which should be allowed a government starting from scratch, which allegedly has “posed an ethical problem for human rights organizations”.

The two organizations whose reports I have seen, The Lawyers’ Committee for International Human Rights and Amnesty International, refused to allow any leeway at all, insisting that Cambodia should be judged by the same standards as prosperous western countries with fully developed legal systems, i.e., not even judged by Southeast Asian capitalist standards. Most western media comment adopts the same view, at least where the PRK/SOC is concerned.

Things are different for the other side. When UNBRO (United Nations Border Relief Operations – dominated by Americans) and the Catholic COERR assigned American lawyers to teach basic law in the camps of the Coalition Government on the Thai border, they explicitly recognized that considerable leeway had to be allowed. As one of the young American lawyers said, “Many of these things [police practices in the camps] fly in the face of what we believe about the law ... But ... we came here as a ‘liaison’. Who are we to challenge basic Khmer concepts of justice and fair play?”

Those ‘liaison’ lawyers are attempting to introduce a new code, “the backbone” of which is “an allowance for Khmer tradition ... ‘accordance with Khmer practice’”, for “We don’t want to force anything on the population here” – certainly not, at least, the standards which Amnesty International and Asia Watch think they are entitled to impose on Phnom Penh.<sup>572</sup>

(2) “The Khmer Rouge forces largely refused to accept international aid” after they took refuge on the Thai border in 1979. This is not true.

Since 1979 they received – and it was given overtly, publicly – enormous amounts of aid in the form of camps in which to live (the very first major camp, Sakeo, some 50 km inland from the border, was built expressly for the Khmer Rouge),<sup>573</sup> food, medicine, ‘non-lethal’ equipment, etc. What they refused to accept was “some access to their activities” by “Western observers”; and the western aid organizations, backed (in some cases pressured) by western governments, spinelessly caved in to Khmer Rouge conditions.

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<sup>572</sup> Tom Nagorski, “Wanted at Site 2: Law and Order”, *The Nation* (Bangkok), 9 June 1989, p. 25. After the formation of the post-election government in 1993 at least one of the lawyers quoted by Nagorski, Ken Bingham, moved, along with his students, to teach law in Phnom Penh under the auspices of Asia Foundation. The transparent purpose was to develop anti-government lawyers.

<sup>573</sup> See Michael Vickery, “Refugee Politics: The Khmer Camp system in Thailand”, pp. 305-6.

There have been rather reliable reports that the Khmer Rouge have even received direct US financing, and lethal equipment too, although this is more difficult to document.<sup>574</sup>

(3) U.S. support for the Khmer Rouge did not begin in 1982. The CIA obviously saw advantage in using them against Viet Nam earlier, perhaps as early as 1977.<sup>575</sup>

And it is not true that the Coalition formed in 1982 “was given Cambodia’s seat in the UN”. The Democratic Kampuchea representative had kept that seat continuously after 1979, and what happened in 1982 was US, Chinese, and ASEAN pressure on Sihanouk and Son Sann to join the Pol Pot group, and to accept that group’s continued occupation of the UN seat.

(4) The Amnesty Report. It is not true that “Since the Amnesty report was issued, the Phnom Penh government has formally outlawed torture ... and announced a number of legal reforms”. As I wrote three years ago, torture was outlawed in 1986, and important legal reforms were introduced then.<sup>576</sup>

(5) In answer to Ms. Jones positive comments on recent free market reforms, the listing of economic reforms “During late 1988 and 1989”, page 18, column 2, next-to-last paragraph, describes things already true as early as 1984, perhaps even 1981-2. Although there were further changes in 1988-1989, most of which appear to have been economically disastrous. As remarked by an Asian diplomat cited in the next column (of Ms Jones’ article), “liberalization of the regime ... had started in 1984”.

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<sup>574</sup> One piece of documentation which has never been properly followed up is noted in my “Cambodia (Kampuchea): History, Tragedy, and Uncertain Future”, *BCAS*, Twentieth Anniversary Issue on Indochina and the War, Vol. 21, Nos. 2-4 (April-December 1989), pp. 35-58 (see p. 35 and note 1, concerning a letter from Jonathan Winer, counsel to Senator John Kerry, about direct US aid to the Khmer Rouge.

Although soon after this letter was made public Winer refused further contact, and those uncomfortable with what he had said tried to deny his credibility, his Washington bona fides as a financial analyst are now supported by an *International Herald Tribune* article of 21 September 2001, p. 1, entitled “Bin Laden Money Trail: How America Stumbled”, citing Jonathan Winer, “who led the State Department’s international law enforcement efforts from 1994 to 1999” on the subject of *hawala* banking, an institution which has been revealed to the US public since the September 11 events (further on Winer see the 18 June 2001 *Nation* (New York) article “After Dirty Air, Dirty Money”, by Lucy Komisar, citing “Jonathan Winer, a former high-level crime-policy official in the Clinton State Department”).

For more detail from Winer’s letter see Vickery, *Cambodia: A Political Survey*, p. 35. See also Ben Kiernan, “The Inclusion of the Khmer Rouge in the Cambodian Peace Process: Causes and Consequences”, in *Genocide and Democracy in Cambodia*, p. 251.

<sup>575</sup> See my “Democratic Kampuchea – CIA to the Rescue”.

<sup>576</sup> Vickery, “Criminal Law in the Peoples Republic of Kampuchea”, *JCA* (1987). See comment on the Amnesty report in question above, pp. 279, ff.

(6) I assume the evocation of the ‘Nicaraguan model’ for Cambodia was intended as a bit of comic relief in a catalogue of Cambodia’s problems. Or are Asia Watch, and Senator Kerry, really naive enough to imagine that after what happened in Nicaragua it would be seen in Phnom Penh as a desirable model, or that the PRK/SOC would, or should, cooperate in its own destruction.

Whatever the intentions with that remark, I think it does highlight a key element of the post-July 18 1990 US regime policy, to squeeze and cajole Phnom Penh into a Nicaragua-type debacle, rather than expect outright victory through military action by the US-backed Coalition *contras*.<sup>577</sup>

(7) Unless it is part of the new liberalization which began after my last visit in November 1988, the allegation that “Works of fiction ... cannot be published” is the most egregious nonsense. On visits in 1981, 1984, 1986, and 1988 I collected both new works of fiction and reprints of old works, and the *Kampuchea Weekly* [Khmer-language newspaper] regularly published fictional short stories and serials.

(8) I find quite peculiar the remark that “As late as 1980, there were no laws or administrative regulations of any kind”, after Asia Watch had showed some sensitivity to the situation in which Cambodia found itself.

Just how would you expect a country with no formal administration, no legally-trained people, etc., to create a legal system and law codes in less than a year. Would you approve if, say, the Vietnamese law codes, court system, and legal personnel had been imposed? I dare say you would not, and certainly neither would the crowd of PRK/SOC enemies who accuse them of being too closely tied to Vietnam.

Asia Watch does seem to be aware that beginning in 1980 laws were promulgated, and increasingly, but Ms. Jones’s reluctant acknowledgement suggests influence from someone in the Lawyers’ Committee who was piqued when, in answer to their 1984 lie that there was a “virtually complete absence of a functioning legal system”, I noted that in November of that year “I acquired three volumes, nearly 400 pages, of published law texts”.<sup>578</sup> So the new anti-Phnom Penh line is, “ok, but there weren’t any laws until 1980”.

(9) It is a mistake, I think, to give the “second perspective ... encountered” [corruption, authoritarian leaders, exaggerated preoccupation with defense]

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<sup>577</sup> See my published comments on the similarity of US backing for ‘*contras*’ in both countries, above, pp. 275 ff. Ms. Jones had referred to a similar suggestion by Senator John Kerry about post-Sandinista Nicaragua as a model for what the US should strive for in Cambodia.

<sup>578</sup> See my “A Critique of the Lawyers’ Committee for International Human Rights, Kampuchea Mission of November 1984”, *JCA*, Vol. 18, No. 1 (1988), pp. 108-116, in particular pp. 110, 111. On a later visit I obtained three more volumes of published law texts, about 300 pages.

equivalent status with the first [reforms, improved social services, new guarantees of human rights].

At least in reporting the first Ms. Jones was able to cite some contacts with Cambodians and with foreigners engaged in activity helpful to the country, whereas the second, as a general outlook, seems to come from professional enemies of the PRK/SOC, who, in material, both journalistic and academic, which I have recently seen, appear to be coordinating efforts to discredit Hun Sen and to emphasize one or more rival factions headed by Heng Samrin and Chea Sim.

The latter do have a somewhat different political background from Hun Sen, and they may disapprove of some of the economic liberalism since 1988 (and Ms. Jones's article indicates that they may have good reason), but I have yet to see a convincing report on the nature of whatever factional strife may be going on.

I suspect that this particular media campaign originates with those who fear that other Phnom Penh factions may succeed in halting the economic decline which has resulted from Hun Sen's liberalism and which is playing into the hands of PRK/SOC enemies.

Ms. Jones cites East European diplomats for some of the negative information about the Phnom Penh government. Of all people in Phnom Penh, I think they may be the least objective, with the most reason to take an anti-Vietnamese position, and to say what they think the US regime wants to hear.

(10) Ms. Jones noted, apparently with some disapproval, that "a government official who has a large house can rent it to a foreign aid organization for at least \$1,000 a month, and he can keep every penny".

What do you want? A couple of pages earlier she had praised the liberalization of 1988-1989 which permits this sort of thing, on the ground that such "free-market reforms have brought the economy back to life". Perhaps you now see what I meant when I said these latest reforms had been disastrous.

(11) It is not true, or at least it was not true in 1988, that "there is no banking system", although it would be true to say that it is not well developed.

Two years ago I met people in Phnom Penh who were receiving cash from relatives abroad through the national bank, and at a rate not much different from the free-market rate. Of course that was when PRK 'socialism', before liberalization, was still keeping the money supply, exchange rate, and price level relatively stable.<sup>579</sup>

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<sup>579</sup> See my *Kampuchea, Politics, Economics, and Society*, chap. 9; my "Cambodia 1988", *ASIEN* (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Asienkunde, Hamburg), Nr. 28, July 1988, pp. 1-20; and my "Cambodia", in Douglas Allen and Ngo Vinh Long, eds., *Coming to Terms, Indochina, the United States and the War*, Westview Press, Boulder, Colorado, 1991, pp. 89-128, for description of the separate and more successful economic management in Cambodia than in Vietnam, up to late 1988.

Perhaps now the reforms which have “brought the economy back to life” (at least for the privileged) have destroyed the banking system. I do not, however, have up-to-date information on this.

(12) The Vietnamese troops who “returned between November and January to support the government army” may have been a hoax (see pp. 352, 372.)

(13) As of November 1988 the “money-changers on the ferries crossing the Mekong River” were mostly Khmer, as were pimps in Phnom Penh. And it is an old tradition in Southeast Asia that prostitutes, for those who disapprove of their activity, are always of some other ethnic group. [This was in answer to one of the fantastic claims about Vietnamese entering the country and overwhelming Khmers in various occupations, of which I noted those mentioned by Ms. Jones.]

(14) Destruction of personal property in Phnom Penh after 1975, or after 1979. It is amusing that during 1975-1979 the western press, particularly in 1975-76, was filled with stories about the blind destruction wrought on housing, books, consumer goods, etc., by the Khmer Rouge. Now we are to be told that the Khmer Rouge never harmed a thing, and it was only those nasty Vietnamese who did it.

I have investigated this matter to some extent, first among refugees in Khao-I-Dang in 1980, and later on trips to Phnom Penh (with some detail in my *Cambodia 1975-1982*), and my view is that neither is true, for the most part, although neither the Khmer Rouge nor the Vietnamese are entirely without blame. Most such destruction resulted from lack of control of the Khmer population which flowed back into Phnom Penh after January 1979. They scrounged, pillaged, and destroyed until an administration was set up.

(15) I conclude with a remark on Ms. Jones’s concluding paragraph. Ms. Jones, in writing it, seems to have forgotten that Cambodia is at war, against enemies which have received considerable material, political, and moral aid from Ms. Jones’s government.

If Ms. Jones wants the Phnom Penh government to seek greater credibility through elimination of all legal abuses, an end to “young men ... abducted and sent to fight”, and no more villagers at risk from shelling, she should first direct her attention to US intervention in Cambodian and Vietnamese affairs. Only then can she honestly expect cooperation from the Cambodian government in “assess[ing] the extent of political imprisonment and the conditions under which prisoners are held”.

### Exchanges with the FEER and Tommy T.B. Koh

I was not the only one in 1989-90, after the Vietnamese withdrawal and the increasing evidence that the PRK could be a success, to offer positive treatments of Cambodia, which met with increasingly frenzied denials. In an October 1989 issue of *FEER* Gary Klintworth offered a positive overview of Viet Nam’s role

in Cambodia since 1979, which three weeks later attracted a shrill attack from Mr. Tommy T.B. Koh, then Singapore's ambassador to the US.<sup>580</sup>

Koh's main points concerned the legitimacy of Vietnamese intervention in 1979 – it was disproportional, not really in the interest of human rights, was illegal aggression, and would not serve to bring peace to Cambodia.

These were the standard anti-PRK arguments of the time, and hardly deserved attention, but one detail caught my eye, and inspired this answer to *FEER*.

### Former Khmer Rouge? (1989)<sup>581</sup>

Serious, but non-specialist, readers who have tried to follow the Cambodian situation from the *Review's* usually well informed columns might wonder where Tommy T. B. Koh found that, "according to some academic estimates, about 80% of the [Phnom Penh] regime's present cadres are former Khmer Rouge".

As one of the academics involved in Cambodia studies, and in particular as one who demonstrated already 3 years ago that no more than about 20% of the Party Central Committee and a third of the government ministers and state council were former Khmer Rouge, I would like to indicate the probable sources of Koh's misinformation.<sup>582</sup>

The 80% figure is not an *ad hoc* guess by Koh, but is at least its third manifestation in the Cambodia debate, and its origin needs to be pinned down before it takes off as a new basic datum.

In the *New York Times*, 5 August 1989, Douglas Pike, in "Khmer Rouge: Not the Threat it Was", argued that the Khmer Rouge have changed, and that since "about 80 percent of the present cadre structure [a misleadingly vague formulation] of the Phnom Penh government are ex-Khmer Rouge", Cambodia "accordingly ... is not threatened so much by the return of the Khmer Rouge", and there is no good reason to block the return of all the rest.

Pike's source may have been the apparently next previous appearance of the 80% figure, Nayan Chanda's *Brother Enemy*, where Chanda, p. 453, n. 8, writing in 1986 said, "eighty percent of the K[ampuchean] P[eoples] R[evolutionary] P[arty] Central Committee members are [emphasis added] former anti-French fighters (Khmer Issarak) allied with the Vietnamese ..."; but they are not at all the group which is now designated 'Khmer Rouge'.

Chanda's source was a 1981 [again emphasis added] paper by Stephen Heder who further emphasized that "80 percent of the KPRP Central Committee members are from provinces bordering Vietnam, and 60 percent of the CC members have spent twenty or more years in Vietnam". Heder's purpose was to

<sup>580</sup> Gary Klintworth, "Hanoi's role in Cambodia", *FEER* 5 October 1989, p. 38; Tommy T.B. Koh, "Hanoi's role in Cambodia", *FEER* 26 October 1989, p. 28

<sup>581</sup> Michael Vickery, Letter to the Editor, published in *FEER*, 11 November 1989.

<sup>582</sup> Vickery, *Kampuchea, Politics, Economics, and Society*, pp. 48, 80-81.

make the PRK look bad because of its Vietnamese connections, and less attention was given to the former Khmer Rouge who, as Chanda wrote, formed “20 percent of the Central Committee”.

Whatever the figures on ‘former Khmer Rouge’, the important detail is that they are indeed former, having broken with Pol Pot at various dates between 1975 and 1978, while the Khmer rouge friends of Pike and Koh are still what they have been since their victory in 1975.

Perhaps a still more significant statistic which receives too little attention is that following expansion of the Central Committee in 1985 nearly 40% of the combined full and alternate membership consisted of new (post-1979) party members with no pre-1970 communist record, while the number of old veterans with Viet Nam connections had declined to 8%.

By 1988 the same group of new people were also holding nearly half the ministries, and an even larger number of sub-ministerial and provincial leadership posts.

Following this, on 30 November 1989, *FEER* published a response from Koh, in which he tried to be witty, with “Singapore never had any illusions about the nature of the Khmer Rouge. Unlike some members of the US Left, we have never described them as ‘agrarian reformers’.” To be sure, Koh also said that “I have ... never denied that an incidental result of the intervention was an end to the oppressive and barbarous rule of the Khmer Rouge”, although “my contention is that Viet Nam intervened in Cambodia in order to impose Vietnamese hegemony on Cambodia just as it has done on Laos”.

To this I replied as follows.<sup>583</sup>

#### To and Fro with Rip van Koh (1989)

Now we know why official utterances by Singapore’s international representatives on the subject of Cambodia are so steeped in rhetoric of unreality.

Rip van Koh has obviously just awoken from a 40-year sleep ready to react against the last words he heard before dozing off – a speech by a Wallacite [Henry Wallace] arguing that the newly victorious Chinese communists in 1949 were only “agrarian reformers”. That was the last, perhaps only, time that anyone on the US left characterized a communist revolution in those terms.

Again Koh could not contain himself, and fired off a missive (1 February 1990), decrying my sarcasm.<sup>584</sup>

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<sup>583</sup> Michael Vickery, Letter to the Editor, *FEER*, 11 January 1990. Apparently afraid to offend a Singapore ambassador, editor Bowring, in the publication, changed ‘Rip van Koh’ to ‘Ambassador Tommy Koh’.

<sup>584</sup> Tommy T.B. Koh, *FEER*, 1 February 1990.

“I am disappointed that Michael Vickery [LETTERS, 11 Jan.] should have found it necessary to resort to sarcasm to respond to my point that from 1975-78 several prominent members of the American Left defended the Khmer Rouge regime against their critics and heaped praise on that regime’s “agricultural reforms” and “agricultural revolution”.

“To refresh his memory, I would respectfully suggest that Vickery re-read George Hildebrand and Gareth Porter’s 1976 book, *Cambodia: Starvation and Revolution* and Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman’s 1979 book, *After the Cataclysm*. Hildebrand and Porter defended the policies of the Khmer Rouge regime and praised its agricultural revolution. Chomsky cited US congressional testimonies by David Chandler and Porter to dismiss as “myth” allegations that “the leadership of Democratic Kampuchea adopted a policy of physically eliminating whole classes of people.

“Interestingly, Chomsky in 1977 cited the writings of Vickery to refute refugees’ testimonies on abusive conditions in Cambodia. Vickery was quoted as equating the forced relocations from Cambodian cities as comparable to “basic policies considered by bourgeois economists and political scientists to be rational and practical for a country with problems similar to Cambodia.”

And I answered again.<sup>585</sup>

One sarcasm (Koh, 30 November 89) deserves another (Vickery 11 January 90). Didn’t Koh ever learn sportsmanship on the playing fields of Singapore?

If he now wants to shift ground that is OK too, but he needs a new research assistant. The ‘agrarian reform’ argument originally appeared in order to minimize ‘communism’ and make a case which even non-leftist American liberals might accept for recognizing the new Chinese government in 1949.

Even if not quite accurate in detail, the goal has subsequently been accepted as correct, against U.S. policy which for over 20 years tried to make Taiwan China while relegating ‘Peiping’ to the back of the moon. Throwing ‘agrarian reform’ at the American Left now is to line up with those old China Lobbyists who brayed on about ‘losing’ China until they were relegated to the museum shelves where they already belonged in 1949.

Praise in 1976 for the reforms, or revolutions, in agriculture in Cambodia is quite another matter, and Koh was not simply arguing, nor was I denying, that some “members of the American Left defended the Khmer Rouge regime against their critics”.

At least in dredging up those “prominent members of the American Left”,

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<sup>585</sup> Michael Vickery, unpublished Letter to the Editor, *FEER*, 9 February 1990.



Noam Chomsky, Edward Herman, David Chandler, George Hildebrand and Gareth Porter, Koh is only a dozen years out of date rather than four decades. They may respond as they will, but I take the occasion to assert that most of those views offered in 1976 and early 1977 stand up rather well in light of subsequent research, and even where proved wrong do not require regret or apology from their authors.

Nowhere in their book did Hildebrand and Porter argue that the KR (their NUF) were mere ‘agrarian reformers’. They insisted on the revolutionary nature of their policies, and at the date they wrote (1976) their claims for increases in agricultural production are largely confirmed by careful sifting of refugee testimony, although the brutality accompanying it in some areas – not everywhere, I emphasize – was greater than they allowed for.

As for Koh’s other stalwarts of the “American Left”, nothing he cites is relevant for the question of ‘agrarian reform’ vs. ‘communist revolution’, nor is any of Porter’s or Chandler’s congressional testimony cited in Chomsky and Herman related to the alleged “policy of physically eliminating whole classes of people”.

Koh has also fudged in his allusion to my own contribution to Chomsky and Herman. In addition to my report on the contradictory nature of refugee testimony in 1976-77, which U.S. State Department specialists confirmed, Chomsky and Herman also quoted (note 225) my observation that “a good bit of Cambodian policy since the end of the war [1975] has been inspired by good old-fashioned vengeance and that the revolution could have been carried out more gently”.

If Koh was discomfited by my remark about Khmer Rouge evacuation policy being in line with measures advocated by “bourgeois economists and political scientists”, he should condemn them, not me. Are they also to be dismissed as mere lefties, including another person cited by Chomsky and Herman (p. 153), U.S. Foreign Service Officer Peter Poole.<sup>586</sup>

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<sup>586</sup> Poole is quoted above, p 102. Others who offered similar opinions were US regime cold war intellectual Guy Pauker (see above, p. 102), and Jeffrey Race, political scientist and author of a well-received book on the Vietnam war, *War Comes to Long An*. See Vickery, *Cambodia 1975-1982*, first edition pp.64- 65, second edition, pp. 69-70.

Race was one of the group who in 1976 wrote “Blueprint for the Future of Thailand”, published in six installments in the *Bangkok Post*, 15-25 February 1976. They argued that if Thailand was to avoid a revolution “the surplus population of the cities should return to the countryside, much more investment should be made in agriculture, the administration should be decentralized, unproductive wealth should be taken from the rich, and political power from the old elites” – all Khmer Rouge policies, which if implemented soon enough in Thailand might avoid a Khmer Rouge-type revolution.

Such a suggestion was and is utopian. Revolutionary policies of that type cannot be implemented without a revolution, and arguing that they are necessary simply means supporting revolution, which is never a gentle procedure, and which Race certainly did not desire. See Race, “The Future of Thailand”, *Pacific Community*, Vol. 8, No. 2

And since Koh's controversy is with me, why not attack the two books I have written rather than pick on people who, except for Chandler, have not been involved in Cambodia studies for a decade? Perhaps the reason is my argument that because the KR revolution was 'peasantist' (not agrarian reformist), it therefore resulted in more brutality than would have occurred under a stricter Marxist-Leninist regime, a line of argument that has been welcome neither on the left nor the right, but against which no one has tried to offer an honest refutation.

The 'American Left', even if mistaken on some details in 1976, or overly optimistic then in their predictions for the future, have now concluded, in some cases after careful sifting and publication of written and oral evidence, that the Pol Pot regime failed miserably and should not be given a second chance. This is a much better show than that of the US and Singapore Right who are trying to give the Khmer Rouge another shot at state power.

Finally, returning to the point at which this exchange began, the closest approximation to the old 'agrarian reform' claim with respect to the Khmer Rouge has come from someone on the American Right, and the source of Koh's initial error: Douglas Pike, who in 1979 lamented the overthrow of Pol Pot, a "charismatic" leader of a "bloody but successful peasant revolution with a substantial residue of popular support" under which "most [peasants] ... did not experience much in the way of brutality" (*St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 29 November 1979).

I obviously had Koh up against the wall. This was too much for *FEER's* Bowring and he pulled the plug. He refused publication, and wrote to me saying that the correspondence was closed – which was not true.<sup>587</sup> My response to this is given below.<sup>588</sup>

Dear Mr. Bowring,

I have received your gutless communication of 23 February 1990 regarding my letter of 9 February.

Perhaps you sent it first to Koh for vetting, as you obviously did with my letter of 30 October 1989 printed on 11 November 1989, permitting Koh to get off on a quick start with his first sarcastic and irrelevant response. This time it appears that finding himself worsted in argument he was unable to provide a coherent answer, so you helped him out by suppressing it.

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(January 1977), pp. 303-325. Revolutions from above, about which Race was fantasizing, are always in the interests of power holders, not for the benefit of poor peasants or oppressed workers. [2010: Thailand's political fragility, which Race's suggestions highlighted, is even more apparent, and potentially revolutionary, thirty years later.]

<sup>587</sup> In *FEER* of 8 March 1990 Bowring published a letter against me from a certain Willy van Damme, proving that "closing this correspondence" was an act of censorship.

<sup>588</sup> Michael Vickery, unpublished letter to Philip Bowring, 3 March 1990.

Throughout the part of the world in which a more or less free press operates, it is considered a matter of basic courtesy – in some places it is a legal obligation – to permit a reader who has been the object of allegations and innuendoes such as those dropped by Koh to respond adequately. My letter was not so long as to afford the excuse that it could not be published; and you have exhibited a deficient sense of intellectual honesty and basic fair play.

This is the second time within a month that you have rejected a letter on spurious grounds [the other concerned a different subject], and it confirms my previous suggestion that the *Review* slants its comment about Cambodia.

One must recognize, however, that *FEER* had had trouble with Singapore, and that this cut into profits. In a later memoir Bowring acknowledged this in an indirect way while attempting to record their red-blooded courage under his editorship:

“The new approach [after Bowring in 1992 had been replaced as editor by Crovitz] was soon evident in the deal the *Review* cut with Singapore, from which the magazine had been banned for more than four years. Before the ban, about 15 per cent of the circulation had been in the city state. But the price of return was to stop covering Singapore in the forthright manner the readers expected. The magazine had thrived on controversy and promoting a free press in a none-too-free Asia. Although the costs in the short term could be high, the reputation that the magazine acquired more than made up for it.”<sup>589</sup>

Bowring’s cave-in to Koh appears as a preliminary to the ‘deal cut with Singapore’.

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Biased treatment of Cambodia was not confined to propaganda organizations and moralizers, but appeared even in some of the respectable press enjoying a somewhat leftist reputation, as I noted in the following “Outside powers’ manipulations fascinate the Cambodia watchers”, published as a letter and with significant cuts, in *Guardian Weekly* (England), 26 July 1990.<sup>590</sup>

### Outside powers’ manipulations fascinate the Cambodia watchers (1990)<sup>591</sup>

I was flattered to see, in John Gittings’ “Cambodia’s peace hopes wither on a dying bamboo vine”, *Guardian Weekly* 24 June 1990, reference to myself, along

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<sup>589</sup> Philip Bowring, “Without Feer”, *South China Morning Post* October 30, 2004.

<sup>590</sup> The *Guardian*’s treatment showed the typical deviousness of even the most respectable press. I submitted it as an article, for payment, but after cutting out a couple of sentences, including a criticism of their own reporting, they published it as a letter.

<sup>591</sup> Michael Vickery, *Guardian Weekly* (England), 26 July 1990. Excisions, changes, and an altered reference by the Editor are shown in italic, and footnotes have been added later.

with Ben Kiernan and Chantou Boua, as “careful scholars” who do not think the Khmer Rouge did such a good job of running Cambodia in 1975-1979.

*I fear, however, that except for a small group of specialists, few among even the presumably well-informed readers of the Guardian know who we are, what we have written, and why it might be significant in comparison with reports on Cambodia by more famous writers.*

*Certainly we are not unusual in writing about negative aspects of the Khmer Rouge in power. The ‘evil of Pol Pot’, at least in 1975-1979, is a nearly universal theme across the ideological spectrum from extreme right-wing hacks (Stephen Morris) and popularizing trendies (William Shawcross), through US government professionals (Timothy Carney, Karl Jackson, Kenneth Quinn and Charles Twining) to serious specialists and historians who, with respect to Cambodia, can hardly be anywhere but somewhere on the left.<sup>592</sup>*

Outside of a few specialists, however, nearly all writers on Cambodia, supported by a hitherto rarely seen unanimity of the English-language press, whether left or right by other criteria, have fallen into line behind the US regime, denying, or at least refusing to acknowledge, that there was an increasingly viable alternative to the Khmer Rouge within Cambodia: the government of the People’s Republic, now State, of Cambodia.<sup>593</sup>

It is thus hardly surprising that otherwise intelligent columns, editorials, letters to editors, etc. show preoccupation with manipulations of the various Cambodian actors by outside powers to impose a new, hopefully non-Khmer Rouge, or at worst only part Khmer Rouge, regime on the country, neglecting almost totally the proposition that the most effective anti-Khmer Rouge force has been the Phnom Penh government which has run Cambodia rather well on exiguous resources for over 10 years, and that the best way to prevent Khmer Rouge return would be simply international recognition of the PRK/SOC.

The *Guardian* itself has shown little interest in going beyond the conventional wisdom that the answer to a Khmer Rouge return was the imposition of one or another complex formula worked out among outsiders.

*When in December 1986 I offered a description of recent changes in PRK leadership which showed them as a genuine Khmer nationalist government it was turned down, not with the excuse that it was journalistically unworthy – indeed it was complimented (“one of the most perceptive and farsighted pieces I have read about Phnom Penh politics in recent weeks”) – but with the excuse that the Guardian had too many people contributing on Cambodia (letter to me from Richard Gott, 6 January 1987). Subsequent issues which I saw (admittedly*

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<sup>592</sup> On the US government professionals see Karl D. Jackson, ed., *Cambodia 1975-1978: Rendezvous With Death*. Four of the six writers of its nine chapters, Jackson, Timothy Carney, Charles H. Twining, and Kenneth M. Quinn, were Cambodia or Southeast Asia specialists in the service of the US government.

<sup>593</sup> On this subject see Vickery, *Cambodia: A Political Survey*, pp. 9-13, and *passim*.

*I missed some) did not bear this out, and certainly no one else writing for the Guardian made the same point about developments within the PRK.*

Even now, Guardian writer (*Guardian Weekly* 8 July 1990), Nicholas Cummings-Bruce, one of the stalwarts whom Gott considered to be providing all the news Guardian readers needed about Cambodia, nearly a year after Vietnamese military withdrawal, remains loyal to the shibboleth “Hanoi-backed regime”, whose “intransigence”, and only their intransigence, is forcing the beneficent great powers to waste time to “probe ways around” it.

It is discouraging that the *Guardian*, no more than the right-wing press, in fact even less than *Time*, is willing to ask why certain great powers, and some smaller but influential ones, have felt obliged to re-impose on Cambodia remnants of three previous regimes, each of which was in turn rejected by its people, when simply ‘laying off’ and allowing the PRK to govern alone would have done more to bring about peace.

It would seem that the purpose behind probes of Phnom Penh is to destroy the PRK/SOC rather than to inhibit the Khmer Rouge.

The international press, including the *Guardian*, has spinelessly cooperated in the blockade of Cambodia, the economic and political effects of which are increasingly apparent, and it may be true that in some rural areas close to their bases the Khmer Rouge, well-supplied as they are with international aid, are making some new converts.

Even more significant and dismaying, in addition to the suppression of information about the PRK by the international press, including the *Guardian*, is the veritable epidemic of up-beat articles about the reformed Khmer Rouge and their growing popular support, even though close reading shows that most of the information is based, not on personal observation by the writers, but on statements by Khmer Rouge officials, rumors put about by Thai military, and unattributable opinion from anonymous ‘western diplomats’ and ‘embassy officials’ in Bangkok.

If the Khmer Rouge win again, the press which was so eager to relay rumour about their change of stripes after withholding serious information about the PRK when it might have been helpful can claim a share of the champagne poured out by the *Pol Pot-backed George Bush [I] regime*. [changed to “Pol Pot regime backed till last week by George Bush”]

## Alan Dawson and the Bangkok Post

In 1990 the *Bangkok Post*, in the person of Alan Dawson, continued its propaganda activity. Dawson’s writing inspired me to a couple of short contributions in answer.

The first was my reaction to his review of Karl D. Jackson, ed., *Cambodia 1975-1978: Rendezvous With Death*, noted above in comment to the *Guardian*. Four of the

six writers were Cambodia or Southeast Asia specialists in the service of the US government. The other two were David Hawk and François Ponchaud.<sup>594</sup>

Dawson used his review, which was very favorable to the book, to denigrate writers on Cambodia who had been sympathetic to the PRK and opposed to the US war in Viet Nam and Cambodia, and whom he called 'Khmer Rouge apologists'. *Bangkok Post* published my letter critical of his review on 23 June 1990.

### Return to Lucy's Tiger Den (1990)<sup>595</sup>

The first thing that is clear from Alan Dawson's recent book review, "Bad for Khmer Rouge Apologists", is that Dawson wouldn't recognize a KRA if one sat down beside him in Lucy's Tiger Den wearing a sign.

'KR apologist' must mean someone who defended Democratic Kampuchea during its existence in 1975-1979, or who does now that they are an out-of-power guerrilla group (and who did not support them before 1979), or who has supported them all along. Dawson seems to think they are all around us, "too many remain, especially in the West".

Quite a lot of serious people defended the KR while they were in power, some out of an ideological belief that what they were doing was the best sort of revolution for a poor agrarian country, others because they considered that the record of foreign interference in Cambodia in the 1970s was so misdirected and destructive that the Cambodians should be left alone with their society, no matter what the result.

Very few of the ideological supporters are still around, and those who are keep very quiet, except when they are brought out of their closets every couple of years for a conference, such as "The Third International Conference on Kampuchea, 25-26 July 1987" in Bangkok, to try to give a degree of intellectual respectability to a hardline policy of destroying the Phnom Penh government at whatever risk, even return of the Khmer Rouge.

The lead-off speeches were by Air Marshal Siddhi Savetsila and Khieu Samphan. One Anglo-American participant tried to give Mrs. Thatcher a leg up by evoking British support for the 'Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea', while dropping Mrs. Thatcher's name to give respectability to the

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<sup>594</sup> Michael Vickery, letter, *Bangkok Post*, 23 June 1990.

<sup>595</sup> Twining was US Ambassador in Phnom Penh from 1991 to 1994, when Quinn took over that post. Carney directed an important component of UNTAC during the election of 1993 in Cambodia. On Ponchaud see Chomsky and Herman, *After the Cataclysm*; Vickery, *Cambodia 1975-1982*, index references (but note that in his chapter in this book Ponchaud reversed himself on some important points). Hawk has a background with Amnesty International and as a researcher on violence during the DK period. From sometime after the 1993 election until late in 1998 he worked in the United Nations Center for Human Rights in Phnom Penh.

KR, and she ended with a salute to the KR and their allies, “from England, the motherland of parliaments, we wish you well”.<sup>596</sup>

Now there, at that conference, were real KRA, but they are obviously not the people at whom Dawson is aiming.

Those real apologists are not, for instance, among the “serious apologist-authors [who] will have trouble refuting the fact that Khmer Rouge violence *increased* during their four years in power”; and not just because the former, the ‘real apologists’, have written so little as to hardly be called ‘authors’. Among all the books, serious, semi-serious, frivolous, apologetic, or anti-, including two produced by myself, I cannot recall any that try to deny the increase in KR violence, particularly in 1977 and 1978.

Does the increase in violence really support Dawson’s point, that is, “make specious the idea that the [1970-75] war fuelled a feeling of revenge, or that US bombing so brutalized the Khmer Rouge that the killings were somehow mindless”?

The first, and still only, author who made that a major explanatory factor for Khmer Rouge policy was William Shawcross, who has now rejoined the angels and no longer wishes to be associated with the idea. Shawcross, though, and David Hawk, a contributor to the book Dawson was reviewing, have continued to allege another type of outside influence, French Marxism of a Maoist variety, as bearing responsibility for KR policy.

The serious writers, apologist or not, have on the contrary focussed on the internal sources of Khmer Rouge policy; and thus a new book (the one Dawson was reviewing) which argues that “no outside agency or force determined this policy, made it inevitable, or was able to affect it”, will not be “bad news”. Speaking personally, I am delighted that Dawson implicitly agrees with me that neither classical Marxism, Leninism, nor Maoism can explain the KR phenomenon.

It is just silly, however, to imply, as Dawson does, that the US bombing which killed tens or hundreds of thousands had no effect on the psyche of survivors; in fact there is ample first-hand interview material to demonstrate that many killings in 1975, which was not the worst year, were linked with it.

Where are the serious apologists about whom Dawson thinks we should be worried? Obviously not among the conferencers evoked above; and neither are they where Dawson has his sights fixed, or where he wishes his readers to fix theirs. They are, however, real.

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<sup>596</sup> This was Laura Summers, an American who teaches Political Science at Hull University. Her remarks, entitled “Increased Pressure Must be Brought to Bear on Vietnam”, were published in “The Third International Conference on Kampuchea 25-26 July, 1987, Bangkok, Thailand”, Bangkok, Department of Press and Information of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea, August 1987, pp. 48-49.

One pamphlet that tried to do just what Dawson thinks apologists have done, deny that KR violence increased from 1975-1979, was the CIA-produced “Kampuchea: A Demographic Catastrophe”, May 1980. The anonymous researchers totally whitewashed, through ignoring it, the greatest massacre of all in 1978, and their purpose was clear, to make Pol Pot look relatively better than the new Peoples Republic.

Although anonymous, that pamphlet must have been put together by people with “distinguished US government service” and particular expertise on Cambodia, like the contributors to the book Dawson was reviewing. Among them, Carney has personally assured me that he was not involved, but publicly none of the US government Cambodia specialists, including in particular Jackson, Quinn, or Twining, has ever been willing to dissociate himself from that extremely disinformative tract which constituted the first apology for the Khmer Rouge after their overthrow.<sup>597</sup>

Dawson has been looking in the wrong direction. He was right to say that “on the face of it, this book is suspect” because four of the six authors, named above, work for the US government, but it is not suspect in the way he meant.

The real KR apologists are in the US government, among the authors of *Cambodia 1975-1978: Rendevous With Death*, and among their anonymous colleagues and associates who now weekly, if not daily, assure press hacks both in Washington (Twining) and in Bangkok that the KR have changed their stripes, have real popular support in Cambodia, are needed to chase out imagined Vietnamese, and that peace is inconceivable without their participation in a new government.

None of the historians, in particular “from Woolongong, Australia [and passing via Penang] ...” will have anything to do with that line.<sup>598</sup>

A couple of months later Dawson appeared again with a rather hysterical revelation of Soviet black propaganda aimed at the unwary in the West.<sup>599</sup> It seemed to me that his screed in itself constituted another type of black propaganda. This time the *Bangkok Post* chose to protect Dawson, and my answer to him, sent on 5 August 1990, which raised matters of real anti-Cambodian disinformation, was not published.

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<sup>597</sup> The CIA pamphlet was published by the National Foreign Assessment Center, May 1980. I dissected it in “Democratic Kampuchea – CIA to the Rescue”, in *BCAS*.

<sup>598</sup> Dawson’s crack about Woolongong was aimed at Ben Kiernan, and at the time I was employed at Universiti Sains Malaysia in Penang.

<sup>599</sup> See Dawson, “Black propaganda more than little white lies”, 15 July 1990.



**Black Propaganda (1990)** <sup>600</sup>

My delight in the big spread devoted to Alan Dawson's new crusade for the truth was exceeded only by my amazed admiration at the breadth of Dawson's worldwide multilingual research, from *La Tribuna* (Tegucigalpa) to *Sovetskaya Rossiya* to *Tiedonantaja* (newspaper of the Communist Party of Finland) which ratcheted up my respect for him as perhaps the only other American Southeast Asia freak who can read Russian and Finnish.

And I thought that, as a fellow combatant in the fight against disinformation, perhaps the next time I am in Bangkok we could share a few beers and swap a few Finnish jokes in Lucy's Tig ... oops, I mean Mississippi Queen. <sup>601</sup>

Maybe.

But then I thought that if Dawson knows Finnish he should also know that even within the badly fragmented factions of Finnish communism 'Stalinism' has been out for at least 20 years, and if *Tiedonantaja* is a "Stalinist newspaper" it must be restricted to a readership of only a few hundred in one of Europe's most obscure languages. Hardly a vehicle for the orchestrated campaign of anti-American black propaganda (BP), the threat of which Dawson wants to frighten his readers with.

How influential either, no matter if full of nonsense, are *Cameroon Tribune*, *La Tribuna* (Tegucigalpa), or *Barricada* (Nicaragua). Surely their excesses do not rate a full page in the *Bangkok Post*, whose readers might never have heard of these objectionable stories were it not for the energetic research of Dawson.

Another problem I had with Dawson's story, after my first shiver of excitement, was that it is old. I read most of the same exposé in Australia or travelling in Europe over two years ago, in particular the AIDS story (i.e., that AIDS was started by CIA or Defense Department biological weapons research), and the plot to unseat Rajiv Gandhi, almost detail by detail and sentence by sentence.

Thus if those stories have not taken off in the intervening two years, and Dawson still has to search for them in *Tiedonantaja* and the *Cameroon*, then his great fear is groundless, and "you'll [not] be seeing it again, Real Soon Now", nor will "several newspapers in the world ... print [them] in the next few months [in] exclusive stories".

What is Dawson up to? Or why did someone lay this silly story on him and insist that it should be printed again now in Bangkok? Let's look at the BP items in question.

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<sup>600</sup> Michael Vickery, unpublished letter to *Bangkok Post*, 5 August 1990..

<sup>601</sup> The reason for this remark was that in his published answer to my published comment on his review of *Cambodia 1975-1978* (above) he had considered it important to tell his readers that Lucy's Tiger Den had been closed and he did his drinking in Mississippi Queen, another famous Bangkok bistro.

Most nonsensical of course is the Ethnic Bomb, a weapon which would kill only non-whites. For this Dawson did not cite any specific sources, except a story about “alleged research on ethnic weapons” in the US Communist *People’s World* in 1980, which according to Dawson, without any source, had by 1988 been “enhanced to ... a joint venture between South Africa and America”. Rather than Soviet disinformation, it sounds more like the invention of some manic journo trying to sell a backwoods rag than an attempt at serious black propaganda.

But a fear that South Africa, at least, would desire an ethnic weapon was not paranoid or necessarily Black Propaganda. John Pilger cited evidence before the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission by the former director of the Roodeplaat Research Laboratory that there had been a project to “develop a vaccine to make blacks infertile”, and that the “big dream ... was to develop a race-specific biochemical weapon, a ‘black bomb’ that would kill or weaken blacks and not whites”.<sup>602</sup>

Incidentally, I first encountered that theme in a *Playboy* short story way back in the early 70s, maybe even the 60s; a source from which many journalists worldwide have no doubt drawn inspiration of one kind or another (better check out ol’ Hugh Hefner’s connections to the KGB, and perhaps *Playboy’s* “Service A” means more than Dawson thought).

The AIDS story has now been proven wrong, but it was an idea that occurred to many people in different places independently, was reported in the serious press, and does not have to be attributed to the Soviets, though they may have been happy to give it good coverage while it was still under investigation.

Another of the KGB-invented BP themes, according to Dawson, was “Vile Americans ... ‘adopting’ Latin American (or Asian) babies, killing them and using their body parts for organ transplants”. This was the least Black Propagandistic of Dawson’s stories. Quite credible stories of murder for organ transplants have been reported from various poor countries, none that I have seen involving Americans, but that story in itself is not incredible.

Perhaps Dawson is counting on readers forgetting that it is not the Soviet Union which is the dominant foreign power in Honduras, the ascertained place of origin of the story, and that the fact of who is the dominant power may have accounted for the original source refusing to confirm his story that rich Americans were buying the organs of poor children in Honduras for transplants, of course killing the children in the process.<sup>603</sup>

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<sup>602</sup> John Pilger, *Freedom Next Time*, London, Bantam Press, 2006, pp. 227-229.

<sup>603</sup> Dawson could not leave these themes alone. Three years later he wrote, “Meanwhile, maybe we can have another reprise at how Americans adopted Guatemalan children for their body parts”. Yes indeed, we can. In September 1998, a young American couple of my acquaintance who were in Phnom Penh to adopt a Cambodian child were told by the US consul that one of the reasons for the very careful checks carried out on adoptions is

Even if entirely incorrect, some of these stories – the Ethnic Bomb, and by 1990 even the AIDS story – would seem to have been non-political wild rumors, not KGB-invented black propaganda. It is not only in Bangkok that some journalists are so starved for, or impermeable to, intellectually respectable material that they pounce on any oddity to earn their bread and entertain an opiated public.

But perhaps these funny tales are regurgitated to discredit by association some much more serious things. And here we have some news items which were not part of the earlier edition of the handout given to Dawson, and for which he could not provide published sources from his world-wide perusal of the press. “US military expansion into Latin America”, which he said “will gain publicity” [emphasis added] is not disinformation.

It has occurred, most recently in Panama, and few people would care to risk much money on a denial that something of the sort had been planned for Nicaragua if the Sandinistas had won the election [1989] and carried on victoriously.

Nor can it be denied that the apparent new peace in Europe is largely due to Soviet efforts which caught the US unawares and to which the US has only grudgingly acceded. Over the last few months I have read stories acknowledging this in *Time*, *The International Herald Tribune*, *The Guardian* (England) and other quality press organs which I do not think would appreciate being lumped by Dawson with *The Cameroon Tribune* and the Tegucigalpan.

Is Dawson’s piece as a whole some kind of black propaganda in itself? Did somebody suggest, “Alan, the Soviets are getting too good a press in Bangkok, and we’ve got to throw a banana skin under them; so let’s update and refloat this old ‘black propaganda’ handout”?

Why did Dawson not give more attention to some of the real disinformation which has played in Southeast Asia over the last few years? Yellow Rain for instance, or the cultural genocide of Cambodia by the Vietnamese [in fact he did, in his own way – see p. 323, in his use of Luciulli], or a case just as peculiar as that of the Honduran babies used for organ transplants.

This was the Adelia Bernard story (discussed pp. 220 ff.) about Soviet hospitals in Phnom Penh using babies for poison gas experiments, and her claim

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that in some countries, in particular in Central America, children had been adopted for organ transplants, and they were worried about the possibility of such occurring in Cambodia – not unreasonably, given the dire poverty into which international interventions, first of all American, have pushed much of Cambodia’s population.

For more sources on the matter see Noam Chomsky, *World Orders Old and New*, pp. 56, 134, 137. Dawson’s main point in the 1993 note, in the *Bangkok Post* “Post Bag”, 11 October 1993, was, “Beware of AIDS disinformation”, refuting a repeat of the story that AIDS was invented at Fort Detrick, referring to a “detailed explanation ... in the *Sunday Post* on July 15, 1990. It identifies the Soviet KGB agents who thought it up and where they planted it”.

to have herself carried a child's corpse as proof to the UNHCR office in Bangkok, only to have those commie-influenced UN officials ignore her.

Possibly that story did not play well in Bangkok because too many people were aware of the logistics, but it was taken very seriously by the press, and by parliament, in Australia, where I was at the time, and in some serious circles in the US, where it received special attention in *Commentary* magazine, without any attempt by US authorities who had direct information on refugee and border affairs from their JVS (Joint Volunteer Service) and KEG (Khmer Emergency Group), or by mainstream journalists working from Bangkok, to discount it.

Eventually *Commentary* was forced to retract, in part because of my own efforts in the campaign I share with Dawson to unmask disinformation. I hope that truth-seeker Dawson performed equivalent service in Bangkok (I wasn't receiving the Bangkok papers regularly at the time, and don't know what happened there).

Most of the time, however, on these local issues, Dawson gives aid and comfort to the disinformers, as in his "The Vietnamisation of Kampuchea" (*Bangkok Post* 8 November 1988), about Esmeralda Luciulli's disinformative article on that subject in the Singaporean *Indochina Report* (see note 555).

And how did Dawson react when one of his colleagues invented the return of Vietnamese troops to Cambodia last year long before they were discovered by the Coalition forces who were supposedly facing them in battle? This story went through an international transmission circuit almost worthy of Dawson's baby transplant tale, from source unknown, to *Jane's Defense Weekly* ("earlier this month") to "Asian diplomats in Singapore" to *International Herald Tribune* (21 Feb 1990) to anonymous intelligence sources to *The Nation* (22 Feb 1990).

A really intriguing detail, though, was that a certain *Bangkok Post* colleague (Jacques Bekaert), in his report to *Le Monde* of 9 February claimed to have been told of the returned Vietnamese by PRK troops, including the gem that they had to be paid "at least 100 dollars a month", yet in his *Bangkok Post* column of 8 February was unwilling to report the same thing, which did not come forth from journalists visiting the Coalition troops until 25 February (*The Nation*), perhaps after they had learned what their problem was from the international press. Now we know it was all part of what Dawson is out to get, Black Propaganda.<sup>604</sup>

## Phnom Penh: Political turmoil and red solutions

Following the total withdrawal of Vietnamese troops from Cambodia in September 1989, 1990 was a year of frantic speculation among journalists about survival of the PRK, the end of Hun Sen's 'liberalization', in part legitimately brought on by the arrest of several persons in May 1990 for trying to establish a new political party, and the possibility of a 'Red Solution' (see pp. 356 ff.).

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<sup>604</sup> Richard Ehrlich, *Bangkok Post*, 8 July 1990. For details see below, pp. 373, ff.

Among the journalistic speculations was an article in *FEER* by Murray Hiebert to which I offered the following response.

### Still Seeing Red (1989) <sup>605</sup>

Murray Hiebert's "Still seeing Red" (*FEER*, 7 Dec 1989) is not entirely coherent.

Are the Soviets and East Europeans "pushing ... Hun Sen to include individual Khmer Rouge"? So what's new? The possible inclusion of individual Khmer Rouge, even though no one in the PRK was ever willing to suggest names, has been Phnom Penh's line for years, but this does not mean "to go back to the negotiating table again". The question there was not integration of individuals into the Phnom Penh government, but devaluation, even dissolution, of that government vis-à-vis the Khmer rouge faction and its allies.

And should non-communist westerners suddenly accept that Hungary's switch to capitalism and democracy provides the Khmer Rouge with instant credibility? The heady atmosphere along the Danube may tempt some there to replace Brezhnevism with Reagan-Bushism, but that does not mean that the rest of us should be mesmerized by the vagaries of East European euphoria – certainly not so long as they are denouncing both communist centralization, in favor of a freer market economy, and status differentiation, which implies a call for a more pure socialism.

Let us not forget that Hungary's new stance on Cambodia approaches that of Romania. Should that now make Romania respectable again?

Romania after all has another feather in its cap (besides agreeing with Washington on Pol Pot and abortion). They have paid off their foreign debts, which, if the world were a consistent place would earn them the same sort of praise as showered on 'gallant little Finland' three or four decades ago. No doubt repayment involved squeezing the Romanian people, who it is said now lack heat and light bulbs, but is not that precisely what World Bank and IMF emergency plans for poor, indebted Third World countries always imply, at least in the short run?

It seems quite unlikely that ex-Khmer Rouge Cambodian officials fear that their involvement in DK policies would be exposed if Khmer Rouge officials were allowed to return. There would be more reason for the Khmer Rouge to spill the beans now to discredit the Phnom Penh leadership if there were any secrets to be revealed. As least Hiebert has on this point emphasized that "no

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<sup>605</sup> Michael Vickery, unpublished letter to *FEER*, 11 December 1989. Footnotes have been added.

evidence has emerged linking Phnom Penh's senior leaders to Khmer Rouge atrocities".<sup>606</sup>

I also wonder who in Phnom Penh are meant by that overworked and until now meaningless term 'hardliners', presented on the one hand as those who formulate Phnom Penh's anti-Khmer Rouge policy, and in another context as a group critical of Hun Sen's opening to Thailand. Presumably all Cambodians, hard, soft, or whatever, are disappointed that the result has not been a cutoff in Chinese arms to the Khmer Rouge via Thailand, but can we believe that they blame Hun Sen for trying?.

Are the 'hardliners' the ex-Khmer Rouge who not too long ago were characterized as objecting to Hun Sen's version of *perestroika*, because they wanted a command economy like they remembered under Pol Pot? Or are they the now miniscule group of old 'Viet Nam veterans' still in leadership positions who might object to an alignment with Thailand rather than with Vietnam, and who certainly oppose too much accommodation with the Khmer Rouge?

If the former, then does not the call for a Phnom Penh opening to the Khmer Rouge by the Hungarians make them now more hardline than they were before their communist party fell apart? In that case, by analogy, Cambodian hardliners would be the young administrators and technocrats who have overseen a type of economic development not unlike what the Hungarians have undertaken.

If 'hardliner' means what it does in Eastern Europe – opposition to *glasnost* and *perestroika* – then the Phnom Penh hardliners should find it ideologically easy to follow the Hungarian suggestion and cooperate again with the Khmer Rouge, who have shown the same interest in those concepts as Budapest's opponents Ceausescu and Honecker.

Least likely of all do I find the supposition that "mid-level non-party officials ... think that [Hun Sen] should more actively seek an accommodation with ... Sihanouk". Most mid-level officials are now in the party; but party or not they constitute the group within Cambodian society who have been the most consistently anti-Sihanouk since the 1960s when, as young students, teachers, or low-level officials, they gave me my first lessons in Cambodian politics.

They also have material reasons to favor present policies. They occupy, and have recently been given title to, up-market real estate, and in terms of quality of dwelling are living better than most of them could have hoped before the war. Because of the nearly complete turnover of the Phnom Penh population, almost

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<sup>606</sup> On this see "Recent Developments in Cambodia", a talk by Stephen R. Heder, Australian National University, 5 September 1990, printed and distributed by Campaign to Oppose the Return of the Khmer Rouge, Washington, D.C., p. 2, " ... I have seen no evidence that any of the ex-Khmer Rouge in positions of high political authority in today's Cambodia were involved in large-scale or systematic killing of Cambodian civilians ... it seems they were not deeply involved in any of the massacres of Cambodian civilians that took place between April 1975 and January 1979".

no one occupies the same house as before 1970, nor have old ownership records been preserved.

The original owners, if they survive and are politically active, are among the Sihanouk and Son Sann partisans, and no doubt one of the first things they would try to do on return to Phnom Penh would be to recover their old property, thus provoking a trauma which might approach the proportions of April 1975. For this reason alone I do not expect much support for them among Phnom Penh officialdom or the new class of private businessmen.

Bowring refused to publish the letter, but, surprisingly, sent me a personal communication to explain why. My response to that follows.

### Response to Bowring (1989) <sup>607</sup>

Dear Mr. Bowring,

Thank you for your letter of 18 December 1989. I was flattered and surprised to receive it, since it is not obligatory, nor usual, at least in my experience, for a chief editor to explain to a correspondent with "Editor (Letters)" why a letter could not be used.

I have always accepted that those responsible for publication have an absolute right to publish or not publish such contributions without explanation. I do not find it easy, however, to accept the reasons which you offered (unnecessarily) for not publishing that letter.

My topic, possible relationships between what is or is not happening in Cambodia and the changes in Eastern Europe is not a subject which had "been rather oversubscribed", nor to which I had previously contributed. It had **first been raised** by the article of Hiebert to which I was responding.

I assure you, nevertheless, that I understand your reticence to publish my letter of 11 December, particularly now that I see the way the subject is being pursued.

Further, with respect to slanting news on Cambodia, could you ask Hiebert to stop referring to the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea, or any of its three factions, as 'the resistance'?

Hiebert may not be old enough to recall and be sensitive to the issue, but 'the resistance' conjures up images of French and Polish heroines remaining silent under Gestapo torture, or of ordinary citizens hiding Jewish neighbors from deportation, not US-financed contras trying to destroy what little progress has been made in their countries in the interest of groups which behaved hardly better than Gestapo when they had earlier chances to govern.

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<sup>607</sup> Michael Vickery, unpublished letter to Philip Bowring, 1989.

## Political arrests and Red Solutions

The Cambodians arrested in May 1990 for allegedly trying to form a new political party were released in October 1991. They included Thun Saray, now director of an important human rights NGO named 'Adhoc', Ung Phan and Kann Man, close collaborators of Hun Sen who joined FUNCINPEC after their release, and Khay Matoury, an architect who was one of the founders of 'Adhoc'. Khieu Kanharith was removed from his editor's post at *Kampuchea*. The group was believed to be close to Hun Sen. Since, except for Khieu Kanharith, they were little known to foreign journalists, their arrest, signaling that a new party would not be tolerated, fueled much speculation.<sup>608</sup>

It is amusing, with hindsight, to note that in the press comment of the time a split was seen between 'liberal' Hun Sen, and 'hardline communist' Chea Sim, and makes one wonder whether subsequent comment on alleged differences among CPP leaders, for example, between 'strongman' Hun Sen and ardent Buddhist Chea Sim, should be given any more credence. Of course, something was going on among the leadership, but frivolous speculation about 'liberals' and 'hardliners' does not help to understand it. In November of that year I was able to make a short visit to Phnom Penh, after which I wrote several articles.

Three of them, reproduced below, appeared in *The Nation* (Bangkok) on 5, 6, and 13 January 1991 (footnotes have been added later). Together, with other material, they appeared in *Indochina Issues* 93, August 1991, as "The Campaign Against Cambodia: 1990-1991". I had tried to place the combined article in *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*, where it was rejected for reasons which suggested that BCAS was in danger of going the way of *New Republic*, with its own coterie of Leftists for Reagan, à la Peter Collier and David Horowitz, led by Edward Friedman, then on the editorial board and a founding member.<sup>609</sup>

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<sup>608</sup> In his *A History of Cambodia*, third edition, p. 238, Chandler neglects to say that their offense was to form a new party, asserting rather that they were trying to "loosen the country's alliance with Vietnam" but were "thwarted by hard-liners in the PRK" and accused of "counterrevolutionary activities". Not unexpectedly, for Chandler, there is no source for this interpretation, and at least 'loosening the Vietnamese alliance' is way off base, typical of the throwaway lines about Cambodia-Viet Nam relations that pepper his writings. That alliance had been loosening since 1981, dramatically since 1985, and the last Vietnamese troops had been withdrawn in 1989.

Of course, Chandler may have uncritically repeated Phnom Penh gossip, which since 1979 has interpreted every sudden change, or unexpected death, of leading personnel, as Vietnamese machinations – again, the 'Vietnam syndrome'. These remarks, and any reference to the event, have been removed from his fourth edition, 2008. The most detailed treatment of the question is in Gottesman, pp. 336-350, which, based on later interviews, like much of Gottesman, requires very careful reading.

<sup>609</sup> For those too young to remember, *New Republic* was once one of the leaders among the left liberal press, but in the 1980s turned to retrospective support for the US war in Vietnam and active support for US policy in the Caribbean, especially in Nicaragua (see



### Notable Changes in Phnom Penh (January 1991) <sup>610</sup>

In September-October 1990 a group of over 30 Cambodian classical dancers spent six weeks touring the United States, much of the time living in fear from pressure by right-wing refugees, the Lawyers' Committee for International Human Rights, and finally the U.S. State Department and Immigration Service, to make them defect as a massive political statement against the Phnom Penh government.

In spite of threats, inducements, invasion of privacy both during their work and in their free time, and at last confinement in their hotel for interrogation during the final day and evening of their tour, when they had hoped to shop and see a bit of New York night life, only 5 decided to remain, inflicting a political slap in the face of the US regime.

This case, in its very pettiness, epitomizes the US position on Cambodia. What the US regime attempted on a small scale was its 'Nicaragua strategy', which seems to be the guiding line of US policy on Cambodia. This strategy consists first of external pressure – political and military against the nation; moral and material on the individual.

When this fails to bring about collapse there is both inducement and threat to persuade the nation to relax its vigilance against the external pressure, and open up its economy to capitalist freedoms and its politics to competing factions.

Then, it is implied, the external heat will be taken off, and the US will help effect a reconciliation with the external enemy (which the US had organized and financed), development aid and investment will be forthcoming, and progress with freedom will be assured.

Inevitably, economic liberalism in a small, poor country, at war and facing a US economic blockade, results in disastrous inflation and further impoverishment of most of the population until, when an election comes, they may be so disoriented as to vote for even proven enemies because they seem to be backed by the rich Uncle Sam, in the mistaken belief that generous aid will be forthcoming.

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Al Santoli, "The New Indochina War", *The New Republic*, 30 May 1983, pp. 19-23, and on Nicaragua, Ronald Radosh, *New Republic*, 24 October 1983, p.7). On Horowitz, Collier, and Friedman see above, p. 258 and note 454.

Later Friedman left *BCAS*, following acrimonious discussions among the editorial board on what *BCAS* should say about the rape of an Okinawan girl by US servicemen in September 1995. Friedman's position was that this was not the type of issue in which *BCAS* should get involved. In particular he did not want *BCAS* to take an anti-US military position, or suggest that US military be withdrawn from Japan.

In the end, except for a laudably tough piece in the "Notes from the Field" section (*BCAS*, Vol 27, No 4, 1995, p. 91-94, "The US Military and Sexual Violence against Women", by Sandra Sturtevant), *BCAS* dropped the issue. Beginning with *BCAS*, Vol 29, No 3, July-Sept 1997, Friedman's name was no longer among the editorial board.

<sup>610</sup> Michael Vickery, *The Nation* (Bangkok), 5 January 1991. Footnotes added.

If that side wins then rich uncle's promises evaporate and the country is left to rot, just as the Cambodian dancers realized that after defection they would be on their own in a strange country, without even minimal reward for the political points they had made for Uncle Sam.

Press reports on Cambodia during 1989-90 have given disturbing indications that the Nicaragua strategy may be succeeding, even abstracting from the individual hostility of most Western journalists to the Phnom Penh government, and the enthusiastic advocacy by some for the Coalition.<sup>611</sup>

Their attitudes show that however nebulous the alleged gains made by the Khmer Rouge in the hearts and minds of Cambodian villagers, they have certainly made inroads into the hearts and minds of the Western press corps covering Cambodia.

The most objective sign of Nicaragua-type decay has been the explosive inflation, 400% in two years, after eight years of money management which kept the *riel* and price level relatively stable, a far better record than in Vietnam. Another matter of concern emphasized by the press has been the increasing power of an alleged 'hardline' faction opposed to 'liberal' Hun Sen and intent on wiping out the gains in personal and economic freedom which had slowly accumulated since 1979.<sup>612</sup>

As evidence of Hun Sen's declining influence journalists have cited greater difficulty in obtaining interviews with him, and increasing prominence of Chea Sim in the local press.

At the end of November 1990 I was able, for the first time in two years, to visit Phnom Penh for a direct view of the changes which have occurred.

Pleasant surprises were in store. At the Cambodian consulate in Saigon I asked to drive to Phnom Penh rather than fly. On previous trips this had meant tedious discussion, calls to Phnom Penh for permission, requests for Vietnamese Foreign Ministry guides to the border where one was met by other guides sent from Phnom Penh to take the traveler to a designated hotel and an appointment with the Foreign Ministry Press Section. At times there was even a problem renting a car through the Vietnamese authorities.

Now it is a simple commercial operation. "No problem", the consul said; "just tell me when you want to go and I'll set up a car for you". No guides either; just the driver and me, and on departure the consul remarked, "I haven't phoned Phnom Penh about you, to save money. When you get there just check into a hotel and then go over to the Foreign Ministry to tell them you have arrived".

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<sup>611</sup> Unaccountably, some relatively influential observers who evince at least marginal sympathy for Cambodia consider the Nicaragua solution desirable. See Asia Watch's Sidney Jones, "War and Human Rights in Cambodia", in *NRYB*, 19 July 1990, which is discussed above, pp. 332 ff.

<sup>612</sup> Note again the press corps flip-flops on 'hardline' and 'liberal'.

Similar novelties waited in Phnom Penh. There was freedom to pick any of the several hotels newly opened since 1988, and competition has driven the price for a basic room with toilet, shower, fridge, and aircon down from the earlier rock bottom \$17 at the Monorom to \$7-8 in the now popular Asie and Santhipheap, the latter favored by emigré Khmer flocking back on visits from the US, Canada, and France.

The next morning at the Foreign Ministry was equally casual. “Glad to see you again, hope you have a pleasant stay”. There was no more need for an official car or guide unless I went outside Phnom Penh, which I had not planned in the short time at my disposal.

My first errand was to contact old friends from the 1960s, a project which in previous years meant an official request, car and Foreign Ministry guide. This time I just showed up at the Municipal Education Office where one of them worked to invite her, her husband, and another couple for dinner the following evening. No one at her office showed any surprise, as though strangers dropping in for a chat was no more controversial than in 1960 (and less so than after 1964 when Sihanouk’s regime hardened).

Three more lunch and dinner meetings with them and other prewar colleagues, whether in a restaurant or in their homes, were equally uncomplicated, and they all commented on the increased personal freedom compared with earlier years.

All of them have responsible middle-level official positions, make ends meet with combined salaries and family members in the private sector, are happy to have received legal title to the houses assigned to them after 1979, and are cautiously optimistic about the future in spite of the universal fear that the Democratic Kampuchea Coalition, including the Khmer Rouge, could be forced on the country again through misconceived Big Power plans.<sup>613</sup>

A research objective on this trip was to collect issues of the Front, Party, and Army newspapers for the past two years to complete my collection starting from 1979. This, also, used to involve a formal written request, a wait for permission, a car and guide.

This time I took a pedicab to each office, made an informal verbal request, and returned the following day to collect the bundle, without any sign of suspicion or surprise that a foreigner was maintaining a collection of the local Khmer-language press. This is not only an improvement in freedom under the present government, but also in comparison to the late 1960s when a foreigner collecting the Khmer press could inspire interest from the secret police, and an inopportune visit to a newspaper office caused near terror among the personnel.

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<sup>613</sup> Real estate was state property from 1975 until 1988, when Phnom Penh residents were given title to the quarters which had been assigned to them, or where they had squatted, after January 1979.

As for the new economic freedom, its effects are visible in the improvements to housing, new shops, hotels and restaurants, consumer goods, and many more vehicles, which although not signs of productive investment or what a poor country needs in wartime, at least demonstrate increase of wealth in private hands, still lightly taxed, if at all.

Where, then, is the 'hardline' threat about which the Western press is so worried? Since late 1988 rights to private property have increased as has freedom for private business. There is more freedom of speech and for contact among Khmer and foreigners, with foreigners resident in Phnom Penh renting not only entire houses, but rooms and portions of houses in which they are in constant contact, sometimes sharing meals, with the local owners.

Are the 'hardliners' perhaps endangering the peace process, something which simple inspection could not reveal and in which concerned foreigners would have a legitimate interest?

Should one take seriously the rumors of a Red Solution, a deal between the internal communists in the Phnom Penh government and the external Khmer Rouge which would marginalize the Sihanouk and Son Sann groups and would be bitterly opposed by the Cambodian people?<sup>614</sup>

#### Comment on the 'Red Solution' (1994)

The "red solution" materialized like a goblin in press speculation about Cambodia in 1990-1991. At the time I considered that it emanated from sources who feared that peace with honor might really be achieved in Cambodia.

This fear appeared clearly in a 1991 journalist's report that "Western analysts have speculated that the recent agreement among the four warring Cambodian factions to seek reconciliation in a supreme national council (SNC), and the fact that China and Viet Nam have agreed to go along with it, suggests that the two

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<sup>614</sup> James Pringle, "Fears of a return to the 'red way' in Cambodia", *Bangkok Post*, 12 November 1990; Agence France-Presse, "Vietnamese Cadres Weigh 'Red Solution' for Cambodia", *The Nation* (Bangkok), 13 December 1990.

According to Pringle, there is "little concrete to it yet although there are straws in the wind"; "neither Vietnam nor China would welcome planned United Nations-sponsored elections and a UN peace-keeping force here"; "why [quoting a 'western diplomat'] would Vietnam want its own unhappy population to see free elections next door?"; "Raoul Jennar ... said, 'Cambodia is hesitating between a Western way and a red way to peace'"; "Cambodians do, after all, refer to their adversaries as 'brother enemy'; and 80 percent of the top leadership of the Phnom Penh regime are themselves former Khmer Rouge, including ... Hun Sen ... Chea Sim and ... Heng Samrin".

Pace Pringle, 'brother enemy' is the vocabulary of Nayan Chanda, not the Cambodians, and was probably inspired by *Red Brotherhood at War*, by Grant Evans and Kelvin Rowley; the 80% figure is a serious exaggeration, a propaganda element which has been orchestrated during the past two years by academics and journalists hostile to Phnom Penh. See Vickery, letter to the *FEER*, published 30 November 1989, and above, pp.338 ff.

Asian communist countries are now working towards a 'red solution' ... a possible Sino-Vietnamese formula which would abandon the UN-sponsored peace plan and, instead, bring together the two communist factions ... under the leadership of Prince Norodom Sihanouk".

This reflects a terror that Cambodians, with the aid of China and Vietnam, might find a road to peace and national unity without neo-colonial interference.<sup>615</sup>

That this was the cause of terror, and not the nature of the solution, is seen in the precisely identical structure accepted by the interested capitalist powers in the 1991 Paris Peace Agreement when it could be achieved with their intervention.

A year earlier Raoul Jennar had described the 'red solution' as "trying to achieve peace through the reconciliation of the two rival branches of the Cambodian communist party ... organized and guaranteed by the communist regimes of Asia (China, Vietnam, Laos, North Korea)", "I think it would be as imprudent to simply reject such an hypothesis as to grant it excessive credit", "It is obvious that 'the red solution' is progressively growing stronger as the military pressure of the Khmer Rouge and economic difficulties are increasing and that the chances to make a success of the Paris conference are withering".<sup>616</sup>

And a British NGO official reported, "A senior member of the Phnom Penh delegation to Paris [Supreme National Council conference, 21-22 December 1990], told me unattributably that there was something in the idea of a ... Red Solution for Cambodia, whereby China and Viet Nam would act to reimpose communism on Cambodia ... This meant Viet Nam removing Mr. Hun Sen and the more pro-Western members of his cabinet, in return for China removing Pol Pot and the worst of his genocidal henchmen. The two Cambodian parties would then be fused together and the country run the way Viet Nam and China wanted. But my informant said that ... it was highly unlikely. It was talked about in NGO circles in Phnom Penh by those who knew little or nothing of Cambodia outside the capital ... it overlooked the degree of hatred between the Khmer Rouge and the former Khmer Rouge in governing circles in Phnom Penh [and] ... the hatred of the people for the Khmer Rouge".<sup>617</sup>

As Raoul Jennar reported from a conversation with Hun Sen, the latter said that "barring the return of the Khmer Rouge to power, such a 'red solution' would be the worst of all catastrophes for Cambodia ... [a]lthough he agrees to

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<sup>615</sup> Murray Hebert and Tai Ming Cheung, "Comrades again". *FEER* 22 August 1991, p. 8.

<sup>616</sup> Raoul Jennar, "Cambodia: the hardest is still to be done", "Mission report from 01.10.90 till 02.11.90, to the NGO Forum on Cambodia", Document RMJ/8, dated 6 November 1990 pp. 10-11.

<sup>617</sup> John Pedlar, Report on "The Cambodian SNC Meeting, Paris, 21 & 22 December [1990]", 26 December, typescript.

the presence in Phnom Penh of supporters of such a solution, due to ‘*war weariness*’, he stresses the gap between men like Messrs Heng Samrin and Chea [Sim] and the Khmer Rouge leadership”.<sup>618</sup>

Nevertheless, there may have been more to it. In early 1989 Sihanouk said that the Soviet Union and China might impose a settlement to end “Vietnam’s occupation”, but he “warned it would lead to a prolonged civil war”. This was in reference to the recent Soviet-Chinese meeting on Cambodia, in which they had linked a Vietnamese troop withdrawal to a decrease and eventual termination of foreign aid to both the Khmer ‘resistance’ and to the PRK government. The Khmer Rouge said the two things must not be linked, and Sihanouk was worried that it meant victory for the PRK.<sup>619</sup>

Moscow would support a four-party provisional body under Sihanouk, but not a new four-party government, which is what China wants; Sihanouk then agreed to such an executive committee outside the PRK.

At the same time, and seen as in relation to the Red Solution, in May 1990 six members of the liberal wing of the KPRP (named on p. 356) and believed to be close to Hun Sen, were arrested after having attempted to form a Democratic Freedom Party in preparation for the elections projected for the near future. Transport Minister Ung Phan, and Kann Man, in particular, were close to Hun Sen; as was another friend of Hun Sen, Khieu Kanharith, editor of *Kampuchea*, an official weekly newspaper, who lost that position.

Although Western comment blamed the incident on ‘hard-line’ Communist conservatives, the timing of the attempt to form a new party was very bad, indeed it was provocative, and it tended to weaken Hun Sen, who was a major obstacle to the plans of those powers who favored the tripartite coalition in the ongoing peace negotiations. The *FEER* published an unattributed note that there was “concern among Indonesian officials that Thailand may be moving towards acceptance of Premier Hun Sen’s government in Cambodia”.<sup>620</sup>

The most intriguing comment on the ‘red solution’, came much later from Hun Sen, in his June 1994 letter to Sihanouk, in which he said he had faced untold dangers in searching for a political solution in Cambodia. He alluded to

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<sup>618</sup> This is from an untitled report by Raoul M. Jennar to the NGO Forum in Phnom Penh written after the second Pattaya Conference on 26-30 August 1991.

<sup>619</sup> *Bangkok Post*, 11 February 1989, p. 6, “Khmer settlement ‘may lead to war’; *Nation*, 11 February 1989, “Emphasizing agreement and playing down disagreement”, a joint Sino-Soviet nine-point statement on Kampuchea.

<sup>620</sup> Tom Lansner, “Chain reaction”, *FEER*, 19 July 1990, pp. 28-29. A red herring was the information given to Lansner that “a major complaint of the officials who tried to launch the Democratic Freedom Party was a secret treaty they claimed made territorial concessions to Vietnam”; and “Intelligence”, *Loc. cit.*, p. 8. This is as weird as Chandler’s assertion, above, note 608, that they wanted to ‘loosen the alliance with Vietnam’. See also Gottesman, pp. 336-350.

“the influence of leaders of some countries exerted upon me to seek a red resolution [*sic*] which would have denied the roles to be played by Your Majesty and the non-communist resistance forces and which I did not accept was another kind of danger, which I would not reveal their names right now but would mention in the book to be published later on”.<sup>621</sup>

Chea Sim: the hardline leader (1991)<sup>622</sup>

In recent months there has been a veritable explosion of stories in the Bangkok and Western press about the new prominence of Chea Sim, an alleged ‘hardliner’, who is portrayed emerging as a counterweight to the 1989-90 liberalization associated with Hun Sen.<sup>623</sup>

The stories do not seem to be orchestrated, but rather the result of journalistic pack hunting. Their total effect, however, is to implicitly justify the Nicaragua strategy on the grounds that the alternative in Phnom Penh is the Red Solution. Even writers for ostensibly non-reactionary publications now treat ‘Cambodian intransigence’ as a particularly Phnom Penh phenomenon.<sup>624</sup>

It is difficult to determine what the stories are based on, for they have been vague both as to sources, which may be understandable, and as to the ‘hardline’ measures or policies which Chea Sim is supposed to favor. One certain source is the Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) in Phnom Penh, in particular reports by their diplomatic consultant Raoul Jennar, who although sympathetic to the Phnom Penh government, excitedly emphasizes the worst rumors about impending dangers.<sup>625</sup>

<sup>621</sup> *The Nation*, 24 June 1994, “Sihanouk and Hun Sen at opposite ends”, translated text of Hun Sen’s letter to Sihanouk concerning Sihanouk’s desire to assume power.

<sup>622</sup> Michael Vickery, *The Nation* (Bangkok), 6 January 1991. Footnotes added.

<sup>623</sup> An example: James Pringle, “Hardliners outflank Hun Sen”, *Bangkok Post*, 20 October 1990. “In the capital, new official directives seeking to limit contacts between foreigners and Cambodians have been introduced”; Hun Sen “has lost influence internally, according to East European and Soviet envoys”; “In the past six months, Chea Sim has filled most government and party positions with people loyal to him, diplomats here say”; “The hardliners are made nervous by talk of a UN presence, dismantling of their regime, free elections and a multi-party system, they say”. One wonders if Pringle got these ideas from his own research or just from reading Murray Hiebert (above, pp. 353 ff.). His impressions were contrary to mine in November 1990.

<sup>624</sup> Nicolas Cummings-Bruce, “Khmer Rouge ignore cease-fire to advance on Cambodia’s capital”, *Guardian Weekly* 8 July 1990.

<sup>625</sup> Raoul Jennar, “Cambodia: Which Way to Peace?”, *Indochina Issues* 91, Washington, D.C., October 1990; “Cambodia: the hardest is still to be done”, Mission Report, 6 November 1990. For examples of Jennar’s influence on journalists see James Pringle, above, “Fears of a return to the ‘red way’ in Cambodia”, *Bangkok Post*, 12 November 1990, p. 5; and Sue Downie, “Report”, *Bangkok Post*, 30 November 1990, p. 7.

I asked one NGO head, whose own background as a onetime Marxist-sympathizing student in a western European country has immunized him against knee-jerk anti-socialism, why the NGOs were so concerned about Chea Sim. He answered that whenever there was an important public ceremony or meeting Chea Sim was there playing a prominent role, and suddenly I realized what might have happened.

In the last two years there has been a dramatic increase in the number of NGOs and foreign aid personnel in Phnom Penh, from a mere handful in 1988 to over 60 organizations and more than 200 people by the end of 1990. Few of the new personnel were familiar with Cambodian personalities. They of course knew Heng Samrin, if only because of the journalistic shibboleth 'Vietnamese-backed Heng Samrin regime', and Hun Sen would have been familiar to anyone reading, however casually, news of Cambodia.

But Chea Sim, until the latest anti-Phnom Penh press campaign, was hardly mentioned except in specialist studies.

Suddenly, on arriving in Cambodia in 1989 and 1990 our NGO innocents see another face appearing daily on Phnom Penh television and in public gatherings. They learn that he was one of the former DK officials in the present government and that he may object to the negative effects of economic liberalism, and the 'hardline reaction' is born.

Could it not, nevertheless, be true?

Is Chea Sim gaining in power and influence at the expense of Heng Samrin, and more importantly Hun Sen, or are the first two, ex-DK 'hardliners', countering Hun Sen's supposed liberalism, perhaps even aiming for the Red Solution? A Kremlinological analysis of the Cambodian press does not support either hypothesis.<sup>626</sup>

A count of prominent appearances of all three in the Party newspaper *Pracheachon* during 1989-1990 and in 1986, Hun Sen's second year as both Prime Minister and Foreign Minister after his ranking had been consolidated, shows Hun Sen given more prominence than either Heng Samrin or Chea Sim in both 1989 and 1990, whereas in 1986 both of them had appeared more often.

Moreover, the number of Hun Sen's appearances increased from 1989 to 1990 (55 to 62), while those of both Chea Sim and Heng Samrin decreased slightly, from 44 to 41 and from 49 to 48.

Neither does *Kampuchea*, organ of the Front, Chea Sim's own organization, help the 'hardline' case. Hun Sen is less prominent, perhaps only because that paper gives less attention to foreign affairs, but space devoted to him was steady in all three years and equal to Chea Sim in 1986 and 1990. Heng Samrin dominated overall, with greater attention given to Chea Sim only in 1989, the

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<sup>626</sup> It is perhaps this sort of result which has made Kremlinology unpopular in certain circles, as discussed above, pp. 244, ff.



year of allegedly Hun Sen-inspired liberalization, and when *Kampuchea* was under an editor close to Hun Sen.<sup>627</sup>

The new public prominence of Chea Sim, ‘seen’ by NGO workers and transient journalists, seems really to be a result of their previous lack of familiarity with the country.

As for the Red Solution, it is the least plausible of all scenarios. The Khmer Rouge consider the Phnom Penh leaders traitors, and the latter have for too long rejected the Khmer Rouge both as traitors and as genocidal murderers. It is unlikely that even reconciled China and Viet Nam would press for such a solution, nor could they impose it, for in the eyes of the Khmer Rouge the worst treason of their former colleagues in Phnom Penh is friendship with Viet Nam, and Viet Nam would hardly collude in restoring their most bitter enemies to any degree of control in Cambodia.

The Red Solution is a canard which can only make sense to people locked in an early Cold War mindset, where ‘once a communist always a communist’, and of only one variety.

But supposing that behind the scenes Chea Sim (who after all is second-ranking member of the Politburo, President of the National Assembly, and President of the Front, and therefore a person of undoubted power and influence), really is showing his muscle, what precisely are the ‘hardline’ policies which he might wish to impose against Hun Sen?

The journalists love to prate about a Chea Sim-inspired suppression of the new liberal economic policies with which Hun Sen has been associated – increased private ownership of housing and land, the end of attempts to collectivize agriculture, more freedom for private market activities, in particular import of foreign goods via Koh Kong.

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<sup>627</sup> Stephen Heder, “Recent Developments in Cambodia”, a talk given at the Australian National University, 5 September 1990, printed and distributed by Campaign to Oppose the Return of the Khmer Rouge, Washington, D.C., p. 7, was mistaken in writing that after the arrest of people trying to form an independent political party in 1990 “[t]he prominence given to Hun Sen in the official news media suddenly dropped, at the same time that given to Heng Samrin and Chea Sim suddenly rose”.

If the newspaper counts are broken down by half-year periods, the relative prominence of all three leaders varies irregularly by semester in all years. In 1990, to the end of November, Hun Sen was featured in *Kampuchea* 10 times in the first semester and 6 in the second, while Chea Sim’s 16 appearances that year were in the opposite proportion, a statistically insignificant difference.

The differences in all years seem related to the duties they perform. Hun Sen gets more attention when foreign affairs, such as international conferences, are important, while Chea Sim dominates the press during sessions of the National Assembly or Front conferences. The arrests occurred in May, but Hun Sen’s activities continued to receive the same attention during the next three months, while Chea Sim’s slight relative predominance is only noticeable from September.

These measures have been popular, at least in Phnom Penh, and among those with extra cash or valuables to invest or spend on luxuries. Even state employees living on exiguous salaries were happy to receive title to the houses in which they had squatted with tacit government approval since 1979; and this new property ownership has already resulted in a speculative real estate market which has brought wealth to some people who previously had little but their salaries.

The other side of the coin has been the 400% devaluation which has hit all those on salary, has probably hurt farmers who are not in a position to receive a corresponding increase in prices for their products, has created a new group of conspicuously wealthy Phnom Penhites, and has widened the gap between city and country. As those who now worry about Chea Sim delighted in reporting all through 1989, one effect of economic freedom was widespread corruption and scandalous profiteering by some of those in power, extending, so they said, right up to the country's top families.

Certainly these developments trouble Chea Sim, and no doubt others who are not at all 'hardline'; in fact, all but the profiteers who flaunted their wealth in the new night spots until some controls were recently imposed on them.

Chea Sim may well be saying that certain of the liberal developments must be reined in. At the very least some of the new and largely unproductive wealth must be taxed. Before western journalists express shock at 'hardline' economic measures they might take note that so far no effective taxation has been applied on the imports from Thailand, Singapore, and elsewhere which pass through Koh Kong, and increased taxation, particularly in that sector, is in the cards for 1991.

Other 'hardline' measures were explicitly suggested by Chea Sim in a December 4th televised conference at which he addressed Health Ministry officials.

One of the problems he said must be solved is the vast quantities of outdated, fake, and dangerous medicines which have so far been imported untaxed, and sold without restriction in private pharmacies and street stands, a concern which health workers have voiced for 10 years. Chea Sim said that new regulations must be introduced to control the import and sale of medicines, and that none should be sold until certified by government experts. He was speaking to the right audience, for most of the private pharmacists are also Health Ministry officials.

Another problem Chea Sim emphasized was the attitude of doctors to patients. He complained that too often doctors were impolite or arrogant to patients, particularly the poor, and he said they must change their attitude.

A third problem was the scarcity of doctors in distant provinces. All graduates of the medical school, he said, want to stay and work in Phnom Penh, and the state should begin to take measures to require doctors to serve some time in rural areas. Incidentally, these are not problems unique to Cambodia within Southeast Asia.

These are some examples of Chea Sim's 'hardline' ideas, suggesting policies and regulations which are normal throughout the world, but which have not yet been applied in the anarchically 'liberal' situation which Cambodia could not avoid because of the penury of trained personnel and state resources after 1979.

Among his audience were several NGO foreigners whose presence illustrates the new opportunities they have for association with local colleagues and observation of the Cambodian leadership, but which may lead to misunderstanding when, as in this case, they had no idea of what was being said. Perhaps, bored themselves, and noting the glum expressions of the conferees who were being chided for profiteering and shirking of duty, they may imagine they were witness to an example of 'hardline' repression of freedom.

Interestingly, Chea Sim linked the problems he cited and their solution to the coming free elections, the holding of which he treated implicitly as a foregone conclusion. He told his audience that if they, that is the Cambodian government and its officials, did not get the people's support they would lose the election, and would thereby lose their present positions. Doctors and pharmacists, in order not to lose potential electoral support for the government, must henceforth insure that patients get safe medicines, are treated politely, and in distant provinces receive at least minimal care.

Chea Sim certainly knows what he is talking about. As one of the old guard of revolutionaries he was part of the Pol Pot-led revolutionary apparatus in the days when it was winning popular support among the poor and in the countryside, against a Phnom Penh which appeared increasingly as the home of the wealthy, arrogant, and exploitative. It was with such support that Chea Sim and his comrades withstood US bombing and conquered Phnom Penh in April 1975.<sup>628</sup>

He may well be more sensitive to the danger of social divisions than younger people, who only joined the revolution in the 1970s and who, since 1979, have emphasized the role of foreign influence in the Pol Pot regime rather than the popular support which that group once enjoyed. Chea Sim no doubt agrees with the remark of an Australian education adviser to his Khmer counterpart in November 1990 that "every imported Mercedes costs the government 10,000 votes".<sup>629</sup>

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<sup>628</sup> Chea Sim is reported to have rejoined guerilla forces in Cambodia in 1967, by 1975 had become District Chief of Ponhea Krek, Prey Veng Province, in Region 20, and later became chief of Region 20. See Ben Kiernan, *How Pol Pot*, pp. 258, 278; and Kiernan, "Wild Chickens, Farm Chickens and Cormorants: Kampuchea's Eastern Zone Under Pol Pot", in Chandler and Kiernan, eds. *Revolution and Its Aftermath*, p. 167.

<sup>629</sup> This was related to me by the Australian, Bill Vistarini, in November 1990.

Is Cambodia ready for liberalization? (1991)<sup>630</sup>

Pertinently, Hun Sen in his 29 November 1990 conference for the foreign press (which was immediately televised to the Cambodian public that evening), noted that the situation in Cambodia may be less serious than, for example, in the Philippines, where President Aquino declared a national emergency during the rebellion of December 1989.

Hun Sen said that his government had not yet felt obliged to declare a state of emergency which, he emphasized, could give them the right to enforce general mobilization and confiscation of property in order to maintain internal security and national defense. This observation may have been directed less at the foreign journalists who probably missed its significance than at his local audience, warning the profiteers and corrupt among them that norms of international practice, even in the capitalist and formally democratic states, permit a government to resort to dictatorial and confiscatory measures in times of great national crisis.<sup>631</sup>

No country can afford to indulge in political and economic liberalization in wartime, least of all the small and weak. Even in the US, far as it has been from any battlefield in the 20th century, wars have at times meant conscription, rationing, internment of supposed subversives, and censorship.

Demands for Phnom Penh to open up multi-party politics before the war is over are misplaced, and may reasonably be construed there as demands for them to commit political suicide. If a few people were detained earlier this year for insisting on formation of a new political party and pluralism as in Warsaw or Prague, it was a normal wartime measure and not necessarily a sign of a split between Hun Sen liberals and Chea Sim hardliners.<sup>632</sup>

And quite apart from Cambodia's precarious situation, the view of Eastern Europe from Phnom Penh is shattering. Here were a group of industrialized socialist countries, who helped revive Cambodia after 1979, where thousands of Cambodian students have been sent for advanced university and technical studies, and whose living standards seemed ultra-modern to post-revolutionary Cambodians. Suddenly they embrace pluralism and capitalism and within a year seem to go down the drain both economically and socially.

Not even the new democracy and free speech cut much ice in Phnom Penh when children write home, as did the daughter of one of my friends, that many of the 500-odd Khmer students in former East Germany have had to interrupt their

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<sup>630</sup> Michael Vickery, *The Nation* (Bangkok), 13 January 1991. Footnotes added.

<sup>631</sup> I attended the press conference, taped it in Khmer, and watched some of the televised portions.

<sup>632</sup> See above, pp. 356 ff.. The full story of those events has never been revealed, and in my experience the persons involved are reluctant to talk about it. Their action was inopportune and premature, and suggests that they may have victims of a provocation (see Gottesman, pp. 336-350)

studies and flee from smaller towns where they were studying to the slightly greater security of metropolitan Leipzig, to escape being hunted down by neo-Nazi hoodlums.

If the Eastern European states, which appeared stable, prosperous, and progressive, could collapse so easily, a Cambodian does not have to be a 'hardliner', or a closet Khmer Rouge, to believe that political pluralism, beyond elections among the existing factions, is premature.

Even in Viet Nam, where the dangers of war are past and a new prosperity is evident, the leading pro-free market economist, Nguyen Xuan Oanh, recently (December 1990) answered a Western journalist's question about political pluralism there with the observation that Korea had developed under Park Chung Hee, Taiwan under the Kuomintang, and Singapore under Lee Kuan Yew. So much for the attractions of political pluralism to, not just 'hardline' politicians, but hardheaded economists.<sup>633</sup>

The Cambodian hardline reaction, if that is what it is, must also be viewed against what has not happened in the West in response to the tentative steps toward *perestroika* and *glasnost* in Indochina during the past two years, and which really began there even earlier than in Eastern Europe. Since 1979 the problem had allegedly been Vietnamese troops in Cambodia; there were implicit promises that their withdrawal would bring relaxation of US and ASEAN pressures.<sup>634</sup>

They left, but except in Thailand nothing happened, and statements by US regime figures could be construed as meaning they want the Vietnamese to interfere in Cambodian affairs again to help secure US policy goals. In Viet Nam IMF and World Bank recommendations were followed, and the Cambodian economic liberalization in 1989 was similar. But even after the IMF in 1989 wrote a glowing report, and insisted Viet Nam deserved normalization of economic relations, investment, and aid, the US blocked all such plans.<sup>635</sup>

What is Phnom Penh to make of this, especially when, even more than in the Vietnamese experience, their liberalization has resulted in explosive inflation, a flood of destabilizing luxuries, and politically dangerous class disparities? The disastrous effects were to be expected, given Cambodia's wartime weaknesses.

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<sup>633</sup> This was related to me by the journalist, whom I had accompanied to Saigon, soon after the interview. I do not know whether the interview, with this detail, was published.

<sup>634</sup> Nitya Pibulsongkram, Thai Ambassador to the United Nations, told the General Assembly, "he was sure that external support for the Kampuchea resistance would stop when Vietnamese forces pull out of Kampuchea" (*Bangkok Post*, 4 November 1988), and "China pledges to halt aid to Khmer Rouge" if Vietnamese troops are withdrawn by the second half of 1989, as was agreed in recent talks with the Soviets (*Bangkok Post*, 30 December 1988).

<sup>635</sup> *FEER*, 28 September 1989, pp. 22-23.

Even when the US finally got around to taking a minimally concrete decision against the Khmer Rouge, refusing to support further recognition in the UN, it was accompanied by a tightening of restrictions on travel and trade by Americans in Viet Nam and Cambodia; now in 1991 we see a new US blueprint for normalization of relations which takes an even harder line.

Coming when it did, 10 years too late, an obvious finesse of domestic criticism, and simultaneous with Big Power projects which are biased against Phnom Penh, Cambodians can easily view it with some degree of cynicism, as nothing more than an element in the Nicaragua Strategy.<sup>636</sup>

All of the so-called 'peace plans' have been designed to effect the dissolution of the Phnom Penh government, starting with the original Australian 'Redbook' of February 1990, whose authors thanked Congressman Stephen Solarz and Prince Norodom Sihanouk, and no one else, for inspiration.<sup>637</sup> No more ardent enemies of Phnom Penh, outside of the Khmer Rouge leadership, could be imagined.

Hun Sen's adamant refusal to accede to the demand for dissolution, or surrender of authority to the UN, does not need to be blamed on Chea Sim in the background. He has the support of all those Cambodians within the country who still worry about a Khmer Rouge danger, and even hostile journalists agree that they are the majority of the population.

The week after I met them, the men among my Phnom Penh friends were scheduled to 'go down to the base'. This means two weeks to a month in a distant village, living with the people in order to explain and gain support for government policies. It is a duty of all officials below Politburo level, but not of the free market operators who import luxury cars and fake medicines, and swill cognac with journalists in the Cambodiana hotel, perhaps regaling them with horror stories of Chea Sim-inspired taxation.<sup>638</sup>

The 'base' may be in Siemreap, or Koh Kong, regions of actual or imminent Khmer Rouge attack. This is a duty from which some do not return, but if there were times in the past when officials from Phnom Penh may have had to justify policies about which they were themselves less than enthusiastic, there can be little doubt that this time they will spare no effort to tell their more isolated countrymen about Hun Sen's view of the peace process, Chea Sim's statements

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<sup>636</sup> For the blueprint see Susumu Awanohara and Murray Hiebert, "Open door in dispute", *FEER*, 25 April 1991, pp. 10-11.

<sup>637</sup> "Cambodia: an Australian Peace Proposal", "Working Papers prepared for the Informal Meeting on Cambodia, Jakarta, 26-28 February 1990", Canberra, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, February 1990.

<sup>638</sup> As a protest against stories of generalized corruption and praise for honest, modest, hard-working civil servants in Phnom Penh see the letter by W. Vistarini, *FEER*, 30 January 1992, p. 5.

on social and economic inequalities, and the dangers to Cambodia of siren calls for pluralism and lax economic organization before peace is secure.

If they had seen it, they might even cheer the observation of a “frustrated” UN official who pretentiously “warned that unless the Cambodians ‘get their act together’ and arrived at an early settlement to the conflict, ‘they risk being set aside’ by the world”.<sup>639</sup> If being set aside means nobody gives any more aid, sanctuary, privileged access, or diplomatic support to any faction, in particular the Khmer Rouge, this might be the ideal solution viewed from Phnom Penh.

One important result of the policy of ‘going down to the base’ was a change in the Phnom Penh government’s attitude toward Sihanouk. Soon after the Paris Peace Agreement was signed in October 1991, Sihanouk returned to Phnom Penh with all honors.

The shift in CPP attitude toward Sihanouk from contempt and accusations of selling out to the Khmer Rouge to full honors due a former king and chief of state was a direct result of PRK Marxism, one principle of which was keeping in touch with the people, both to propagate policies decided on by the state, and to determine reactions at the grass roots. In the early years they made anti-Sihanouk propaganda, but by 1988 those returning from the base reported that the anti-Sihanouk line was not selling well, and that grass roots peasants were demonstrating increasing support for him.

Along with their adaptation to international developments, the PRK leadership took cognizance of popular opinion and decided to change its line on Sihanouk, hoping, of course, that they could control him, and coopt him in their election campaign.<sup>640</sup>

### Vagaries in Cambodian Journalism 1988-1991

At the time the above articles were written for *The Nation*, there had been much careless and misinformed journalism about Cambodia. Although the Chea Sim hardline interpretation was exaggerated, it is possible that the Cambodian government may have rethought the policy, associated with Hun Sen, of giving generous access to all and sundry journalists, many of whom have taken

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<sup>639</sup> *The Nation*, 26 November 1990, p. A10.

<sup>640</sup> I was first made aware of this by friends who had ‘gone down to the base’, and whom I met in 1988, 1989, and 1991 when the reassessment of Sihanouk was being made. A detailed treatment of this subject is Viviane Frings, “The Cambodian People’s Party (CPP) and Sihanouk”, *JCA*, Vol. 25, No. 3, July 1995, pp. 356-363, with a section on the 1992 CPP claim that they represent the continuity from Sihanouk’s Sangkum organization of the 1960s.

advantage of it to fill their columns with the trivial or scandalous with little regard for accuracy or relevance.<sup>641</sup>

At the end of 1988 there seems to have been a decision that Cambodia had made such progress that most news about the country reaching the outside world would be good news, whatever the preconceptions of the reporters, and journalists of all stripes were given easier entrance and greater access to ranking persons than at any time since 1980.

The first notable example was Hun Sen's two-hour interview in November 1988 with Elizabeth Becker and Jacques Bekaert, both of whom had exerted their talents to undermine the PRK throughout the previous eight years.<sup>642</sup> The new policy was successful in turning Becker around. After that her writings on Cambodia became for a time supportive of Phnom Penh, and virtually indistinguishable in tone from the work of Cambodia specialists whom she had excoriated a few years earlier.<sup>643</sup>

In Bekaert's case the results have been more nuanced, although his columns show more positive treatment of the Phnom Penh government than before. But he also seems to have been responsible for one canard which fits perfectly with the propaganda of Phnom Penh's enemies. This concerns the alleged return of Vietnamese troops to Cambodia to counter an offensive in the northwest in early 1990.

Possibly the first mention of these troops was in Bekaert's report in *Le Monde*, 9 Feb 1990, written from Battambang with the headline "Des soldats vietnamiens participeraient à la protection de Battambang". Most of the contents were devoted to the Vietnamese return, of which he claimed to have been informed by PRK soldiers, including the gem that they had to be paid "at least 100 dollars a month". It is intriguing that in Bekaert's articles in the *Bangkok Post*, 6 and 8 Feb 1990, also in part about Battambang, he was unwilling to give

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<sup>641</sup> Stephen, Heder, "Recent Developments", p. 7, wrote that in 1990 "whereas Hun Sen had previously been very accessible to the foreign press, he was suddenly giving very few interviews"; and Heder related this to an alleged "reigning in of Hun Sen by Chea Sim and his ... group", an inference which I find goes beyond the evidence.

<sup>642</sup> Reported by Bekaert in "Hun Sen: We're making progress", *Bangkok Post*, 17 November 1988, p. 7. The interview took place in France.

<sup>643</sup> For examples of Becker's earlier and recent work see "Cycle of Poverty" and "New Rulers Obscure Role of Party Under Pol Pot", *Washington Post*, 28 February-1 March 1983 (and comment above, pp 166, ff.); "Cambodian Tragedy" [a review of Craig Etcheson, *The Rise and Demise of Democratic Kampuchea* and Michael Vickery, *Cambodia, 1975-1982*, in *Problems of Communism*, May-June 1985, pp. 70-73], and *When the War Was Over*, 1986; and, for the new Becker, "Pol Pot is the Real Killer", *Washington Post*, 1 November 1989; "Sihanouk's Lust for Power Threatens Cambodia", *New York Times*, 8 February 1989; "Let the Cambodians vote", *Washington Post*, 25 May 1990; and *When the War Was Over*, second edition, 1998.



the same emphasis to Vietnamese troops; they were mentioned in very low-key sentences toward the end of the reports.

Apparently the *International Herald Tribune* picked up Bekaert's *Le Monde* story and a similar report in *Jane's Defense Weekly* and published it on 21 February, but the story did not otherwise run in Bangkok until the *Nation* picked it up from the *IHT* on 22 February. It did not come forth in Bangkok from journalists in contact with coalition troops until 25 February (*Nation*), perhaps after the coalition had learned what their problem was from the international press.

Finally a Bangkok-based journalist, Richard Ehrlich, reporting from Phnom Penh, said that "several senior Western and Eastern diplomats in Cambodia and Viet Nam agreed there is 'no evidence' to support reports that Vietnamese troops have been secretly fighting against the resistance in Cambodia" (*Bangkok Post* 8 July 1990).<sup>644</sup>

Of greater concern is the new current of up-beat reporting about the reformed Khmer Rouge, in which Bekaert has had a hand, through his re-publication to the French and English-speaking world of KR radio claims of success which would otherwise be without influence, and unnoticed outside a narrow circle of specialists. His *Bangkok Post* columns have become the main western-language outlet for KR propaganda, which Bekaert himself admits is often untrue.<sup>645</sup>

Another example is James Pringle, who has lost no opportunity to pinpoint the faults of the SOC government and society. He found it newsworthy, after a visit to a Pol Pot camp near the Thai border, to announce that "Pol Pot turns over a new leaf and goes green". The same theme was headlined a month later by Charles-Antoine de Nerciat in a visit to another Pol Pot camp, this time on Thai territory.

According to Pringle, orders have gone out to Khmer Rouge troops and villagers under their control to "protect endangered species", for "wild birds and animals are an important part of Cambodia's heritage". Pringle contrasted this with the situation in an area 24 km distant "controlled by the Vietnam-backed Phnom Penh regime" where all sorts of wildlife are captured, sold, and eaten.<sup>646</sup>

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<sup>644</sup> See also Charles Antoine de Nerciat, "Envoy: Phnom Penh receives army aid from Vietnam", *The Nation* (Bangkok), 3 March 1990, citing the Soviet Ambassador in Phnom Penh and Cambodian editor Khieu Kanharit for denials that there were Vietnamese combat troops, although there were technicians and advisers (note the headline designed to give an impression contrary to the content of the article); and Jeremy Wagstaff, "Are the Vietnamese troops back in Cambodia", *The Nation* (Bangkok), 5 March 1990, citing the usual 'Western diplomats' who can only explain SOC military successes in that way.

<sup>645</sup> A good example is "The new Khmer Rouge policy", *Bangkok Post*, 19 March 1991.

<sup>646</sup> James Pringle, in *Bangkok Post*, 31 January 1981, p. 8. Charles-Antoine de Nerciat, "The green Khmer Rouge?", *Bangkok Post*, 17 February 1991.

Since concern for wildlife was not a part of traditional Cambodian culture, nor a policy of any previous regime, it would appear that the Khmer Rouge have been given some friendly western PR advice, which has quickly paid off in the writings of Pringle and de Nerciat.

It should be noted in their favor, however, that they also revealed on the basis of personal investigation that top Khmer Rouge leaders live in houses inside Thailand, and have lucrative business deals with Thai scrap metal and timber dealers, through which “their forces inside Cambodia are often flush with dollars”.

Pringle, moreover, noted that then “Prime Minister Chatichai Choonhavan ... probably opposes this Khmer Rouge presence in Thailand ... [b]ut factions in the Thai military still back the Khmer Rouge”; and those factions have now taken over control of the Thai government.<sup>647</sup>

It is unfortunate, but typical, that a Khmer Rouge PR ploy, designed to gain sympathy among naive westerners, was given emphasis over the valuable political information which these experienced journalists had obtained on a visit to a sensitive, isolated area.<sup>648</sup>

A more blatant example of the new KR-chic is found in the writing of Nate Thayer in *FEER* and *The Washington Quarterly*. Reporting that “Pol Pot goes all-out to build popular support”, Thayer describes “Khmer Rouge fighters, including many sons of the village, ming[ling] easily with peasants”, as in “hundreds of villages ... making a remarkable comeback with a sophisticated political campaign aimed at gaining power in the elections proposed in a UN peace plan”.

In contrast to their rivals, the Khmer Rouge, according to Thayer, are honest, disciplined, and “respectful of civilians”. They are volunteers, well-paid and equipped, unlike the Phnom Penh government draftees, whose impressment has “caused widespread resentment among the peasantry”. Thayer alleges “abuse of human rights at all levels of the Hun Sen government”, which he sets against Khmer Rouge discipline. For Thayer, internal SOC refugees from the ongoing conflict are all “civilians ... forced to move ... to deprive the Khmer Rouge of food and recruits”, or people who have fled from government areas to Khmer Rouge areas “complaining of conscription, indiscipline ... [and] corruption”.<sup>649</sup>

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<sup>647</sup> James Pringle, “The double life of Ta Mok”, *Bangkok Post*, 14 February 1991, p. 5. de Nerciat, op. cit., who also noted the apparent PR character of the Khmer Rouge ‘Green’ program, which appears to be implemented only where it may come to the attention of impressionable outsiders.

<sup>648</sup> It cannot be excluded that the relative emphasis was the choice of *Bangkok Post* editors, in which case I hope that Pringle and de Nerciat will respond and denounce the pro-Khmer Rouge use that was made of their work.

<sup>649</sup> Thayer, “Cambodia: Misperceptions and Peace”, *The Washington Quarterly*, Spring 1991, pp. 181, 190.

Much of this is the straight, undigested official KR line. Thayer has seen a few of their villages, but not “hundreds”. He has not claimed to have investigated the situation of the internal refugees, and his statement contradicts the reports of those who have, and who say that most of those people have fled on their own to escape fighting caused by KR attacks.

As for voluntary participation in the KR forces by a supporting population exercising free choice, there has been no lack of credible reports of forced mobilization and movement of people under Khmer Rouge control. As an example, in January 1990 officials of the International Committee of the Red Cross and United Nations Border Relief Operation told reporters that, “[i]nstead of allowing the refugees to return to their home villages, the communist [KR] guerrillas may move them into the [‘liberated’] zones, for use in military and diplomatic maneuvering or for contesting elections if peace comes”.

In 1989 they forcibly moved 4,000 people out of a UN camp and across the border, thwarting “UN plans to transfer them to a safer area. The “resistance wants ... to keep their hold on these people”; and this “seems to be a Libanization of Cambodia”. The Khmer Rouge “has used [UN] camps for recruitment and has diverted food, medicine and other supplies from them to the front”.<sup>650</sup> These seem to be as clear examples of human rights abuse and corruption as anything charged against Phnom Penh.

Thayer might argue that he is only doing his journalistic duty, reporting what he sees and hears in the area which he has chosen to study. This is not entirely true, for his articles, in addition to straight-faced repetition of official KR handouts, are laced with details sourced to anonymous ‘diplomats’, ‘Western intelligence officials’, and ‘analysts’ (at Western embassies, in Bangkok, etc.), whose pronouncements, at least so long as they are anonymous, are no more credible than official KR briefings.

It is worth noting that in trying to make a different point – that the KR had not been all that bad – Thayer acknowledged that “US and other foreign policy suffers from an extraordinary lack of effective intelligence and accurate information from inside Cambodia, particularly information regarding the KR”, and he was piqued that those agencies would not confirm his claimed observations.<sup>651</sup>

An interesting new propaganda twist is Thayer’s positive assessment of KR “political cadres [who] outrank military officers ... [and] whose job is to explain the organization’s political programme to peasants”. When reporting on the PRK

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<sup>650</sup> Associated Press, “UN: Khmer resistance using refugees as pawns”, *The Nation* (Bangkok), 15 January 1991.

<sup>651</sup> Thayer, “Cambodia: Misperceptions and Peace”.

Western journalists have repeatedly damned such political cadres and their work.<sup>652</sup>

In spite of often uncertain sources, Thayer has become an on-the-spot KR specialist, and the information he transmits is ‘news’, even when its factual content may be low, or poorly substantiated.

The editors of the *FEER*, however, do not have that excuse. They receive material from a variety of sources, some of which directly contradicts the details offered by Thayer. Theirs is a studied choice to block out, or minimize, reporting favorable to the SOC, while emphasizing Thayer’s idyllic picture of happy villagers under the reformed Khmer Rouge.

Thayer’s influence may explain a remark in an article by Senator Kerrey which puzzled me at the time: that the announced US intention “to open discussions with the Vietnamese about Cambodia strengthens the political message of the Khmer Rouge [because] they have been organizing around a fierce nationalist, anti-Vietnamese, anti-corruption message ... , [while] the Cambodian people have intense feelings about the Vietnamese ... , [and] our ‘collaboration’ with the Vietnamese will become a battle cry for committed Khmer Rouge fighters”.<sup>653</sup>

In my answer to Kerrey I said the idea that improvement in US-Viet Nam relations could “strengthen the political message of the Khmer Rouge” can only have come from a disguised Khmer Rouge source, perhaps via one of our national security agencies which, Kerrey alleged, hide the real news about Cambodia.<sup>654</sup> Now it seems that Kerrey had been privileged with a pre-publication copy of Thayer’s article, or with the type of research help from which Thayer may also have benefited.

In that letter, I continued, “on the contrary, peace between the US and Viet Nam would be of immediate help to Phnom Penh and to the Cambodian population suffering from the continuing war. The entire purpose of US, Chinese and ASEAN manipulations to form the coalition and support it for ten years was to bleed Vietnam, whatever the result for new Khmer Rouge strength”.

Thayer might not disagree with this, but he does not wish to help the Phnom Penh government, which he sees as inferior to the Khmer Rouge and too close to Vietnam.

Whatever the level of Cambodian antipathy for Vietnam – and such feelings, as Thayer emphasized, are widespread – it was not Khmer Rouge opposition to Viet Nam that brought them to power the first time.

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<sup>652</sup> Thayer, “A Khmer Ruse”; Elizabeth Becker, *Washington Post* series, 28 February-1 March, 1983 (see pp. 166 ff., above).

<sup>653</sup> J. Robert Kerrey, “US Still Unwittingly Helps Khmer Rouge”, *Christian Science Monitor*, World Edition, 31 August 1990-6 September 1990, p. 19.

<sup>654</sup> My letter, dated 12 September 1990, to the *Christian Science Monitor*, and a copy of which I sent to Kerrey.

At the beginning of their revolution, and until 1972, it appeared both to their friends and to their enemies that the Khmer Rouge were working with the Vietnamese communists. And it was their violent turn against Viet Nam after 1976 that brought about their downfall; not just because they attacked an enemy too strong for them, but because their war effort exasperated an already sorely tried population to the point where they preferred a historical enemy to a nationalist, but brutal, Khmer regime.

Both Heder, implicitly, and Thayer have taken on the role of defender of the anti-Phnom Penh forces. There are interesting differences between their positions. Heder takes as axiomatic that Viet Nam has a primordial and unalterable intention to absorb Cambodia, whereas Thayer claims only that this is a nearly universal Cambodian belief, even if it is not true.

Thayer thinks that the true saviors of Cambodia may be the so-called Non-Communist Resistance, but to secure their return to power it is necessary to do nothing to hinder the activities of the Khmer Rouge.

Heder went through that phase some eight years ago, and now recognizes the unviability and incompetence of the NCR. His tactic now, and a continuing theme from his writings of 1979-1980, is still to discredit the Phnom Penh leadership; but the result in his latest papers is that the only figures who emerge with any credibility are people who were among Pol Pot's most bloody enforcers, Ta Mok, Kae Pok and Son Sen.

Other journalists have written endlessly, and pettily, about corruption in Phnom Penh, refusing to acknowledge that corruption inevitably accompanies the economic freedoms which the same journalists insist Phnom Penh should maintain in emulation of Eastern Europe.<sup>655</sup>

Just as in discussion of Vietnamese forces in Cambodia, noted in the articles above, mystification filled the estimates of the armed forces of the Democratic Kampuchea group after 1979. The powers concerned with manipulation of the peace process, and subservient writers, tinkered with statistics on the number of Khmer Rouge troops. The reason for this was to maintain the excuse that the Khmer Rouge could not be dropped from the peace process because they were too strong. Once the election was over the estimated numbers dropped dramatically.

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<sup>655</sup> Indeed, James Pringle, "'Rampant graft' hurting image of Hun Sen regime", *Bangkok Post*, 21 September 1989, labeled as "leftist-leaning" a foreign relief official who remarked that "We [the western world] complained they were too socialist, so they liberalized the economy, and along with materialism came corruption".

### Khmer Rouge Troop Numbers (1979-1992)

For several years before the 1993 election western estimates of KR armed strength had been in the 30-40,000 range, which, so it went, made them too strong to exclude from the 'peace process'.

Then, for the public who had followed the news, UNTAC head Yasushi Akashi's startling May 1993 announcement that KR strength had increased by 50% would have meant that UNTAC had suddenly discovered that their true strength was in the 45-50,000 range, in fact alarming (see further below). That was what I thought he meant at the time. Suddenly, once the election was over, public estimates of KR strength plummeted to the 10-15,000 level, about where Hun Sen had always placed them, in his efforts to downgrade KR importance in negotiations leading up to the Paris Agreement.

Throughout the 1980s guesses in the Western press about DK strength were grouped around figures of 30-4000, whatever the political position of the writer, although Elizabeth Becker reported 50,000 in 1983, and a somewhat lower, and seemingly more precise, 28,000 "remained" [my emphasis] "the commonly accepted number for the Khmer Rouge armed force" in Nayan Chanda's *Asian Survey* article for 1987.<sup>656</sup>

The anti-PRK Bangkok journalist, Paisal Sricharatchanya, writing in *FEER* in the fall of 1988, gave a figure of 13,000 "fighters" who were in "three Khmer Rouge divisions active along the Thai-Cambodian border", as being "roughly a third of the group's estimated total of 30-40,000 soldiers".<sup>657</sup> Not long afterward Nayan Chanda from Washington offered a lower "US intelligence estimates Khmer Rouge fighting strength at 20,000 (with plans for expansion)".<sup>658</sup>

More attention should have been paid this low figure (even though it might at the time have been as disinformative as any other) for we now know it was much closer to the truth. Higher figures, however, continued to enjoy more prominence. The relatively pro-PRK Oxford historian Peter Carey thought they had "nearly 40,000 men under arms", with which "western diplomats in Bangkok" generally agreed ("30-40,000 guerrillas, about half of whom are in Cambodia"), although "officials in Phnom Penh [in agreement for once with US intelligence] say the [DK] group has only 20,000 fighters, with about 8,000 operating in the country."<sup>659</sup>

Confusion both about totals, and about who believed what, was seen in "[Khmer Rouge] defectors speak of military units being between 40 and 60

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<sup>656</sup> Michael Eiland, "Cambodia in 1985", p. 121, said 40,000.

<sup>657</sup> Paisal Sricharatchanya, "On the offensive again", *FEER*, 22 September 1988, p. 23.

<sup>658</sup> Nayan Chanda, "Lethal disclosures", *FEER*, 17 November 1988, p. 14.

<sup>659</sup> Peter Carey, "Prospects for peace in Cambodia" ("The 5th Column"), *FEER* 22 December 1988, p. 17; other estimates in Murray Hiebert, "The war winds down", *FEER*, 12 January 1989, p. 17.

percent under strength, belying Pentagon claims that the group can field up to 40,000 battle-hardened guerillas. Other defectors say they would be lucky to field half that number". There is concern among them that China would eventually cut off all aid, and this led to an ideological shift in 1987, when they opted to make money. Undoubtedly based on these 'Pentagon claims' were the 35,000 "well-trained, well-equipped" forces reported in an analysis from the Congressional Research Service in January 1989.<sup>660</sup>

The low figure came again, from the Thai side, when the commander of the "Chanthaburi-Trat task force ... opposite the Cambodian provinces of Battambang, Pursat and Koh Kong ... said an estimated 40,000 Vietnamese and PRK troops have been fighting some 20,000 mostly Khmer Rouge guerrillas since mid-April [1989]". It would seem, however, particularly in relation to the figure for the Vietnamese-PRK side, that he meant only the DK troops in that area.<sup>661</sup>

The same (but perhaps really a slightly different) 20,000 showed up a few months later in another Bangkok-based article, which said that "the Khmer Rouge command would only be able to muster an estimated combat force of less than 20,000 for any concerted military thrust against Phnom Penh [emphasis added]", while "Hun Sen's troops, numbered at 40-45,000 ... backed by a militia perhaps 100,000 strong".

Evidence that the writers meant their 20,000 as only one part of the Khmer Rouge forces was found in another article three weeks later, where they reported on "the better-disciplined Khmer Rouge, with an estimated 40,000 guerillas led by seasoned commanders".<sup>662</sup>

An extreme among low estimates came from a foreign friend of Phnom Penh, Gary Klintworth, who believed that "from a peak strength of around 200,000 in 1979, armed Khmer Rouge fighters inside Cambodia now number as few as 8-10,000, with perhaps another 6-8,000 serving as unwilling porters". Perhaps the key phrase was "inside Cambodia", with Klintworth adopting the PRK

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<sup>660</sup> Alan Pearce, "Khmer rouge facing hardship, fear and crumbling morale", *The Nation* (Bangkok), 27 February 1989. "Cambodian Crisis: Problems of a Settlement and Policy Dilemmas for the United States", by Robert G. Sutter, Foreign Affairs and National Defense Division, Congressional Research Service, January 27, 1989, p. 13, noting that "these general estimates were confirmed during a telephone conversation with the Department of State in January 1989", although "precise US government estimates of forces in Cambodia are classified".

<sup>661</sup> Paisal Sricharatchanya, "Wait and see", *FEER*, 11 May 1989, p. 24.

<sup>662</sup> Michael Field, Rodney Tasker and Murray Hiebert, "No end in sight", *FEER*, 7 September 1989, pp. 14-16; Rodney Tasker and Murray Hiebert, "A test of arms", *FEER*, 28 September 1989, p. 21.

estimate.<sup>663</sup> It may have had no significance, but in Singapore Ambassador Tommy T.B. Koh's strong attack on Klintworth the force totals were ignored.<sup>664</sup>

Mainline journalism went back to the higher figure with Rodney Tasker's "the estimated 40-45,000 Khmer Rouge fighters", or "30-40,000 troops the Coalition's strongest military force" in 1989, for which year Khatharya Um gave 30-40,000 in her *Asian Survey* article.<sup>665</sup>

It seemed peculiar that when Nayan Chanda, after his sojourn in Washington, interviewed Hun Sen about the military situation in mid-1990 he did not ask Hun Sen about his government's estimates of DK forces, or if he did ask did not report Hun Sen's answer. Of course it was well known to Cambodia researchers that Phnom Penh estimates were consistently far lower than those published by Western sources, except those friendly to Phnom Penh.<sup>666</sup>

Still over a year later, and just before the final Paris Agreement, the *FEER* was reporting "an estimated 35,000 troops" for the Khmer Rouge, although it was "only", and "compared with Phnom Penh's more than 100,000 regular forces".<sup>667</sup>

Confusion, or disinformation, did not stop even after UNTAC was in place. Careful journalists and UNTAC personnel were getting low figures directly from Khmer Rouge soldiers, but Sihanouk insisted that Khmer Rouge strength was 30-40,000. What was probably the best research was ignored.

In an informal gathering in July 1992, Christophe Peschoux said that Khmer Rouge strength might have dropped to around 10,000, from a maximum of 17,000 in 1989. Peschoux also said that the estimates of 30-40,000 had been deliberate exaggerations in order to be able to include them as a credible factor in the movement against the PRK, on the grounds that "they're strong we can't avoid them, must deal with them". Similar figures are repeated in his book.<sup>668</sup>

<sup>663</sup> Gary Klintworth, "Hanoi's role in Cambodia" ("The 5th Column"), *FEER*, 5 October 1989, p.38.

<sup>664</sup> Tommy T.B. Koh, "Hanoi's role in Cambodia" (The 5th Column), *FEER*, 26 October 1989, p. 26. See discussion of my correspondence with Koh above, pp. 337.

<sup>665</sup> Rodney Tasker, "Fighting for turf", *FEER*, 26 October 1989, p. 36; Rodney Tasker, "Another Year Zero?", *FEER*, 9 November 1989, p. 12; Khatharya Um, "Cambodia in 1988", *AS*, Vol. XXIX, No. 1 (January 1989), pp. 73-80; and "Cambodia in 1989", *AS*, Vol. XXX, No. 1 (January 1990), pp. 97-104.

<sup>666</sup> Nayan Chanda, "On the offensive" ("Interview/Hun Sen"), *FEER*, 7 June 1990, p. 30.

<sup>667</sup> Rodney Tasker, "What killing fields?", *FEER*, 12 September 1991, p. 15.

<sup>668</sup> "Indochina Digest", Washington DC, Indochina Project, 28 August 1992, citing Reuters Phnom Penh correspondent Mark Dodd and, for Sihanouk, *Le Figaro*. "The Khmer Rouge: Old Wine in New Wineskin?", rough notes from a Talk by Kavi [Chongkitthavorn] and Christophe [Peschoux]", Aranyaprathet, 13 July 1992, provided by Bob Maat, SJ of Coalition for Peace and Reconciliation; and Christophe Peschoux, *Les "nouveaux" Khmers Rouges 1979-1990*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 1992, pp. 20, 128, 129 "the figure of 35,000 fighters generally accepted since 1980 is to be divided at least by



The mystical figure of 40,000 surfaced once again after the four Cambodian parties accepted the Paris Agreement, which obliged them to declare the number of their armed forces and prepare to demobilize 70% of them. As Peschoux has remarked, the Khmer Rouge claimed 40,000, which, after demobilization of 70% would leave 12,000, “very close to the estimate of their actual soldiers which I have reached”.<sup>669</sup>

Credible estimates of low or declining KR force numbers undermined the role assigned them in the anti-Phnom Penh ‘Peace Process’ and UNTAC – that they had to be included because they were so strong.

Eventually it was necessary to remove the French General Michel Loridon, who believed that “Khmer Rouge strength is much less than generally assumed”, to prevent any risk of destruction of the Khmer Rouge before they had served their purpose.<sup>670</sup> His removal meant that UNTAC would never enforce ‘phase 2’.

A year later, as an excuse to avoid enforcement, someone provided Akashi with an assessment that “the KR are stronger than before” and a great risk to the elections: “their military strength has increased by at least 50 per cent, they have new weapons, they are operating in larger units, they are led by leaders who are more extreme than in past years, so we have to be prepared”.<sup>671</sup>

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two ... 13-15,000 fighters, with a maximum of perhaps 17,000 seems to me to be closer to reality”, and “I estimate that the number of regular fighters is probably between 10,500 and 14,000 men, with a maximum of perhaps 17,000”, and “a maximum total of 17,000 is possible, but in my opinion improbable”.

<sup>669</sup> Peschoux, *Les “nouveaux” Khmers Rouges 1979-1990*, p. 129.

<sup>670</sup> General Michel Loridon commanded the advance UN military mission, UNAMIC, and was replaced in 1992 for trying to push an aggressive policy if the Khmer Rouge did not observe the provisions of Paris. On the Loridon affair see Nayan Chanda, “UN Divisions”, *FEER*, 23 July 1992, pp. 8-9.

<sup>671</sup> *The Nation*, 20 May, 1993, citing a statement by Akashi. Just after the election Victor Mallet reported in the *Financial Times*, 27 May, that Akashi had claimed the 50% increase in Khmer Rouge forces gave them a total of 15,000, but it is not clear if the 15,000 was in Akashi’s statement, or further clarification obtained by Mallet elsewhere – in fact part of the rewriting on this subject which I am describing.

Earlier Jacques Bekaert, “Cambodia Diary”, *Bangkok Post*, 6 May 1993, had less dramatically reported that the Khmer Rouge had received new weapons and uniforms, supposedly from China. He listed 122mm guns, 120mm mortars, rocket launchers, and possibly some tanks. Other reports on China’s position in 1993 indicate that Chinese aid to the KR had stopped entirely, and if Bekaert’s news was not a red herring, the equipment, including the tanks, had probably been supplied by the Thais, perhaps from the US-Thai strategic stockpile.

It is now clear that this was all nonsense, but it was necessary in order to counter the declining estimates of Khmer Rouge strength, which might in turn have undermined the role in which they had been cast.<sup>672</sup>

The source of the information in Akashi's alarming announcement was not revealed; nor, as far as I was able to observe, did any journalist take an interest in it. The statement was simply accepted at face value, but as soon as the election was over the estimates of KR strength fell once and for all from more than 30,000 to 10,000 or even fewer, just about what the PRK had been saying since in 1988-90, and justifying Loridon's claim that they were relatively weak and sensitive to UN pressure.<sup>673</sup>

Akashi was no doubt disinformed, probably by one of the peculiar analyses for which his own '[Dis]Information and Education Component' (UNTAC 12) became famous.<sup>674</sup> Had there been no Khmer Rouge, the PRK/SOC could not have been defeated with the 'peace process' mechanism.

It is intriguing that a year later Stephen Heder told the *Phnom Penh Post* that "in the UNTAC period we calculated that their armed force was about 17,000 before [emphasis added] the Paris Peace accords [that is before October 1991] ... then they self-demobilized". Moreover, "of these 17,000 not everybody was armed ... they didn't have enough arms ... they don't want too many people running around with guns" ... then they began remobilizing ... they may be close to that number again ... I would guess they have 15,000 troops".<sup>675</sup>

Heder said there that he "interviewed a lot of self-demobilized NADK defectors". There were 81 to be exact, and very low level, according to Heder in

<sup>672</sup> For some of these low estimates, only 8-10,000, see Gary Klintworth, "Cambodia 1992, Hopes Fading", *Southeast Asian Affairs 1993* (Singapore), p. 122. In Mid-1992 the SOC estimate of KR armed forces was 11,800, against KR claims to UNTAC of 27,500 and a reported UN "military intelligence" estimate of between 17,000 and 22,000 (Nate Thayer, "KR Blueprint for the Future Includes Electoral Strategy", *PPP*, vol. 1, number 4, 27 August 1992, p. 4).

<sup>673</sup> Compare Rodney Tasker, "What killing fields", *FEER* 12 September 1991, p. 15, the Khmer Rouge "has only an estimated 35,000 troops, compared with Phnom Penh's more than 100,000 regular forces"; and *Bangkok Post*, 6 July 1993, "Inside Indochina", "Finding an elusive formula for integrating the KR". They have an army of 10,000 against 40,000 for the Cambodian government armed forces.

<sup>674</sup> See more detail on this in Vickery, *Cambodia: A Political Survey*, pp. 58-59, and on the UNTAC Information and Education Component (UNTAC 12), see below, *passim*. A year later the ambassador of an ASEAN country told me he believed that UNTAC 12 was behind the disinformation, but that Akashi was probably aware of it. This ambassador informed his government that there was no new danger.

<sup>675</sup> "What lies behind KR's moves", Heder interview, *PPP*, 3/10, 20 May-2 June 1994, p. 8.

another publication, but there no troop totals were supplied, and it seems that the 17,000 figure is from a different source.<sup>676</sup>

This is in all important details a contradiction of Akashi's May 1993 announcement. Even if there had been a 50% increase in DK strength from the previous year, the total was still only half of what the international public had been led to believe, and not alarming.

If what Heder said in that 1994 interview was really what UNTAC 12 had concluded from investigations in 1993, then UNTAC 12 was involved in at least passive disinformation in not warning Akashi that the wild estimates he had received from some other source were not true. But should we believe that Akashi went public on a subject like this without consulting his Cambodia 'experts'? Note that Christophe Peschoux, who in 1992 had provided the most credible, and low, estimates of KR strength, was co-opted by UNTAC 12 in 1993.

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<sup>676</sup> Steve Heder and Judy Ledgerwood, eds., *Propaganda, Politics, and Violence in Cambodia* [at the time of the 1993 election], *Democratic Transition under United Nations Peace-keeping*, Armonk, New York, M.E. Sharpe, 1996 [cited further as Heder-Ledgerwood], p. 76.

## Chapter 6: The 1993 election

The pressure of the Great Power coalition behind the tripartite Khmer Coalition against the PRK/SOC government in Phnom Penh, together with the end of aid from the Soviet Bloc following its collapse, and the withdrawal of the last Vietnamese troops in 1989, left the SOC unable to defend itself indefinitely against its enemies. They therefore acceded to the Paris Agreement of October 1991, which led to the UN intervention and supervised election in 1993.

Soon after the signing of the Paris Peace Agreement on 23 October 1991 I began writing a pessimistic essay on the 'peace process', which I passed around to several acquaintances, but never tried to publish, and to which I later added more material in. It began as follows, starting with my impressions in Phnom Penh on 23 October 1991.

### Cambodia After the Peace (1991-1993)<sup>677</sup>

On 23 October the Cambodian peace agreement was signed. In Phnom Penh, however, there were no grand celebrations, no dancing in the streets, no new official holiday. The text of the agreement was not immediately published in the local press, nor even reported in detail, and a week later when I left Cambodia it had only been disseminated among the top levels of the government, some vice-ministers claiming that they had not yet seen it.

The apparent lack of enthusiasm may reflect reality. As one foreign economic expert with long experience in Cambodia remarked, "Cambodia survived the war, American bombing, Lon Nol's incompetence, Pol Pot's brutality, and the poverty of the last 12 years, but it may not survive this peace".

I do not think this is an unduly pessimistic view. I hope that he, and I, are wrong. But if we are not, it is important that someone will have said it now, not just as a second guess some years hence. We must not forget that Cambodia has been victim of a crime against humanity.

I do not mean the endlessly evoked 'Pol Pot/Khmer Rouge genocide' or 'Vietnamese aggression', which have too often been used as excuses to do

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<sup>677</sup> Michael Vickery, unpublished essay, 1991-1993. Parts of this essay were incorporated into "Överlever Kambodja 'Freden'" ['Will Cambodia survive the peace?'], *Kommentar* (Stockholm), Nr 1-2, 1992, pp. 3-13; "Cambodia After the Peace", *Thai-Yunnan Project Newsletter*, Canberra, Australian National University, Number Seventeen, June 1992, pp. 3-18; "The Cambodian Economy: Where Has it come from, Where is it going?", in *Indochina Economic Reconstruction and International Cooperation*, ed. by Tsutomu Murano and Ikuo Takeuchi, Tokyo, Institute of Developing Economies, 1992; and my "Cambodia: a Political Survey", Discussion Paper No. 14, The Department of Political and Social Change, Research School of Pacific Studies, Australian National University, 1994.

nothing, or the wrong thing. I am speaking of an international crime against humanity consisting of the economic and political isolation of a country already at the lowest point of human existence in 1979, and the concomitant physical resuscitation, moral rehabilitation, and re-arming of the political faction who bore most responsibility for the further destruction of their own country after the already disastrous war of 1970-1975: the 'Khmer Rouge', officially the *Partie of Democratic Kampuchea*, led by the same persons who governed Cambodia from 17 April 1975 to 7 January 1979.

The greatest responsibility for this crime must be borne by the United States, for Americans, some official, had been loudest in condemnation of Democratic Kampuchea (the 'Khmer Rouge') during the life of their regime, yet as soon as they were overthrown official America became most active in their revival. Eager collusion in this crime was pursued by China and most of ASEAN, especially Thailand, and was followed with hardly a whimper of protest by the major capitalist countries, Japan, Australia, and Western Europe.

Neither did the bureaucrats of international organizations try to persuade their constituent members to allow normal intervention by those world bodies to alleviate the misery within Cambodia.

China's position has at least been one of principled consistency. They supported the Cambodian revolutionary movement when it first began moving against Sihanouk in the 1960s, continued this support during the period of Democratic Kampuchea rule, and maintained it after the DK overthrow.

Now that the new so-called peace agreement is opening the doors to normal foreign relations and international aid, it may be too late. Those shedding crocodile tears over the possibility of a Khmer Rouge return to power will all have some indelible blood on their hands if that occurs.

Let us review the basic facts about the Paris Agreement and its background, the election, and its sequel.

After 1975 Cambodia went through the most violent revolution of modern times. It caused total disintegration of normal Cambodian society, the end of most cultural activities and education, and a death toll over normal of possibly more than 10% of the population.

This revolution was followed after 1979 by ten years of moderate reform communism under year-by-year decreasing Vietnamese tutelage, but afflicted by an economic blockade by the West, China and ASEAN, the purpose of which was to destroy the government in place and replace it by its Cambodian rivals. Aid came from the Soviet Bloc; when it collapsed, the Phnom Penh government was forced to enter into negotiations with its enemies and make concessions which had not been envisaged before 1987.

This led to acceptance of the Paris Agreement of October 1991, in which the State of Cambodia (SOC) government in Phnom Penh (formerly, 1979-1989, Peoples Republic of Kampuchea [PRK]) and its enemies in the tripartite Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea (CGDK), agreed to make

peace and participate in an election to be supervised by the United Nations. They also committed themselves to a free-market capitalist economy and democratic political forms.

The CGDK, we should recall, consisted of (1) the *Partie of Democratic Kampuchea* (PDK ['Khmer Rouge']), (2) the royalist FUNCINPEC Sihanoukists, and (3) the non-royalist, anti-Communist Khmer Peoples' National Liberation Front (KPNLF), which together since 1982 had enjoyed the support of the United States, China and ASEAN and recognition by most of the West.

These three factions, all of which had at different times been rejected by the Cambodian people, were revived and rebuilt as tools in the American and Chinese-led struggle against Viet Nam. They all represented one of the dark sides of Cambodian politics – anti-Vietnamese xenophobia – which in the nature of the cooperation with the US, China and ASEAN became their principal *raison d'être*.

The PRK, whom they were opposing, was the first government in modern Cambodia which followed a policy of friendship with Viet Nam and with Vietnamese within Cambodia. Even if this was, first of all, because they owed their existence to Viet Nam, it was a positive change from the situation before 1979, when hatred of Viet Nam and Vietnamese was a bedrock of Cambodian nationalism and patriotism.

This was some of the unavowed baggage brought back into Cambodia as a result of the Paris Agreement, and it had great consequences for Cambodia's subsequent development.

### Update 1992

Back in Penang, perusing the bundles of Bangkok newspapers which a taxi driver brought me from Haadyai every couple of weeks, I began to feel like a Rip van Vickery awakening from a long bender on magic Mekhong, which had transported me back to the Cambodia I had known with pleasure some thirty years earlier.<sup>678</sup>

What's new in Cambodia, I asked myself? An official gets shot and killed, and a couple more are wounded. Sihanouk calls the Ministry of Interior and says "please, guys, don't do that".<sup>679</sup> Students riot against corruption and get beaten

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<sup>678</sup> This was written in Penang between visits to Cambodia in late 1991 and the summer of 1992. At the time newspapers from Thailand were not on sale in Penang, possibly, although I could not confirm it, because they were forbidden by the Malaysian authorities. Occasionally those brought in by taxis were confiscated at the border.

<sup>679</sup> "Assassination threat to peace – Sihanouk", *Bangkok Post*, 27 January 1992; "Khmer dissident in coma after 'murder attempt'", *Bangkok Post*, 19 March 1992.

up.<sup>680</sup> Sihanouk's kids are given high profile positions, even though they cannot maintain peace among themselves.<sup>681</sup>

New private banks work a scam to momentarily revalue the *riel* by 100% and clean up huge profits, while the man in the street moans that prices of goods continue to rise, astonished because of the belief that *riel* inflation was just a function of its devaluation against foreign currencies.<sup>682</sup> Any day now I expect to hear that Asia Foundation has set up a center to teach English to monks, or to whomever the target group now is.<sup>683</sup>

Old hands can breathe a sigh of relief, I thought. Cambodia is back to the good old days of the 1960s.

Not quite. The Prime Minister gave shelter to one of the intended assassinees.<sup>684</sup> That would not have happened in the 1960s. Nor would the Americans, as now, have been able to circulate among the foreign community a circular overtly subversive of the legal government.<sup>685</sup>

680 "Bloody clash rocks Khmer peace hopes", *Bangkok Post*, 23 December 1991.

681 "Sihanouk's son [Chakrapong, made adviser to Hun Sen] , daughter [Bopha Devi, Deputy Minister of Information and Culture] get top govt posts", *The Nation*, 27 December 1991; "Dance-teaching prince [Sihamoni, son of Monique] proposed for UN seat", *The Nation*, 8 February 1992; "Sihanouk sons' [Ranariddh and Chakrapong, of different mothers] armies clash over defections", *Bangkok Post*, 18 February 1992; "Sihanouk: My sons don't like each other", *Bangkok Post*, 20 February 1992.

682 Robin Davies, "Cambodia experiences a riel contradiction", *Bangkok Post*, 6 February 1992. The 1960s parallel to this was the 1963 competition between Sihanouk friend Nhiek Tioulong and Thai businessman Songsakd Kitpanich, each of whom wanted his bank to be the one nationalized under Sihanouk's new economic plan (innocent foreign economists should take note of Cambodian Capitalism under which a go-getter financier may wish nationalization). Tioulong won, Songsakd was translated almost overnight from insider socialite to crook, and many of those who had been close to him came under suspicion of everything from embezzlement to treason.

683 Soon after writing a first draft of this I picked up *The Nation* of 22 March 1992, and in an article by John Laird, "How to keep the peace", found "Asia Foundation staff have made several visits to Phnom Penh ... offering support for legal and judicial reform in conjunction with a proposal from the US Bar Association for technical assistance to the SNC". This was amplified for me in Phnom Penh in June 1992 by Khmer-speaking foreigners who had been approached by Asia Foundation to form survey teams to determine how provincial Cambodians would vote in the forthcoming elections. Sensibly they all refused and the project was dropped. One of them, however, was later tempted by the princessly wages offered by UNTAC to take up a position in UNTAC 12, the Information and Education Component, a worthy implementer of traditional Asia Foundation Cambodia policies.

684 "Hun Sen gives Oung sanctuary after bid on life", *The Nation*, 30 January 1992.

685 This was "Agency for International Development, Cambodia Strategy Document", March 1991. Although dated before the Paris Agreement, it was circulated among NGOs in Phnom Penh after October 1991.

The last may be a signal that a repeat of the transition, from born-again Sihanoukism to neo-Lonnolism, is being compressed into a much shorter period than before. Other signals of the latter are the hold-ups of foreign personnel, almost before they have a chance to enjoy the pleasures of diplomatic or UN life promised by the new so-called peace arrangements, the raids on villages by unidentifiable bands of armed men, and the trendy praise of the Khmer Rouge by right-wing journalists.<sup>686</sup>

If history repeats itself, the next stage is already visible just over the horizon. I have several times written that Cambodia was in danger of a Nicaragua solution, but I was optimistic that they might avoid it.<sup>687</sup> My optimism was misplaced, and the Nicaragua solution is upon them.

In the peace agreement of last October the PRK/SOC – which by 1988 had appeared as the best Cambodian government ever – had been pressured to sign away everything but its formal existence. In spite of the lessons to be drawn from the East European debacle, they also swallowed the extremist free-market snake oil being peddled by itinerant American gurus and Thai con men, a version of capitalist economics which would not be entertained for a moment by those who run the economy in any of the western capitalist countries, even if people like Reagan, Thatcher, and the Bushes might personally believe in it.<sup>688</sup>

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686 “P. Penh police shake down foreigners after curfew”, *Bangkok Post*, 3 February 1992; “Phnom Penh complains of political banditry”, *The Nation*, 13 January 1992. For the journalistic Khmer Rouge chic see Nate Thayer, “Cambodia: Misperceptions and Peace”, *The Washington Quarterly*, Spring 1991; Nate Thayer, “A Khmer Ruse”, *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 7 March 1991, pp. 25-26. See also footnote 400, above. For details of Thayer’s Khmer Rouge line see Michael Vickery, “The Campaign Against Cambodia: 1990-1991”, *Indochina Issues* 93.

687 See above and below, pp. 275, ff.; note 611.

688 For a denunciation of that economics by a professional see “Class that plays for keeps”, an interview with John Kenneth Galbraith, in the *Guardian Weekly*, 7 June 1992, p. 21, and Galbraith’s *The Culture of Contentment*. [Of course by 2008, the defects of that type of economics were clear.] A pessimistic view specifically of the Cambodian case was Victor Mallet, “Lack of control raises worries over Cambodian ‘free-for-all’”, *Bangkok Post*, Business, 13 December 1991, “Another fear is that Cambodia ... will make the same mistakes as Thailand”, “It’s only a few rich people making money ... It is the law of the jungle”.

One who may believe in it, and whom we should watch, is L. Gordon Crovitz, the new editor of *Far Eastern Economic Review*. In *Asian Wall Street Journal*, 10-11 April 1992, he wrote an article entitled, “Rule of Law”, “Hayek’s Road From Serfdom for Legal U-Turn”, about the work of the recently deceased Friedrich Hayek. Following discussion of Hayek’s work on legal systems, arguing that law must be universal, applicable to those who make it as well as to those who are administered, Crovitz added “... economic development has been greatest in parts of the world such as Southeast Asia that embraced forms of the British common law ...”.

Nonsense. Economic development in Southeast, and East, Asia has been most impressive where state control has been strongest, to the extent that one might consider it



And who should be surprised? This is what the ‘peace agreement’ imposed on a reluctant SOC by the Big Five was all about. The goal was to get rid of the SOC at any price, including risk of a Khmer Rouge return to power.

The ‘peace agreement’ has imposed the Khmer Rouge, whom four of the big five claimed to abhor, on the back of Phnom Penh. In the end it was not China (the traditional big friend of the Khmer Rouge) who was most effective in their support, but the US which, formally, had been loudest in their condemnation.

The Khmer Rouge were assigned, though not explicitly, a particular role in the plans to destroy the PRK/SOC. In arguments such as that of Gareth Evans (*Cambodia: A Political Survey*, pp. 34-35, concern about the ‘Red Khmer’ was a red herring. They were needed as the ever-present threat to keep Phnom Penh from simply going its own way; and by 1990, in spite of relative success on the battlefield, the SOC knew they could not maintain sufficient military force against the Khmer Rouge who still received foreign aid.

During the negotiations throughout the 1980s it was asserted that the Khmer Rouge were too strong to be excluded, even if they were abhorred. Phnom Penh denied that, and said the problem was foreign support for the Khmer Rouge, and now we know they were right. After the agreement was signed, there was even some noise from the US blaming SOC for agreeing to association with the KR, and American insistence that they would never recognize a government in which the KR were included.

Phnom Penh had been conned. Now that the international community has forced the SOC to accept the Khmer Rouge, it is Phnom Penh which is getting the blame. A journalist commented on the possible future of Pen Sovann that he is “the only noteworthy Cambodian politician untainted by the current Phnom Penh government’s cooperation with the Khmer Rouge in the peace plan”, that is by the acceptance of the Khmer Rouge into the new coalition which was forced on Phnom Penh by the Big Five.<sup>689</sup>

And the US Congress, with its typical perspicacity, grumbled about paying the US share of a UN operation if the Khmer Rouge were included.<sup>690</sup> In Phnom Penh in June 1992 I was told by one of Hun Sen’s associates that before his trip to the US in March, the US State Department’s Robert Solomon warned him that he would face hard questioning from Congress about the Khmer Rouge in the new Supreme National Council (SNC).

According to a report on that visit by Nayan Chanda, however, Hun Sen in Washington seemed to be getting acceptance as the only bulwark against the

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‘Stalinist Capitalism’, as in Singapore and the Republic of Korea; and the latest [in 1993-94] high flyer, Malaysia, has distinguished itself by dramatic rejection of the British common law principles with which it started after independence.

<sup>689</sup> AFP [Sheri Prasso], “Pen Sovann’s return may result in instability”, *New Straits Times* (Kuala Lumpur), 10 February 1992.

<sup>690</sup> “US senators seek ban on KR return”, *The Nation*, 5 December 1991.

Khmer Rouge. He argued that if the US wanted the UN plan to succeed they should contribute more money. He played the role of free-marketeer, favorably impressing the US officials whom he met, according to Chanda.<sup>691</sup>

Subsequent events seemed to indicate either that Chanda's inferences were overly rose-tinted, or that US policy-makers changed their minds about Hun Sen. For several more years there was little indication that he enjoyed Washington's favor, rather the contrary. Perhaps, if Chanda's impressions were accurate, Hun Sen's lobbying was interpreted by US officials as indicating that he was a Cambodian leader who would maintain Cambodia as a tool against Viet Nam and keep Indochina divided into hostile blocs.<sup>692</sup>

I did not see it at the time, but these somewhat contradictory signs were probably indications of a bifurcation in US policy toward Cambodia, which became clear after the 1993 election, and which has caused consternation among those journalists and 'experts' who hoped to make, or remake, their careers by giving support to the US line. It may have been on this visit that the decision was taken to admit Hun Sen's eldest son to West Point, where sons of right-wing figures from South of the border were in earlier years instructed in 'American Democracy'.<sup>693</sup>

Everyone, except the *Partie of Democratic Kampuchea* themselves, pretend to view the return of the Khmer Rouge to power with horror, but only the PRK/SOC, Viet Nam, and those few other countries, mostly of the former socialist bloc, who recognized the Phnom Penh government, tried to take effective military, political, and propaganda measures to prevent their return.

Everyone else – the US, China, ASEAN, Western Europe, international bodies – even while paying lip service to the view that the DK regime was a horrible failure which should never recur, have exerted all efforts to force the Khmer Rouge, leaders and followers, onto the back of the Phnom Penh government. Every so-called peace proposal has started with the presupposition that the Khmer Rouge must participate in a new regime.

The argument advanced to justify this political aberration was that the Khmer Rouge are too strong to keep out, and that their influence may be diluted in a

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<sup>691</sup> Nayan Chanda, "Hun Sen Accepted in US as Lobbyist", *Asian Wall Street Journal*, 31 March 1992.

<sup>692</sup> Was Chanda, as suggested by parts of his book *Brother Enemy*, again being used by Washington? For suggestions of later evolution of US policy in favor of Hun Sen see my *Cambodia: A Political Survey*.

<sup>693</sup> Obviously this retrospective observation was not part of the text written in 1992. It does not seem to be easy to get information on the admission of Hun Sen's son to West Point. None of the prominent journalists writing on Cambodia reported on it at the time; and when in 1997 in Phnom Penh I asked one of the top State Department officers concerned with Cambodia when and how Hun Sen's son was admitted to West Point, he claimed he didn't know, an answer which, I submit, severely strains credulity.

coalition with Phnom Penh and Sihanouk. Now that inclusion of the Khmer Rouge is a *fait accompli* we may hope that the latter proves true, even if it is obvious that the purpose was to dilute the SOC, not the KR.

The first part of the argument is probably not true. Surely no one will believe that the *Partie of Democratic Kampuchea* could prevail against united opposition by Thailand, China, and the United States, which could take the form of economic and political strangulation with little risk of military conflict.

It is nevertheless true that the Khmer Rouge are strong in comparison to other Cambodian forces, but how did they get that way? All observers and students of the question agree that by the autumn of 1979 they were virtually destroyed, their troops decimated and lacking arms and their supporting population suffering from disease and starvation.

They could have been left that way until they sued for peace or disappeared. As Prince Sihanouk told a journalist, "To save Cambodia ... all you had to do [in 1979] was to let Pol Pot die. Pol Pot was dying and you brought him back to life".<sup>694</sup>

Phnom Penh was conned. Instead of 'if you agree to accept the Khmer Rouge they will be weakened and with international support you can defeat them in elections', it is now 'the Phnom Penh government must go because they agreed to accept the Khmer Rouge'.

It seems that UNTAC, and foreign journalists reporting from Cambodia, are worried about anti-Vietnamese racism fostered by the Khmer Rouge, KPNLF, and Ranariddh factions, and the possibility of massacres of Vietnamese by Cambodians. They are certainly accurate in the vibrations they have picked up. During a month-long visit to Cambodia in June 1992 I had the impression that the American-Khmer Rouge line was gaining influence among the Cambodian public.

In surprising encounters I was told that the Khmer Rouge were right in their complaint that Vietnamese troops had not left Cambodia, that the danger to Cambodia had always been the immutable Vietnamese goal of taking Cambodian territory, and that only the Americans had saved Cambodia from the Vietnamese danger. To this some added that Sihanouk deserved credit, for since his return security has improved, abstracting from the enormous UNTAC presence which has come at the same time.

The apparent surprise of UNTAC innocents and even experienced journalists should be cause for much wonderment, for hatred of Vietnamese as a bedrock of Cambodian patriotism, under Sihanouk, Lon Nol, and Democratic Kampuchea was never hidden. The only modern Cambodian state which tried to reverse that ideology and develop relations of cooperation and friendship with Viet Nam was

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<sup>694</sup> T.D. Allman, *Vanity Fair Magazine*, April 1990, also cited in Christophe Peschoux, "Enquete sur les 'nouveaux' Khmers Rouges (1979-1990), Essai de débroussaillage", Paris, unpublished 1990, photocopy supplied by the author, p. 17.

the PRK/SOC, and this is no doubt one of the reasons why its overthrow was so desired by the international community. Too many powerful actors desired Cambodian-Vietnamese enmity as a support for their own policies in Southeast Asia.

The authors of the successive drafts of ‘peace’ proposals which culminated in the October 1991 Paris Agreement all knew that they were backing those Cambodian forces which would try to reinvigorate Cambodian anti-Vietnamese chauvinism. But no matter, the purpose of those papers was to dissolve the SOC, whatever the results, either return of the Khmer Rouge, or resurgent racism.

The chauvinist tendency is also encouraged by the composition of the leadership of one component of UNTAC, the Information Component, in the persons of its director Timothy Carney and his deputy Stephen Heder. Not that they themselves are personally racist, but they have been deeply involved since 1979 in US-backed support for those Cambodian elements most likely to engage in racist politics. Their presence in such prestigious posts is direct encouragement to the extremist Cambodian factions who intend to destroy the SOC and establish a chauvinist Cambodia with a policy of hatred against Viet Nam.

Carney was among the American diplomats active in the international effort to rehabilitate the Khmer Rouge on the Thai border in 1979 and the early 1980s, to the extent that high-ranking Khmer Rouge referred to him as Mit (‘comrade’) Carney, and Heder, at the time a respected academic specialist on Cambodia, produced several studies sympathetic to the Cambodian chauvinist view of the danger of an expansionist Viet Nam.<sup>695</sup>

Later, since 1985, behind the icon of Amnesty International he was responsible for a series of propaganda attacks on the PRK which could not have withstood critical response if attempted as journalism or academic studies.<sup>696</sup>

Just after the election, but before the results had been announced I wrote the original text of the following, summing up some of the developments leading up to the election, and emphasizing the anti-SOC bias of the Paris Agreement and UNTAC. It was one of several reports and comments I wrote for the Redd Barna (‘Save the Children’) organization (Norway) during the election period; and I wish to thank them for facilitating my stay in Cambodia at that time.

Here I have expanded the Redd Barna text, inserting in square brackets relevant comment and texts of other documents both published and unpublished.

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<sup>695</sup> ‘Mit’ Carney was revealed by Heder in his interview with Thiounn Mum, which I quoted without mentioning Carney’s name in “Democratic Kampuchea – CIA to the Rescue”, p. 54, note 34. See Heder’s other writings listed in the bibliographies of my *Cambodia 1975-1982*, and *Kampuchea Politics, Economics, and Society*.

<sup>696</sup> For Heder on Amnesty, see above, pp. 279 ff.

### The Cambodian Elections, Nicaragua, Angola, or Somalia? (1993) <sup>697</sup>

Cambodia has just carried out a 'free and fair' internationally supervised election. Since it went off without disruption and with very high participation, everyone is expressing relief and congratulating themselves on the victory for democracy, losing sight of the fact that it is not the electoral process which is important, but the result to which it leads. <sup>698</sup>

Little thought has been given by UNTAC or by the political parties to what comes next: the drafting of a new constitution and formation of a new government. The worst may be yet to come.

This election was held in perhaps the worst possible conditions for such an exercise. The Democratic Kampuchea (DK) group, or 'Khmer Rouge', the second most powerful of the four signatories to the October 1991 Paris Agreement denounced the election, with a spurious claim that a crucial clause of the Agreement, withdrawal of Vietnamese forces, had not been observed, and they succeeded in convincing a large proportion of the urban population of the truth of that claim.

Violence among the parties, against Vietnamese, and among the citizenry, now all armed in the American- and Thai-style freedom which has been instituted, is generalized. The economy, which in spite of the US-led blockade, showed slow, steady progress from 1980-88, has collapsed since the peace agreement was signed, and a wide wealth gap, which PRK/SOC (Phnom Penh Government) policy up to 1988 had tried to prevent, has increased the misery of much of the population.

There was talk that perhaps the election should be postponed, or canceled. What would happen if the Khmer Rouge launched a large-scale attack, even against foreign personnel? One answer, by the Australian Foreign Minister, was that his troops would switch rather than fight, and from his former pose as Great White Father to Cambodians, and sponsor of the first major draft peace proposal, he was transformed into Great White Feather. <sup>699</sup>

<sup>697</sup> Michael Vickery, unpublished report written for Redd Barna ('Save the Children'), Norway, 1993. The original text has been expanded, as noted.

<sup>698</sup> In fact, the trendy line now is that it is not the results, but the electoral exercise in itself which is important. That is, 'banana republic' democracy, which prevails in the US too, where, as Noam Chomsky put it, "there is a single major political party with two right wings."

<sup>699</sup> "Australia to pull out if attacked", *New Straits Times* (Kuala Lumpur), 12 April 1993; Gareth Evans said "his country will withdraw its peacekeeping force from Cambodia if the Khmer Rouge launched a 'full frontal assault' on the United Nations there". On Evans' role in the 'Peace Process' see *Cambodia: a Political Survey*, pp. 34-35.

Nate Thayer, "KR Vows to Foil UNTAC Election", *PPP* 2/8, 2-22 April 1993, pp. 1, 5, wrote that there were serious splits in both FUNCINPEC and BLDP, with strong support for withdrawal following Khmer Rouge persuasion. In particular, "FUNCINPEC's number two official, Sam Rainsy, favors withdrawal", prefigning his

Would the UN have to leave Cambodia in disgrace, having been unable to fulfill their mission? Was the 'peace plan' a failure, casting shame on the UN, as some were saying? No, that was not the way to view what happened. UNTAC did not fail, and even if the elections had been disrupted the UNTAC project would not have been a failure.

What has happened has been shameful, but not because of failure. UNTAC and their application of the Paris Agreement have been a smashing success, quite apart from the election. The shame lies in the very concept of the Agreement. The purpose was to destroy, or at least seriously weaken, the SOC, even at the risk of return of the Khmer Rouge, whom all western states, communist as well as capitalist, professed to abhor.

That goal was already achieved before the election. Even if the Cambodian Peoples Party of the SOC wins an absolute majority in the election, the SOC will not emerge as it existed, assuming it is allowed to emerge at all without being subjected to an Angola-style recount, as some of its opponents have threatened.<sup>700</sup>

The SOC, as a regime committed to gradual, mixed socialist-market development, a society without great class distinctions, protection of a poor peasantry from land-grabbers, equality of men and women, and, for the first time in Cambodian history, a rational policy of peaceful cooperation with Viet Nam instead of hostility to Viet Nam as a bedrock of Khmer nationalism, will not reappear.

Instead of Social Democracy, toward which they were moving, they may have been pushed back to Sihanouk-Lonnolism in politics; in the economy they have leapt into an extreme free market, without any of the state controls or minimally adequate taxation usual in even modern liberal capitalist regimes as well as in socialist economies.

The Paris Agreement was the culmination of a long process of harassment and negotiation begun soon after the overthrow of DK in 1979; read carefully, it seems designed to ensure further destabilization, rather than lasting peace. It is

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positions which usually paralleled the Khmer Rouge line over the next five years. This was confirmed at a small conference in Canberra in October 1993 by one of the highest-placed UNTAC election officials who said, entirely off the record, of course, that the Khmer Rouge nearly succeeded in persuading FUNCINPEC and BLDP to withdraw from the election and resurrect the pre-Paris Agreement Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea.

<sup>700</sup> In the Angolan presidential election of September 1992 Jonas Savimbi, favored by the US, lost narrowly to President dos Santos, but the latter did not get over 50% of the vote, requiring a second round. Savimbi charged dishonesty, although international observers certified the election as honest. There was neither a recount nor a second round, and Angola lapsed again into civil war. On earlier events in Angola see Stockwell, *In Search of Enemies*.

the last stage in the international campaign to destroy the PRK/SOC as part of the US vendetta against Viet Nam.

Negotiations reached this stage because the PRK/SOC refused to dissolve as had been predicted for ten years, and because it was realized that the PRK/SOC was a relative success and not a Vietnamese front, that the Vietnamese army was really leaving, and that the new Cambodian state could not be defeated militarily by its enemies.

When it was seen that just recycling the Khmer Rouge and creating new contra groups, like those which were the nuclei for Son Sann's KPNLF and Sihanouk's FUNCINPEC, would not destroy the PRK, the international community in 1982 cobbled together the three-party Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea (CGDK), taking the name of Pol Pot's 'Khmer Rouge' regime.

This strange creature, a shotgun marriage of three partners whose mutual hatred was only exceeded by their antipathy for the PRK and Vietnamese, received both international recognition and Cambodia's UN seat, thus setting the stage for the comedy of the next few years. A government steadily improving the conditions of its people treated as a pariah, while the contras became legitimate Cambodia. Still PRK Cambodia continued its slow progress.

At the same time, changes in geopolitics, in particular in Sino-Soviet relations, meant that China's interest in Democratic Kampuchea was waning. The ostensible reason for their support, Vietnamese 'occupation', was disappearing of itself as Viet Nam withdrew troops in solid blocks from as early as 1983.

By 1988 there was reason to hope that some western country would break ranks and recognize the PRK. Had any such government the courage this might well have ended the 'Cambodia Problem', and the frightful muddle of 1992-3 would never have come about.<sup>701</sup> [As discussed in my *Cambodia: A Political Survey*, the 'Peace Process' was developed to forestall this danger.]

The zeal to undermine the SOC meant that the Paris Agreement favored the Khmer Rouge, as was recognized in a talk by Pol Pot to a group of cadres in February 1992.<sup>702</sup>

The anti-SOC bias of UNTAC also appeared in its personnel policy where, in spite of the lack of Cambodia expertise, acknowledged at all levels, Cambodia specialists with a known background of sympathy for the SOC were unwelcome,

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<sup>701</sup> Australia was the country on which hope was pinned, and this was encouraged when in 1988 an Australian foreign service officer was detached and posted in Phnom Penh to oversee Australian aid activities in Cambodia. These hopes were disappointed after Senator Gareth Evans replaced Bill Hayden as Minister of Foreign Affairs in September 1988, starting a switch of Australian policy on Cambodia to the US-ASEAN hard line.

<sup>702</sup> See below, pp. 401, ff.

but a record of strong prejudice against Phnom Penh qualified a person to work for UNTAC.<sup>703</sup>

The UNTAC bias showed up again in a Human Rights conference organized in the last week of November 1992. The bias there was somewhat surprising because in June 1992 Dennis McNamara, the chief of that component, had told me he thought there was perhaps more risk for human rights activists in Malaysia and Singapore than in Phnom Penh.

Among the invited foreign participants were representatives of all the western SOC-bashing organizations – Lawyers’ Committee, Amnesty, Asia Watch – while specialist students of Cambodia who have written frequently about human rights there, but with sympathy for Phnom Penh, were not only not invited, but two of them who happened to be in town [Ben Kiernan and I] were denied permission to sit in as observers.

I suppose it was inevitable that the opening public ceremony began with an incantatory plea for the release of Aung San Suu Kyi, even if the relevance for the business of establishing guarantees for human rights in Cambodia was not clear. It might seem that one purpose was to suggest that the Phnom Penh government was the equivalent of SLORC.<sup>704</sup>

It could not have been intended as a call for improvement in human rights in Southeast Asia, for not a peep was heard about the longest-serving political prisoner, perhaps in the entire world, Singapore’s Chia Thye Poh, who after 27 years imprisonment without trial was transferred to restricted residence before Aung San Suu Kyi was subjected to similar surveillance.

But of course, Chia Thye Poh is not a middle-class glamor person. He is a real leftist who, before being put away in the 1960s was saying very nasty things

<sup>703</sup> See above, p. 392, on Timothy Carney and Stephen Heder. Another person with similar tendencies who was hired by UNTAC without hesitation was the Norwegian legal expert Hanne Sophie Greve who while working in the border camps became a passionate supporter of the anti-Phnom Penh parties and an opponent of PRK/SOC. In Norway she presented arguments that the PRK/SOC was as bad as DK ([www.nkp.no/artikler/2000/02/slaktaren.html](http://www.nkp.no/artikler/2000/02/slaktaren.html)) This was the type of neutral expertise required by UNTAC.

<sup>704</sup> It was by Thant Mint-U, who has since written an interesting book about his country using standard western writings on Burma together with his personal knowledge of Burma’s elite, both pre-British and modern, Thant Myint-U, *The River of Lost Footsteps A Personal History of Burma*. It is very valuable in demonstrating the objective historical circumstances leading to Burma today rather than the ‘bad guys doing bad things’ treatment one sees in most contemporary writing about that country (a real journalistic ‘Burma syndrome’).

By 2008 the scenario suggested in 1992 had become ridiculous. A Thai writer in the *Bangkok Post* (Achara Ashayagachat, “Silence raises questions of relevance”, 13 December 2008), was comparing Thailand to Burma, and complaining about the failure of ASEAN to take a stand on either country, while Cambodia was appearing more stable and better governed than its neighbor, and Hun Sen had become a respected ASEAN diplomat.



about the Americans in Viet Nam. Not the sort of political prisoner to whom UNTAC would wish to call attention, with their Singapore police component, and subservience to American Viet Nam policy. There were no individuals in Cambodia at the time, nor since, in situations equivalent to that of either Aung San Suu Kyi or Chia Thye Poh.<sup>705</sup>

[*Added 2009*: After the 1998 election, however, there was a Western media campaign to present Sam Rainsy as a sort of Aung San Suu Kyi in drag, as it were. Important differences, just to keep things serious, are that Sam Rainsy was never imprisoned or even placed under house arrest, and that most of the ‘threats’ of such action against him were manufactured by himself, while Aung San Suu Kyi, in contrast to Chia Thye Poh as well, was never confined to a prison.

The real similarities between Suu Kyi and Rainsy are that both are foreigners, in terms of citizenship and residence; children of famous fathers in Burma and Cambodia whose careers were violently cut short in their prime, who injected themselves into tense political situations with poor, or perverse, understanding of local conditions and desires to revive and re-live the greatness of their fathers.<sup>706</sup>

The misuse of Aung San Suu Kyi at that UNTAC conference was also an illustration, although not fully realized then even by myself, of the way in which ‘human rights’ was to be used as a tendentious political weapon against the Cambodian government by UNTAC, carrying on the work of Stephen Heder’s propaganda tracts disguised as Amnesty International reports, and prefiguring the activities of the United Nations Center for Human Rights in Phnom Penh.

The entire gamut of attention to Aung San Suu Kyi also illustrates the media’s insistence on trivializing serious matters by concentrating on star performers rather than on issues and processes.<sup>707</sup> Amusingly, as reported in *Cambodia Daily*, 11 June 2008, p. 1, Rainsy, commenting on Hor Nam Hong’s suit against him for slander, compared himself to Aung San Suu Kyi.]

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<sup>705</sup> Chia Thye Poh was finally given complete freedom at the end of November 1998 (*Bangkok Post*, 29 November 1998, p. 4, “The best part of my life was taken away”).

<sup>706</sup> See Aung San Suu Kyi, *Freedom From Fear*, London, Penguin, 1991, extolling her father Aung San’s democratic propensities, and ignoring that everything he said and did indicates that he was a left-wing socialist. For a dissection of the politically correct myths surrounding Aung San Suu Kyi see, Michael A. Aung Thwin, *Myth & History in the Historiography of Early Burma*, Ohio University, 1998, pp. 155-59. On Sam Sary, see Chandler, *Tragedy*, pp. 99-100.

<sup>707</sup> On the Center for Human Rights, see below, pp. 511, ff. The last matter is a major theme in several books by Noam Chomsky, and is seen in Pierre Bourdieu, *Contre-feux* (Paris, Éditions Raisons d’Agir, avril 1998), p. 76, “La télévision, le journalisme, et la politique”.

The first panel of the closed sessions in the November 1992 conference was a review of human rights in Cambodia by Cambodia historian David Chandler and Human Rights activist David Hawk, both Americans. Unfortunately they spoke off the cuff and did not distribute papers, and my informant from inside the conference did not think what they said sufficiently interesting to take notes. That must mean they were not too bad.

Hawk's Cambodia Commission has been active in publishing revelations of DK cruelty, but not from a position of sympathy for Phnom Penh. Some years ago, when it was popular among a certain coterie, Hawk's writings tended to assimilate the PRK leaders to the Khmer Rouge. In line with this position, he encouraged the journal *Index on Censorship* to censor out information revealing dishonest anti-PRK writing by William Shawcross, one of the figures in the campaign to treat the PRK leaders as Khmer Rouge. *Index* itself refused to take note of other matters of censorship which I tried to bring to their attention.<sup>708</sup>

Chandler's record at the time was moderate, and his appearance might balance the extremists, but for the last two years he has been Amnesty's Cambodia expert in their missions to Cambodia, and his presence at the conference was as Amnesty's man, not as an independent historian.

It will be interesting to see if Chandler will have a moderating influence on Amnesty's Cambodia reports. He has told me that the abuses he has discovered on his visits in 1991 and 1992 are "Sihanouk-period stuff". Apparently Cambodia, in this important area, has already reached the standard which UNTAC claims to wish to impose in the political and economic areas.

In a misplaced concern with 'human rights' which too often focuses only on the SOC, UNTAC and most journalists forget that the impact of the Paris Agreement and UNTAC is largely responsible for the breakdown of law and order, without which general respect for human rights is impossible. The bias of the new Human Rights groups and UNTAC encourages a belief that the SOC is illegitimate, that its laws do not need to be obeyed.

Steeped in Amnesty propaganda, UNTAC has forced the release of criminals, who continue to commit crimes; and the free-market frenzy that has been inculcated has meant that there is no control over the import of firearms. Phnom Penh, once a rather peaceful city in which very few dared to carry unlicensed guns, has come to resemble Manila, Bangkok, or Los Angeles. Sadly, this was part of the model. Cambodia was to be purged of 'socialism' to resemble those paragons of free-market and free gun democracy.

UNTAC could ultimately have done more for real human rights in helping to build up a better-trained, more effective police force, in tandem with more

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<sup>708</sup> The correspondence among Hawk, *Index* and myself was between January and December 1986.

efficient court and legal systems, where the PRK/SOC had made good progress on their own before 1991.<sup>709</sup>

This might have improved SOC capability to deal with criminals in more legalistic ways, to confiscate illegal goods, including cars and weapons, and to enforce tax collection from the new, especially foreign, private enterprises. But this would have strengthened the SOC, something directly contrary to the assigned role of UNTAC. The message to Phnom Penh, and to members of the Cambodian population who would prefer to work outside the law, is that no one should be arrested, tried, or imprisoned until perfect western-inspired laws and courts are in place.

One exception to the neglect of law and order is with respect to attacks on members of the anti-SOC political parties. There UNTAC wants quick action, and has implicitly treated most such incidents as the work of the SOC, although in very few cases have they offered any evidence. Hun Sen's answer, that the SOC has no reason to attack the other parties, and that most such attacks are by criminals or Khmer Rouge saboteurs, or are personal feuds, although to some degree disingenuous, should be given more attention.

The steps toward a coalition of the SOC and FUNCINPEC starting in 1991 showed signs of leading to a solid government after the election, a situation which could only harm the Khmer Rouge. They in particular had a special need to spoil relations between SOC and FUNCINPEC.

This was one of Pol Pot's worries as expressed in a talk to his subordinates in February 1992. He was extremely disturbed that Ranariddh would break from FUNCINPEC'S traditional alliance with the Khmer Rouge, and move toward cooperation with the SOC. To prevent this he told his people that they must raise the flag and cause trouble.

Then, according to David Ashley, "exactly a year" after the FUNCINPEC-SOC coalition was formed, "when the informal cooperation between the two sides had ... broken down", CPP "reverted to state-authorized violence against FUNCINPEC".<sup>710</sup>

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<sup>709</sup> See Michael G. Karnavas, "International trial for KR a bad idea, S. African-style truth commission is way forward", *PPP*, Volume 8 Number 7, 2-12 April, 1999, pp. 10-11; and, especially, "Cambodians can handle a KR trial", *PPP*, Volume 8 Number 9, 30 April-13 May, 1999, p. 14. Karnavas is a former Federal and State public defender having practiced criminal defense law at all levels. In 1994 he trained the Cambodian Defenders and from 1995-6 he worked for the Cambodian Court Training Project of the International Human Rights Group.

<sup>710</sup> On Pol Pot's 1992 talk see below, pp. 401, ff. On the projected FUNCINPEC-CPP coalition see Rodney Tasker, "The Odd Couple", *FEER*, 28 November 1991, p. 10-11; David Ashley, "The End Justifies the Means?" *PPP* 4/11, 2-25 June 1995, p. 6, "Within a month of the agreement [Paris Oct 1991] a coalition between CPP and FUNCINPEC had already been signed at Prince Sihanouk's urging"; Ashley "In Reply": (to Vickery), *PPP* 4/14, 14-27 July 1995, p. 6, "FUNCINPEC and SOC very publicly announced an

And indeed, toward the end of 1992, and throughout the early months of 1993, before the election, the potential CPP-FUNCINPEC coalition was destroyed by acts of violence, including several murders, mostly of FUNCINPEC activists, and blamed on the CPP, in particular on two CPP ministers, Sar Kheng (Interior) and Sin Song (State Security).

Although in some cases it could be shown that the immediate perpetrators of violence were connected to the CPP, it is difficult to explain why the CPP should have tried to destroy the coalition which they needed. Indeed, there was no attempt by political analysts at the time to explain it. They preferred to treat it as typical 'communist' violence to intimidate the opposition.

It was rarely mentioned that those who stood to gain from a CPP-FUNCINPEC split were the 'Khmer Rouge' PDK, who were still formally in the running for the election until April, and whose leader Pol Pot, in his February 1992 speech, had complained of the danger from the rapprochement of his former allies, the FUNCINPEC leaders, with the CPP.

A CPP-FUNCINPEC election alliance was also anathema for most of the powers behind UNTAC, who considered that the purpose of the election was to eliminate the CPP.

[*Added 1998:* As reported later, UNTAC Military Commander General Sanderson held that an alliance would be a "major infraction of the Paris Accords", although to quote an approving assessment of Sanderson, in "a functioning, established democracy such behavior would not be frowned upon".

Cambodia was not to be permitted to engage in such democratic behavior on its own. "It could have been disastrous", although no reason was given beyond "it would have antagonized the Khmer Rouge". Of course the international community, concerned with democracy, could not do that. Only the CPP was to be antagonized; and the feared disaster was obviously that with Sihanouk's support, the CPP might have secured a real victory in the election.<sup>711</sup>

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alliance in November 1991"; and Ashley, "The End", *PPP*, 7/8, April 24 - May 7, 1998," Pol Pot saw the November 1991 alliance of Hun Sen's CPP and Prince Ranariddh's FUNCINPEC as a US-inspired arrangement to isolate the Khmer Rouge and prevent the CPP's collapse". For the text of the CPP-FUNCINPEC agreement see David Ashley, "Between war and peace: Cambodia 1991-1998", *Conciliation Resources*, London, November 1998

<sup>711</sup> See Trevor Findlay, *Cambodia the Legacy and Lessons of UNTAC*, Stockholm: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute and Oxford University Press, 1995, p. 24; and my review of it and Timothy Carney and Tan Lian Choo, *Whither Cambodia? Beyond the Election*, Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1993, in *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol. 26, No. 2 (September 1995), pp. 439-443. Findlay quaintly remarked that "Sihanouk and Hun Sen shelved their plans for a coalition government by early December".

What was not known when I wrote the Redd Barna report in 1993, outside of certain inner sections of UNTAC, was that the period of greatest allegedly CPP-FUNCINPEC violence in 1992-93 was also the time during which the PDK leadership had ordered their personnel in the field to engage in a policy of real genocide against any and all Vietnamese.

This was only revealed in 1996 when Heder, one of the UNTAC inner circle who were directly involved, published the results of his interviews with PDK defectors.<sup>712</sup> This was the only evidence ever found of a DK **genocidal policy**, and it is peculiar that it was covered up at the time by the UNTAC authorities.

Because Sin Song and Sar Kheng were later exonerated, Ashley's proposal that it was first of all the CPP, under their leadership, which "reverted to state-authorized violence" loses some of its force.<sup>713</sup> ]

### Pol Pot's plan for UNTAC<sup>714</sup>

The zeal to undermine the SOC meant that the Paris Agreement favored the Khmer Rouge, as they themselves gleefully recognized.

In the transcript of a talk by Pol Pot to a group of cadres in February 1992, leaked to the SOC and distributed to foreign journalists in December 1992, Pol Pot emphasized the advantages which they derived from the Agreement, and complained about the delay in setting up UNTAC, which he felt would permit an application of the Agreement favorable to the Khmer Rouge, and protect them from hostility by UNAMIC under the French General Loridon.

It is clear from Pol Pot's remarks that he considered Loridon a serious threat, which would disappear with the arrival of UNTAC, an assessment in which he was proved correct.<sup>715</sup>

There can be no doubt that the author of this document, the title page of which has "Uncorrected Draft", was Pol Pot, not Ieng Sary as one analyst guessed.<sup>716</sup>

<sup>712</sup> See Steve Heder, "The Resumption of Armed Struggle by the Party of Democratic Kampuchea: Evidence from National Army of Democratic Kampuchea 'Self-Demobilizers'", chapter 3 in Heder-Ledgerwood. See further below, pp. 463 ff.

<sup>713</sup> On Sin Song and Sar Kheng see below, pp. 456 ff.

<sup>714</sup> Michael Vickery, unpublished. This paper, referred to above, but never published, was begun in late 1993 and writing continued over several years.

<sup>715</sup> Reuters' Mark Dodd gave me a copy of the hand-written 38-page Khmer text on 10 December. On the Loridon affair see Nayan Chanda, "UN Divisions", *FEER*, 23 July 1992, pp. 8-9.

<sup>716</sup> "K.Rouge wants to open battlefield in P. Penh", *Bangkok Post*, 10 December 1992. "Dated February 6 ... it appears to be a directive to young Khmer Rouge diplomats from the radical faction's Foreign Minister Ieng Sary, according to Ben Kiernan, a Cambodia scholar at Yale University ... who examined it ... [t]his is typical of Khmer Rouge language," he said, 'It's background for [their] people speaking out to the rest of the

The text, however, was written down by someone else, apparently as Pol Pot spoke, as shown by inconsistencies and garbling of French expressions used by the speaker. Pol Pot as the speaker is revealed for certain in a short historical account on pages 29-30.

He said “My own experience has not been in diplomatic work”, which rules out Ieng Sary. “My work was secret. In ‘65 I went to the Yuon and to China.”<sup>717</sup> The Yuon then made a lot of talk about how great Ho Chi Minh was, and they spoke much about *les quatres l’empire* [sic], i.e. Lê Duẩn, Tru’ờng Chinh, Lê Đức Thọ, and Võ Nguyên Giáp.

The French phrase inserted in the Khmer text is grammatically incorrect and meaningless (the term ‘*empire*’ does not exist), but is of considerable interest. It proves that the text was not written by the speaker but by someone whose knowledge of French was inadequate.

To an historian of early Southeast Asia the epithet ‘the four ...’, designating four important men, suggests ‘the four columns’ by which a group of four important ministers or officers were known in China, in Ayutthaya, in Cambodia, in Vietnam, among the Lue and possibly in other Asian polities.<sup>718</sup>

The expression in Vietnamese is *tu*’ [4] *tru* [column]. During the Nguyễn Dynasty they were “four marshals ... of the advance guard ... the right ... the left ... the rear guard”, collectively called “the four columns of the empire”.<sup>719</sup>

One wonders if Pol Pot had not comprehended the classical allusion, and garbled it, or if in his talk he repeated correctly, in French, “the four columns of

world’ ...”; “Khmer Rouge plans battlefield in Phnom Penh”, *The Nation*, 10 December 1992, “Secret document quotes Pol Pot”, following a report from *FEER*, which attributed the document correctly to Pol Pot.

The authenticity of this document was accepted by Timothy Carney in Timothy Carney and Tan Lian Choo, *Whither Cambodia? Beyond the Election*, Singapore, ISEAS, 1993, p. 35, “On my reading of it, and every other Cambodian specialists [sic] who looked at it, it was Pol Pot talking to senior leadership circles”. Kiernan, in, “The Inclusion of the Khmer Rouge in the Cambodian Peace Process: Causes and Consequences”, pp. 233-234, persisted, against all internal evidence, in attributing this document to Ieng Sary.

<sup>717</sup> As late as the second edition of *How Pol Pot* (2004), p. 220, Kiernan still said Pol Pot “has never explicitly conceded that [the visit to China] occurred”. It is peculiar that neither Kiernan nor Chandler knew of this text in time to correct the misapprehension in their work that Pol Pot had never admitted his tip to China. See also below, p. 436.

<sup>718</sup> Ayutthaya was the capital of the country now called ‘Thailand’ from the 14th century to 1767. The Lue are a Tai-speaking people of northern Laos and an adjoining area of southern China, with their traditional capital in Chiang Rung/Hung. A description of their political system is in Jacques Lemoine, “Tai Lue Historical Relation with China and the Shaping of the Sipsong Panna Political System”, in *Proceedings of the International Conference on Thai Studies*, The Australian National University, Canberra, 3-6 July 1987, pp. 121-34, see p. 122.

<sup>719</sup> E. Luro, *Le pays d’Annam*, Paris, 1897, p. 95.

the empire”, and it was the secretary who misunderstood. Literal misunderstanding on the part of Pol Pot is unlikely given the level of French education which he had received. Probably his conversations with Vietnamese leaders were conducted in French, for there is no evidence that he knew Vietnamese.

If he understood, it might at first seem strange that he used the French translation in his talk to Khmer cadres, for old Cambodian administration had the same conception and expression, *catosdam*, ‘four columns’, referring to four important ministers.<sup>720</sup>

This should perhaps be interpreted as evidence that Pol Pot, unlike the Vietnamese, refused to mix traditional ‘feudal’ conceptions with revolutionary rhetoric; this is one more example of the Vietnamese communists’ incorporation of traditional images, a nationalist device contributing to their success.<sup>721</sup>

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The purpose of Pol Pot’s February 1992 talk was to assess the effects of the Paris Agreement three months after its signing, and to plan for the coming year.

Perhaps most interesting is that he considered the Paris Agreement favorable to them, not because of the electoral process, which he did not mention, but because it should give his party a political advantage against the SOC outside the electoral process.

In fact Pol Pot was in a hurry for UNTAC, which had not yet arrived, to be set up, in part to protect him from UNAMIC under General Loridon, who had the KR very worried. Loridon is mentioned in the document more often than anyone but Sihanouk and Ranariddh. Pol Pot was in effect asking, ‘why doesn’t UNTAC come and get him off my back’? Not long afterward Pol Pot’s wish came true. Whoever was responsible for Loridon’s transfer did Pol Pot a great favor.

Another theme was the ‘Yuon’. They still controlled Cambodia, and were in league with the Americans against Democratic Kampuchea. Moreover, the Americans were pressing China on the subject of human rights in order to force them to break with Democratic Kampuchea and join the Yuon. The Chinese, he said, had already stopped giving aid.

A problem with the Paris Agreement was that it was causing the troops to go soft. The two other members of the coalition, FUNCINPEC and the KPNLF,

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<sup>720</sup> Robert K. Headley, Jr., *Cambodian-English Dictionary*, Washington, D.C., The Catholic University of America Press, 1977, Vol. I, p. 168, identifies the four as “the four highest ministers in the Khmer government (ministers of Justice, Interior, Navy and War)”. The difference may indicate that in Cambodian practice the designation was less definite, and less meaningful, perhaps because Cambodian administration had been less influenced by China.

<sup>721</sup> See Alexander Woodside, *Vietnam and the Chinese Model*, Harvard University Asia Center, 1988

who never fought very much anyway, were now even less interested in fighting, and assumed that the war was over and peace at hand. This pacifist attitude had even permeated some of the DK troops who were war-weary, and measures had to be taken to stiffen their resolve.

A major political threat was that Ranariddh, who was untrustworthy anyway, might break away and join SOC, and it was absolutely essential to prevent this. Pol Pot does not show much respect for either Ranariddh or Sihanouk, but for Ranariddh least of all.

Other weaknesses emphasized by Pol Pot were the end of Chinese aid, and the defection of the KPNLF and FUNCINPEC elements from the tripartite coalition. Sihanouk was unreliable, and ‘went around the bend’ in moments of stress. Ranariddh, Pol Pot felt, might move toward the PRK/SOC.

A continuing theme throughout the talk was the advantage the ‘documents’, that is the Paris Agreements, gave them. Pol Pot kept saying, “if we insist on the documents, we will win”. What they should insist on was formation of a four-power interim government as had been projected by the Paris Agreement, as he read it, and the necessity to rid the country of the Yuon before any further political progress could be made.

It would be interesting to know how much of this document was translated for Akashi by his UNTAC 12 expert Stephen Heder, who provided the *Far Eastern Economic Review* with its accurate information, as far as it went; and whether UNTAC, or foreign diplomats, had information about this document before it became public in December 1992.

Perhaps not, since no journalist reported on the very interesting revelation of Pol Pot’s fear of Loridon, and his worries about defection of Ranariddh and FUNCINPEC to the SOC. It seems that Heder did not supply them with these details. They were not even mentioned by Nate Thayer who claims the ability to read such documents on his own. Did Akashi get them, and did the French embassy know about this at the time Loridon was pressing for a hard line on the Khmer Rouge?

As far as I have been able to determine, no one studied this text in detail for publication except Heder in his PH.D. thesis several years later.<sup>722</sup> Heder’s purpose was to show that Pol Pot had failed in his plan to follow a Vietnamese model for People’s War, and in particular that his projections for winning a large number of villages, detailed near the end of his talk, was wildly fantastic. Heder makes no mention of Pol Pot’s fear of Loridon.

As we shall see, other emanations from UNTAC 12 reveal a possibility that they manipulated this document too in what they conceived as their interests. It

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<sup>722</sup> Stephen Russell Heder, “Pol Pot at Bay: People’s War and the Breakdown of the 1991 Paris Agreements”, Ph.D. thesis, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 1999, where Pol Pot’s talk is entitled “Clarification of Certain Principled Views to Act as the Basis of Our Views and Stance”, 6 February 1992.



was not in their interests, in December 1992 when this document was made public, and when they were trying to pin all blame for violence and breakdown of election preparations on the CPP, to reveal that Pol Pot was very interested in breaking up any possible FUNCINPEC-SOC cooperation.

Even if Akashi and the UNTAC military knew the full content of Pol Pot's February talk, they might well have ignored it, because it was necessary to get rid of Lorida. A vigorous Khmer Rouge was essential to the UNTAC game plan.

Akashi, in a talk in the Cambodiana Hotel in Phnom Penh on 10 July 2001, said that in his last "tête-à-tête" with Khieu Samphan in Beijing in January 1993, he had told Samphan that the KR should remain in the election; that although this time they might win only a few seats, it would give them opportunity to exercise influence, make their ideas known, and eventually win more, even a majority.

The sensitivity of this matter for UNTAC 12 is transparent in the star-wars explanation of the Lorida affair later offered by Heder to David Roberts. It merits full citation as an illustration of the mentality of some of UNTAC's upper ranks.

Heder claimed that Lorida's proposal to use force against the Khmer Rouge, made in 1992, was in fact not what Lorida said then and later to people, such as Roberts, who were investigating the matter.

Heder claimed that an 'Operation dovetail' had been planned, which was "to establish ... an UNTAC presence in Khmer Rouge zones ... to use UNTAC civilians as a kind of human shield behind which the UNTAC military would stand in case of trouble ... At the heart of it would be UNTAC 12 with its Khmer speakers [Heder's crowd of starry-eyed anti-CPP ideologues] [who] would make contact with the civilian population under Khmer Rouge control ... and if trouble eventuated ... the troops, the Dutch marines [would] come in and exfiltrate (*sic!*) us" (in the way they protected Bosnians in Srebrenica?).

This wild idea was shelved, according to Heder, because both Sihanouk and Kofi Anan opposed it.

General Sanderson, quite credibly, denied to Roberts that such a project had ever existed, saying it "was harebrained and not militarily feasible". Lorida claimed ignorance of it, and "no other UN official admitted to having heard of it".<sup>723</sup>

The following is a published text, relevant to the remarks in the Redd Barna paper above, but written much later.

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<sup>723</sup> Roberts, *Political Transition in Cambodia*, p. 70.

### Son Sen and all that – challenging the KR pundits (1996) <sup>724</sup>

For long-term observers of Cambodian affairs the flurry of punditry surrounding the defection of Ieng Sary in 1996 arouses amusement.

Brother No. 2 was of course never No. 2, that was just Vietnamese propaganda; he could not have been more than number 4 or 5, and the real No. 2 was Nuon Chea, to whom not much attention had been paid.

Was Ieng Sary responsible for genocide? Of course not. He wasn't well enough connected, not really in the inner circle. The inner circle, then as now, the hardliners, were Pol Pot, Nuon Chea, Ta Mok, and Son Sen. But Ieng Sary must have been involved too, they say.

What we have here are *ad hoc* responses to an unexpected situation from 'specialists' who, to maintain that reputation, have to say something. I am reminded of the 'Pen Sovann affair' of 1981. Pen Sovann, after 1979 treated by specialists as Hanoi's proconsul in Phnom Penh, was going to be the agent of Cambodia's absorption by Vietnam, and the new government in Phnom Penh was labelled by one specialist the 'Pen Sovann regime'.

Then in December 1981 Pen Sovann was suddenly removed and disappeared. Since of course Viet Nam decided everything in Cambodia, his removal could not have been by another faction of Cambodians, and for Viet Nam to remove its own proconsul he must have betrayed them to some other foreign power, so a Soviet connection was devised.<sup>725</sup>

I do not pretend to know any more about the recent KR collapse than those who have emitted the excited speculations of the past few weeks. I did not predict that Ieng Sary, nor anyone else, would be the first KR leader to split, although everything that has happened since 1993 made a breakdown in KR solidarity a strong possibility.

It was clear that the PRK/SOC had hoped for such a break for years, and the only so-far unpublished information to which I lay claim is that the insistence by PRK propaganda in the early 1980s on the 'Pol Pol-Ieng Sary genocidal clique', to the exclusion of other KR leaders; started at a time when there was a serious belief that the defection of Khieu Samphan could be effected. Obviously by 1991, at least, that goal had been given up.

The degree of credibility to be accorded the punditry may be reflected in the case of Son Sen, about whom various rumors of uncertainty in his position within the KR circulated over the years, but have now been put authoritatively at rest by David Ashley, wondering how "leaders of the stature of Nuon Chea ... and Son Sen could have been in such a poorly-defended base" (Samlot) – Nuon

<sup>724</sup> Michael Vickery, *Phnom Penh Post*, vol. 5, no. 4, 29 November-12 December, 1996, p. 7.

<sup>725</sup> For 'Pen Sovann regime' see Stephen R. Heder, 'From Pol Pot to Pen Sovann to the Villages', paper presented at the International conference on Indochina and Problems of Security in Southeast Asia, Bangkok, Chulalongkorn University; and for discussion Vickery, *Kampuchea Politics, Economics, and Society*, pp. 45-7.

Chea “No. 2 in the KR hierarchy for decades”, and Son Sen, “believed to rank No. 3 or No. 4” [“Mystery surrounds Son Sen ... ” (*PPP* 5/21, 18-30 Oct 1996), p. 4].

Careful readers of *Phnom Penh Post* may well do a double take. Early in 1994, *à propos* of nothing, Nate Thayer revealed a “Shakeup in KR hierarchy” in May 1992, when Ieng Sary was said to have been purged, and Son Sen relieved of duties, after losing a high-level dispute over whether the KR should pull out of the UN peace plan. Son Sen, according to that analysis, had wanted to enter phase two, and for that, “sources say” (a favorite Thayerism), he “went through ... reeducation from June to December 1992”.<sup>726</sup>

Perhaps other readers than I wondered at that time why there had been a delay of two years in discovering the information presented in this, as we shall see, over-hasty revelation.

On the military side of the revamped Khmer Rouge, Thayer continued, there was a group of about seven commanders, who formed a collective committee for strategy and tactics. They included So Hong, a nephew of Pol Pot; Son Sen’s brother Nikorn (or Ny Kan [respectively romanizations via Thai and Khmer]); and a son and son-in-law of Ta Mok. This was hardly new information, nor evidence of a ‘shakeup’. Ny Kan had figured in reports on high-level KR leadership since 1980, and the importance of Ta Mok’s family members had also been recorded since that time.<sup>727</sup>

Finally, still in the context of the alleged shakeup, Thayer wrote of “a group of younger political cadre who analyze, carry out, and formulate policy ... made up of about 15 highly educated intellectuals” who, in spite of youth, “have been with the movement since the 1960s and ... 1970s”. Thayer did not name them, perhaps because some readers might recognize that they had all been named before and did not owe their prominence to a ‘shakeup’.

I speculated at the time that Thayer’s belated and, as we shall see, hipshot revelation of events in 1992 might have been to head off questions inspired by subsequent research on the alarming and misinformed announcement by Akashi in May 1993 that “the KR are stronger than before”, a great risk to the elections; “their military strength has increased by at least 50 per cent, they have new weapons, they are operating in larger units, they are led by leaders who are more extreme than in past years, so we have to be prepared”.<sup>728</sup>

<sup>726</sup> Nate Thayer, *PPP*, 3/2, 28 Jan-10 Feb 1994.

<sup>727</sup> Vickery, *Cambodia 1975-1982*, pp. 99, citing reports by Stephen Heder.

<sup>728</sup> See, for example, a paper I gave in Canberra in November 1993, published in early 1994 as “*Cambodia: A Political Survey*” [expanded in 2007 as *Cambodia: A Political Survey*]; Akashi’s remarks from *The Nation*, Bangkok, 20 May, 1993.

This set off a panic among UNTAC and NGO personnel and many fled to Bangkok. Most peculiarly, no journalists at the time seemed interested in the identities of the alleged, more extreme, new leaders.

To understand what is going on we must look back to the middle of 1993 when UNTAC was supposedly agonizing over the failure to persuade the Khmer Rouge to enter Phase 2; whether they should be pushed more energetically, as had been advocated by General Loridon, dismissed in July 1992 for his views, or whether UNTAC should give up and go on with the election without the Khmer Rouge.

The choice in part hinged on estimates of Khmer Rouge strength. The 'peace process' organizers had, since the 1980s, desired the inclusion of the Khmer Rouge in the new Cambodian regime, and as a reason gave the great strength of that group which made exclusion impossible.

The Phnom Penh government, on the contrary, had always insisted that in terms of troop numbers the Khmer Rouge were relatively weak. Loridon agreed, and believed that they could be forced to accede to the terms of the Paris Agreement by UNTAC military pressure.

Pol Pot seems also to have agreed at the time, for his talk to cadres in February 1992 showed that he greatly feared Loridon, and was eager for the arrival of Akashi whom he expected to be easier to manage. It would be interesting to know if UNTAC knew of this talk of Pol Pot at the time of Loridon's removal.

It was necessary to remove Loridon to prevent any risk of destruction of the Khmer Rouge before they had served their purpose. His removal meant that UNTAC would never enforce 'phase 2'. By May 1993 UNTAC had opted for the version that the Khmer Rouge were too strong to be pressured, and Akashi, after failing to persuade Khieu Samphan to keep the KR in the election (see p. 405), unloaded his startling announcement as an excuse to avoid enforcement.

The extreme haste with which Thayer pushed his piece into print is seen in his forgetting that in August 1992, while showing off his access to "internal documents of the Khmer Rouge", he had identified Son Sen as "Commander-in-Chief of the Army", and second in order after Khieu Samphan (making him No. 3 or No. 4, depending on where one placed Ieng Sary), ahead of Nuon Chea (apparently not then No. 2) and Ta Mok. When in November 1992 "the KR announced the formation of the Great National Union Party", it was "headed by Khieu Samphan and Son Sen".

And had Thayer checked the wider historical record before unloading his much delayed analysis, he would have seen that Son Sen attended the June 1992 Tokyo Conference as 'Defense Minister' and 'military chief', and deputy to Khieu Samphan, certainly not indications that he had been relieved of his duties

the previous month. What a load of homework Son Sen must have had with this public activity, all the while undergoing reeducation too!<sup>729</sup>

Eventually Thayer seems to have checked the record, for just five months later, in July 1994, the subject came up again. Reporting on the formation of a new Khmer Rouge government structure, the 'Provisional Government of National Union and National Salvation of Cambodia', Thayer insisted once more that the absence of Son Sen's name proved, as "analysts say", that "he has been purged", but, this time, only after June 1993.

Thayer also still insisted, trying to save the phenomena, that Son Sen was purged because "he lost a power struggle" over whether they "should comply with the UN phase two process".<sup>730</sup> This simply will not do. That question could have arisen, as Thayer said the first time, in May 1992, but by June 1993 the election was over and phase two long in the past.

By June 1993 the Khmer Rouge were trying to negotiate entrance into the new royal government through the back door (aided by Sihanouk and Julio Jeldres, see note 800). If Son Sen lost a struggle then, and for that reason was not in the new PDK government, it would appear that the line he wished to follow was not too soft, as implied earlier, but too hard, opposed to negotiating a new cooperation with Phnom Penh, consonant with his allegedly rigorous position now.

Thayer's July 1994 list of new KR government personalities included the names of the first tier of seven [still the magic number '7', but different] headed by Khieu Samphan, the rest being "united front personalities, mainly intellectuals, who were announced as founding members" of a new KR party at the end of 1992, and who "served in diplomatic and political posts during the 15 years since the Khmer Rouge were driven from power".

They thus seemed to be more or less part of the unnamed "group of younger political cadre who analyze, carry out, and formulate policy ... made up of about 15 highly educated intellectuals" who, in spite of youth, "have been with the movement since the 1960s and ... 1970s", whom Thayer had in his first article cited as evidence for the alleged shakeup in May 1992, perhaps justifying Akashi's alarming announcement a year later.

Finally Thayer supplied some of the names. Besides Khieu Samphan, Chouen Choeun (usually written Thiounn Thioeun) and Chan Youran were already prominent in their fields before the overthrow of Sihanouk in 1970, and the second was a member of Pol Pot's inner circle all through Democratic

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<sup>729</sup> Nate Thayer, "KR Blueprint for the Future Includes Electoral Strategy", *PPP*, 1/4, 27 August 1992; Jacques Bekaert, "The Khmer Rouge's Dangerous Game", *Bangkok Post*, 5 December 1992; Kavi Chongkittavorn, "Tokyo talks clouded with uncertainty", *The Nation*, 20 June 1992.

<sup>730</sup> Nate Thayer, "Split formalized as KR declare 'govt'", *PPP*, 3/14, 15-28 July 1994, p. 11.

Kampuchea. In Sopheap's name had been well-known as a leftist and then DK intellectual since the 1970s, and Mak Ben was a KR spokesman in Phnom Penh during the UNTAC period.

They do not, and did not in 1992, represent either a shakeup or a radicalization of the KR. I do not have detailed information about Kor Bun Heng or Pich Chheang, but the latter name has been mentioned among DK intellectuals for years.

As for Son Sen, the attribution of the portfolio of "Minister of National Army" to Khieu Samphan, with Pich Chheang as his deputy, may have meant that Son Sen had lost the Ministry of National Defense, although he might still have been Commander-In-Chief of the army. Nor, since the last announcement of a position for Son Sen had been as "Vice President of the Great National Union Party", was his absence from the new *government* list necessarily significant. Pol Pot was not mentioned in the new government either.

Whence came the new and revised information which Thayer seemed to have acquired only, apparently, with a delay of almost two years after the event? He did not provide his sources, at least not directly, but a background detail about Son Sen which he inserted the first time – that Son Sen had allegedly been in danger, and on the next list for elimination in 1978, and was only saved by the Vietnamese invasion – was "according to recent [1993-early 1994?] analysis of confessions of other party cadre at Tuol Sleng prison, Cambodia scholar Stephen Heder told the *Post*".

Note that Heder was not identified as Deputy-Director (Analysis) of UNTAC 12, responsible for providing Akashi with the type of information which Akashi recited in his May 1993 announcement.

The analysis which Heder provided Thayer on this point was in no way 'recent'. Elements of it, via Heder, appeared in 1986 in Elizabeth Becker's *When the War Was Over*; and the full statement, that "men marked for arrest and death" when the Vietnamese invaded in December 1978, "included ... Son Sen", was included by Heder, following then 'recent' research in the Tuol Sleng files, in a talk at the Australian National University in September 1990.

Even then the story about Son Sen's shaky past was nearly ten years old. Serge Thion presented it in a 1981 paper, with details from some other source than Tuol Sleng, writing "Son Sen was denounced as a traitor in high administrative circles for at least a month before the Vietnamese intervention saved him from being purged ... [h]e hid himself in the forest for eighteen months, with a handful of bodyguards, before resurfacing in the DK apparatus, apparently with strong Chinese and Thai support".<sup>731</sup>

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<sup>731</sup> Becker, *When the War Was Over* (first edition), pp. 447-448, removed from second edition; Stephen R. Heder, "Khieu Samphan and Pol Pot: Moloch's Poodle", p. 7, printed for distribution by Campaign to Oppose the Return of the Khmer Rouge, Washington DC. The same detail was included in Steve Heder, "Pol Pot and Khieu Samphan:

Heder still maintained this view in early 1996, referring to “the PDK facade for the covertly communist leadership group headed by Pol Pot, Nuon Chea, and Ta Mok” period!<sup>732</sup>

These articles by Thayer were as peculiar as Akashi’s announcement of a revamped Khmer rouge in May 1993, on which Thayer did not choose to comment at the time, although nearly all of the information was already then available. Why did Thayer decide to pull it out in 1994, and in two versions with contradictory details? Was it because in October 1993 I had presented a paper in Canberra in which I called attention to Akashi’s inaccurate announcement, and inferred that UNTAC 12 might have been to blame?<sup>733</sup>

If so, or even if not so, Thayer’s analyses, derived from Heder’s prompting, indicate continuing sensitivity in some circles over the events preceding the election, and the advice given to Akashi by his experts. As for Son Sen he is again among the ‘hardliners’, without even speculation about when he might have been rehabilitated. In fact, is there any solid information at all about the present [late 1996] position of Son Sen, and why, given the vague quality of all the published evidence, did Thayer think it important enough to publish twice in 1994 in an original and a revised version?<sup>734</sup>

But what was the truth about KR strength in May 1993?

The question of Khmer Rouge strength is addressed by the article *Khmer Rouge Troop Numbers* (see page 378 ff.). It is shown that by the end of the 1980s KR strength had

Moloch’s Poodle”, paper presented at the Association for Asian Studies Conference, New Orleans, 1991, p. 20. Serge Thion, “The Cambodian Idea of Revolution”, in Chandler and Kiernan, *Revolution and its Aftermath*, p. 30, and reprinted in Serge Thion, *Watching Cambodia*, Bangkok, White Lotus, 1993, p. 93.

In that publication Thion did not identify his source, but he later told me that it was Laurence Picq who had been with the remnants of the DK Foreign Ministry on the Thai border, and who said the information about Son Sen was common knowledge. Picq was author of *Au delà du ciel cinq ans chez les Khmers Rouges*, about her experiences in 1975-1979 within the DK Foreign Ministry as wife of Ieng Sary’s close colleague Suong Sikoeun. In 1983, however, an Australian military officer who had worked in Thailand told me that the Thai considered Son Sen to be the upcoming power figure among the KR.

<sup>732</sup> Heder-Ledgerwood, p. 73.

<sup>733</sup> Michael Vickery, “*Cambodia: A Political Survey*”, Australian National University, 1994. I presented the paper on 5 November 1993, although it was not printed for distribution until several months later, but when I visited Phnom Penh in December 1993, I discovered that some journalists had heard of it. It was expanded in *Cambodia: A Political Survey*, Phnom Penh, Funan Press, 2007.

<sup>734</sup> Whatever the truth of the various interpretations of Son Sen’s position, he came to a bad end because of disagreement with Pol Pot. Sen and his entire family were murdered in 1997 during the splits among Khmer Rouge leaders. Some knowledgeable Khmers now (2008) believe that he was killed for trying to negotiate with Phnom Penh.

diminished to an extent that they were no longer a serious military threat, but that their strength had to be exaggerated in order to include them in the anti-PRK plans of the 'peace process'.

Below, another Redd Barna paper continues the discussion of the 1993 election.

### Political Parties in 1993 (1993) <sup>735</sup>

For the 1993 election twenty parties were on the ballot. Few of them, perhaps fortunately, appeared serious. Several were founded by people who had spent most of the previous 10-20 years in France or the United States, and reading a list of parties suggests a new, but reactionary, 'Operation California'. <sup>736</sup>

Most of their names were permutations of a few clichés: Democracy, Republican, Neutralist, etc. Their platforms consisted of praise for everything good – democracy, freedom, human rights, social welfare, peace, and of course a free market economy – without concrete policies to achieve such virtues, and with an amazing lack of realism about their own, and Cambodia's, possibilities in the future.

Interestingly, the most competent capitalist among the small party leaders, Y Phandara from France, admired Singapore and wanted gradual progress toward democracy; and another small party chief with wide administrative experience, Chak Saroeun, admired South Korea as a model. One new party leader returned from 20 years or so in the US showed his level of realism by raising the American flag over his office and hanging a picture of George Bush (senior) on the wall. <sup>737</sup>

The only serious contenders were the party of the Phnom Penh government, that is, the Cambodian Peoples Party (CPP), FUNCINPEC under Sihanouk's son Norodom Ranariddh, and two branches of the former KPNLF of Son Sann. If the Khmer Rouge had taken advantage of UNTAC's spineless open door policy, they also would have been important, if only because they would probably have had total control over the votes of up to 10% of the population.

Still another party with a serious name and leader is *Le Parti Democrat* of In Tam, although it is difficult to guess what attraction they might have for voters now. The Democrat Party was the strongest party of pre-independence

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<sup>735</sup> Michael Vickery, unpublished report for Redd Barna, 1993.

<sup>736</sup> The original Operation California in Cambodia was a private initiative in 1979-1980 to bring medical and food aid directly to the new PRK in Phnom Penh, and in the face of US regime disapproval. They continued to provide aid to Cambodia and other disaster areas, and in 1988, began using Operation USA as their corporate name.

<sup>737</sup> For more detail on the ridiculous pretensions of these parties and their ignorance of the situation within Cambodia, see Chantou Boua, "Development Aid and Democracy in Cambodia", in *Genocide and Democracy in Cambodia*, ed. By Ben Kiernan, Monograph Series 41/Yale University Southeast Asia Studies, New Haven, 1993, pp. 273-283.



Cambodia, winning all the country's past free elections, in 1946, 1947, and 1951, on a platform of pluralism, nationalism, understood if unexpressed resistance to royalism, and a covert goal of full independence, including sympathy for Cambodian, and Vietnamese, guerrillas fighting against the French.

They were destroyed after Sihanouk's victory of 1955, but until 1975 they were remembered with sympathy by politically conscious Cambodians, in particular the educated urban 'middle class', survivors of which make up a large section of the SOC second and third level administrators.<sup>738</sup>

In Tam was in those days a loyal Sihanoukist, not of the Democrat Party, but he gained considerable popularity for having run against Lon Nol for President in 1972, perhaps losing because of dishonest ballot counting. After 1979 he organized an armed force on the Thai border, then renounced warmongering, and in 1988 returned to visit Phnom Penh in a manner indicating support for the PRK. Had his new *Parti Democrat* won any seats they were expected to support the Phnom Penh government party (CPP) in a coalition.

During the last half of 1992 it appeared that no party would take a majority, and most observers were betting on the election resulting in a coalition of Hun Sen's CPP, and Ranariddh's FUNCINPEC. At least that is what people who did not desire chaos hoped for. Moreover, the SOC in particular had been working toward that outcome soon after the Paris Agreement was signed.

Their own socialist-inspired attention to grass-roots opinion had shown them as early as 1987 that there was increasing support and nostalgia for Sihanouk in rural areas; as a result they welcomed Sihanouk effusively when he returned to Phnom Penh in 1991, promising to accept him again as Chief of State, and in 1992 the CPP declared that their policy was now to follow the line of Sihanouk's *Sangkum* of the 1960s.<sup>739</sup>

The SOC is the only group with a national administrative capability, and Ranariddh, of all other party leaders, had been making the most conciliatory and rational noises, notably opposing violence against the Vietnamese. Since then that potential coalition has broken down, in line with Pol Pot's February 1992 plan for UNTAC, the CPP is accused of organizing violence against FUNCINPEC, those two parties have become bitter enemies, and FUNCINPEC's line on the Vietnamese hardly differs from the KR. A debacle by SOC now, leaving a

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<sup>738</sup> I have written 'middle class' because there is no middle class in the sense of that term in the capitalist West. Most of the persons concerned were state employees, and some small business persons, all of whom should be called 'petty bourgeoisie'.

<sup>739</sup> See discussion above, pp. 370 ff., about PRK officials 'going down to the base'. Sihanouk named his political organization and government the *Sangkum reastrniyum*, which he translated as 'People's Socialist Community', although no term in the original Khmer means, or implies, socialism. 'Socialism', however, was the buzzword of the time, even for populist authoritarian rulers such as Sihanouk.

coalition of FUNCINPEC and the ex-KPNLF parties, or either or all of them with 'Operation California' would be a disaster.

One striking feature of the platforms of most parties is lack of any reference to Cambodia's traditional royalty. It would appear that except for FUNCINPEC and a couple of others, the parties are republican, as could be expected from the backgrounds of those leaders whose previous political activities are known.

Because of this, the presidential election which was proposed in April, nearly two months before the parliamentary election, to make Sihanouk a Chief of State, would not only have preempted the constitutional process and been contrary to the Paris Agreement, but would have been against the wishes of most of the parties.

The peace agreement was not only a threat to political stability, but seemed guaranteed to undermine the fragile economy now brought to shattering point by the new addiction to free market patent medicine which the international community has encouraged, and which is leading to a headlong rush into privatization of all economic activity.

Until 1989, in spite of all the objective difficulties, the economy showed grounds for optimism. According to a 1990 UN study, "[c]onsidering the devastation inherited from war and internal strife, the centrally directed system of economic management ... has attained unquestionable successes ... especially marked in restoring productive capacity to a level of normalcy and accelerating the pace of economic growth to a respectable per capita magnitude from the ruinously low level of the late 1970s". They also made creditable progress in developing social services, health care, education, agriculture, and vaccination programs for children and animals.

Among the frantic measures intended to effect destruction of the PRK-SOC was an economic blockade against Cambodia along with Viet Nam which the US successfully railroaded through international financial institutions, even against the views of their experts. Although no one thought Cambodia would immediately fall apart economically, or be defeated militarily, there was a possibility of exhaustion in the long-term if US policy to arm their enemies and block their economy continued.

The United States has successfully applied its Nicaragua strategy to Cambodia. That is, a new government, after the elimination of a ruinous dictatorship, starts to reconstruct an administration and economy with very limited resources, both material and human. They consider that a type of socialism is most appropriate to their policies of emphasizing basic needs of the population rather than profits for business. Normal international relations and foreign aid are important, if not crucial.

The US, however, blocks such aid and gives support to contras operating from the border regions of a neighboring state happy to serve US interests. Gradually the pressures of trying to rebuild the economy while forced to invest heavily in defence undermine the currency and discourage the population. The

new state is persuaded to move more and more into a free-market economy favoring the import of luxuries by the rich, which further alienates the rest of the population; and the state officers themselves succumb to the temptations of easy wealth. Finally, in an election the new state may lose to enemies favored by the US.

Admission of this policy for Cambodia two years before the election was in a support programme for the Cambodian KPNLF 'contras' which "officials say is loosely based on the successful American strategy in Nicaragua". Washington "is allocating up to US\$20 million to be mostly funnelled through territory under control of the two non-communist groups", the KPNLF and the Sihanoukist forces.<sup>740</sup>

UNTAC economists have pretended that there is no negative fallout in the Cambodian economy from the overwhelming impact of millions of dollars and 20,000 high-spending foreigners. What is wrong, they ask, if Cambodians rent their premises for dollars which they use to improve the same and to build new houses, or spend on imported luxuries? The dollars, they claim, are soaked up by the free import of goods, and thus have no inflationary effect.

Forget about the bidding up of local prices by the spending of the new rich, and the demonstration effect which impels everyone to strive for new goods and services which neither he/she nor the country can afford. UNTAC seems to have an oversupply of Marie Antoinettes, male as well as female, who, mesmerized by the cake enjoyed by themselves and by the Cambodians from whom they rent houses, imagine that all Cambodians can substitute it for bread.

A non-UNTAC economist in an important advisory position, objecting to my characterization of Thailand as a bad example which Cambodia was now following, answered that Thailand's favorable statistics on per capita GNP and foreign currency reserves proved the success of its type of development. The obvious decline in living standards of most of the Thai population and the destruction of the environment, which has provided much of the calculable wealth, do not count, because not quantifiable in the same way as GNP or currency reserves.

Then, seemingly unaware of the contradiction, he launched into praise of the astounding success of current economic development in China, and the rapid economic improvement in Viet Nam. The latter, he said, fully deserved international recognition, and once that barrier is removed, Viet Nam "will certainly give Thailand a run for its money" in the race to be the next Asian success story.

This economist foresaw good economic development in Cambodia if peace could be established. One reason was the pools of skilled manpower which surround Cambodia, meaning Singapore, Malaysia, and not least Viet Nam, which can supply talent lacking locally, as is already seen for example in

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<sup>740</sup> Nate Thayer, "Guerilla fund-fare", *FEER*, 7 February 1991.

housing construction, which would cease immediately if all Vietnamese were expelled.

Basing Cambodia's future growth on surrounding pools of skill, however, suggests something like an Indochina Federation, which all right-thinking persons professed to abhor, except when it was imposed by French colonialists. Although this man, on a right to left ideological scale, would be somewhere on the right, his view of the necessity for Cambodia to make use of clever and efficient neighbors is in line with the original PRK/SOC policy of alliance with Viet Nam, and is far from the chauvinists of the KR, FUNCINPEC or Son Sann factions who call for expulsion of all Vietnamese.

China and Viet Nam, of course, are following political-economic policies entirely different, not to say diametrically opposed, to what has been standard practice in Thailand, now being imitated in Cambodia.

They insist on tight state management of the gradual move into a more free market system. Leaps into excessive political freedom are not yet tolerated, and law and order, as in the major western capitalist countries, are seen as an imperative for development. Indeed in classical capitalist ideology, maintenance of law and order is the main, perhaps almost sole, justification for the state.

As *Time* correspondent Strobe Talbott wrote, concerning Somalia, "an even worse fate for a nation than even the most dictatorial regime imaginable ... is the absence of any regime at all" (*Time* 14 December 1992). This is the direction, a regime so weak as to be no regime at all, in which UNTAC may have pushed Cambodia.

I followed the above later with another report for Redd Barna with details and comments on the results of the election and formation of the new government.

#### Remarks on Cambodia (1993) <sup>741</sup>

The Cambodian election, conducted 23-26 May, 1993 to choose 120 members of a Constituent Assembly resulted in 45% of the popular vote and 58 seats for FUNCINPEC, the party of Prince Sihanouk's son Prince Ranariddh, 38% and 51 seats for the Cambodian Peoples Party of the State of Cambodia (the Phnom Penh Government), 4% and 10 seats for the Buddhist Liberal Democratic Party of Son Sann, and one seat for the MOULINAKA party.

The remaining 16 small parties won nothing, although together they received about 11% of the total popular vote. Most of them were explicitly republican, or non-committal concerning the monarchy, and several of them explicitly favored cooperation with the CPP. Those 16 minor parties, moreover, were **the only parties spontaneously formed by groups of interested citizens, the basis for civil society.**

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<sup>741</sup> Michael Vickery, unpublished report for Redd Barna, 15 September 1993.

The total popular vote was not the most important figure, for parties won on the basis of proportional representation by provinces, which meant that a very good result in a large province could in principle offset poor results in smaller provinces. Had total popular vote been the determining factor, FUNCINPEC would have won 54 seats, the CPP 45, the BLDP 4, and the rest would have been taken by some of the small parties who were in the end excluded.<sup>[742]</sup>

The method of proportional representation for allocating seats in the new Assembly – which seemed to be designed to weaken the CPP when it was expected that the CPP would receive a majority of the vote – did not work as expected, first of all because of the near total rejection of the small parties and the poor showing of Son Sann's BLDP.

The new Assembly, contrary to expectations, is essentially a two-party organ, with a small BLDP in a position to affect majority votes. Proportional representation has, however, performed its function of diluting the power of the party receiving the largest vote, that is FUNCINPEC. Had the election law incorporated the principle of largest party taking all seats in any election district, then FUNCINPEC would have won 79 seats to 41 for the Cambodian Peoples Party; and no other parties would be represented in the Assembly.

Seventy-nine would be just one short of the two-thirds majority required to govern, and FUNCINPEC in that situation could certainly have pulled over one CPP representative. The designers of the election law, who hoped to overthrow the CPP, would appear to have outsmarted themselves. In negotiations leading up to the Paris Agreement Hun Sen had argued for the first-past-the post system, usual in previous Cambodian elections, but had been forced to give in and accept the proportional system.<sup>743</sup>

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<sup>742</sup> Probably, few but specialists realize that several formulae have been used in democratic countries to calculate proportional results. No questions were raised about this in 1993, but it became a burning issue after the 1998 election. In brief, never are the results based on strict proportionality because of the remainders when the number of seats available is divided by the percentage of votes obtained by each party.

The main difference among the several formulae which have been used is whether the calculations should favor the maximum entry into parliament of small parties, which leads to unstable governments, or should favor the inclusion of only the largest parties. The choice of formula is always a political choice. UNTAC in 1993 opted for a formula which in principle favored the maximum number of parties, but failed in its purpose because the Cambodian voters preferred the well-known larger parties. For the formula problem after the 1998 election see *Cambodia: A Political Survey*, pp. 172-174.

<sup>743</sup> Raoul Jennar reported on Hun Sen's objection to proportional representation at the Pattaya II conference in August 1991, and said that "Prince Sihanouk expresses the same point of view" (Raoul M. Jennar, untitled and undated report to the NGO Forum written after the Pattaya II conference). See also "Cambodia, All set to sign", *FEER* 3 October 1991, p. 12. It is not certain that Hun Sen's international opponents wanted too strong a showing by FUNCINPEC either. In particular, the US did not want a dominant Sihanouk,

Another special feature of this election was that voters did not vote directly for individual candidates, but for parties, and the parties determined which of their members would occupy the seats won. Although in principle each party should have made the identities of its candidates in each province known, and there should have been lists of the candidates posted in each polling station, these procedures were not always followed. It is certain that in many places voters did not know the candidates for whom they were voting, although they probably knew the identities of the party leaders.

Around 90% of registered voters turned out, and in general the voting and vote counting seem to have been fair, although UNTAC was guilty of an inexcusable number of technical faults, such as broken locks and seals on ballot boxes, and loss of some ballots during transport. These irregularities, however, were probably not sufficient to alter the election result.

The result was an unexpected defeat for the CPP, who had expected to win at least a majority of seats, perhaps even two-thirds, and it forced them to make important adjustments in their choice of victorious candidates. Before the election each party had registered far more candidates in each province than there were seats to be won. As examples, the CPP had 10 candidates in Banteay Meanchey for 6 seats, and 26 candidates in Phnom Penh for 12 seats.

It was expected that the candidates chosen for the assembly seats would be the first names on each provincial list, but between the time the results were known and their official announcement by UNTAC, 34 of the CPP candidates who were high enough on the respective provincial lists to be considered winners resigned, leaving their places open for candidates who were farther down the lists.

Most of those who resigned were high-ranking political figures, with long service in the party, whereas those who replaced them were usually younger, better-educated technocrats, administrators, and educationists, who in general had no communist-party background before 1975. At least 33 of the CPP assembly members have some level of higher education or experience in professional education.

Of course, some of the old political figures, such as Heng Samrin and Chea Sim had to be included too, but they are outnumbered. Moreover the so-called 'Chea Sim faction', considered by most observers to be more 'hardline' and less competent, suffered in the choice of CPP candidates, of whom the largest number are considered to be supporters of Hun Sen.

Their choice of candidates indicates that the CPP is now dominated by leaders close to Hun Sen, and that they intend to work in sincere cooperation with FUNCINPEC in the writing of a new constitution and in governing the country.

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and probably would have preferred a strong bloc of the former KPNLF parties, with support from FUNCINPEC and the emigré parties.

In spite of the complaint of some FUNCINPEC members that, having 'won' the election there was no need for them to share equal power with SOC, it is clear that FUNCINPEC needs SOC as much as SOC needed the coalition to recoup what they had lost in the election.

Except for a few stars from the royalty and old Phnom Penh elite, who have had no experience within the country for 20 years, the FUNCINPEC assembly members are an unimpressive group, far inferior to those of the CPP in terms of education and administrative or professional experience. Most, perhaps 40 or more, have had no more than primary education, before 1975 no more impressive experience than primary school teacher, and since 1979 have either been guerrillas on the Thai border or farmers within Cambodia.

The formation of a new government happened unexpectedly, and in a way not provided for in the Paris Accord, which specified that the new assembly was a Constituent Assembly, whose task was restricted to preparing a new constitution within three months, after which the assembly would become a Legislative Assembly and a new government would be formed according to the new constitution. The Paris Accord was vague concerning the interim government, apparently considering that the existing administration would continue under advice from UNTAC.

Then suddenly, on June 3, when the election results were known, Prince Sihanouk announced that he had formed a new government giving FUNCINPEC and the CPP equal status, and with Prince Ranariddh and Hun Sen as co-Deputy Premiers. At the same time SOC announced that it had been dissolved in order to enter the coalition government. This arrangement gave SOC more than it had won in the election, and FUNCINPEC less, but it was a way to avoid potential conflict resulting from the CPP claim that the defects in UNTAC's conduct of the handling of ballot boxes had rendered the election unfair in four provinces and the city of Phnom Penh.

Sihanouk's initiative was sharply rebuked by the United States, received without enthusiasm by UNTAC, and even Prince Ranariddh, who was in Thailand, made some objection to details of the arrangement and refused to return immediately to Cambodia as his father had demanded. Thus, on June 4 Sihanouk renounced his plan.

Nevertheless, after the Assembly was officially opened on June 14, several days of consultations among Sihanouk and the party leaders led to virtually the same formula for a new government. The differences are that Sihanouk does not have a formal position, and the new government, announced on July 2, includes members of all four parties who won seats in the election.

The two large parties, FUNCINPEC and CPP have equal weight. Prince Ranariddh and Hun Sen are Co-Presidents, with one Vice-President from each party. There are 28 ministries, each with Minister and Vice-Minister from different parties, except Defence, Interior, and Public Security, in which Ranariddh and Hun Sen are co-ministers, with in each case two vice-ministers,

one from each party. Three ministries are held by the BLDP. In two of them the vice-minister is from FUNCINPEC, and in the third he is from the CPP; and one ministry, War Veterans, was given to MOULINAKA, with a vice-minister from CPP.

Although FUNCINPEC 'won', it did not have a parliamentary majority. Its most logical ally in a coalition, according to normal parliamentary procedure and their mutual antipathy to the CPP, would be the BLDP, but their combined total of 68 seats was still not the two-thirds (80 seats) necessary to ratify a constitution. Thus drafting of a new constitution could have been blocked if cooperation between FUNCINPEC and CPP had not been achieved.

Even the combined FUNCINPEC-BLDP majority, which would normally suffice to form a government, might be only theoretical, for those two parties did not have a national administrative capability. Continuing administration had to count on support by the cadres of SOC, particularly after it was decided that a two-thirds vote would also be required for votes of confidence in the government.

Moreover, in spite of their joint status in the CGDK as the 'non-communist resistance', FUNCINPEC and the BLDP represented historically hostile factions whose cooperation could not be assumed after they were freed from the constraints of the CGDK. There had to be either open cooperation between FUNCINPEC and CPP in the government, or FUNCINPEC must persuade a large number of SOC politicians and administrators to defect to FUNCINPEC.

The CPP ministers who are elected members of the assembly are all from among the younger intellectuals or are persons with solid professional training and experience. None of the old politicians or Communist Party figures, such as Chea Sim, Heng Samrin, Sar Kheng, or Nay Pena, became ministers.

Thirty-seven of the 65 members of the government – 14 from FUNCINPEC, 19 from SOC, the three from BLDP and Moulinaka's single minister – have been chosen from outside the elected members of the Assembly, which is in conformity with previous Cambodian practice before 1975. Here, too, the CPP choices are younger persons with technical and administrative qualifications, not the Party figures who were dropped after the election.

The choice of CPP members to fill the assembly positions, and then the choice of persons for government positions bodes well for peace and progress. The CPP has put forward their most talented and progressive persons, not party hacks. The FUNCINPEC ministerial choices are also the best they have, although the shallow depth of their talent pool is reflected in the occupancy of three positions by one of their more qualified persons, Ing Kieth, an engineer since before 1970, who is Minister of State as well as Minister of both Energy and Mines, and Public Works.

Another matter for optimism is the recent action of the new government against the Khmer Rouge, after it had appeared that FUNCINPEC's and Sihanouk's policy of reconciliation would prevail. Following warnings by



Ranariddh in mid-August, the new coalition army of SOC, FUNCINPEC, and BLDP forces has attacked and defeated the Khmer Rouge in several locations. This may indicate that Ranariddh has adopted Hun Sen's pre-election policy of destroying the Khmer Rouge militarily after the new government was formed.

The most recent matter is the form of government to be established by the new constitution, in particular whether to restore the monarchy with Sihanouk as king, or to adopt a non-monarchical form with Sihanouk as head of state. It seems they have decided on a monarchy. The reason for indecision, or for suggesting return to monarchy at all, is the Sihanouk problem. All parties are on record as considering that Sihanouk must occupy a leading position, if only ceremonial. Probably most, even within FUNCINPEC, want his role to be ceremonial, not that of a powerful executive.

Nevertheless, CPP derives inherently from an anti-monarchical tradition, and BLDP, like its predecessor KPNLF, was until 1991 outspokenly anti-monarchist, and most of the 16 minor parties who received 11% of the popular vote but not seats were non-royalist. This means that fewer than 50% of the voters intentionally cast ballots for a monarchy or for the person of King Sihanouk. That part of the democratization process had been pre-decided in the negotiations leading up to the Paris Agreement, in all of which it was assumed that Sihanouk would be given a major role, as king, president, or chief of state.

On the one hand the decision for monarchy is good for Cambodia; for the history of the 1940s-1960s shows that in Cambodia it has been easier to draft a constitution depriving a king of real power than to limit the role of chief of state. On the other hand, Sihanouk probably has such a short time left to live that he could not do much damage as chief of state, while a monarchical constitution leaves the succession problem as a perennial source of conflict.

Perhaps there was fear that even in a brief term as chief of state Sihanouk would make a new deal with the Khmer Rouge just when there seems to be agreement among the three other main factions, and the ability, to destroy them.

If monarchy is taken seriously as the long-term structure of Cambodia's government, rather than perhaps limited to Sihanouk's lifetime, succession conflicts will be inevitable, probably not between Norodoms and Sisowaths as before 1975, but among Norodom factions, of which at least four are among current players, Ranariddh, Chakrapong, the sons of Monique, and Sihanouk's half-siblings, children of King Suramarit, of whom FUNCINPEC's Norodom Sirivudh, the new Minister of Foreign Affairs, is the most prominent.

One detail which I neglected in all that I wrote at the time, and which was not given attention by anyone else, was that far from just refusing to hand over power, as his enemies charge, Hun Sen was never given the opportunity (which is not to say that he would have been willing had he been faced with the required situation). An understanding of that situation, however, is important, for the details illuminate the immediate post-election events from an angle that has not usually been considered.

That is, the election was not to choose a new government, but a constituent assembly whose sole task was to write a new constitution, and three months could be devoted to that task, during which time the pre-election government would remain in place. I have treated this in detail elsewhere (*Cambodia: A Political Survey*, pp. 78-83).

## Chapter 7: The Vietnam Syndrome after UNTAC

The mixed result of this election, leaving the PRK stronger than its enemies had hoped, but in second place after the royalist FUNCINPEC whom the West had favored, has meant that the new coalition in Phnom Penh has been under constant observation and carping for every real or imagined defect in its behavior.

Most writing about Cambodia since 1993 has continued to be critical of the PRK/SOC and its Cambodian People's Party in the coalition. Even writers who once (in order to show opposition to the DK-dominated Coalition) tended to show some sympathy to Phnom Penh and to the Vietnamese, now feel it is safe to take a Cambodian chauvinist anti-Vietnamese position, which on the part of westerners seems to derive from suppressed Vietnam War emotion; or perhaps it is simply a question of careerism in this age of the 'collapse of Communism', etc.

An example is David Chandler. At one time Chandler was proud to have been active with the "Committee of Concerned Asian Scholars", and together with Ben Kiernan and Muy Hong Lim he produced a paper which tried to show some sympathetic understanding toward Democratic Kampuchea in its first year.<sup>744</sup>

Similarly, when Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman published their *Political Economy of Human Rights* with its long chapter reviewing the evidence available in 1978 about Cambodia, Chandler wrote them a laudatory letter, saying he "was impressed by the solidity of your arguments overall".

As the years went by, however, his writings were increasingly peppered with anti-PRK and anti-Vietnamese off-the-cuff remarks. After Chomsky's lectures in Australia in 1994, he severely criticized Chomsky for having refused to recant what he had written about Cambodia in 1978.

By the time he finished the third edition of his *History* in 2000 Chandler accused Viet Nam of re-establishing 'Indochina', and of "imitating France, Viet Nam embarked on a civilizing mission", all of which, like the French protectorate in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, isolated Cambodia from "the world of Southeast Asia".<sup>745</sup>

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<sup>744</sup> David P. Chandler with Ben Kiernan and Muy Hong Lim, "The Early Phases of Liberation in Northwestern Cambodia: Conversations with Peang Sophi", No. 10, Working Papers, Centre of Southeast Asian Studies, Monash University, November 1976. Reprinted in Kiernan and Boua, eds. *Peasants and Politics in Kampuchea 1942-1981*, pp. 318-329.

<sup>745</sup> Chandler, "Chomsky holds fast to error", *The Australian*, 20 January 1995; and Chomsky's answer, "No glossing over the truth of Pol Pot's barbarities", *The Australian*, 15 February 1995, from which I have quoted Chandler's letter to Chomsky dated 27 November 1978. For another right-wing attack on Chomsky during his Australia visit see

As an academic exercise in the new vein he issued “Epitaph for the Khmer Rouge?”, published, surprisingly, in the *New Left Review*, putting them too in a peculiar ideological situation, in comparison to their traditional positions. I tried to place a counter there to Chandler, but it was refused.

### Epitaph: for the Khmer Rouge, or for the New Left? (1995)<sup>746</sup>

It was surprising to find David Chandler’s “Epitaph for the Khmer Rouge?” in *NLR*. It is neither new nor left, and of all Cambodia specialists Chandler has perhaps been the least left-oriented; indeed, usually contemptuous of the left, and moreover hostile to theoretical treatment of historical issues for which *NLR* is justly famous.

Chandler’s narrative, for that is what it is, is well within current mainstream opinion, particularly journalistic. It is little more than a restatement of what has appeared in several earlier descriptions of Cambodia, and in its detail is too often misleading. What, then, made it attractive to the *NLR* editors?

Two main themes emerge from Chandler’s prose. They are the emphasis on alleged Vietnamese iniquities, which has always characterized Chandler’s work, too often in the form of offhand *obiter dicta*, not even *à propos*, and, equally tendentious, the adoption, in guise of a search for the communist model influencing DK, of a favorite right-wing technique – use of DK extremism to discredit all socialisms.

These two themes, inevitably, sometimes work at cross purposes, contributing to some incoherence in parts of Chandler’s treatment.

The anti-Vietnamese theme appears first, and permeates the entire text. The Cambodian Communist Party was “formed in the 1950s by the Vietnamese” (87), although not contrary to fact, if not qualified by further explanation appears in an article destined for a non-specialist public to be a move in the now popular game – in fact adopting the Khmer Rouge line – of making Vietnam responsible for Cambodia’s ills.

However the party was organized, throughout most of its life and in particular under Pol Pot after 1962, the period with which Chandler is most concerned, it was intent on emphasizing its independence from Vietnamese influence and management.

Then, having dutifully noted in *Reader’s Digest* that deaths in Cambodia “were apocalyptic in scope” and “captured much of the world’s imagination”, Chandler blames the Vietnamese in particular for trying, inaccurately, to connect

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Robert Manne’s column in *The Age* (Melbourne), 15 January 1995. For the new Vietnamese ‘protectorate’ see *Chandler, A History*, p. 248.

<sup>746</sup> Michael Vickery, unpublished response (sent August 1995) to David Chandler “Epitaph for the Khmer Rouge?” *New Left Review* 205, May-June 1994, pp. 87-99.

the Khmer Rouge record with the Holocaust and to “label the Khmer Rouge, their former protégés [*sic!*, not since the 1950s], as ‘fascists’” (88).<sup>747</sup>

To be sure Chandler notes that “the parallel [between the Khmer Rouge and the Nazis] ... sprang to many people’s minds”, perhaps even sooner and more forcefully to those unnamed many people than to the Vietnamese, until the former realized that it did not fit the larger propaganda picture they favored.

Chandler should have known better than to copy a rather silly argument by William Shawcross, which appeared in 1984 in his “The Burial of Cambodia”, against which Chandler protested at the time.<sup>748</sup>

There, Shawcross berated the Vietnamese for “assiduously” trying “to associate Pol Pot with Hitler ... thus Tuol Sleng prison has been called ‘an Asian Auschwitz’”. He went on to explain why Tuol Sleng and Auschwitz were not comparable, and that Democratic Kampuchea should be treated as Communist. Shawcross was way off base here. Although the Vietnamese at times termed the Pol Pot regime ‘fascist’, it was rather with Mao and the Chinese Cultural Revolution that they ‘assiduously’ tried to draw a comparison.

The Nazi analogy began as propaganda in the West. In 1977 Jean Lacouture compared Cambodian executions with Dachau, and also with Katyn; and in 1978 Senator George McGovern declared that Cambodia made “Hitler’s operation look tame”.<sup>749</sup>

This theme continued after the overthrow of Pol Pot in 1979. In the middle of that year *FEER* (20 July 1979) published photographs of execution sites, including Tuol Sleng, under the rubric, “The Kampuchean Holocaust”, and compared them to “post World War II films of the horrors of Dachau, Belsen and Auschwitz”.

Nearly a year later a *New York Times* article of 22 April 1980 likened the decrease in Cambodian population to a “holocaust”. *FEER* correspondent Nayan Chanda, along with a photograph captioned “A Kampuchean Auschwitz” wrote

<sup>747</sup> In recommending my treatment of deaths in Democratic Kampuchea to his readers (Chandler’s footnote 1) and at the same time calling the situation ‘apocalyptic’, Chandler breaks contact between his sources and his analysis. A point of detail, although not of great historical importance, is Chandler’s statistical summary, p. 87, that under Pol Pot “over a million Cambodians ... died from malnutrition, overwork or untreated illnesses ... At least a hundred thousand more were summarily executed ...”.

This does not agree with any other estimates. My own has been that there were roughly 700,000 deaths above a normal peacetime total, and that possibly half were executions, although I now feel that estimate for the number of executions might be lowered.

<sup>748</sup> The *NYRB*, 10 May 1984, to which I wrote an answer, unpublished, on 29 May 1984 [see above, pp. 126, ff.]. Chandler’s letter to *NYRB*, dated 5 June 1984, was against the pretension of the article as a whole, and Shawcross’s misuse of evidence, not against the point I am raising here.

<sup>749</sup> Chomsky and Herman, *After the Cataclysm*, pp. 149, 138.

that “each village seems to have its local Auschwitz”, a formulation which should have come closer to satisfying purist Shawcross, since those local Cambodian ‘Auschwitzes’ were generally execution prisons near work sites, more like the real Auschwitz, rather than interrogation centres.

Chanda also noted “the Vietnamese propaganda line about Chinese instigation of the massacres” (*FEER* 4 April 1980). Chanda did not call Tuol Sleng an ‘Auschwitz’, and that particular usage, which Shawcross in 1984 wished to knock down, may have been strictly his own (although I have made no effort to collect all media references to Tuol Sleng).

In an earlier attempt to de-emphasize ‘Khmer Rouge’ atrocities in order to make the Vietnamese look bad Shawcross cynically referred to Tuol Sleng as “a school which, the Vietnamese say, was a Khmer Rouge torture chamber ... no one can doubt that the Khmer Rouge tortured people, but whether there was an ‘Asian Auschwitz’ in this particular place and with these precise methods remains uncertain”.<sup>750</sup>

Yet later Shawcross found the Nazi analogy useful in his piece for a collection of academic essays, and he there devoted most of 5 pages to it without objection, although he also included a three-line warning that “the evocation of fascism [should] not obscure the fact that the Khmer Rouge was a Marxist-Leninist government”, a concern which Chandler now also assiduously pursues, while restating that “the analogy with Nazi camps is imprecise”, even though “[v]isitors were encouraged [implicitly by the Vietnamese] to perceive parallels between Tuol Sleng and Nazi concentration camps”.<sup>751</sup>

Nevertheless, Chandler has not been able to resist decorating turgid prose with evocation of Nazi times, “Accounts of the second evacuation ... late 1975 and early 1976 – have a trance-like quality ... hauntingly echoes the Jewish experience in World War II”, with a difference which apparently made it worse: “in Cambodia the oppressors had the same nationality”, forgetting that many of the Jews were also Germans, and that not all of the German deportees were Jews.<sup>752</sup>

I would agree that the Nazi analogy is not very useful, but Chandler and Shawcross cannot be taken seriously if they use it in one context while denouncing it in another. In any case it is not a propaganda device whose origin can be laid to the Vietnamese.

Nor, as Chandler continues his Viet Nam bashing, were the Vietnamese eager to label the Khmer Rouge fascist because “the truth was a political embarrassment to Vietnam”. The Khmer Rouge in their “so extreme, inept and primitive”

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<sup>750</sup> William Shawcross, “The End of Cambodia?”, *NYRB*, 24 January 1980.

<sup>751</sup> William Shawcross, “Cambodia: some Perceptions of a Disaster”, in Chandler and Kiernan, *Revolution and its Aftermath*, pp. 230-1, 250-2; Chandler, *Tragedy*, p. 285.

<sup>752</sup> Chandler, *Tragedy*, p. 261.

style were hardly “recognizably Communist in ... party organization, social aims and centralized planning” (88), as Chandler would have it (but more on this below); at least they were totally different from the Vietnamese variety of communism.

Chandler is also wrong to differentiate the Khmer Rouge killings from the Holocaust on the grounds that in Cambodia “a programmatic racist element was lacking”. Although indeed “Khmers killed fellow Khmers, rather than members of a despised minority” (88), and here Chandler adds “sadly”, thus implying it would have been more acceptable if they had killed a despised minority, they had a despised minority who were meant to be killed – Vietnamese.

If so few Vietnamese were killed within Cambodia during 1975-79 it was only because nearly all of them had left in time, but when Democratic Kampuchea invaded Viet Nam in 1977, civilians were massacred in ways demonstrating a programmatic racist element.

It is interesting that the propaganda which has been made about ‘Khmer Rouge genocide’, and which Chandler correctly implies was often misplaced, rarely noticed the Vietnamese. Instead it was the Cham, or even the Khmers themselves, victims of ‘autogenocide’ who were given attention. But this was natural. The Khmer Rouge were rebuilt, in large part with US aid, after 1979, precisely because they were such fierce enemies of Vietnam – that was good genocide.

When Chandler continues, accurately enough, that the deaths in Democratic Kampuchea were the result of “demented economic programmes” rather than planned mass murder, he again fudges a detail, saying that “when the programmes failed, the Khmer Rouge blamed the failure on political enemies – a constantly changing category [*sic!*] – and killed them off” (88).

The categories of Khmer Rouge demons changed once. Through 1975-76, before the programmes were recognized as having failed, the main demon was the CIA. From 1977, when the programmes had failed, the enemy behind the failures was – guess who – Viet Nam, which had allegedly infiltrated saboteurs among the cadre.

Then, as all researchers (except the CIA) have recognized, the most numerous planned killings occurred, and if not strictly racist in the identities of the victims, at least because those victims were accused of aiding a racially-defined enemy.<sup>753</sup>

Chandler’s own anti-Vietnamese bias shows through in his treatment of Pol Pot’s visit to Hanoi in 1965. First there is the throw-away line about “the half-forgotten [by the Vietnamese] Cambodian Communists” (92), quite unjustified by any available evidence, and directly contrary to the well-known circumstance

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<sup>753</sup> On the position of the CIA with respect to propaganda on Khmer Rouge killings, see Vickery, “Democratic Kampuchea: CIA to the Rescue”.

that one thousand or so of the Cambodian Communist elite had fled to Hanoi following the Geneva settlement in 1954, and had been undergoing training, presumably for the day when they would cooperate with Viet Nam in establishing an allied communist state in Cambodia.

Chandler's reference to them is strictly propagandistic – "some Cambodian Communists who had been held hostage [emphasis added] in Vietnam since the 1950s".

As Chandler well knows, they went to Viet Nam voluntarily because of a decision by the Cambodian party, made in part because they feared for their security in post-Geneva Sihanoukian democracy. Some of them, as Chandler wrote in an earlier publication, "went along for a time but returned to Cambodia later", thus hardly hostages, and "those who remained in Cambodia or were sent back there to work on united front tactics ... may have felt betrayed" [by the Pol Pot group, that is].<sup>754</sup>

During the 1965 visit, Chandler says Le Duan criticized Pol Pot's Cambodian Communist programme "vigorously for an hour ... found it utopian, Cambodia-centred and unrelated to Vietnamese objectives – an accurate assessment, from his perspective [emphasis added]" (92).

Why this 'from his perspective'? Does Chandler disagree with Le Duan's perspective, that is, does he consider that Pol Pot's programme was not 'utopian'? Does he think Cambodia would have fared better if the Vietnamese had encouraged Pol Pot to launch a revolution against Sihanouk and the 'feudalists' in the 1960s, as Pol Pot wished?

And since Chandler is known from other writings to have taken a position against the Vietnam War, does he now think that Pol Pot's programme for revolution in Cambodia in the 1960s would have shortened that war, and freed Indochina from American aggression earlier, rather than, as Le Duan may have argued, weakening Vietnam in its fight against the Americans?

That would be an interesting position to argue, and not self-evidently wrong; but it must be argued, not smuggled in surreptitiously under the guise of defending Cambodians, any Cambodians whatsoever, against Viet Nam. Is Chandler damning Le Duan's view just because it was Vietnamese?<sup>755</sup>

When Pol Pot's hostility to Viet Nam was translated into armed attacks, Chandler says, "the raids, it seems, were his response to Vietnamese refusal to accept and honor their pre-1975 sea borders with Cambodia". This refers to the 1967 agreement by both the DRV and NLF to recognize "Cambodia's existing frontiers".

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<sup>754</sup> Chandler, "Epitaph", p. 97; *Tragedy*, p. 75; Michael Vickery, *Cambodia 1975-1982*, p. 198.

<sup>755</sup> Chandler has now switched, apparently, and wishes to blame Vietnam for dragging Cambodia into the war from as early as 1963, rather than as here, trying to discourage a Cambodian revolution as late as the mid-1960s (see p. 445).



Chandler thus pursues, with a modification, his erroneous allegation in *Brother Number One* that fighting over the islands in 1975 was because “the Cambodians wanted the Vietnamese to honor the agreements they had made with Sihanouk in the 1960s concerning Cambodia’s ‘existing frontiers’”, and his even earlier tendentious treatment in *Tragedy* that “in 1975 the Vietnamese were unwilling to abide by the statements they had made in 1967”, which in that context he referred to Stephen Heder’s article of 1978.<sup>756</sup>

That presentation of the situation was not accurate, as shown by another context of *Tragedy*, nor was it even what Heder wrote. Citing testimony from surviving participants, Chandler said in *Tragedy* that, after the Democratic Kampuchea victory but before fall of Saigon, DK troops tried to occupy several islands, “some known to be under Vietnamese jurisdiction and others disputed between Cambodia and Vietnam”, including Phu Quoc, “claimed by Cambodia but never administered by the Khmer”; “Fighting continued on several islands after the Vietnamese Communist victory”.

Then in June 1975, citing Wilfred Burchett [but no source listed], “Pol Pot told the Vietnamese that his forces had been ‘ignorant of geography’ implying that the attacks were a mistake”, and here there is no comment by Chandler on the border question.<sup>757</sup>

Heder, although in the article in question clearly sympathizing with the Cambodian position, did not claim that it was justified by Vietnamese violations of the 1967 agreement. He said merely that “the Cambodians increased pressure on certain disputed zones [emphasis added] left from Sihanouk’s dealings with the Vietnamese in 1967 ... attempted to drive the Vietnamese forces out of disputed zones they felt [emphasis added] had been illegally occupied by Vietnamese between 1965 and 1975 ... began to initiate military activities ... not only in the disputed areas but also in what they acknowledged as Vietnamese territory as well”.<sup>758</sup>

Peculiarly, Heder did not try to indicate where those disputed zones were located, but his text implies that they were along the land border, where there were certainly locations in which the lines drawn on maps could not possibly correspond to measurements on the ground.<sup>759</sup> If at sea, they were not covered by the 1967 agreement which was concerned only with the land borders, and Heder’s case is not helped by a footnote (n. 2) to an anything-but-clear remark

<sup>756</sup> Chandler, “Epitaph”, p. 96; Chandler, *Brother Number One*, first edition, p. 140, second edition, p. 133; *Tragedy*, p. 168, and note 31, p. 347; Heder, “Origins of the Conflict”, *Southeast Asia Chronicle* [in Chandler cited erroneously as *Indo-China Chronicle*], 64 (September-October 1978), pp. 3-18.

<sup>757</sup> Chandler, *Tragedy*, pp. 256-57.

<sup>758</sup> Heder, “Origins of the Conflict”, p. 18; discussion in Vickery, *Cambodia 1975-1982*, pp. 194-195.

<sup>759</sup> See Vickery, *Cambodia 1975-1982*, pp. 195-96, and footnotes.

by an anonymous Vietnamese about an undated agreement to the Brevié line in a *FEER* article.<sup>760</sup> The 1967 agreement has appeared both in Vietnamese and non-Vietnamese publications, and it is clear on this point.<sup>761</sup>

Perhaps Chandler took another look at the evidence before writing “Epitaph”, for it is no longer the attacks of 1975 which were related to the alleged Vietnamese perfidy; in fact those attacks are not even mentioned.

In “Epitaph” the dating is sometime after “the end of 1976, as famine spread, [and as] Pol Pot had become obsessed with plots against the regime ... and sponsored a series of vicious cross-border raids”, which can only refer to the first attacks of 1977. The discussion is still further muddled by indulgence in an apparent penchant for the occult with a look “In Pol Pot’s mind”, where “Vietnamese tactics [that is the alleged refusal “to honor their pre-1975 sea border”] were linked to the petroleum deposits known to exist offshore”.

Indeed, once the countries concerned, not only Viet Nam, but Cambodia, Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia as well, started claiming the 200-mile economic zones which were related to petroleum, and which are permitted by international sea law, all sorts of conflicts over sea borders could break out, not only between Vietnam and Cambodia, and not attributable to Vietnamese aggression alone.

Realizing that the 1975 incidents were not suitable for the anti-Viet Nam case he wished to make, Chandler re-dated the linkage between DK raids and alleged Vietnamese rejection of pre-1975 border agreements to 1976, because it was not until 1976-77 that the maritime border question began to be “linked to the petroleum deposits known to exist offshore”. The agreements of 1967, and the post-1975 negotiations related to maritime economic zones and petroleum are quite separate matters.<sup>762</sup>

A better explanation for DK attacks on Viet Nam lies in the failure of DK economic plans, their obsession “with plots against the regime”, and Pol Pot’s conviction that ““microbes’ ... had buried deep inside the party, and were intent

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<sup>760</sup> The *FEER* article, dated 19 August 1977, was by Nayan Chanda. Apparently, based on an appendix to Heder’s article, “The Border Dispute on the Seas”, by L.F. [Lowell Finley ?], pp. 39-40, the only Vietnamese agreement to use of the Brevié line was in 1976, but only “to determine sovereignty over the islands, but not ... as a border on the sea itself”.

<sup>761</sup> The 1967 border agreement was published in English by Vietnam in *Kampuchea Dossier I*, Hanoi, *Vietnam Courier*, 1978, pp. 123-4; and in French in Jean Morice, *Cambodge du sourire à l’horreur*, pp. 168-70.

<sup>762</sup> Of course, if the DK attacks on southern Vietnam in 1977 had succeeded in complete conquest of the southern tip of Vietnam, Vietnamese claims to the 200-mile economic zone would no longer have impinged on the area traditionally claimed by Cambodia. There is so far no evidence that such was the plan of the central DK authorities, even ‘in Pol Pot’s mind’, but some of the DK soldiers involved had been told by local superiors that the objective was reconquest of the lost provinces of Kampuchea Krom.

on destroying the revolution” (96). There is much evidence that ‘in Pol Pot’s mind’ the microbes were Vietnamese agents and saboteurs, and that both the purges which began in 1977 and the attacks on Vietnam were meant as defence against that, imaginary, threat.

Moving into the 1980s and the People’s Republic of Kampuchea, Chandler is still prisoner of his distaste for Viet Nam. He alleges that Cambodians “had little voice in the government” and “there were no indications for most of the 1980s that the Vietnamese intended to leave”. These remarks, which could have been taken from the Pinochet-Chilean Sihanouk sycophant Julio Jeldres, are directly contrary to the facts.<sup>763</sup>

By 1981 it was evident that not only was the new government to be solidly Khmer, but that even the Khmer communists who had spent 1954 to the 1970s in Vietnam, and to whom a submissive attitude to Vietnam might reasonably have been imputed, were to be gradually replaced by Khmers whose entire career had been within Cambodia. By 1985 at least it was clear that educated Khmer with no previous pre-1975 Communist background would numerically dominate both the administration and the Party Central committee. There was a significant withdrawal of Vietnamese military forces in 1983, and continuing partial withdrawals in each following year.<sup>764</sup>

As for doing “little to introduce democratic reforms”, Chandler must have been day-dreaming of the best models of Western Europe, a utopian fantasy with respect to Cambodia. Compared to Pol Pot’s Democratic Kampuchea, the real world situation on which one would expect a historian to focus, the Vietnamese-backed People’s Republic represented real democratic progress, and it compared well even with the late Sihanouk years.

Further factual inaccuracies accompany Chandler’s summary of the ‘peace process’, apparently in order to imply that it was obstructed by the Vietnamese. The “stage was [not] set for negotiations between the Phnom Penh regime [*sic*] ... and the coalition government in exile” [note here Chandler’s prejudicial use of language] only in 1989 after the last Vietnamese soldiers and advisors had gone home. Negotiations began in 1987 with Sihanouk’s request to meet Hun Sen in Paris, and continued in 1988 with the first Jakarta meeting.

<sup>763</sup> See, for example, the letter from Jeldres in *FEER*, 3 October 1981, pp. 3-4.

[Jeldres is now, see below, a ‘Research Fellow’ at Monash University’s Asia Institute, Chandler’s academic home base. For documentation of his pro-Pinochet position see Ben Kiernan, *Genocide and Resistance in Southeast Asia*, Transaction Publishers, New Brunswick (USA) and London, 2007, pp. 229-230.]

<sup>764</sup> All of this had been studied in detail in Michael Vickery, *Cambodia 1975-1982* [published 1984], *Kampuchea Politics Economics and Society*, London, Frances Pinter Publishers, 1986, several articles, which Chandler is on record as approving, and latest, Vickery, *Cambodia: A Political Survey*, pp. 20-30.

Chandler still insists on the demon's role for Viet Nam obstructing the peace process, alleging that only after 1989 was the State of Cambodia [his 'Phnom Penh regime'] "no longer seen as the foreign creation it had been". Thus, Chandler aligns himself with those western anti-Vietnamese cold warriors and the Cambodian exiles who refused to acknowledge the political progress and Khmerization which had been noticeable since 1981.

Although not strictly contrary to fact, it is tendentious to say that the Khmer Rouge (that is, Democratic Kampuchea) held Cambodia's UN seat only until 1982, after which their foreign backers forced them into the tripartite "government in exile", which Chandler does not name. The 'Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea', in which Democratic Kampuchea (that is, Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge) personnel figure, continued to occupy the UN seat until 1992.

It is not "in fact" true that "the Paris agreements cheated the Khmer Rouge", or that the UN trusteeship marginalized them.<sup>765</sup> In a February 1992 talk Pol Pot told his listeners that the Paris Agreement favored them, and he complained about delay in setting up UNTAC which he believed would end the threat of General Loridon's aggressive policy.<sup>766</sup>

By making the so-called 'Partie' of Democratic Kampuchea one of four equal parties, the Paris agreement immediately gave them much more international prestige than they had previously enjoyed. The result of the process was not marginalization but a step forward into the Cambodian political process, and possibly some increase in the territory which they controlled. At least Chandler is correct that the "UN trusteeship undermined the Phnom Penh regime's ... hold on politics", but that had been the main goal of all western and Chinese policy against Cambodia and Vietnam since 1979.

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Chandler introduces his second theme with "the closest parallels ... are with the Soviet Union under Stalin in the 1930s and with Mao Zedong's China after the mid 1950s" (88); "these two regimes ... are known [*sic!*] to have inspired Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge ... Soviet and Chinese programmes were the models which Cambodia chose to follow" (88).

As examples Chandler cites the "brutal [Soviet] collectivization of agriculture" in the 1930s, the later purge of the Soviet Communist Party, Mao's Great Leap, and the Cultural Revolution.

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<sup>765</sup> Chandler, "Epitaph", p. 99.

<sup>766</sup> See above, "Pol Pot's Plan for UNTAC", pp. 401, ff. Pol Pot was obviously obsessed by Loridon, whose name appears more frequently than any other but Sihanouk in the 1992 talk. Whoever decided on Loridon's removal did a great favor to the Khmer Rouge.

Having written thus far, Chandler seems to have realized he was losing his main demon, Vietnam, and he hastened to add that “Vietnam (89) provided Cambodian Communists with the party’s organizational format, military training, and many day-to-day operational procedures”.

But were these different from what they learned from China or Russia. Is this a proper inference to set beside “Vietnam, they thought, wanted to consume Cambodia”, Pol Pot’s “mimicry of China, his paranoia about Vietnam” (91), “Vietnamese precedents for Cambodian Communism were played down” (93); after victory DK rejected the Vietnamese model which “stressed national reconciliation” and chose the Chinese model which “called for continuous political conflict” (94)?

Pol Pot also “borrowed a range of other organizational and behavioral elements “from Russia, France, and Vietnam”, among them, and showing Chandler’s lack of control, is that “from France came the notion of a world-wide revolution conducted by a fraternity of parties” (89). That notion, if it registered at all, was quickly locked away, and DK policy was in every way a rejection of it.

This may be good enough for the journalist or the dilettante, but one would have expected a professional Cambodianist like Chandler to shrink from such superficiality.

The DK rustication was the opposite of Soviet collectivization, which was intended to release surplus labor for growing urban industries and to provide food for them. Party purges following coups and revolutions, going back to the big one in France, are so common that Pol Pot’s cannot be linked causally to Stalin’s without very specific evidence about the details, and the Cultural Revolution was quite unlike the cultural degradation in Cambodia.

The French background deserves more attention. The early Cambodian communist leadership had no direct contact with Stalinist police practices, and probably developed their methods from what they had seen of the French *sureté* in Indochina.

Chandler’s most embarrassing blooper may be in his treatment of certain grand ambitions imputed to Saloth Sar/Pol Pot. In 1952, Saloth Sar “became a member of the French Communist Party ... Sar admired Joseph Stalin” (91).

This is directly contrary to what Chandler wrote in his detailed history of the period, where “Saloth Sar’s relationship with the CPF is problematic ... he spent a month (August 1950) in an international work brigade in Yugoslavia ... At the time, the confrontation between Stalin and Tito was so intense that visiting Yugoslavia was grounds for expulsion from the CPF. Students were recruited for the summer by anti-Stalinist French radicals estranged from the party ...”.

Sar did not attend the Stalinist International Federation of Democratic Youth in East Berlin, the following year, July 1951, to which several of his Cambodian comrades traveled. Indeed some elements of DK extremism more resemble what Pol Pot might have seen in Yugoslavia, than what he learned from Russia and

China.<sup>767</sup> And in his biography of Pol Pot Chandler said only that “It seems likely that Sar joined the French Communist Party at this time [1952] ... but this cannot be corroborated”.<sup>768</sup>

The new assurance in “Epitaph” about Sar’s CPF membership is accompanied by the elevation to a historical record of some political gossip about which Chandler earlier showed commendable reserve. On his own authority Chandler retrospectively reads Sar’s mind, finding that the “young Cambodian was impressed by the way that Stalin combined total secretiveness ... conviction and unchallenged power. In joining the Communist party Sar followed the lead of several of his friends. His personal ambitions were precise. ‘I will direct the revolutionary organization’, a contemporary recalls him as saying [*sic!*, emphasis added] ‘I will be its secretary-general. I will hold the dossiers, and control the ministers. I will see to it that they don’t deviate from the line fixed ... by the central committee’”.

This is cited from a book by François Debré, whereas in *Tragedy*, Chandler was only willing to reproduce this alleged quote from Sar as “a contrary report, unfortunately unsourced”, and Debré’s book is nowhere mentioned. Moreover the statement is attributed to Sar in 1951, a year before he is supposed to have joined the CPF, and when he had been behaving more as a Titoist than as a Stalinist.<sup>769</sup>

In the biography Chandler got Debré’s name right, and, without citing a source for his stronger conviction, upgraded Debré’s gossip to “an unnamed source [who] spoke with ... Debré [and] who had attended the [Cambodian Paris Marxist] discussion groups”.<sup>770</sup>

Debré’s book fully merits the neglect Chandler accorded it in *Tragedy*. It is totally unsourced, and reads like the gossip of old Indochina hands, replete with historical errors.

One serious error in the passage under discussion, the misidentification of Pol Pot as Rath Samoeun rather than as Saloth Sar, is excusable, for when Debré was writing no one outside the Cambodian communist inner circle knew the identity of Pol Pot (although this means, if the report is factual, that statement may have been made by Rath Samoeun rather than Saloth Sar/Pol Pot).

Indeed, if such a statement was made, Samoeun is a more likely guess, for he had been active in leftist politics already in Cambodia before going to Paris. Moreover, Chandler recorded that “Pierre Brocheux has recalled visiting his

<sup>767</sup> Chandler, *Tragedy*, p. 54-55; and on the relevance of Yugoslavia see Vickery, *Cambodia 1975-1982*, pp. 275-280.

<sup>768</sup> *Brother Number One*, first edition, p. 41, second edition, p. 39.

<sup>769</sup> “Epitaph”, p. 91; François [mis-cited by Chandler as ‘Michel’] Debré, *Cambodge La Révolution de la forêt*, [Paris], Flammarion, 1976, p. 86; *Tragedy*, p. 54.

<sup>770</sup> *Brother Number One*, first edition, p. 36, second edition, p. 34.

friend and fellow communist Rath Samoeun in the hospital and listening to Samoeun speak approvingly of the possibility of some day conducting similar purges in the ranks of the ICP” (*Tragedy*, p.53).

Debré’s other errors argue for inexcusable carelessness, and make it impossible to accept any statement in Debré which has not been otherwise corroborated, certainly not through the device of upgrading Debré’s totally unsourced statement to “an unnamed source [who] spoke with ... Debré [and] who had attended the [Cambodian Paris Marxist] discussion groups”, that is, implicitly, one of the Cambodian communist inner circle.

Ben Kiernan, moreover, claims that the “unnamed source” was Keng Vannsak, whom he interviewed, and who attributed the statement, not to Saloth Sar/Pol Pot, but to Ieng Sary. Kiernan did not comment on Debré’s work, and we cannot therefore be certain that Keng Vannsak was indeed Debré’s source, but the bombast sounds more like what we think we know of Ieng Sary than Pol Pot’s personality as described by Chandler.<sup>771</sup>

It is of course possible that Debré spoke to someone else, but Keng Vannsak was the most accessible for non-communists of the old Marxist Circle members. Curiously, Chandler, who also interviewed Keng Vannsak, citing him in the same context of *Tragedy* for a different opinion of Saloth Sar, “unassuming”, and not “singled ... out as a potential leader” by his comrades, did not, apparently, question Vannsak about the remark in Debré.

Chandler’s peculiar triple treatment of this matter does not inspire confidence in his use of sources.

Undoubtedly Pol Pot was influenced by his trip to China in 1965, following his visit to Vietnam and meeting with Le Duan. This has always been one of the more mysterious events of his career. There have long been reports from Vietnamese that, following the visit of the Khmer communist delegation to Hanoi in 1965, Pol Pot continued alone to China, but as the specialists in that period, David Chandler and Ben Kiernan have noted, “very little is known about Pol Pot’s visit to China (he has never explicitly conceded that it occurred)”. They speculated, however, that he must have met Deng Xiaoping and Liu Shaoqi.<sup>772</sup>

In “Epitaph” Chandler is both more cautious, not speculating on Pol Pot’s interlocutors, and more dramatic, “the experience was exhilarating”, he “was

<sup>771</sup> Ben Kiernan, Review of David Chandler, *Brother Number One*, in *The Journal of Asian Studies* 52/4 (November 1993), p. 1077, with reference to p. 121 in Kiernan, *How Pol Pot*, London, Verso, 1985.

<sup>772</sup> Kiernan, *How Pol Pot*, pp. 220, 222; Chandler, *Brother Number One*, first edition, p. 76, second edition, p. 72. See also Chandler, *Tragedy*, p. 148, “Pol Pot has never mentioned the visits [to China and Korea]; neither have Chinese documents”, where Chandler does not speculate on whom Pol Pot may have met. Engelbert and Goscha, *Falling Out of Touch*, assert that those meetings occurred, but relying, apparently, p. 77, n. 96, on the speculations of Kiernan and Chandler.

surrounded by the triumphant fervour of a revolution on the march”, “encountered officials sympathetic to his view” (how does Chandler know this, given the uncertainty about whom Pol Pot met?), when he returned to Vietnam he “was full of praise for China”.<sup>773</sup>

Unfortunately Chandler did not heed a new document of direct evidence which was available and cannot have been unknown to him at the time he was preparing “Epitaph”. In fact he should have heard about it in time for *Brother Number One*.

This was the February 1992 talk by Pol Pot to some of his subordinates which I have discussed above. It provides an answer concerning Pol Pot’s contacts in China, “at that time Deng Xiaoping was Secretary General of the Party. I was received by P’eng Chen and Li Fu-ch’un”. This is the proof that the author is Pol Pot, confirmation that the trip occurred, and identification of his main contacts, apparently not Deng Xiaoping and Liu Shaoqi, as Chandler and Kiernan had speculated.<sup>774</sup>

This may force reinterpretation of relations between the Pol Pot group and the different Chinese factions at the time of the Cultural Revolution. P’eng Chen and Li Fu-ch’un, it seems, had opposed the Great Leap Forward (the latter as an economic planner), and both returned to prominence with the rise of Deng Xiaoping and Liu Shaoqi in the early 1960s.

In 1965 P’eng Chen was fifth-ranking member of the politburo, and tried to contain the Cultural Revolution by treating it as a purely academic question, in which he succeeded until the spring of 1966, when in May he was condemned for having obstructed it, becoming the “first of the high-ranking party leaders to fall”.

In the 1950s Li Fu-ch’un was chairman of the State Planning Commission, and had favored a long period of transition of individual small producer peasants to socialist agriculture. Because of a long relationship with Chou En-lai, and his economic skills, Li was still on the Planning Commission and in the Central Committee in 1968.<sup>775</sup>

Or, it may simply indicate the level of importance assigned to Pol Pot by the Chinese – not first rank. In *Tragedy*, Chandler seems to have hit the mark better in suggesting that the Chinese did not think Saloth Sar very important.

It would not seem to support Chandler’s speculations in “Epitaph” that in Peking Pol Pot “was surrounded by the triumphant fervour of a revolution on the march”, and “encountered officials sympathetic to his view that the Cambodian

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<sup>773</sup> Chandler, “Epitaph”, p. 92.

<sup>774</sup> On Pol Pot’s February 1992 talk see above, “Pol Pot’s Plan for UNTAC”, pp. 401, ff.

<sup>775</sup> Maurice Meisner, *Mao’s China, A History of the People’s Republic*, New York, Free Press, 1977, pp. 267, 310-11, 122, 137, 147-48 respectively; and for the last remark about Li, Jean Daubier, *A History of the Chinese Cultural Revolution*, New York, Vintage Books, 1974, p. 259.



revolution should follow its own dynamic, rather than be guided by external models and advice”; at least if ‘its own dynamic’, as Chandler speculated in other contexts of the same essay, meant inspiration and models from the “brutal collectivization of agriculture in the USSR ... [the] Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution”, and “the Chinese model” of “continuous political conflict”.

This is not what he would have gotten from P’eng Chen and Li Fu-ch’un, and Pol Pot’s contact with them undermines Chandler’s speculation that “there is some doubt that Pol Pot and his colleagues knew that the Chinese Leap had failed”.<sup>776</sup>

The fact that Pol Pot and his fellow DK leaders did push the Cambodian revolution to “follow its own dynamic, rather than be guided by external models and advice” infirms all the superficial and contradictory proposals to blame it on Soviet, Chinese or Vietnamese models.

It was not only in the secrecy surrounding identities of leaders that “the Cambodian revolution was unique”, and even here Chandler cannot resist searching for a nebulous communist model, “Stalin’s infrequent public appearances from the 1930s on”.<sup>777</sup>

It was, within modern ‘communism’ unique in every aspect of its political and economic organization, which so far deviated from the alleged models that it becomes propagandistic to insist that DK was communist in any Marxist-Leninist or even Maoist sense.

### Postscript (1995)

I asked in the beginning what it was about this article that made it attractive to the *NLR* editors.

Perhaps the two themes I discerned suited a ‘leftist’ journal searching for new respectability following the collapse of socialism in the last few years, and with an ideological position on Cambodia that “there is still a sense in which the Khmer Rouge were an indigenous phenomenon [so far true enough, and in accord with mainstream scholarly opinion] ... they control about a fifth of the country and retain the strength to wreak havoc elsewhere [unfortunately empirical facts, and that, implicitly therefore], the far-sighted policy could be to follow the example of ANC and Mandela in South Africa, when they included Inkatha representatives in their new government”, that is to bring the Khmer Rouge into the coalition government formed after the election of 1993.<sup>778</sup>

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<sup>776</sup> Chandler, “Epitaph”, pp. 92, 89, 94, 95 respectively. In his attempt to blacken all communist movements by imputing their excesses to mutual influences, Chandler seems to have partly lost control of his sources.

<sup>777</sup> Chandler, “Epitaph”, p. 95.

<sup>778</sup> *New Left Review* 205, p. 2, editor’s comment, in “Themes”.

This is not at all the consensus of Cambodia specialists. It has never appeared to be Chandler's own opinion either, but it has been the line of the Khmer Rouge themselves, of King Sihanouk, usually, of many Khmer returned from ten to twenty years exile in the West, including some of the pro-West politicians in the new Cambodian National Assembly, and of a few nostalgic survivors from the old pro-Pol Pot coterie in the West.<sup>779</sup>

Moreover, the parallel is not at all apt. Inkatha should more accurately be compared with the royalist FUNCINPEC, but of course they are in the government, and via an election in which they won with a plurality of the votes.

Chandler, in the end, opts for the opposite. The Khmer Rouge and Pol Pot, "[s]imply by continuing to exist ... are a threat to Cambodia's stability and to the self-confidence of its people". They "are unwilling and probably unable to adjust to the pluralism of present-day Cambodia, or to conditions in Southeast Asia in the 1990s"; "Pol Pot and his followers are withering on the vine", but "unfortunately", in Chandler's opinion, that withering process, which Chandler plainly hopes will be realized, "may take several years" (99).

*NLR* has misused Chandler's article, in the way second-rate newspapers publish opinion pieces contrary to the editors' ideology, but get revenge by dressing them up with headlines which give a misleading view of the content, subverting the author for an inattentive readership. I hope that Chandler has submitted a letter of protest about this tendentious treatment of his article.

In the original text of this article I wrote in a footnote that it was not difficult to surmise the linkage of Chandler's article and *NLR* with a few nostalgic survivors from the old pro-Pol Pot coterie in the West, and I referred to Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, London, Verso, "Introduction", footnote 1, unchanged from the first edition in 1983 to the revised edition in 1991, in spite of the voluminous new material on Cambodia.

Also unchanged was, *Ibid.*, page 159, "The policies of the Pol Pot regime can only in a very limited sense be attributed to traditional Khmer culture or to its leaders' cruelty, paranoia, and megalomania ... [f]ar more important are the models of what revolutions have, can, should, and should not do, drawn from France, the USSR, China, and Vietnam", and footnote 7 to that passage, "One might suggest 'yes' to the *Levée en masse* and the Terror, 'no' to Thermidor and Bonapartism, for France; 'yes' to War Communism, collectivization, and the Moscow Trials, 'no' to NEP and de-Stalinization, for the Soviet Union; 'yes' to peasant guerrilla communism, the Great Leap Forward, and the Cultural Revolution, 'no' to the Lushan Plenum, for China; 'yes' to the August Revolution and the formal liquidation of the Indochinese Communist Party in 1945, 'no' to damaging concessions to 'senior' communist parties as exemplified in the Geneva Accords, for Vietnam" [on which see comment above, pg. 31 ff.].

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<sup>779</sup> See the conclusion of the present text of the article.

This was on p. 144 of the first edition of 1983, and is an attempt to freeze Cambodia's history after 1978. If Anderson had taken account of post-1978 Cambodia, which one would expect in a study of nationalism, parts of that list would have to be modified.

As sources for his Cambodia information Anderson, in the "Introduction" to the first edition of his *Imagined Communities*, cited only Stephen Heder, Laura Summers and Anthony Barnett, and no further Cambodia studies were cited for the revised edition of 1991.

This is of more than passing significance, for it was the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia in 1979 which Anderson credits as the main impetus to his idiosyncratic study of Nationalism. Heder and Summers remained the last pro-Democratic Kampuchea holdouts among Western Cambodia scholars, and it is likely that it was through Anderson, brother of the *New Left Review's* Perry Anderson, that Chandler was brought to the attention of *NLR* as someone who might produce an article which would be useful for their post-1979 conciliatory policy on the PDK.

Although it would appear from Heder's publications that he had lost enthusiasm for DK by the time he went to work for the Lawyers' Committee, he never made objection to the Coalition formed in 1982 which gave them a prominent role, and which he touted as deserving strong US support in a presentation to the US Congress in 1981.<sup>780</sup>

Summers remained enthusiastic much longer. In a paper entitled "Increased Pressure Must be Brought to Bear on Vietnam", given at an anti-Phnom Penh Cambodia conference in Bangkok in 1987, Summers, an American who then was teaching Political Science at Hull University, tried to give Mrs. Thatcher a leg up by evoking British support for the 'Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea', while dropping Mrs. Thatcher's name to give respectability to the Khmer Rouge. She ended with a salute to the KR and their allies, "from England, the motherland of parliaments, we wish you well".<sup>781</sup>

Admittedly, my footnote to Chandler's *NLR* article on this point was a fishing expedition, and had the *NLR* editor, Robin Blackburn, made the slightest objection in his letter to me, I would happily have deleted it.

Apparently the fishing resulted in a catch; for in his rather weaselly rejection letter, he offered as reasons that my comment was too long, concentrating

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<sup>780</sup> See note 807. For Heder's position in 1979 see "Interview with Southeast Asian scholars [Steven R. Heder and George C. Hildebrand], A close-up look at Vietnam's invasion of Kampuchea", *The Call*, New York, 5 March 1979, in which Heder and Hildebrand took strong pro-DK and anti-Viet Nam positions.

<sup>781</sup> Published in "The Third International Conference on Kampuchea, 25-26 July, 1987, Bangkok, Thailand", Department of Press and Information of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea, August 1987. See comment on this above, note 596.

“excessively upon minute discussion of various texts” (in fact, as the reader may see, discussion of questions of historical fact), and the weird comment that “in some cases ... you actually prefer what he has written in the *NLR* to what he has written elsewhere, which I would have thought would reduce the grounds for your objection” (there are no such contexts).

Blackburn was also troubled by the passage above, note 36 in the original, saying “none of the editors of the *NLR* were at any time supporters of the Pol Pot régime – we tended to rather Trotskysant positions at that time anyway”; a ground-shifting formulation like much of Chandler. I had said nothing about their position during the ‘Pol Pot regime’, but rather pointed out their current opinion that the Pol Pot group should be reintegrated into the Cambodian government (“the far-sighted policy could be to follow the example of ANC” toward their rivals Inkatha).<sup>782</sup>

A hot issue in comment on Cambodia since 1979 has been Journalism. A constant complaint in the involved foreign community is the alleged oppression of Cambodian journalism and journalists by the state, notwithstanding that since 1993 Cambodian newspapers have sprung up like proverbial mushrooms after rain. Their total at most times in the last 5-6 years has been around 40, although outside Phnom Penh they are not widely distributed. In addition to concern over limits to journalistic freedom, the concerned foreigners also wish to make sure that Cambodian journalists ‘get it right’. One of those efforts caught my attention.

### Myths in Cambodian journalism (July 1994)<sup>783</sup>

When I read about the training course for Indochinese journalists in Bangkok, I could only agree with those Vietnamese participants who say that in the journalistic “inverted pyramid” which the Asia Foundation and associated journalists tried to inculcate in their Indochinese colleagues, “the lead is an elephant and the conclusion is a mouse ... it doesn’t have logic”.<sup>784</sup>

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<sup>782</sup> Blackburn’s letter was dated 12 September 1995. It is interesting that the first reaction to Chandler’s article, at least the first, and only one, I have seen, was a Swedish translation in *Kampuchea*, Nr 1/95 published by the Kambodjaföreningen i Sverige (‘Cambodia association in Sweden’), deriving from the associates of Jan Myrdal who visited Democratic Kampuchea in 1978.

<sup>783</sup> *The Nation* (Bangkok), 16 July 1994, p. A7. Title supplied by the editor; also sent on July 8 to *Bangkok Post* and *PPP*; footnotes have been inserted later.

<sup>784</sup> See *The Nation*, 10 June 1994, “Indochinese journalists learn how to invert the pyramid”, “AP’s Peter Eng writes about a course designed to give reporters a taste of Western press styles and freedoms”; and *Bangkok Post*, 14 June 1994, “Indochinese journalists train in Bangkok”. Indochina Media Memorial Foundation, “Dispatch”, Bangkok, Thailand, Volume 1, Number 2, November 1994, p. [4], “IMMF’s first training

As practiced by the current second and third-rate American-style (not ‘Western’) journalism which is all too prominent in the Bangkok and Phnom Penh English-language press, the big lead is too often hype with nothing beyond it – the apex of the inverted pyramid hardly visible below the base – when it is not deliberately misleading, as in editor-invented titles for features which misrepresent what the writer intended in the content of his article.

It is one of the devices of fiction which have become so frequent in recent attempts to give spice to journalism that the fictional spice dominates the factual content.<sup>785</sup>

In the journalism on Cambodia since 1992, in which some of the instructors of the course were involved, the distinction between ‘hard news’, and ‘soft news’ or features, too often meant between news favorable (or at least neutral), and unfavorable to the American line on Cambodia which had hegemony in UNTAC. Thus when an American organization brought in an El Salvadoran death squad organizer to ‘teach Cambodians democracy’, it was treated in the softest possible way. Most western journalists, and this time not just Americans, refused to touch it, even when it was virtually forced down their throats.<sup>786</sup>

Yet the vaguest allegations of misdeeds by the Phnom Penh government and its Cambodian Peoples Party were accorded maximum inverted pyramid space. Inverted pyramid seems to symbolize journalists hiding their heads in the sand.

Another example was the flurry of journalistic excitement over the sending of Japanese soldiers to Cambodia, while there was not even a feature, never mind some hard-nosed hard news, on the return of the US military, whose record in Indochina was far more murderous than the Japanese.

So the trainee journalists from Indochina were taught “why it is important to attribute information to sources”, were they? (*Bangkok Post*) Does ‘sources’ mean the vague ‘western diplomat’, or more crudely ‘sources say’ which pepper the articles of their mentors? This type of sourcing is no more than a fictional device to add possibly spurious credibility to what may be no more than the writer’s speculations.

course builds Indochina bridges”, “Significant funding from The Asia Foundation and the Freedom Forum made possible IMMF’s first training ...”.

<sup>785</sup> See examples above, 197, 200 in the review of Nayan Chanda’s *Brother Enemy*. A more recent blatant example with another, transparently propagandistic and political, purpose in mind was “EU Media guru says Ranariddh guilty”, by Mathew Grainger, *PPP*, Vol 7, No, 2, 30 January-12 February 1998, p. 2. At the time Raoul Jennar, the object of the title, had no EU position, and he had not said Ranariddh was ‘guilty’, only that it was an established fact that he had negotiated with the Khmer Rouge. The purpose of the article was to create a scandal which would prevent Jennar from getting the EU position for which he was intended; and that purpose was achieved.

<sup>786</sup> See below p. 522.

One star writer for the *Far Eastern Economic Review* and *Phnom Penh Post*, who is particularly adept at that type of sourcing, wrote up one version of the Chakrapong-Sin Song secession of June 1993 as coming from ‘UN Sources’, suggesting to the innocent reader that it was the official UNTAC view, when he, like every active political observer in Phnom Penh, knew that the version he featured was not the UNTAC position, and had been written by a particular person working in one UNTAC component dominated by American professional anti-Phnom Penh figures.

An alternative version was distributed to the UNTAC and journalist community in Phnom Penh, but only one journalist chose to compare the two, naming the authors – that is, providing real sources.<sup>787</sup>

With funding from the Asia Foundation, an organization whose purpose is American intellectual hegemony in Asia, if not worse, it would not be surprising if the instruction continued the slant perceptible in the American journalism practiced in Bangkok and Phnom Penh. I wonder if the trainees were given the hard news history of the Asia Foundation, in particular in Cambodia in the 1960s. Some of the journalists who tried to report the truth about the American war on Vietnam, and who died there, might not approve of what is being done in their names by the Indochina Media Memorial Foundation.

### Postscript

Thayer’s ‘UN’ version of the secession was written by Stephen Heder of the Information and Education Component. The journalist who took note of my alternative version when it was issued was Sherri Prasso, of Agence France Presse, in *The Nation* (Bangkok), 26 June 1993, AFP, “Americans [Vickery and Heder] debate Cambodia secession”.

My version was published in “Cambodia: a Political Survey”, Discussion Paper No. 14, The Department of Political and Social Change, Research School of Pacific Studies, Australian National University, 1994, and in *Cambodia: A Political Survey*, pp. 92-100.

Interestingly, when Heder’s UNTAC superior, Timothy Carney, took note of this matter in a published conference presentation only a couple of months after the election, he implicitly rejected Heder’s interpretation, which at the time he himself had signed before its distribution, and passed the matter off as a controversy between Nate Thayer and myself. See my joint review of the books by (1) Trevor Findlay, *Cambodia the Legacy and Lessons of UNTAC*, and (2) Timothy Carney and Tan Lian Choo, *Whither Cambodia? Beyond the Election*, in *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol. 26, No. 2 (September 1995), pp. 439-443.

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<sup>787</sup> See Nate Thayer, “Sihanouk Back at the Helm”, *Phnom Penh Post*, 2/13, 18 June-1 July 1993, and “Surface Calm, Power-sharing pact brings little change”, *FEER* 8 July 1993. See also the postscript below.

Another interesting implicit rejection of Heder's analysis, a feint with damned praise, if this pun may be excused, is to be found in a particularly tendentious, even disinformative, article about the Cambodian elections of 1993 and 1998 by John M. [General] Sanderson and Michael Maley ("Elections and Liberal Democracy in Cambodia", *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, 52/3, 1998, pp. 241-253).

On p. 248, note 13, they refer to Heder, "the distinguished Cambodia scholar and our former UNTAC colleague", but when attributing blame for the 1993 secession (p. 243, note 3) they "deliberately refer here to the CPP hierarchy, rather than to Hun Sen personally", because "the events of the secession were related to factional differences within the CPP, and the precise roles played by the various CPP actors (**and by Prince Sihanouk** [emphasis added; see my article]) are difficult to evaluate". This constitutes a total rejection of Heder's interpretation of the secession.

A more intemperate rejection by Sanderson of another Heder fantasy, provided to David Roberts during his investigation of the conflict between UNTAC and the Khmer Rouge before the 1993 election, concerned Heder's very peculiar interpretation of the Loridon affair (see p. 405, and Roberts, *Political Transition in Cambodia* p. 70). Perhaps, finally, Heder should be regarded as the least credible of all Cambodia specialists. Even those operatives for whose projects Heder's work provided support, and who were happy to use him until his credibility was blown, finally backed away

## Shawcross in the 90s

Following the 1993 UNTAC election Shawcross continued his slide rightward, until he nearly achieved what I facetiously suggested back in 1984: an autocritique of *Sideshow* in *Commentary*.

In his post-Paris Agreement manifestations Shawcross has denied himself, claiming that *Sideshow* was written to expose the evil of the Khmer Rouge, a claim which must mark some kind of extreme in the rewriting of a personal historical record.<sup>788</sup>

In an article in the *Scotsman* Shawcross was also disingenuous about his writing following a 1975 visit to the Thai border. Although he did tend to believe the refugee stories, his first article, as I wrote in *Cambodia 1975-1982*, p. 59, and noted above, was a "careful assessment of refugee accounts and some of the evidence which might force their modification", together with insistence that the US and Henry

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<sup>788</sup> "From beyond the grave", *The Scotsman* (Glasgow), 14 December 1992, and "A New Cambodia", *NYRB* 12 August 1993, pp. 37-41, see p. 38. However, if Grant Evans's reading of Shawcross is correct (see p. 96 above), this apparent about-face of Shawcross may be just the surface manifestation of a deep-structured continuity.

Kissinger bore some of the blame.<sup>789</sup> His later articles in *NYRB*, which he cites in *The Scotsman*, were easy on the Khmer Rouge, and were designed to discredit the PRK.

### A New Cambodia (2009)<sup>790</sup>

His “A New Cambodia” was billed as a review, and was very laudatory, of David Chandler’s *Brother Number One: A Political Biography of Pol Pot*, but most of the content is pure Shawcross about himself.

Passing the recent history of Cambodia in review, there is no longer heavy blame on the US and Kissinger for deliberately choosing a policy which would destroy Cambodia, but only that Cambodia was “drawn into the inferno of war, partly [emphasis added] as a result of careless [again emphasis added] White House policies, including the destruction of Cambodian villages by heavy bombing”.<sup>791</sup>

A few paragraphs further on he renounces sympathy for opposition to the war, wailing, “those of us who were opposed to the American effort in Indochina should be humbled by the scale of the suffering inflicted by the Communist victors – especially in Cambodia, but in Vietnam and Laos as well”.<sup>792</sup>

Shawcross has now swallowed what Chomsky has termed the left wing of the American imperialist line – the Vietnam war may have been a mistake, but we were not to blame.

What Shawcross did in *Sideshow* was to suggest convincingly, if hypothetically, that the horrific concentration of bombing in the densely populated areas of central Cambodia in 1973 may have so maddened the survivors among Pol Pot’s peasant troops that it contributed to the violence they wreaked on the urban populations who came under their control after April 1975.

Shawcross was damned for this by the American right wing, and had he stuck to his guns it would no doubt have affected his livelihood as an independent journalist.

Poor Shawcross had to make amends by carefully expunging any hint of such allegations from his *Quality of Mercy*, and, in his writings about post-1979 Cambodia, by scrupulously lining up with US regime positions on Indochina, thus implicitly denying what he had written in *Sideshow*, and permitting US regime apologists to use Shawcross against himself to deny any US

<sup>789</sup> Shawcross, *FEER* 2 January 1976, pp. 9-10; above, p. 96.

<sup>790</sup> Michael Vickery, unpublished comment, 2009.

<sup>791</sup> See also *Postscript on Chandler*, below.

<sup>792</sup> Would Shawcross also accept that those who opposed Russian intervention in Afghanistan, including himself, should now be ‘humbled’ by the scale of suffering inflicted there by the non-Communist victors, whose strength to inflict suffering was a direct result of US aid?



responsibility for the traumas which have afflicted Cambodia. Like his father, he ‘heartily floorcrossed’.<sup>793</sup>

This ‘floorcrossing’ resembles ideologically his father’s shift from effective prosecution of Nazis, “together with my Russian colleague” at Nuremberg to regret that “we ignored Hitler’s pleadings not to enter into war. Now we are forced to realize that Hitler was right. He offered us the co-operation of Germany; instead, since 1945, we have been facing the immense power of the Soviet Union”.<sup>794</sup>

It is piquant that Sir Hartley’s cooperation with his Russian colleague which he happily evoked was during high Stalinism, while his retrospective sympathy for Hitler and his aims was when Gorbachev was already assuming direction of Soviet affairs from the ailing Chernenko and Soviet-western relations had been steadily improving since Nixon visited Moscow in 1972 and 1974. Thus Sir Hartley preferred Hitler and the Nazis to Communism with a possibly human face.

Likewise, the younger Floorcross in 1984, and later until now, was, and still is, damning Cambodia and Viet Nam since it has been clear that economic, political, and social conditions after 1979 steadily improved. He has not yet gone so far as to say Pol Pot was right, but, as noted above, already in 1980, he registered doubt about the truth of Tuol Sleng prison, and “the anti-Khmer Rouge propaganda issued by the Vietnamese client government” in Phnom Penh. Like father like son.

These shifts are not as surprising as they at first glance seem. What really terrified the West European elites, from the beginning of the development of strong Social Democratic political parties in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, was the possibility that Marxist regimes might be successful in achieving their best theoretical goals; and in the more recent US we have seen the Sonnenfeldt doctrine (referring to Henry Kissinger’s mentor), on the danger for the ‘Free World’ of communist regimes with human faces (see p. 77).<sup>795</sup>

### **Postscript on Chandler**

Chandler (about whose book Shawcross was writing), has also moved steadily rightward, and now agrees with Shawcross’ position; moreover, that “it’s time to say that Vietnam drew Cambodia into the war from 1963 onwards and that US

<sup>793</sup> Shawcross’ father, Sir Hartley Shawcross, was once teased as ‘Sir Hartley Floorcross’ for voting against his own Labor Party.

<sup>794</sup> Speech in Stourbridge, March 16th, 1984. See [www.usenet.com/newsgroups/talk.-politics.theory/msg00404.html](http://www.usenet.com/newsgroups/talk.-politics.theory/msg00404.html). That speech is also a favorite on the Hitler-doting [www.adolfthegreat.com](http://www.adolfthegreat.com) and the anti-Jewish [www.biblebelievers.org.au](http://www.biblebelievers.org.au). Now we understand why the younger Floorcross dislikes comparison of the Khmer Rouge with Nazis.

<sup>795</sup> Sympathy for fascism and the Nazis as allies against resurgent Russia was current in US elite circles well into the 1930s. See Noam Chomsky, *Rethinking Camelot*, pp. 20-21.

actions were in response to this”, as quoted by Grant Peck, AP, “America’s role in Cambodia still a hot issue”, *The Nation* (Bangkok), 12 April 2000 (part two of a series).

Peck was contrasting those who say it was US actions which drew Cambodia into the war, and that US bombing contributed to genocidal fanaticism of the KR, and those who claim the KR already had a radical agenda, including “David Chandler, one of the leading western scholars on modern Cambodia”.

This is contrary to everything Chandler, or the other leading historian of the period, Ben Kiernan, have written, and who have maintained that until Sihanouk was overthrown by Lon Nol in 1970 the Vietnamese urged strongly that the Cambodian communists not get into an armed revolt (see p. 428; also Chandler’s “Epitaph”; *Chandler, A History*, third edition, pp. 198, 202, fourth edition, pp. 242, 246; Chandler, *Tragedy*, p. 147). I doubted the accuracy of Peck’s report and queried Chandler.

He responded “I have always written that without the VN war the Khmer Rouge would never have existed, and that without Vietnamese help they would not have won the war against Lon Nol. I am surprised that I dated Vietnamese pulling Cambodia into the war as early as 1963, because the agreements between North Vietnam and Sihanouk to station Vietnamese troops in Cambodia date as I remember from 1964 or 1965 [*Chandler, A History*, fourth edition, pp. 236-7, says ‘1966’], but were linked to his break with the United States, which began in 1963. The Lon Nol coup released the Vietnamese from their agreement not to attack the Cambodian government, but the troops that attacked the Cambodian government (in response to its hostility to be sure) were already in Cambodia and had been there for several years”.

This is typical Chandlerian ground-shifting. The proposition that without the VN war the Khmer Rouge would never have existed is here a Chandler smokescreen. The historical discussions (by Chandler, Kiernan, and others) about the ‘drawing’ of Cambodia into the war by the Vietnamese in the 1960s or earlier, have not turned on Sihanouk’s agreements with the government of North Vietnam, and the ensuing permission for their troops to use sanctuaries along the border (not station troops throughout the country).

Moreover, those agreements, from the Vietnamese side, were to keep Cambodia neutral, not ‘draw’ it into the war. The Vietnamese communists also desired a peaceful Cambodia, and, as Chandler has accurately written in the three contexts noted above, refused to countenance Pol Pot’s desire to start revolutionary warfare against Sihanouk in the 1960s, greatly distressing Pol Pot. Everything known about events of the time support the interpretation that the Vietnamese wished to keep Cambodia out of the war until after 1970 that was no longer possible.

In fact, even then they offered Lon Nol the same deal they had made with Sihanouk. Against Vietnamese advice, the Cambodian communists began armed struggle in 1968, continuing with more strength in 1969, and with increasing

popular support after Sihanouk was overthrown in 1970. But what really ‘drew’ Cambodia completely into the Vietnam war was the joint US and South Vietnamese invasion against the communists in 1970, which pushed the Vietnamese troops from their border sanctuaries deep into the country.

Contrary to Chandler’s fantasy that US moves were a reaction to Vietnam’s activities in Cambodia, it was the 1970 US aggression which enabled the Vietnamese, supporting the Cambodian communists, to occupy most of Cambodia by the end of 1970. The Viet forces were important in 1970-71, but by 1972 Khmer Republic troops returning from the Chenla campaigns knew they had been fighting other Khmer, not Vietnamese; and by 1973 Vietnamese troops were gone.

The Khmer Rouge then went on to take Phnom Penh on their own in 1975. Chandler’s remark to Peck and his subsequent explanation to me are typical of Chandler’s ideological shifts in recent years, and which in this case represent distortion of history.

Shawcross has continued his line in later efforts, such as “Tragedy in Cambodia”, *NYRB* 14 Nov 1996, and “The Cambodian Tragedy, Cont’d”, *NYRB*, 19 December 1996, pp.73-4, about which I wrote without publication in 1997, and include here.

### Tragedy in Cambodia (1997) <sup>796</sup>

In format and style “Tragedy in Cambodia” is like some of Shawcross’ earlier writings for *NYRB*, an ostensible book review serving as platform for abuse of people he dislikes and unqualified praise for his friends. In quality of content it is inferior to previous articles, for Shawcross is now even less informed about Cambodian affairs than before.

He starts by admitting he doesn’t understand “perplexing” Cambodia – the third time I have seen this in his writing in the last two years. One would think he would either give up or do some homework, or that editors would finally get wise and have recourse to a more competent person.

Three books are listed as under review. One is lightweight entertainment, and need not take up space here. One of the other two is by an enemy, Ben Kiernan, while the second was jointly edited by a friend, Steve Heder.<sup>797</sup>

Very little is in fact said about the content of these two books, and it is not certain that Shawcross has read them carefully. What he writes about Kiernan’s is identical to earlier unfavorable reviews, and his remarks about the work of Heder and his colleagues could have been taken from the book jacket and David Chandler’s gushing introduction. The group of writers in the Heder book were members of UNTAC 12, the Information and Education Component, led by US

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<sup>796</sup> Michael Vickery, unpublished essay, 1997.

<sup>797</sup> Kiernan, *The Pol Pot Regime*; Heder-Ledgerwood.

Foreign Service Officer Timothy Carney; a fact which, peculiarly, is not mentioned anywhere in the book.<sup>798</sup>

Shawcross' "Tragedy" is disorganized and disjointed in the extreme, no doubt a reflection of his lack of control of his material. He jumps from one subject to another in the most helter-skelter manner, confusing to all but the most expert readers, no doubt on purpose because the points he wishes to make require heavy application of smoke to the eyes.

The main themes of "Tragedy" are the amnesty given to Khmer Rouge defector Ieng Sary, the murder of a Cambodian journalist, and the alleged subversion by a Shawcross enemy, Hun Sen, of the generous, altruistic work of the international community and UNTAC in the 1993 election.

First let's take the Ieng Sary case. UNTAC was unable to keep the Khmer Rouge in the election process, and afterward the new government was faced with the same situation as before the Paris Agreement of October 1991 – a well-armed radical enemy dedicated to destroying them, and whose area of operation had expanded under UN auspices. The expansion is implied (pp. 77, 79, 80, 81, 83, 84,85, 86, 92) in Heder's chapter in the book ostensibly under review, but denied by the second editor, Ledgerwood (pp. 123, 133, n. 13), a contradiction which of course Shawcross would not notice.

Different from before was that the former US-backed allies of the Khmer Rouge, the royalist FUNCINPEC under Ranariddh and the non-royalist non-communist group under Son Sann, had participated in the election and joined the government. Another difference was that after Paris the KR lost the international support and recognition they had enjoyed (they had occupied Cambodia's UN seat since 1981). They still, however, could cut timber to sell to private Thai companies backed by the Thai army.

During the election campaign Ranariddh had argued for accommodation with the KR to achieve peace, a position which Sihanouk also favored, while Hun Sen favored going all out for military victory. Then, the election over, Ranariddh acceded to Hun Sen's anti-KR policy, and the war continued.

In 1994-95 the situation remained indecisive, with gradually increasing government success in persuading KR troops and some officers to defect. Sihanouk, especially during late 1993 and 1994, was wheeling and dealing to bring the KR completely into the coalition, proposing even to illegally amend the constitution and hold new elections especially for the purpose. Another rival faction in the grand coalition would have given him the type of leverage to rule which he had enjoyed in the 1960s, and the KR could be expected to use him against their real enemies in Hun Sen's party.

Hun Sen managed to block those maneuvers, in the process (early July 1994), quashing a coup attempt led by one of Sihanouk's sons. A few days later, 7 July

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<sup>798</sup> See more on this book below, pp. 463, ff.

1994, such games were stopped with a law outlawing the KR, jointly supported by the two big parties in the government, but opposed by Sihanouk, Sam Rainsy, Julio Jeldres, and Amnesty International.<sup>799</sup>

After that the policy of attrition continued, helped along by increasing pressure on the Thai to stop their business dealings with the KR. By late 1996 everyone was astonished to learn that this policy had led to serious splits within the KR, with leading figures, such as supposedly number 2 or 3 Ieng Sary, offering to defect.

It became clear that each government faction, FUNCINPEC and Hun Sen's party, had been trying separately to engineer these defections in their own separate interests, although the background details are still unclear. Each wanted to line up ex-KR as allies against one another and for the coming election campaign. In the FUNCINPEC camp there was a still more dangerous purpose, as Ranariddh once crowed, to use the KR support to exert pressure on Vietnam, a constant fantasy among Cambodian reactionaries.<sup>800</sup>

Acceptance of some of the KR defectors, such as Ieng Sary, who had been condemned in absentia in the 1979 trial, required an amnesty, which had to be signed by the king, and was duly forthcoming.

Shawcross of course shows no concern over Ranariddh's dangerous grandstanding, but only over the situation of poor King Sihanouk, allegedly forced or conned into signing the amnesty against his convictions. He pretends shock that no one, in particular his enemies among Cambodia specialists, has tried to block the acceptance of Ieng Sary by offering evidence of responsibility for atrocities.

As for Sihanouk's complaints, they can be ignored. Sihanouk spent months trying to arrange the return of the entire KR apparatus, and if he is angry at the amnesty, it can only be because the partial defections were handled in such a way that they did not give him an advantage in the power game. There is real danger in the way these defections occurred. At the worst they could lead to the KR holding a balance of power by the time of the 1998 elections.<sup>801</sup>

The fault, however, is not Hun Sen's, nor Ranariddh's, nor due to former communists in the government. Blame goes to the Great Powers, first of all the

<sup>799</sup> Although Rainsy in the end voted for it. See also Vickery, *Cambodia: A Political Survey*, p. 136, n. 151.

<sup>800</sup> *PPP*, 5/10, 20 September-3 October 1996, "Ranariddh dismisses rumored CPP scheme", and interview with Matthew Grainger, "Ranariddh: 'KR will be very tough'". The same theme was implicit in the formation of the 'National Union Front' of FUNCINPEC and Sam Rainsy's 'Khmer Nation Party', with participation in the celebration by 20 Khmer Rouge delegates from Ieng Sary's 'Democratic National Union Movement'. See Ker Munthit, "Smiles all round as one-time foes join hands in NUF", *PPP* 6/5, March 7-20, 1997, p. 4.

<sup>801</sup> This worst case did not come about, because of further KR splits and defections.

US, who built up the KR after their defeat in 1979, and continued to use them as a tool to destroy the PRK in Phnom Penh, for a bloody-minded reason – hatred of Vietnam. After the 1993 election the new Phnom Penh government had to deal with this menace entirely on their own, with already limited resources further reduced by their enforced leap into extreme free-marketism that came with the Paris Agreement.

Now let's look at the case of the murdered journalist, Thun Bun Ly, which according to Shawcross can teach us how “the UN's most ambitious peace effort has become mired in corruption, violence, and deception”.

As he says, Thun Bun Ly had written critically of the government, and was shot while riding a motorcycle. For Shawcross the government is to blame, in particular Hun Sen, “the former communist who has for years been the dominant man in Cambodia”; and the US embassy has not shown sufficient interest in the suppression of human rights, that is, it did not complain loudly enough.

During his long exposition of the case Shawcross repeats some of his favorite themes from past articles, modifying them where necessary. That is, “in 1970 the country was dragged willy-nilly into the Vietnam War” (no longer *Sideshow*-type indictment of US responsibility), and in “1978 Vietnam ... installed a client government dominated by defectors from the Khmer Rouge”.<sup>802</sup>

He fails to tell us how he got his details about the murder, which differ from what was published in the best local press. He refers mysteriously to “reports received by Amnesty International”, without confirming that Amnesty believed them. Although Amnesty's Cambodia record is not without its defects, they do make some distinction between reports received and reports authenticated.<sup>803</sup>

In his idyllic portrayal of the background of Thun Bun Ly, Shawcross shows him as a poor student in 1975, forced to do peasant work under the KR, returned to Phnom Penh in 1979, but disgusted with Vietnamese influence he fled to the border, returning to Phnom Penh after 1991.

Then, says Shawcross, he set up a small newspaper on a tiny budget and attacked the government for corruption, taking aim at both Ranariddh and Hun Sen. This may not be quite the way it was, as is seen in what one of Shawcross' good guys, John Marston, a contributor to the Heder-Ledgerwood book under review wrote.<sup>804</sup>

Of course there was no law against writing pro-KR propaganda, certainly not under UNTAC, and murder is murder and should be punished, but those interested in the case should be aware that Thun Bun Ly was not just a nice

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<sup>802</sup> Note again (*Postscript on Chandler*, above) that this interpretation of Viet Nam ‘dragging’ Cambodia into the war, and even as early as 1963, has been repeated by David Chandler.

<sup>803</sup> See above, p. 279, on Amnesty's Cambodia reporting.

<sup>804</sup> See further below, pp. 468. Heder-Ledgerwood, p. 220.

young man trying to tell the truth and fight for justice. He was deeply involved in complex politics in a violent society, in which, as Shawcross loves to rant in other contexts, many people still nurse hatred of the KR for their brutality when in power.

His newspaper supported the line of those hated enemies during the election, and then took up the cause of another enemy of the state, Sam Rainsy, which since 1994 often meant the same thing, because the KR came out strongly in support for Rainsy, and Rainsy has always loudly beat the racist anti-Vietnamese drum, to such an extent even that during the election he had to be censored by UNTAC (see note 213).

Such troublesome journalists have traditionally been murdered in US-favored capitalist Thailand, without arousing great interest in the West, certainly not articles by Shawcross denouncing the Thai government. In its coverage of his death, *Phnom Penh Post* (31 May-13 June, 1996), “an excellent newspaper, owned by two Americans”, according to Shawcross (p. 45), revealed other insalubrious activities in which Thun Bun Ly may have been involved.

Another interesting case of a murdered journalist cited by Shawcross (p. 44), was Non Chan. At the time of his death in September 1994 the foreign press, led by a Shawcross favorite, Nate Thayer, tried to pin the blame directly on the prime ministers, as motives citing Non Chan editorials of June 1994 insulting Ranariddh.

In this they ignored that the last article by Non Chan before his death (23-26 August 1994 in a Khmer-language newspaper) was a profile of the country’s most prominent businessman, accusing him of being in the drug business since the 1970s.<sup>805</sup>

Of course that businessman is close to the prime ministers, but he wasn’t the one Thayer and his cronies wanted to get. They, like Shawcross now, were after

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<sup>805</sup> Things like this have always brought quick death to journalists in neighboring Thailand, the favorite Southeast Asian capitalist country of the US, without the foreign press getting excited. It was much worse in Thailand some years ago, when murders of journalists were annually in the two-figure range. A relatively recent case was highlighted by the Thai Human Rights Lawyer Thongbai Thongpao in *Bangkok Post*, “Commentary”, p. 7, 18 January 1998, “Time to fight state enemies”.

A few days earlier a provincial reporter for two Thai-language dailies was shot dead, and Mr. Thongbai wrote that “the murder ... teaches an important lesson to other news reporters – that if they perform their duties the [same] way ... the same fate awaits them ... . All parties concerned [Minister of Interior, Police, public] viewed the murder in the same way ... that Mr. Sayomchai was killed because he was reporting news that affected the interests of some influential people ... the main cause that led to his death is undoubtedly corruption”. Mr. Thongbai continued, “last year some [six] members of [a sub-district administrative body] were killed at a meeting ... because they tried to obstruct the corrupt administration and voted to oust the corrupt chairman”. Typically in such cases in Thailand the guilty are never caught, or if caught and tried, serve very lenient sentences.

the Cambodian government, not drug barons or corrupt businessmen. Belatedly, Thayer brought this up in his 'exposé' of drug traffic in Cambodia, cited by Shawcross (p.43) completely out of context.

Thayer's "Medellin on the Mekong", typical of his work, was long on insinuation but short on fact or evidence, as was shown by Tom Fawthrop; but Thayer's story may have contributed to the forcing of a drug law onto Phnom Penh which shocks human rights lawyers because of its violation of due process, unenforceability, and potentiality to inflict heavy penalties on small fry while leaving big operators untouched.<sup>806</sup>

Those like Shawcross who are so concerned with human rights should start with these violations of Cambodian human rights resulting from heavy-handed, ill-intentioned foreign intervention.

These are not matters that interest Shawcross, for he wishes to heap blame for all Cambodian ills on Hun Sen.

With this we can pass to the third theme of Shawcross' "Tragedy", the 1993 election and ensuing political developments. Shawcross starts by naming two purposes of the 1991 Paris Agreement: (1) remove an impediment to *détente* among the US, China, and Russia, (2) deal with the embarrassment of UN support for the KR as part of Cambodia's legitimate government [don't forget that from 1982 to 1993 the West and China considered the legitimate government to be the tripartite Coalition in the woods on the Thai border, not the government in Phnom Penh].

This is the standard line – and it doesn't hold up. By 1991, even by 1989 when the Vietnamese had left Cambodia, Russian-Chinese *détente* had progressed far enough that the Chinese no longer cared much about the KR. Maintaining KR respectability was no longer necessary to persuade the Chinese to stop supporting Pol Pot's troops. And if the West was embarrassed by their own links with the KR, why not break them, especially since there was no longer

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<sup>806</sup> Thayer, "Medellin", *FEER*, 23 November 1995, and Fawthrop, "Smoke but no gun in P.Penh", *The Nation*, Bangkok, 21 April 1996. This view of the drug law was expressed to me at the time by two American lawyers working in Phnom Penh, Brad Adams and Evan Gottesman, of whom the former has since become famous for anti-CPP, anti-Hun Sen, views, while the latter has published an interesting, and also anti-CPP book, *Cambodia After the Khmer Rouge* (see further below, pp. 527, ff.).

For more on the drug law see *PPP* 5/12, 14-27 June 1996. And if journalists want to attack Cambodia as a drug center, they should perhaps start with themselves. In a story in *Soldier of Fortune*, "Hell on the Ho Chi Minh Trail", August 1994, pp. 54-59, Robert K. Brown & Robert MacKenzie, wrote the following: On their arrival in Phnom Penh Nate Thayer said, "Welcome to the freest country in the world!" Then Thayer showed them his collection of weapons, and "As if to reinforce his assertion, Thayer rolled and lit up a joint, continuing, 'Anything you want. You can get a 50-kilo bale of pot at the market'"; "Thayer's prior planning [for their expedition] primarily consisted of drinking, smoking and banging the local bimbos".



a Vietnamese occupation in Cambodia, the alleged original reason for the anti-Phnom Penh Coalition?

By 1991 it was clear that it was not the Chinese, but the US, who were guilty of foot-dragging, and for the reason which Shawcross (p.42) imputed to the Chinese, hatred of “the Vietnamese-backed [but no longer in 1991] regime, which they regarded as an enemy”. By 1989 there could have been an international agreement providing for multi-party elections among the PRK in Phnom Penh and their two non-communist rivals to the exclusion of the KR, but this was the last thing the US wanted.

As for concern about the Chinese, Shawcross’ favorite Cambodia expert Steve Heder, already in 1981 when Chinese interest in the KR was much stronger, arguing for American military support to the non-communists against both Phnom Penh and the KR, said “Kampuchea is not Taiwan, and there is no reason to believe that failure to go along with China’s extreme position on Kampuchea will have any serious negative repercussion on Sino-US relations.”<sup>807</sup>

If that was true in 1981, it was much truer in 1989 or 1991, but of course risks are more acceptable in warmongering than in peace-making. Again, in 1996, the *Washington Post* quoted Heder as saying that China had long favored a cease-fire between the government it now supports [the post-election Phnom Penh government] and China’s old Khmer Rouge allies.<sup>808</sup> If true, it proves that China had given up its “extreme position”.

The Paris Agreement was the product of an intense effort to destroy the PRK/SOC in Phnom Penh, at whatever risk of giving the KR a place in the central government.

Shawcross is closer to the truth in calling UNTAC “a kind of postmodern colonialism” (p.42), designed of course to do only good (that’s what the old colonialisms claimed too), in the following ways:

- (1) “create a new Cambodian society”, whatever that might mean – Cambodian society had been created anew in 1979, and by 1991 was doing very well;
- (2) “promoting human rights”, UNTAC code for finding fault with the PRK/SOC – human rights violations by the KR, acknowledged by all as the greatest violators, were out-of-bounds to keep the KR outside in the anti-Phnom Penh campaign (in the Heder-edited Great Book touted by Shawcross in this review, Heder describes his discovery of an explicitly

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<sup>807</sup> Statement by Heder on US Policy in Indochina to Subcommittee on Asian and Pacific Affairs, 21 Oct 1981.

<sup>808</sup> Keith Richburg, “Timing of Khmer Rouge Defections Suggests Possible Role by China”, *Washington Post* 24 Aug 1996, p. A18.

genocidal KR anti-Vietnamese policy put into effect in late 1992, but not revealed at the time by UNTAC 12 in which Heder worked);<sup>809</sup>

- (3) “rehabilitating the economy”, really a laugh – as in all former socialist states, the Great Leap into a free market destroyed the economy, as everyone knew it would;
- (4) “setting up a civil administration” – there was already one in place, that of the PRK/SOC, and UNTAC knew full well that it had to stay in place because the rival parties were incapable of replacing it;
- (5) “encouraging a free press”, true enough, but the UNTAC press regulations were harsher than subsequent government press laws which have excited such concern in Shawcross’ milieu;
- (6) “and staging free and fair elections” – well, yeah, ok, but see below.

Shawcross then objects that UNTAC could not carry out all of its colonialist program. They were “unable to disarm and demobilize the four factions”, a weasely way of putting it. They were unable to disarm the KR, and did not dare try. A French general who thought they should try was sent home.<sup>810</sup>

The other factions, in particular the Phnom Penh SOC, started loyally to follow the disarmament program, but had to stop when faced by an aggressive and untamed KR. Neither did UNTAC “supervise the large parts of the Cambodian state – perhaps 80 percent – that were still controlled by Hun Sen’s People’s Party (CPP)”, that is, the administration of the Phnom Penh SOC, former PRK.

Even less did UNTAC control the 20% under the other factions, in particular the KR. In this it is true that UNTAC did not carry out the letter of the Paris Agreement, which had in fact envisaged the destruction of the SOC before the election. As noted above only the SOC had administrative capability. Shawcross seems only to bewail the non-neutralization of Phnom Penh, not the untouchability of the KR.

“So”, says Willie, “the elections ... took place among widespread fears that the KR would attack the polling stations and kill large numbers of people”. UNTAC contributed to this with a phony alarm just before the elections which has never been explained.<sup>811</sup> Fortunately nothing happened, although Shawcross does not acknowledge that it was in large part due to efficient protection by the SOC armed forces.

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<sup>809</sup> See below, p. 465.

<sup>810</sup> See p. 381, and Nayan Chanda, “UN Divisions”, *FEER*, 23 July 1992, pp. 8-9.

<sup>811</sup> See Akashi May 1993, and my “Son Sen and All That”, *PPP* 29 Nov-12 Dec 1996, reprinted above, pp. 406, ff.

In spite of getting only 38% of the vote against FUNCINPEC's 45% (no one got a majority), "Hun Sen would not step aside". That is true, but much nonsense has been written about it.

In fact he was not given a chance to 'step aside', at least not in a way in conformity with the requirements of the Paris Agreement and UNTAC rules, nor was he required by those rules to step aside until after the new constitution was written and ratified, something which could take up to three months. By UNTAC's own rules a coalition was necessary, for a two-thirds majority was required to ratify the constitution. Of course, the coalition should have been formed in a parliamentary manner, not through extra-parliamentary wheeling and dealing as occurred.<sup>812</sup>

Even if, contrary to the Paris Agreement, the CPP and Hun Sen had just thrown in the towel right after the election, FUNCINPEC would have been forced by necessity to reach a division not much different from what was finally realized, for, practically speaking, they did not have personnel to staff a government by themselves. Moreover, quite apart from the fact that nothing in Cambodian political mores, least of all under Shawcross' hero Sihanouk, would make such a concession likely, Hun Sen did not believe the election was fair, and there was reason to fear that the US was prepared to try to buy off sufficient CPP deputies to cross the floor and make a two-thirds majority for US interests.<sup>813</sup>

The election was apparently free and fair in the voting, but in collecting the ballots, transporting ballot boxes, and counting the votes, UNTAC, considering their finances and expertise, were inexcusably sloppy. Locks on boxes were found broken, bundles of cast ballots were found scattered on the roadside, promises to allow party representatives to collectively watch over stored ballot boxes along with UNTAC personnel were broken at the last minute, and the protocol for counting and recording votes was often violated.

I have not seen evidence that all of this decisively affected the result, but it gave encouragement to Cambodians who had never trusted UNTAC. The mistrust of UNTAC and the election was not unreasonable. The Cambodians knew that UNTAC was peppered from top to bottom with people who considered that their job was to defeat the SOC-CPP and replace it with non-communist parties, preferably, of course, by means of a fair democratic election.

The leadership of UNTAC 12, Timothy Carney and Stephen Heder, were the clearest examples of Cambodia experts who were professional anti-PRK activists. At the same time, in spite of the acknowledged lack of Cambodia expertise at all levels of UNTAC, Cambodia specialists who had shown sympathy for the PRK during the 1980s were unwelcome, while almost anyone

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<sup>812</sup> For the details see "Revisiting the legalities of '93", *PPP* vol. 7, no. 10, 22 May-4 June 1998; and Vickery, *Cambodia a Political Survey*, pp. 79-81.

<sup>813</sup> Reported by Raoul Jennar, "Cambodian Chronicles X", 29 June 1993.

strongly supportive of anti-PRK parties was taken into UNTAC ranks – including the wife of one of FUNCINPEC’s top men, Prince Sirivudh.

In noting that “Hun Sen would not step aside”, all of this must be taken into consideration.

People voted, and Hun Sen lost, “despite intimidation”, Shawcross says, and cites Ledgerwood in the book he likes that, “the People’s Party had behaved brutally in many parts of the country”. Yes, there was brutality, and it was given full, even more than full, coverage by most of the journalists in Cambodia at the time, and by Heder’s and Ledgerwood’s UNTAC 12.

Yet in the end the statistics did not accord with the noise, and the two CPP officials most often named as responsible, Sar Kheng and Sin Song, were invited to the US a few months after the election. One of them, the one most likely to have been guilty, Sin Song, figures anonymously in what is perhaps Shawcross’ most disgraceful sentence (p. 43), “People’s Party officials opposed to Hun Sen have been sentenced to long prison terms for plotting coups”.

This is so twisted I at first could not think of what might have been meant. But it must refer to the coup planned in July 1994, and which almost came off, led by Prince Chakrapong and Sin Song, earlier a guest in the US. Apparently Shawcross would forgive his election misdeeds as long as he later turned against Hun Sen.<sup>814</sup>

Now we can end with the essence of the book review. Shawcross objects to Kiernan’s argument that the KR policy was motivated by anti-Vietnamese racism. The argument has its weak points, although Shawcross is not qualified to discuss them. Instead, he just reiterates the tired old clichés about Marxism-Leninism, Stalinism, etc., and he is quite wrong, as I showed above, in claiming that it was the “Vietnamese propagandists and their friends” who liked to describe Pol Pot as an Asian Hitler. They rather insisted he was an Asian Mao. Shawcross prefers ‘Asian Stalin’, but that is not at all accurate.<sup>815</sup>

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<sup>814</sup> Responsibility for pre-election violence in 1992-93 has never been adequately explained. Not only were Sar Kheng and Sin Song implicitly exonerated by their invitations to the US, but the clear split between Hun Sen and Sin Song right after the election meant that he was no longer useful for anti-Hun Sen propaganda, a situation made even more certain by his involvement in the coup plot in July 1994 (see *PPP* 3/14, 15-28 July 1994), while by 1994 Sar Kheng was being treated by foreign journalists and diplomats as one of Cambodia’s ‘Great White Hopes’ for Democracy against the ‘dictatorial’ Hun Sen.

An Asian diplomat with long experience in Cambodia told me that he believed the pre-election violence, to the extent it was centrally planned, had been organized by a third person, whom he knew rather well. See Vickery, *Cambodia: A Political Survey*, pp. 132-133.

<sup>815</sup> Weirdest of all is David Chandler’s suggestion that DK was like Ceausescu’s Romania (*Chandler, A History*, third edition, p. 231, removed from fourth edition.), which exhibits absolute and unnecessary ignorance of that country, whether under Stalinism, post-Stalinism, or during 1990s-present ersatz capitalist democracy.

Shawcross also asserts that Kiernan “fails to take adequate account of the work of other scholars”, and I must admit that in this area Shawcross is a real expert. An example of his talent is, “the massacres and internal purges conducted by the Khmer Rouge ... were of a different order” [that is, not racist], “as the Cambodian scholar Steve Heder and others have shown”. Steve Heder has done far less than Kiernan to analyze the intricacies of KR brutalities, and as for the “others”, Shawcross would rather lose an arm than name them.

Shawcross also takes Kiernan to task for criticizing the work of other Cambodia scholars, at least those whom Shawcross likes. Shawcross seems to think that once the people he approves put something on paper it becomes sacred (some of them think the same thing), but it is an essential quality of academic work that nothing is sacred, and that intellectual progress is made through critique and counter critique. Shawcross the journalist does not understand that.

Another thing about Kiernan that excites Shawcross is that Kiernan doubted the sincerity of the Paris Agreement and UNTAC, and argued that “the agreement was helpful to the Khmer Rouge”. Indeed it was. They got international respectability, and increased their area of operations. Shawcross obviously does not know enough of the details to argue the point, and pontificates from authority to deny it.

The peace plan, he says, “was disastrous for the Khmer Rouge. Their present disintegration is a consequence of their defeat after Paris”. Somehow, the rest of us never noticed that defeat. After the election they seemed as strong as before. They are breaking up now [1996], not because of Paris, but because of the maneuvers of the Phnom Penh government, and in spite of pro-KR action by Sihanouk, Sam Rainsy, Thun Bun Ly, and other Shawcross friends.

A final blast at Kiernan is at the end, in connection with the defection of Ieng Sary, and his amnesty. Shawcross complains that there has not been enough international opposition to the amnesty. No one has presented evidence that he was guilty of mass murder. In particular the Yale University Cambodian Genocide Project headed by Kiernan has not been “forthcoming”, and Shawcross insinuates that it is because Kiernan was once a Khmer Rouge sympathizer, who should, because of that, never have been allowed to lead the Genocide Project. Having said that much, Shawcross undercuts himself by admitting that Kiernan has said Ieng Sary was “deeply implicated”.

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This bit of reverse intellectual history is another of Chandler’s loose cannonballs. Romania under Ceausescu’s early years was in every respect (education, health care, nutrition, working conditions, social freedoms) the opposite of Democratic Kampuchea, and comparable to Western Europe, as I saw on three visits in 1969, 1970, and 1972. A fourth visit took place twenty years later in 1991. Chandler also, in the careless hodgepodge of his book’s final chapter, p. 245, says that Pol Pot favored “Leninist politics”, an example of the perverse use of anti-DK critique noted by Edward Herman (note 109 above).

Shawcross, of course, cannot forgive Kiernan for the rare piece of criticism which Kiernan managed to smoke past Shawcross' guardian editor, or for the merciless review of *Quality of Mercy*.<sup>816</sup>

In the first Kiernan, who traveled with Shawcross in Cambodia in 1980, points out lies in Shawcross' "Burial". In the second he details Shawcross' shiftiness in first falling for the US line that a famine was imminent in Cambodia in 1979, and then when the famine proved mythical, blaming Viet Nam for the false prognosis. This goes far to explain Shawcross' animus against the Kiernan Genocide Project.<sup>817</sup>

The interest Shawcross and a number of others had in the first proposals for what was to become the Cambodian Genocide Project was to make the Vietnamese and PRK appear even worse than Pol Pot, and they probably cannot forgive Kiernan for not allowing it to be steered in that direction.

This is a line that all the right-wing hacks have been taking against Kiernan and the Genocide Project. There could be a reasonable argument if they took a consistent principled position that no one who had ever supported the KR should be involved in the Genocide Project, but that is not the way it has gone. If that principle had been followed it would have been difficult to find a Khmer-literate Cambodia specialist qualified to work on the project.

In particular Shawcross' favorite in the milieu, Steve Heder, remained a KR sympathizer longer than Kiernan, but unlike Kiernan, Heder jumped to support US regime positions. Kiernan is under anathema because he did not make that trendy switch, which made Heder the favorite Cambodia scholar of the US regime, at least until 1993, and of right-wing, trendy, and market-oriented journalists.<sup>818</sup>

Heder then, and his colleagues, and their book, get unqualified praise from Shawcross. They "are the Western Cambodia scholars of the future", and are not like "the previous generation", "embroiled in internecine leftist disputes for years". Indeed, most of them are new on the scene, but to say they are the next generation of Greats, at least based on this book, is ideological fantasy (Shawcross would in any case be unqualified to judge).

Heder, however, in terms of output, is generationally slightly older than Kiernan, and his record for "internecine leftist disputes" (now anti-leftist disputes) is perhaps even longer. Their book is not free of disputation either, but in contrast to the good old internecine lefty type, they rely on assertions from authority and throw-away lines rather than argument.

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<sup>816</sup> *NYRB* 27 Sept 1984; *BCAS* 18/1, Jan-March 1986.

<sup>817</sup> See Heder on the same subject below, and a switch by Shawcross, p. 500.

<sup>818</sup> See again, for Heder's position in 1979, "Interview with Southeast Asian scholars [Steven R. Heder and George C. Hildebrand], A close-up look at Vietnam's invasion of Kampuchea", *The Call*, New York, 5 March 1979, in which Heder and Hildebrand took strong pro-DK and anti-Viet Nam positions.

Heder's latest polemic was against the Genocide Project, for not providing information critical of Ieng Sary's amnesty (*Phnom Penh Post* 18-30 October 1996), yet two months later at a conference in Melbourne he was arguing that Ieng Sary had not been in a position to be responsible for mass murder. In particular he had not persuaded Cambodians studying abroad to return knowing they were to be killed. They did not have to be persuaded – they desired to return.<sup>819</sup>

Earlier Heder had told the *Washington Post* that Ieng Sary was different, “more reasonable” than the rest of the KR leadership; in the words of *WP*, citing Heder, “those differences may have existed during the 3 1/2 years of Khmer Rouge rule ... with Ieng Sary advocating a more tolerant attitude ... Ieng Sary was never as powerful as subsequent Vietnamese and government propaganda made him out to be”. In Heder's words, “There's no evidence to suggest that Ieng Sary was ever No. 2, or that he had the kind of power base to allow him to enforce his will”.<sup>820</sup>

At about the same time he was quoted on French radio as saying, “according to the documents I have referred to, Mr. Ieng Sary is the only one, among Khmer Rouge leaders, about whom I have so far been unable to gather tangible evidence showing that he initiated or applied purges against intellectuals”. Interestingly this was in a statement by Ieng Sary's former DK foreign Ministry subordinate Suong Sikoeun, utilizing Heder to exonerate Ieng Sary.<sup>821</sup>

Since I showed in my comments on Shawcross' earlier work that after 1979 he experienced a Pauline (St. Paul, that is, not the GDR nurse in Kompong Thom in 1980) epiphany, and took a Damascene road toward respectability by moving toward US regime positions on Cambodia, readers may wonder where he is now, having accused the US embassy in Phnom Penh of lack of concern over human rights.

I think Shawcross himself may wonder where he is. In fact he has been cast adrift by changes in the US position on Cambodia, changes which were all the more disconcerting because entirely unannounced.

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<sup>819</sup> The conference was “Cambodia: Power, Myth and Memory”, Centre for Southeast Asian Studies, Monash University, 11-13 December 1996, from notes of a participant. From my own research I can confirm that there was no lack of Cambodians who strongly desired to return after April 1975 and that persuasion was not required.

<sup>820</sup> Keith Richburg, “Timing of Khmer Rouge Defections Suggests Possible Role by China”, *Washington Post*, 24 Aug 1996, p. A18.

<sup>821</sup> See *PPP* no. 5/23, 15-28 Nov 1996, p. 7. In 1984 Heder was putting out a different line: “If Pol Pot and his former foreign minister, Ieng Sary, were to disappear, the changes in Khmer Rouge policy would be more credible”, implicitly treating Ieng Sary as number 2 in an article in which there was no mention of any other Khmer Rouge leaders (Steve Heder and Ben Kiernan, in separate sections, “Why Pol Pot? Roots of the Cambodian Tragedy”, *Indochina Issues* 52, December 1984, p. 7).

From 1977 certain important elements of the US regime began to see the utility of Pol Pot and his KR in the ongoing campaign to block the recovery of Vietnam. After 1979 US support for rehabilitation of the nearly destroyed KR was clear, and everything was premised on the destruction of the PRK in Phnom Penh. The various projects failed as the PRK grew stronger, and the tripartite Coalition showed inability to either reconquer the country or present itself as an acceptable alternative.

The Paris Agreement was the last phase, much watered down from previous anti-PRK proposals, and agreed to by the SOC (previous PRK) in Phnom Penh because with the collapse of the USSR and withdrawal of Vietnam their backs were against a wall.

During the election period US influence was still entirely in favor of elimination of the SOC, and the chief representative of the US hard line was Timothy Carney, chief of UNTAC 12, and a friend of Shawcross, who was seen in the international community as much more important than the US Chargé d'Affaires, later ambassador, Charles Twining. The main journalistic conduit for this policy was Nate Thayer, who often seemed to be conveying information from leaked UNTAC 12 documents.

In the US election of 1992, however, the first Bush regime was replaced, and soon after the Cambodian election Carney, instead of becoming ambassador as most had predicted, was quietly removed from Phnom Penh. Then the two SOC officials most blamed for instigating election violence, Sar Kheng and Sin Song, were invited to the US.

Thayer wrote one shocked article in *Phnom Penh Post*, then, instead of pursuing the matter like a good investigative reporter, dropped it like the hot potato it was, apparently having been apprised that there was a new line. Then his writings adopted a nitpicking critical tone against Twining, and, like Shawcross now, critical of the allegedly declining US interest in Human rights, etc. When the pending royalist coup, including Sin Song, was quashed in July 1994, Thayer, like Shawcross now, wrote supportively of the plotters.<sup>822</sup>

Obviously the Clinton administration decided to drop the vindictive policy against Vietnam with Cambodia as a tool, and began to more realistically assess the Cambodian situation for itself. This has led to a realization that whatever the weaknesses of Hun Sen's CPP, and in spite of the troubling aggressiveness of his rhetoric, they are the only group able to run the country, and that Hun Sen is far more capable than any of his rivals, in particular superior to Ranariddh and Sam Rainsy.

What the big players in the international community seem to want now is stability and economic growth. They are no longer trying to destroy Viet Nam,

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<sup>822</sup> See Thayer, "New govt: who's really in control", *PPP*, vol. 2. no. 24, 19 November-2 December 1993; Thayer, "Fury over Sin Song's trip to US", *PPP* vol. 3, no. 3, 11-24 February 1994, and *PPP* 3/14, 15-28 July 1994.



and they are not interested in pursuing ideological fantasies of instant democracy if only some member of the anti-communist elite could take power. As one leading self-identified ‘human rights’ lawyer put it, if Sam Rainsy were in power, he would be no different from Hun Sen (as viewed by that lawyer).<sup>823</sup>

Shawcross and Thayer were caught out on a limb which was cut from under them, and are reduced to collecting and regurgitating political gossip. US authorities no longer take positions Shawcross likes, but having cut himself off from everything to their left, he has nowhere to go.

Above I commented on Shawcross’ qualification of UNTAC as a “postmodern colonialism”. It is unclear what ‘postmodern’ is supposed to mean here. Perhaps it is just one of the currently trendy buzzwords tossed in to make this colonialism ‘good’. The old colonialists thought they were doing good too.

Shawcross, the once vicarious freedom-fighter has come full circle and become a vicarious colonialist. David Chandler, in his Foreword to the Heder-Ledgerwood book also brought up the colonialist parallel, not only making this ‘postmodern’ colonialism look good, but managing to give a positive spin to the old as well. This illustrates the utter ideological vacuum into which some Cambodia scholarship has fallen.

What we have in Shawcross is a market journalist adrift and searching for an ideological patron. The disintegrative effects of the 1991 Paris Accord and UNTAC have created a free field for carpet-bagger scribblers, scraping up crumbs of political gossip, just as they opened the doors to labor-choking carpet-bagger investors from the capitalist states of Asia, and clear-cutting Thai loggers.

Just one month after publication of “The Tragedy”, Shawcross did another about-face in his “The Cambodian Tragedy, Cont’d” on which I wrote as follows, with the comment disseminated over the e-mail net SEASIA-L.

#### Shawcross Recants (1997)<sup>824</sup>

In its issue of 19 December 1996 *NYRB* (pp.73-4) published the most peculiar of all Shawcross articles on Cambodia.

It starts with a claim to on-the-spot news-gathering, “During a visit to Phnom Penh after my article on Cambodia appeared in these pages” (referring to “The Tragedy of Cambodia”, *NYRB* 14 November 1996). If so, Shawcross must have been in impenetrable incognito, for no one in Phnom Penh saw him at that time,

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<sup>823</sup> This was Brad Adams, who expressed this opinion to me in Phnom Penh in December 1996, but who has developed into one of the noisiest critics of the Hun Sen-led government, by default giving support, in 1998, to Rainsy. Another interesting item was his agreement with me on the shocking behavior of IRI in bringing an El Salvadoran ARENA party leader to Cambodia (see p. 500, below).

<sup>824</sup> Michael Vickery, essay posted on SEASIA-L, 5 May 1997.

although many remembered him on the October visit preceding the article to which he referred (I was in Phnom Penh from 7 to 19 December).

Perhaps the incognito was achieved through movement within Cambodia at a constant speed of Mach 4, which could justify the claim to have arrived after his previous article was published on 14 November, and yet have a new article ready to go from Phnom Penh already on 14 November (date at the end of his 19 December article, p. 74).

True to form, Shawcross again found the country “perplexing”, in fact “more perplexing than ever”, and the reader is perplexed about the purpose of the article because there is nothing new about Cambodia which had not appeared elsewhere in the international press.

Yet there is something very new, for Shawcross. Referring to the amnesty for Ieng Sary, Shawcross says that “the best hope of finding the necessary evidence [for eventually bringing Ieng Sary to trial] lies with the State Department’s Genocide Project, headed by Ben Kiernan. His report, which Western observers in Phnom Penh told me they think has been well researched, will soon be issued”.

This recantation must have been the reason for the new article, and it is an 180 degree turn-around from the condemnations of Kiernan’s work found in his 14 November *NYRB* article, and in a letter to *Phnom Penh Post* published in its issue of 18-30 October (vol 5, No 21, p. 6), and datelined ‘England’, thus apparently after his October trip. One may only speculate about the reason for Shawcross’ recantation.

I do not flatter myself that it was because of my letter on the subject in *Phnom Penh Post* 15-28 November, if by chance he snatched it up on an invisible supersonic swish through the *PPP* office. But if it was really because of “Western observers in Phnom Penh”, he would probably have seen them in October, before writing the nasty things about Kiernan’s project which appeared at the end of that month and in mid-November.

Switching lines on Kiernan and the Genocide Project implies another switch – on the Heder-Ledgerwood book which Shawcross reviewed so warmly in his 14 November *NYRB* article, and which he used as a device against Kiernan. Could it be that Shawcross has been turned off by the evidence that the Heder-Ledgerwood (and Timothy Carney) crowd, in their role as UNTAC 12, concealed evidence of KR genocide, in fact the only hard evidence so far produced?

The ‘Heder-Ledgerwood’ book to which I have referred in my treatments of Shawcross is *Propaganda, Politics, and Violence in Cambodia*, with the trendy subtitle *Democratic Transition under United Nations Peace-keeping*, cited above (note 676) .

It is an interesting work, in several ways, and Shawcross’ treatment did not really do it justice. It contains papers by seven persons with some degree of Cambodia

expertise who worked together in UNTAC 12, the “Information and Education Component” of the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC). The papers were first presented at the Association for Asian Studies conference in Boston in March 1994.

### Comments on Propaganda, Politics, and Violence in Cambodia (1996)<sup>825</sup>

The “Foreword” by David Chandler sets the tone. His comparison of this group of mostly neophytes with some of the “grand old men” of Southeast Asian studies, “Coedès, Windstedt [*sic*], Mus, or Furnivall”, is the purest hype.

It is valid only to the extent that employees of UNTAC 12, like the old scholars named by Chandler, were also working for a type of colonialism, which is not the line of comparison which Chandler wished to emphasize, pushing it aside with “the colonial parallel, which can’t be carried very far, was dear to some critics of UNTAC who saw Info-Ed as an ‘Anglo-Saxon’ conspiracy”, evidence for which, according to Chandler, “has never been forthcoming”.<sup>826</sup>

This is a neat bit of Chandler’s typical ground-shifting, suggesting to the unwary that it was just a question of jealous French rivalry, in order for Chandler to get round a real credibility problem with UNTAC 12, its domination, not by ‘Anglo-Saxons’, but by US figures who may reasonably be called professional enemies of the PRK-SOC.

The director of UNTAC 12 was Timothy Carney, a US. Foreign Service officer with a long record of intervention in Cambodian affairs, including the negotiations with the KR in 1979-1980, which helped restore them as a major threat to the new government in Phnom Penh. Carney’s Deputy was Stephen Heder, joint editor of this book, and a campaigner, via the US State Department, the US congress, the Lawyers’ Committee for International Human Rights, and Amnesty International, against the PRK-SOC since 1980.<sup>827</sup>

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<sup>825</sup> Michael Vickery, unpublished essay, 1996.

<sup>826</sup> George Coedès was the leading French scholar of Cambodian epigraphy, both Sanskrit and Khmer, and author of a famous general history of ancient Southeast Asia; Richard Winstedt was a British official in Malaya and scholar of Malay literature and history; Paul Mus, who grew up in Vietnam in the 1920s and 1930s, is famous for scholarship on Buddhism, Sanskrit literature, the Cham, and Vietnamese society; and John Furnivall, a British official in Burma, produced some of the best work on the society and economy of that country.

<sup>827</sup> See above, pp. 281 ff. In 1979-80 Heder was financed by the State Department to do research in the Cambodian refugee camps (see the bibliography of his research results, and my comments, in *Cambodia 1975-1982*, chapter 4); he then summarized his conclusions in, “Statement by Stephen R. Heder, Ph.D. Candidate, Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University before the Subcommittee on Asian and Pacific Affairs on US Policy in the Indochina Region Since Vietnam’s Occupation of Kampuchea”,

Peculiarly, there is no mention, either in Chandler's "Foreword", or in the entire book, of Carney, a friend and former State Department colleague of Chandler, who at least deserved some credit in an Acknowledgement. Had he not hired the persons who wrote this book, they would not have gotten into positions which have boosted them into leaders of trendy new Cambodia scholarship.<sup>828</sup>

Did Carney insist that he not be mentioned? This in itself would be a matter of historical interest. If so, could it have been related to his apparent desire to distance himself from Heder, as seen in his treatment of Heder's analysis of the post-election secession in 1993 (see note 787).

The international community in Phnom Penh during UNTAC did not talk about an 'Anglo-Saxon' conspiracy, but about heavy-handed American domination of a critical unit, and depending on the degree of cynicism, the reaction was either shock or amusement.

The blatancy was such that some of the first people they tried to recruit for their Cambodia expertise refused to work for them, notwithstanding the princely, or princessly, monetary reward (salary and per diem together over \$7,000 per month tax-free at the level of the contributors of this book, except Heder who as Deputy-Director must have had more).<sup>829</sup>

I personally know three such *refuseniks*, and when in 1992 I first met Ledgerwood, who had been working for some time on various genuine scholarly projects in Cambodia, and was not yet violently anti-PRK, she was debating the propriety of working for Carney and Heder because of their records in Cambodian affairs.

Besides the three *refuseniks* known to me personally, I was reliably informed by international NGO acquaintances that some of their Khmer personnel had been approached by UNTAC 12, but had refused to join; apparently also on principle, for UNTAC pay was better than wages anywhere else.

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Wednesday, October 21, 1981; and parlayed this into participation in the Lawyers' Committee propaganda report and several years work for Amnesty.

<sup>828</sup> Poor Carney seems to be suffering generally from refusal to credit his roles in foreign policy achievements. In *Time* 23 December 1996 (Asian edition subscription copy), p. 27, "Bail Bondsman to the World", about Congressman Bill Richardson's rescue of three Red Cross workers from Sudanese guerrillas, a picture shows five men, two caucasians and two Africans seated around a table and nine Africans standing behind them. Richardson is seated second from right, with the Sudanese commander on his right, and on the far left is the other caucasian, US Ambassador to the Sudan Timothy Carney, nowhere mentioned in the article, which notes merely that "Richardson and a State Department team were flying to Gogual", the site of the meeting.

<sup>829</sup> Note Chandler, *A History*, third edition, p. 240, "Much of the [UNTAC] money had gone into inflated salaries".

The objective of the book, and of five of its eight chapters, was to argue that the campaign leading up to the 1993 election was extremely violent, and that primary responsibility lay with the CPP/SOC.<sup>830</sup>

Although this was the tendency of most journalism on Cambodia during that period, it was then focused on Sin Song and Sar Kheng as putative organizers of the violence. Interestingly, Sin Song is not mentioned at all in this book, and there is no attempt to imply that Sar Kheng was involved in the violence against FUNCINPEC. Of course, by the time this book was being prepared, Sin Song and Sar Kheng had been exonerated, as it were, by post-election invitations to the US (see p. 481), and it would have been embarrassing for the Heder-Ledgerwood group to refer to them in that way.

Neither is attention given to the FUNCINPEC-SOC alliance signed in November 1991 but broken in November 1992, and about which Ashley and Heder later made so much noise in other contexts.<sup>831</sup>

In their joint first chapter on “Politics of Violence”, Heder and Ledgerwood, following a summary of Cambodia’s political history, note pertinently the violence of its society, a description of UNTAC and their own UNTAC 12 unit, and in a long final footnote show their sensitivity to the question of their political neutrality evoked above.

The *pièce de résistance* in this book must be Heder’s chapter 3, “The Resumption of Armed Struggle by the Party of Democratic Kampuchea: Evidence from National Army of Democratic Kampuchea ‘Self-Demobilizers’”.

With interviews of 81 DK defectors between July 1992 and August 1993, he demonstrates that the DK leadership, right up to Pol Pot, had decided, after a period of non-aggression, to institute a policy of killing any and all Vietnamese, man, woman, child, combattant or civilian, which, it seems to me, constitutes genocide even according to the most strict definitions, and, moreover, was the first unambiguous evidence of a genocidal **policy** among the ‘Khmer Rouge’ at any time.

This period, we should recall, was also that when increasing violence against FUNCINPEC, usually blamed on SOC, ended all potential electoral cooperation

<sup>830</sup> These are the chapters by Heder, Ledgerwood, Ashley and Marston. Jordens shows a quite different slant, as will be discussed here, while Frieson and Edwards, although evincing the same mind set, focus on ancillary issues.

Edwards’ chapter 2, “Imaging the Other in Cambodian Nationalist Discourse” is a confusing jumble of, I suppose, post-modern trendiness concerning a legitimate subject, ethnic prejudices in Cambodia. Besides some dubious assertions, it is marred by vulgarity of expression – “strut his stuff” (p. 50), “propaganda spewed” (51), “flip side” (54, 68), “let rip with accusations” (57), and contrary to what the author hoped, supports accusations of partisanship within UNTAC 12.

<sup>831</sup> See footnote 710 above and Heder, “Paranoia, genocide and the history books”, *PPP* 4/22, 3-16 Nov, 1995, p. 16, “the signing of political and military alliances between FUNCINPEC and the Cambodian People’s Party in late 1991”.

between the two parties, and followed Pol Pot's February 1992 talk to his colleagues in which he showed concern for Loridon's aggressive attitude and for the danger of Ranariddh defecting from the CGDK triple alliance to SOC.

What did Heder, or his immediate superiors, or the upper levels of UNTAC, do with this shocking revelation – that one of the parties whom they were insisting (in fact they were leaning over backwards for it) must be part of the election had launched a campaign of mass murder against an ethnic minority, presumably in the belief that it would advance their interests in the coming new political arrangements?

So far as I have been able to determine, they did nothing. I was in Cambodia for the election, from early May to late June 1993, and I checked the press and talked to journalists who had been present from 1992, and discovered that there had been no announcement either to the press, or to the UNTAC foreign community, or least of all to the Vietnamese who were in immediate danger, about the new KR threat. Following publication of this book, I again checked in Phnom Penh, and no journalist or publisher could recall any such thing.

Of course, there is a caveat. Heder's record shows such unreliability that it is impossible to completely accept his analysis without checking the original records of interviews, something no doubt now impossible given the way in which UNTAC records, especially those of UNTAC 12, were dispersed after the election.<sup>832</sup>

It is true, however, and is acknowledged in this book, that violence by PDK forces against Vietnamese did increase at that time, and that PDK in general perpetrated more pre-election violence than SOC.<sup>833</sup>

Heder's chapter also shows, if read carefully, that KR influence spread under UNTAC, in contrast to the assertions of his co-editor Ledgerwood.

Ledgerwood's chapter is about violence by the Cambodian government against political opponents before the election. It begins with a description of the exhumation from a well of the victim of a particularly gruesome murder. Such violence did occur, and a description of it is a legitimate part of the history of the period. She goes too far, however, in asserting that it was "part of a pattern", something hardly supported by the statistics she provides. That is, a report from UNTAC at the end of May 1993 said "twenty-one of the twenty-seven incidents of 'political violence [during March to May] against members of political parties' were attributed to SOC, and they were said to have resulted in eleven deaths".

Ledgerwood also describes several incidents which would appear to have been local conflicts, and she acknowledges that no 'smoking gun' was found nor

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<sup>832</sup> On Heder's shiftiness see Ben Kiernan, "Implication and Accountability", *Bangkok Post*, Sunday, January 31, 1999, Guest Column/Cambodia.

<sup>833</sup> See Ledgerwood, p. 117. This is also clear in the chapters by Jordens and Ashley.

any “document [which] contained a direct order from on high to kill nor reported from below the carrying out of a political assassination”, while FUNCINPEC made investigation difficult for UNTAC “by inundating the offices with complaints”, including rumors which could not be traced.<sup>834</sup>

Even the grisly case of Mr. Hou Leang Ban with which Ledgerwood opens her story shows elements suggesting there was more than met her eye, especially when compared with a detail in Heder’s chapter.

There, Heder said that some PDK self-demobilizers had been told they would receive no further support from the PDK, and that they had to become self-supporting through agriculture or “such enterprises as logging”. Ledgerwood’s victim “had his own lumber mill” which local authorities wished to close because “the people working there were of ‘unknown composition’, and no report whatsoever about them has been made to the local state power”.

This suggests clearly that they were suspected KR. In her final footnote Ledgerwood says the SOC claimed that Hou Leang Ban’s ownership of a sawmill suggested he had contacts with the KR and that they had killed him, which Ledgerwood asserts was “patently ridiculous”, in spite of Heder’s acknowledgment of a relationship.<sup>835</sup>

More detail about the background of Hou Leang Ban would have been useful. According to Ledgerwood, he joined CPP in early 1992, during the time of the FUNCINPEC-SOC alliance, then switched to FUNCINPEC in November 1992 just when that alliance was breaking down. All that time, besides his lumber mill, he worked in the district SOC finance office. A thorough investigation of his case should have sought to determine what his position had been previously (1979-1992), and his experiences during DK.<sup>836</sup> But that might have impeded Ledgerwood’s rush to judgment against the SOC alone.

As for the area of KR power and influence, she apparently did not read Heder’s chapter, and in her note 13 criticizes “exaggerated claims of PDK gains ... in foreign media and reproduced inside UNTAC”, in particularly naming the work of Ben Kiernan, against whom Heder has shown considerable hostility.<sup>837</sup>

David Ashley in his chapter describes violence in another province, Battambang, in Cambodia’s Northwest, but more dispassionately, noting pertinently Battambang’s complex political history; a “traditionally rebellious” province which may predispose to violence.

<sup>834</sup> “Patterns of CPP Political Repression and Violence During the UNTAC Period”, quotations pp. 116, 120-121, 126.

<sup>835</sup> Heder-Ledgerwood, pp. 77, 114, 127, footnote 22, p. 133.

<sup>836</sup> Heder-Ledgerwood, p. 115.

<sup>837</sup> See Kiernan’s solid research on this point in Ben Kiernan, “Introduction”, in *Genocide and Democracy in Cambodia*, pp. 9-32, note 42, p. 29.

Although his tone is also unsympathetic to the PRK-SOC regime, he admits that it was unclear how “acts of political violence were organized”, that “in many cases the perpetrators could not be identified”, or “responsibility could be clearly traced to individual subdistrict or district [officials] or police figures”, and in some minor cases “obvious personal animosity had long existed between the perpetrator and the victim”. Thus, contrary to the journalism noted above accusing Sar Kheng and Sin Song, he says the central government leadership “may or may not have been actively involved”.<sup>838</sup>

Another chapter of interest is that of John Marston on the media, pp. 208-242, “Cambodian News Media in the UNTAC period and after”. Although with an obvious bias against what prevailed before UNTAC, there is useful description of new press organs from 1993, particularly those which took an anti-SOC position, which for Marston qualified them as ‘neutral’.

For the pre-UNTAC period it is quite inadequate, affirming merely that the press was ‘socialist’ (bad), replaced after 1993 by ‘corporate ownership’ (good). The earlier newspapers were socialist because “they were controlled by the state” and were dependent on “political and economic links to countries that identified themselves as socialist ... in particular Vietnam”. Even more peculiar as analysis is that even after “the Soviet Union no longer existed and Vietnamese troops and advisers had left ... the media had been shaped by these influences and remained identified with them in the public mind”.

‘Socialism’ of the media was also seen “in that, following a Leninist model, they were under the direction and review of the “Commission for Propaganda and Education of the Central Committee of the [Party]”. Whatever the truth of this, it is much too simplistic, and Marston cites no evidence in support.

For evidence of a much more complex situation see above, pp. 321, 325 on the actual existing press pre-UNTAC in 1990, and description of press criticism of the courts. Marston, without reference to any evidence, says (p. 211) “this led to repression ... when the party decided that the criticism was going too far”.

Perhaps the most interesting detail in Marston for some of us who were interested in the press at the time, but not just as an exercise against the SOC, is that the newspaper *Udomkate Khmaer/Oudomkati khmer*, the paper for which the murdered Thun Bun Ly [see pp. 450 ff.] wrote, was “published by a high-ranking BLDP [Son Sann party] figure” and was one of several papers known for its publication of “inflammatory anti-Vietnamese articles”, which “espoused positions similar to the anti-Vietnamese stance of the PDK [KR], as manifested in its regular broadcasts from the border”. Similar material, according to

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<sup>838</sup> Heder-Ledgerwood, page 172.



Marston, also appeared in a FUNCINPEC newspaper, *Khmer Youth Voice* [in English translation].<sup>839</sup>

That was indeed true. I followed *Oudomkati khmer* (title in correct English translation ‘*Khmer Ideal*’), during the election, and their articles carried an extreme chauvinist anti-Vietnamese content.

Like Pol Pot in his February 1992 conference (see p. 401 ff.), they called the Cambodian government puppets of the Vietnamese, who were still allegedly running the country, and asserted that Cambodia was in danger of becoming a second Champa, or suffering the fate of Kampuchea Krom (Viet Nam south of Saigon, French Cochinchina), that is, being absorbed into Viet Nam. That was the straight Khmer Rouge line, and *Khmer Ideal* added to it that the Vietnamese advisers to the PRK used to say, “to get rid of Pol Pot you must get rid of all Khmer”.

*Khmer Ideal* not only followed the KR line, but in one of its anti-Vietnamese articles, apparently to give their racism the authority of Western opinion, they concluded with, “as Mr. Santoli and Mr. Jeldres have said’ ... ‘the Cambodian Peace Process has fallen into the Yuon warmongering strategy; the Phnom Penh government has no independent policy, but just acts as the Yuon jerk the strings”<sup>840</sup>.

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<sup>839</sup> Marston in Heder-Ledgerwood, p. 220. Marston, however, did not mention Thun Bun Ly or his murder. Thun Bun Ly’s newspaper was identified as *Oudomkati khmer* in *PPP* 5/11, 31 May-13 June 1996, p. 5.

<sup>840</sup> Al Santoli emerged as a commentator on Cambodia with an article in *The New Republic* in May 1983, which started with a description of an attack from the PRK side on the Khmer Rouge base of Phnom Chhat, which Santoli refused to acknowledge as a Khmer Rouge base, treating it as an ordinary refugee camp.

He then charged the PRK with instituting starvation; “farming was severely restricted” during the first year of the Vietnamese occupation “which created a famine”, and he repeated the CIA propaganda figure of 700,000 dead of starvation during that first year, asserting moreover that “Hanoi’s ruthless imperial drive killed as many Cambodians in one year as died in the five years” of Pol Pot. Then, still after 1979, “the Buddhist religion ... is suppressed [and] temples are used for political indoctrination meetings”, and the country was flooded with Vietnamese settlers. See Al Santoli, “The New Indochina War”, *The New Republic*, 30 May 1983, pp. 19-23.

On these CIA figures, which Santoli sourced to Stephen Morris, see Vickery, “Democratic Kampuchea: CIA to the Rescue”, *BCAS*. For the other derogatory material about the PRK Santoli relied on Elizabeth Becker’s 1983 *Washington Post* articles which I have discussed above, pp. 166, ff.

Later on, Al Santoli was an assistant to Dana Rohrabacher in his campaign to undermine SOC Cambodia in favor of the anti-Vietnamese racist Sam Rainsy. Julio Jeldres was an immigrant from Allende’s Chile (see note 763 above) to Australia in the early 1970s, who managed to get into Sihanouk’s entourage, and became an English-language propagandist against Sihanouk’s enemies, which then included the PRK/SOC, and in particular their supporters among western academics.

This, note, was just one week before the 1993 election. These approving citations, from old Vietnam war-monger Al Santoli and Sihanouk minion Julio

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After the Paris Agreement was signed Jeldres received \$A20,000 Australian financing, arranged by Gareth Evans, to set up a “Khmer Institute for Democracy”, which was “the brainchild of Cambodian exiles in California”, and which continued the same propaganda functions (Leo Dobbs, “Former Royal Aide Opens Think Tank”, *PPP*, 1/10, 20 November-3 December, 1992, p. 2, ‘former’ referring to the fact that Jeldres had announced his resignation from Sihanouk’s service; to which he later returned, becoming Sihanouk’s official biographer).

Not long before the election in May 1993 William Shawcross made a documentary film in Cambodia, including a scene of students in Jeldres’ Institute discussing politics in Khmer, with Jeldres presiding with a benign smile on his face. What the students were saying was strongly sympathetic to the Khmer Rouge, lost of course on Shawcross (whether Jeldres understands Khmer is not known to me, but he must certainly have had some idea of what went on in his classes).

In November 1993 Jeldres’ Khmer Institute for Democracy sponsored a conference of representatives from Khmer NGOs to discuss the Khmer Rouge and immigration. There were demands to limit the entrance of foreigners [read ‘Vietnamese’] to Cambodia, and the head of the Khmer Students and Intellectuals Association said the government and the Khmer Rouge should negotiate (Mang Channo, “NGOs urge action on foreign workers”, *PPP*, 2/23, 5-18 November 1993, p. 19).

The following year Jeldres tried to organize another conference against the proposed law to outlaw the Khmer Rouge, and, apparently for this, he was eased out of the Institute. He had tried to organize a non-government forum in his Khmer Institute for Democracy to discuss the draft law outlawing the Khmer Rouge, the purpose of course being to drum up opposition. Ranariddh forbade Sam Rainsy and Norodom Sirivudh, the government members most vocally opposed to the law, to attend, and Chheang Vun, a CPP member of the assembly designated as new ambassador to Australia, accused Jeldres of interfering in internal affairs and threatened him with expulsion.

This was quite piquant, for Jeldres is a naturalized Australian and his KID, the main NGO hothouse for Khmer Rouge propaganda in Phnom Penh, was financed by Australia, and was apparently a project in which Foreign Minister Gareth Evans had a direct interest. Because of the opposition of Sihanouk, who had faxed a message that he would refuse to sign, the assembly then had to vote a law authorizing Chea Sim, as acting chief of state, to sign the bill outlawing the Khmer Rouge (*Bangkok Post*, 5 July 1994, “Inside Indochina”, “Sihanouk balks at outlaw of KR”).

This does not mean that Jeldres is a crypto-commie KR supporter. Everything he has written, as well as his associations, suggest that he is somewhere on the far right, and, like the Cambodian rightists whom he supports, believes that drawing the KR into the government can further the main right-wing goal – get rid of Hun Sen.

*PPP*, 3/17, 26 August-8 September, 1994, with its record of sympathy for those trying to undermine the government, slanted a report against Chheang Vun (“Controversial Vun set for Canberra posting”), without clearly informing their readers what had been at issue, and at the time the incident occurred did not report it at all. In December 1994, *PPP* publisher Michael Hayes acknowledged to me that the headline about Chheang Vun had been bad, but excused himself on grounds of fatigue. In September 2007 Jeldres signed a book review as “Research Fellow at Monash University’s Asia Institute in Melbourne, Australia” (review of a Czech publication on King Sihanouk, *PPP* 16/17, 24 August-6 September, 2007, p. 6).

Jeldres, were apparently lifted from the California based Khmer and English-language newsletter *Khmer Conscience*, which at the time also took a very soft line on the KR (Marston did not mention any of this, but intriguingly translated the name of Thun Bun Ly's paper, *Oudomkati khmer*, as 'Khmer Conscience', rather than, correctly, 'Khmer Ideal').<sup>841</sup>

In another issue at the time of the secession of several eastern provinces just after the election, under the leadership of a son of Sihanouk, that newspaper published a front-page cartoon showing UNTAC in alliance with the Khmer Rouge saving those provinces from Vietnam.

I did not know that *Khmer Ideal* had been bankrolled by a BLDP figure, unnamed by Marston, but if true it supports the CPP contention that some of their non-communist colleagues in FUNCINPEC and BLDP were really working with the KR, and indicates that, to adapt the prejudicial language of Penny Edwards, "the electoral campaign propaganda spewed [*sic!*] by the Cambodian People's Party to smear all opposition parties ... as enemies of the nation in

<sup>841</sup> The Al Santoli article was possibly "A Strategy to Defeat the Khmer Rouge and Prevent Another War in Cambodia", in *Khmer Conscience*, Vol 6, No 4, November-December 1992, which was a repeat of the main Khmer Rouge arguments, that the Vietnamese must leave Cambodia and UNTAC should take over the government.

He wrote, "Although Hanoi claims to have withdrawn its forces, UNTAC has failed to deter countless thousands of Vietnamese civilians who continue to pour into Cambodia"; "Policy makers must deal realistically, in Cambodian cultural terms [that is, hatred of Vietnamese], with the reasons why the Khmer Rouge are growing stronger ..."; Le Duc Anh is the new President of Viet Nam, but "If Hanoi had truly given up its Cambodia objective [that is, to conquer Cambodia], General Anh would have lost face politically and would have been demoted in the Party".

And, as a true VWR (Vietnam warmonger retreat), Santoli said, "American leadership is needed to guide ill-prepared UNTAC authorities to formulate political action ...". The 'Khmer Ideal'/'*Oudomkati khmer*' issue in question was 15 May 1993.

Another hotbed of anti-Vietnamese hysteria was the 'Preah Sihanouk Raj Center for the Study of Khmer International Studies', now renamed 'Center for Advanced Studies', set up with foreign financing under another returned exile, Thach Bunroeun. Soon after the election its Assistant Coordinator Kao Kim Hourn, was propagating to the international community the old lies that "in thirteen years of its occupation, Vietnam had successfully kept Khmer children and young adults ignorant of their history, to say nothing of Vietnamese language, philosophy and ideas which were imposed on the Khmer people ... what the Vietnamese did to Cambodia in 13 years was the equivalent of a 'brain drain', a total loss to Cambodia's mental resources which it [*sic*] cannot be easily replaced".

Furthermore, he said, quoting his chief, Vietnamese "immigrants also took over Khmer labor and Khmer markets ... brought in Vietnamese prostitutes to destroy Khmer Buddhist culture", and "Vietnam also reinforced the already weakening of Cambodia when it invaded and occupied the Khmer nation for 13 years" (Kao Kim Hourn, "Beware the Soft Imperialists", *PPP*, 2/19, 10-23 September 1993, p. 6.).

cahoots [*sic!*] with the ‘Khmer Rouge’ [does not] appear a purely cynical ploy”.<sup>842</sup>

If this presentation by Marston had appeared in isolation, it could be accepted as an honest, if somewhat prejudiced effort to describe the situation of the press in Phnom Penh in 1992-1993. Situated as is it within this book, however, it must be taken as support for the work of UNTAC 12, and for its political position.

As such it is legitimate to bring into play other public utterances by Marston of direct relevance for the case I am making in this publication.

In a Review Essay on “Post-Pol Pot Cambodia” in, of all places, *Critical Asian Studies*, Marston, in a critical treatment of David Roberts’ *Political Transition in Cambodia*, for allegedly “justifying authoritarianism and dismissing the resistance to it”, maintains, as someone who worked for the Information and Education Division of UNTAC, that that agency “had no bias toward any of the political parties”.

More pertinently, with respect to the Heder-Ledgerwood book and the question of political bias in UNTAC, especially UNTAC 12, in an e-mail exchange, in answer to my dismay at an announcement that the Cambodian government would no longer produce school textbooks teaching about KR atrocities, Marston argued that if evocation of KR atrocities would interfere with attention to brutality by the SOC government, then it would be appropriate to repress such teaching, thus demonstrating the anti-SOC prejudice of UNTAC in general and UNTAC 12 in particular.

Concerning Marston’s own prejudices, which I consider were shared within UNTAC 12, in his *CAS* article he wrote, based on Gottesman, that “Vietnamese authorities vetoed human rights provisions of a constitution” and “removed troublesome Cambodian leaders like Pen Sovan [Sovann] from office”, implicitly, in Marston’s text, when “Cambodian leaders [Pen Sovann] actively tried to build direct links to other Soviet-bloc countries, while Vietnam worked to maintain itself as the principle [*sic!*] foreign contact”.<sup>843</sup>

As I wrote in *Kampuchea*, that interpretation of the Pen Sovann affair was nothing more than western journalistic speculation, and is denied, in his recent book, by Pen Sovann himself, who blames his removal on rivalry within the Cambodian ruling group, in particular hostility from Hun Sen and Sai Phoutang.<sup>844</sup>

As I also wrote in *Kampuchea*, based on comparison of three drafts for a constitution produced by three committees in 1980-1981, the final constitution was less specific about human rights than earlier drafts, but there was no

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<sup>842</sup> Edwards, in Heder-Ledgerwood, p. 51.

<sup>843</sup> John Marston, “Post-Pol Pot Cambodia”, Review Essay, *Critical Asian Studies* 37/3 (September 2005), pp. 501-516. See pp. 503, 506; Gottesman, p. 112.

<sup>844</sup> *Kampuchea* pp. 45-47; Pen Sovann, pp. 203, 191, 208, 216-217.

evidence in material available to me that this was because of interference by Vietnamese, nor does Gottesman show such evidence.

In his detailed treatment, based on official records, of discussions leading to a new 1986 law, the arguments about treatment of those arrested, and of what for example should be considered torture, were among Cambodians, and the only mention of a Vietnamese adviser is that he had supported a “blanket prohibition on physical abuse” (p. 249).

In the Heder-Ledgerwood book only the chapter by Jay Jordens strikes a different tone.

Jay (Justin) Jordens learned Vietnamese in Hanoi in the mid-1980s before studying Khmer in Phnom Penh, and he was perhaps the only foreign UNTAC officer with a good knowledge of both (pitifully few knew either), and one of very few with some sympathy for the Vietnamese. Dare I say he was a double threat?

His chapter in the book is entitled “Persecution of Cambodia’s Ethnic Vietnamese”, and one of its themes is their neglect by UNTAC. He wrote “the peace treaty and the implementation of it by UNTAC in some ways encouraged new killings”; “some of its [UNTAC] action facilitated the practices [killing of Vietnamese] it condemned”. Jordens gives some praise to the Human Rights Component with respect to protection of Vietnamese, but “In this regard, the Human Rights Component received little or no backing from other components and sometimes found itself blocked by their disinterest or opposition”.

Moreover, “another UNTAC component that could have attempted to do considerably more to stem racism aimed at Vietnamese was the Information/-Education Division [Heder’s and Jordens’ UNTAC 12] ... it was impotent vis-a-vis PDK radio and did little more than moderate the tone of racist propaganda being disseminated by other factions”. All of this “fell far short of a real program to deter attacks on Vietnamese”<sup>845</sup>.

In October 1992, according to Jordens, “UNTAC presented a definition of the foreign forces ... [which] gave in to pressures from the PDK, KPNLF, FUNCINPEC to include foreign residents with foreign forces”, that is to treat Vietnamese civilians just like Vietnamese soldiers.<sup>846</sup>

Nowhere in Jordens’ chapter is there any sign he was aware of his colleague Heder’s research which established that from October/November 1992 the PDK had decided on full genocide.<sup>847</sup>

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<sup>845</sup> Quotations respectively from pp. 135, 146, 147.

<sup>846</sup> Jordens, page 148.

<sup>847</sup> Neither, apparently had Marston heard of it. At least in an e-mail exchange, in which I had alleged a cover-up by UNTAC, he refused to answer when I asked point-blank if Heder’s conclusions, now published in his and Ledgerwood’s book, were disseminated. Heder finally provided the following curious explanation.

Jordens provided some statistics relevant to the question of the new PDK genocidal policy. He noted an Amnesty report in July 1993 that in six months to May 1993 (the period on which Heder's evidence was focused) almost 200 Vietnamese were killed by the PDK, although Jordens' note 11 expresses doubt about some of Amnesty's incidents "about which few details were available" (not unexpected – that had been Amnesty's policy in Cambodia reports for years).<sup>848</sup>

Jordens' own statistics (note 11) are 124 Vietnamese killed and 33 missing, presumed killed, from April 1992 to July 1993; and the final report of the Human Rights component said 116 killed during July 1992 to August 1993. Although the time periods are not precisely comparable, the 1992 killings were widely reported in the press, because they were new, unusual incidents, and it is safe to conclude that the great majority of the incidents occurred at the end of 1992 and during the first months of 1993, the time of the election campaign.

My own overview of the situation in 1996, "Cambodia Three Years After", was published in translation in the Swedish political magazine *Kommentar*.

### Cambodia Three Years After (1996)<sup>849</sup>

Three years after the international carnival of the UN-organized national election in Cambodia in May 1993, pessimism prevails among most of the continuing observers of Cambodian affairs.

It would seem that what I wrote, with conscious exaggeration, just after the signing of the Paris Agreement in 1991: "Cambodia survived the war, American bombing, Lon Nol's incompetence, Pol Pot's brutality, and the poverty of the last 12 years, but it may not survive this peace", may have been more prescient than I desired.<sup>850</sup>

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Acknowledging that the UNTAC 12 Analysis/Assessment reports on PDK/KR policy toward Vietnamese were circulated to top UNTAC staff, not to the general public, Heder added, "As for John Marston, he may have been unaware of the contents of these memos because by the time they were written, he was working for the Control Unit of the Information/Education Division, which was responsible for promoting freedom of the press in Cambodia and preventing abuse of this freedom by Cambodian news media. All Analysis/Assessment memos, etc, were copied to the head of this unit, the former chargé d'affaires of the Soviet Embassy in Phnom Penh, Valentin Sviridov. It was up to him to decide about their further distribution. He may have decided not to pass them on to his subordinates".

<sup>848</sup> Jordens, page 139.

<sup>849</sup> "Kambodja en rättvis betraktelse", *Kommentar* (Stockholm) Nr 2/96 (1996), pp. 15-24. Some post-1996 comment has been added here.

<sup>850</sup> See above, pp. 384, ff. and Michael Vickery, "Överlever Kambodja 'freden'", *Kommentar*, Nr 1-2/1992, p. 3.

Three years later the war which the Cambodian population thought would end with the international intervention and election, continues, although at a somewhat reduced level; but its most serious effect for development – an inflated military budget and military control of scarce resources such as forests – may be greater threats to progress than the situation before 1993.

Although certain macroeconomic indicators seem positive – inflation is under control, and there is some real economic growth as measured by free-market standards – the disparity between small very rich groups obviously living far beyond their legitimate incomes, and the mass of the population whose standard of living declines, is increasingly evident with each passing year.

The state, moreover, is too weak to collect normal levels of taxation. One result of the economic imbalance and the siphoning of wealth into dubious channels is that no state salaries provide even a fraction of the income necessary for a minimum decent life, and all civil servants must have other sources, either by neglecting their duties to engage in other jobs, or through corruption. Of course, education, medical care, and even minimal social services have fallen far below their levels in the last half of the 1980s.

International donors are aware of these imbalances, and together with plans for loans to Cambodia, they are asking why local resources cannot be mobilized more effectively. The resources are certainly there, for there is obviously much wealth being wasted on conspicuous consumption.

Mobilization means first of all adequate taxation, and there is no sign that the National Assembly would democratically vote the taxes required. If they did, they might be charged by business interests, both local and foreign, with interference in the free market. This is an area in which the tools given to Cambodia by the West in 1993 are inadequate for the tasks Cambodia has been forced to face.

As an alternative, Cambodian leaders, starting with the two Prime Ministers, have been mobilizing domestic resources for partisan interests through concessions to large foreign investors. Perhaps the most dangerous are the enormous concessions for logging and plantations given to Malaysian and Indonesian companies in the Northeast, and to Thai interests in the Northwest. Yet such concessions are well within normal free market behavior in capitalist Southeast Asia,

The international community in Phnom Penh, and most of the international media, complain that in spite of the great favor done to Cambodia by the Great Powers in bringing democracy to the country, the ungrateful Cambodians, in particular the ‘communists’ of the Cambodian People’s Party, have refused to implement a true multi-party system, and that within the existing government coalition the CPP has held on to more power than they were entitled to after ‘losing’ the election which FUNCINPEC ‘won’.

The government, they say, continues to intimidate opponents, harass the press, engage in corruption, and maintain a regime characterized by gross human

rights violations, and in one of the latest mantras of a certain vocal section of the international community, it promotes a society in which the rights of women and children are increasingly violated. Naturally, these critics blame the government, rather than objective international conjunctures, for the weak economy and ensuing social injustice.

Indeed, most of the foreign media which takes an interest in Cambodia, encouraged by many of the foreign-backed NGOs which sprouted like mushrooms under UNTAC, and sections of the foreign community working in large international organizations, are engaged in a campaign to demonize the Cambodian government that is reminiscent of US-led propaganda against Cambodia and Viet Nam in the 1980s.

In their latest move, NGOs are demanding that the large donor nations should put conditions on their aid to Cambodia pending political changes, a demand also made by the leading opposition politician, Sam Rainsy, who outside of the Khmer Rouge, is the leading manipulator of anti-Vietnamese chauvinism to further his political goals.<sup>851</sup>

With the Paris Agreement the close relationship with Viet Nam was broken, and a new opening was made for cultivation of ethnic hatred. Cambodia was also deprived of Vietnamese help and advice in the transition to capitalism and a free market, which is being managed in Viet Nam in a less disruptive way than in Cambodia. Cambodia was in this way forced into closer relationships with Thailand and Malaysia, which have become models for Cambodia's politics and economy.<sup>[852]</sup>

With the Paris Agreement neither side achieved its aims. The CGDK and their foreign backers had been hoping to dissolve the SOC in advance of elections, or at least reduce them to merely one among four equal factions. The SOC, on the other hand, in view of its increasing success in redeveloping the country and defending it after 1979, had for long assumed that they could hold out until their opponents were forced either to give up and go away, or return to political life within the country on terms set by the SOC.

Had it not been for the collapse of the socialist bloc, on which the PRK-SOC had depended for aid and expertise, and which included the total withdrawal of Vietnamese support from Cambodia in 1989, it seems probable that the SOC would have prevailed. From 1979 to 1989 the sights of the CGDK had to be set lower and lower, while the Phnom Penh side steadily developed, although slowly.

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<sup>851</sup> *The Nation* (Bangkok), 3 June 1996 Opinion, p. A5, "Politics left off the aid donors' agenda".

<sup>852</sup> This was written, remember, in mid-1996. Since then economic and political events in those two countries show that my negative assessment of them as models for Cambodia was not aberrant.



Cambodia has thus been a victim of the same processes as the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. Just as occurred in the former Soviet bloc, the sudden leap from a type of socialism to the free market meant, after 1988-89, a collapse of social services and education, which in spite of Cambodia's precarious situation had shown impressive development after 1979.

There was a decline in living standards for most, but sudden wealth for those who could make use of the new market freedom, too often in ways which if not illegal, were dubious. Luxuries flowed in for those who could pay for them, the most visible being private automobiles. Less visible was the uncontrolled market in weapons, and Cambodia soon came to resemble Thailand, with many people carrying handguns, and willing to use them to settle personal disputes.

Different from the Soviet Bloc, the transition was more clearly imposed from without, and carried out under heavy-handed foreign pressure and an overwhelming foreign presence during 1992 and 1993.

Although the economic effects of their 'Great Leap' from a form of socialism to a free market were apparent before the arrival of UNTAC's roughly 20,000 contingent, they were exacerbated by the flood of new money brought in to finance the UN operation, and as salaries for the highly-paid and free-spending new foreign community of UNTAC, Western aid organizations, plus hangers-on, NGO organizers, and journalists.<sup>853</sup>

This new international community which descended on Cambodia after the 1991 Paris Agreement saw Cambodia at its worst since the early years of the PRK in the 1980s. They had not seen the steady development of 1979-1989, nor had they read of it. They knew little of Cambodia and had been misled by the anti-Phnom Penh and anti-Viet Nam propaganda which had dominated in the Western media.

Thus they imagined that the gross inequalities, corruption, and violence which they saw in 1991-1993 had been typical since 1979, and that the task of UNTAC was to oversee the replacement of an evil regime with a better one under which those problems would be alleviated. When this did not happen, they blamed the Cambodian leaders, not what had been imposed on them by changes in the world economy, or by the interference of the Western Great Powers, together with China.

Although UNTAC left soon after the election, a large number of the new foreign community remained to work with the dozens of NGOs established during 1993, most of them explicitly as activist groups against the Cambodian government. A large new American contingent settled in with USAID and the Asia Foundation, famous for their partisan activities in the 1960s, and they brought generous funding for a number of the new NGOs.

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<sup>853</sup> Even relatively low level foreign employees hired locally by an UNTAC component could earn over US\$7,000 per month, in salary plus per diem, tax-free.

### The post-election situation

After the election all the parties in the Assembly formed a coalition government which was dominated by FUNCINPEC and the CPP. This came about in three stages. First, on June 3, Sihanouk announced the formation of a FUNCINPEC-CPP coalition under himself with his son Prince Ranariddh and Hun Sen, Prime Minister of SOC, as Deputy Prime Ministers. Within 24 hours, following American displeasure, coolness by UNTAC, and reluctance by Ranariddh, Sihanouk renounced this project.<sup>854</sup>

On July 2, following further discussions among Sihanouk and party leaders, the FUNCINPEC-CPP coalition was formed anew, as a Provisional National Government, and after promulgation of the constitution in September the Royal Government, with Sihanouk as King, was formed in October 1993. There were First and Second Prime Ministers, respectively Prince Ranariddh of FUNCINPEC and Hun Sen of CPP, and ministries were divided almost equally. Wherever the minister was from one party, the deputy minister was from the other. BLDP was allotted three ministerial positions, in proportion to its strength.

The National Assembly thus consists of parties which are all in the government, and there is no formal, evident, or institutional opposition. In such a situation there cannot be political or institutional independence of the National Assembly. There are very few, perhaps no, members of the Assembly who represent private interests outside the parties through which they reached the Assembly.

The deputies of the CPP were nearly all party or PRK/SOC state officials before 1993, and that party is thus a bureaucratic party. Most of the deputies from the other two parties were also party workers in exile, or they are professionals who only returned to Cambodia just before the 1993 election, and had no personal or institutional base within the country.

There is no party or faction representing business, workers, or peasants, or any groups or classes outside the parties and government themselves. So far the only opposition has been by individual members of FUNCINPEC and BLDP.

Some, both Cambodians and foreigners, have treated the government coalition as illegitimate, because FUNCINPEC 'won' the election, and should have been allowed to form the new government by itself. A coalition, however, was required by the constitutional provision that the new constitution be ratified by two-thirds of the new parliament, that is 80 out of 120 members. Only through a voting coalition of FUNCINPEC and CPP could that total be reached.

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<sup>854</sup> The US mission in Phnom Penh had "released to the diplomatic corps what is called in official jargon a 'non-paper'. The conclusion of this document was: "We are opposed to the establishment of any interim government" (*The Nation*, Bangkok 10 June 1993, "Let the Khmers decide on democracy", a comment by Raoul Jennar).

A legitimate criticism of the way the coalition came about is that it could have been formed in a parliamentary manner, that is by allowing FUNCINPEC, the largest party in parliament, to form the first government, then negotiate with CPP over the modalities of sharing under which CPP would support FUNCINPEC on the crucial vote. Regarded legalistically, that seems unobjectionable.

The CPP had reason, however, to mistrust both FUNCINPEC and sections of the foreign community, and to feel that if the coalition was not nailed down first, they might be deprived of even the strong minority position they had won in the election.

At the time of Sihanouk's first effort to form a coalition right after the election, one of the top American UNTAC officials had remarked, "to do what we want in Cambodia we don't need Sihanouk, and we don't need the CPP. We have 90 million dollars to hold the officials and soldiers of SOC and to buy the CPP Assemblymen needed to get a two-thirds majority and set up the coalition we want".<sup>855</sup>

That did not happen, and US policy on Cambodia may have changed, as there are other signs that it did. But the CPP should not take all the blame for extra-parliamentary arrangements, when they had every reason to suspect that their enemies, both domestic and foreign, were preparing extra-legal measures against them.

The government and parliament which formed in 1993 is very much like Sihanouk's *Sangkum* government of the 1960s, and is in accordance with local political tradition, which has an aversion to confrontational politics, pluralism or tolerance for opposition, as in other Southeast Asian semi-democracies.

This situation became inevitable once there had been a tacit agreement among the Great Powers and the major Cambodian factions that Sihanouk would return as King or President or Chief of State. Sihanouk would not have accepted rule over an active democracy, and in the election campaign of 1993 the major parties all professed support for him.

### **Politics under the new government**

Like the prewar state under Sihanouk, the parliamentary and governmental coalition comprises several factions, which in a European parliamentary system would constitute rival competing parties within and outside parliament. In the 1960s, and now again, such open rivalry was discouraged, if not suppressed, and the factions, under cover of a grand coalition loyal to a supreme leader or

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<sup>855</sup> Raoul Jennar, "Cambodian Chronicles (X)", 29 June 1993. Jennar told me this earlier in a personal conversation, then he stated it publicly in a large NGO meeting, before publishing it in his "Chronicles". Even if, for lack of witnesses or other proof, Jennar can never reveal who the official was, I consider Jennar's report credible, and the identity of the American transparent.

figurehead, try to further their competing goals by covert lobbying and by courting support of influential figures.

The most obvious factions now are the three parties, CPP, FUNCINPEC, and BLDP, but each of these parties contains potential lines of fracture.

For several years before 1993 observers of Cambodian politics commented on a perceived split in the CPP between old alleged communist 'hard-liners' led by Chea Sim, and younger liberals, more open to political pluralist and free market growth, led by Hun Sen, and supported by the young technocrats and intellectuals who had become prominent in the PRK-SOC toward the end of the 1980s. The same analysts discerned another group of younger leaders more loyal to Chea Sim, and led by his brother-in-law Sar Kheng.<sup>856</sup>

Within FUNCINPEC a split could have been predicted between royalty and non-royalty. The BLDP was clearly divided between those loyal to their old leader Son Sann and group of younger members. There had already been a split within the original KPNLF between those who remained loyal to San Sann in the BLDP and another group of younger activists who had been prominent in the border camps after 1979, who dominated the KPNLF military, and who for the election formed their own Liberal Democratic Party (LPD).

King Sihanouk remained a faction to himself, prohibited, according to the new constitution, from an active political role, but expected, as in the 1960s, to try to manipulate the other contending factions to secure more effective political power for himself.

The first step in factional maneuvering was an attempted secession of three or four eastern provinces under Sihanouk's son Prince Chakrapong and Sin Song, former Minister of State Security of the pre-election SOC. They were among a group of more than 30 CPP candidates forced by the party to give up seats after the election in order to be replaced with more suitable parliamentarians.<sup>857</sup>

Chakrapong and Sin Song were thus rebelling against the CPP, and had probably been encouraged by Sihanouk, who saw an opportunity to intervene, stop the rebellion, and gain political credit. If so, the attempt backfired, for the secession quickly collapsed with Hun Sen gaining most credit for the government victory.

Another interesting shift in the factional balance, which involved American interest in Cambodia, and which represented a surprising shift in the US move to establish contacts within the new regime, was the repositioning of Sar Kheng,

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<sup>856</sup> See above, "Kremlinology and Cambodia", pp. 244, ff; "Chea Sim: the hardline leader", pp. 363, ff.

<sup>857</sup> This was permitted by the UNTAC rules under which voting was for parties and parties had control over the choice of winning candidates. I have discussed these events in "Cambodia: a Political Survey", Discussion Paper No. 14, The Department of Political and Social Change, Research School of Pacific Studies, Australian National University, 1994; and in *Cambodia: A Political Survey*, Phnom Penh 2007, p. 92-98.

believed, until after the formation of the new government, to be leader of a young 'hard line' anti-Hun Sen faction within the CPP.

The American threat to reform the coalition by buying off key members of the new assembly did not materialize, though whether because it had merely been a wild statement by an individual going beyond official policy, or whether policy had changed, may not be determined.

There was, however, a clear shift in key American personnel in Phnom Penh. Charles Twining, who, although US Chargé d'Affaires since November 1991, was in the eyes of UNTAC, NGOs and media overshadowed by Timothy Carney, chief of the UNTAC component for 'Information and Education', came into his own with his promotion to Ambassador in 1993 and Carney's removal from the scene soon after the election.

In November 1993 Sar Kheng was invited to the US, followed in February 1994 by an invitation to Sin Song. Sar Kheng's invitation was official – "to expose [him] to the mechanics of democracy and ... wean him away from the influence of Viet Nam ...", as it was quaintly reported, and Sin Song was invited privately by an American Senator who opposed lifting the embargo against Viet Nam.

These two CPP figures, accurately or not, had been most often identified as responsible for pre-election violence against other parties. As reported in the press, however, the State Department said "Sin Song did not fall under any of the visa ineligibilities set forth in our immigration law"; "US officials say they had no evidence that Sin Song was directly implicated in terrorist activities" although Sin Song was "a former minister, implicated as a leader of last year's short-lived secession attempt and an organizer of CPP death squads"; and "firm evidence emerged in early 1993 that Sin Song was abusing his position by coordinating squads of secret police tasked in assassinating and intimidating political opposition, UN investigators, human rights activists, and opposition party officials say".

They were thus implicitly, and in the case of Sin Song very clearly, exonerated by the US, or else, as some cynics would have it, they were rewarded for organizing the violence which, by undermining a FUNCINPEC-CPP alliance, favored US plans. Or, of course, the accusations against them had possibly been wrong.

Just as now the organizers of the KR trial are troubled by the possibility that much DK violence during 1975-1979 was the unauthorized work of low-level cadres, so in 1992-1993 low level cadres and police may have been independently responsible for attacks on FUNCINPEC imputed to SOC.<sup>858</sup>

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<sup>858</sup> See Steve Heder, "Cambodia, Nazi Germany and the Stalinist Soviet Union: Intentionality, Totalitarianism, Functionalism and the Politics of Accountability" (Draft for Presentation at the German Historical Institute, Washington, DC, 29 March 2003), 64

The Americans, displeased at the ability of the CPP to preserve its hegemony in the new coalition, seemed to be playing a new card in Cambodian factional politics, giving support to Sar Kheng, previously reputed to be of the more rigid communist faction of Chea Sim and a rival of Hun Sen, and to Sin Song, clearly out of favor with Hun Sen since the secession.

At the same time Sar Kheng began recruiting as advisers a number of intellectuals from the LDP who had spent years fighting against the PRK on the Thai border or in exile in the West, in particular in the US. By 1995 Sar Kheng, in the view of the politically active foreign community in Phnom Penh, had been transformed from hard-line communist terrorist to the new hope for democracy against the intransigent Hun Sen, and Sar Kheng's reputed patron, Chea Sim, was transfigured from ex-Khmer Rouge communist to benign supporter of Buddhism.<sup>859</sup>

A continuing bone of contention among the factions, including King Sihanouk, was relations with the PDK ('Khmer Rouge'). During the election campaign the CPP had insisted that if they won they would attack and eliminate the PDK militarily, whereas FUNCINPEC based its campaign on negotiations and a peaceful solution. This was the policy favored by Sihanouk.

After the election and the formation of a new army, the government, with full acquiescence by Ranariddh, adopted the CPP policy toward the PDK, and in September 1993 the new unified army achieved some initial successes on the battlefield. The PDK survived, however, and by February 1994 inflicted stinging defeats on the government forces. Fighting still continues, and the PDK still controls its key bases in the North and Northwest.

In November 1993 Sihanouk offered the PDK a role in the government, or as his special advisers, if they ended violence, dissolved their army, and gave up their territory. In April 1994 he again proposed reconciliation, and in May 1994 he proposed new elections in order to include the PDK in the National Assembly, in fact offering to set aside the constitution and the 1993 election.

In order to rule as he had in the 1960s, Sihanouk needed a coalition of as many mutually hostile factions as possible, particularly after FUNCINPEC (under Ranariddh) began to cooperate closely with Hun Sen. In an interview with the *Far Eastern Economic Review* in June 1994, Sihanouk admitted he wanted political power, and blamed Hun Sen for blocking him.

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pp; Vickery, *Cambodia: A Political Survey*, pp. 199-200, and above on Heder-Ledgerwood.

Sar Kheng's trip was reported in *PPP*, vol. 2. no. 24, 19 November-2 December 1993, Nate Thayer, "New govt: who's really in control"; and Sin Song's invitation was reported in *PPP* vol. 3, no. 3, 11-24 February 1994, Nate Thayer, "Fury over Sin Song's trip to US". Information on Sin Song's patron is from *Indochina Interchange*, Vol. 4 no 1, March 1994.

<sup>859</sup> See above p. 356.

This provoked a long public answer from Hun Sen in which he rejected concessions to the PDK, and also rejected constitutional changes to give more power to Sihanouk, and which had been proposed to him by Prince Sirivudh, Sihanouk's half-brother, who held the posts of FUNCINPEC Secretary-General, and Foreign Minister.<sup>860</sup>

In the context of Cambodian society and political history, Hun Sen's bold stance against Sihanouk could be seen as unforgivable *lèse-majesté*.

These tensions came to a head on 2 July 1994 when Prince Chakrapong and Sin Song, the leaders of the June 1993 attempted provincial secession, were accused of leading another plot to overthrow the government. At the request of the King and Queen, Chakrapong was allowed to leave the country, but Sin Song and several others were arrested, and later tried. Most of them were found guilty, although Sin Song escaped to Thailand.

This second coup attempt by Chakrapong and Sin Song, coming in the middle of the tensions surrounding policy toward the PDK and Sihanouk's evident desire for increased power, no doubt convinced Hun Sen that his domestic enemies, including some princes and their allies, would stop at nothing to remove him.<sup>861</sup>

On 7 July 1994, in the face of their inability to defeat the PDK, and the PDK refusal to lay down their arms and join the new government on any but their own exaggerated terms, the Cambodian government voted a law outlawing the PDK. This was opposed by King Sihanouk, and in the Assembly by Prince Sirivudh and Sam Rainsy. After passage of this law, relations between Rainsy and Sirivudh and the government became increasingly strained until both were finally removed from the National Assembly.

### **The Sam Rainsy and Prince Norodom Sirivudh incidents**

An example of unsuccessful opposition activity, also reminiscent of events in the 1960s, is the case of Mr. Sam Rainsy of FUNCINPEC, who was appointed Minister of Finance following the election. He is an emigré, son of Sam Sary who was involved in an American-backed plot against Sihanouk in 1958, and spent most of his adult life before the election in France. Within and outside of the Assembly he continued to attack the CPP, and implicitly his own party FUNCINPEC, ignoring the coalition.

His attacks concentrated on corruption, political harassment and policy toward the PDK. He strongly objected to the law outlawing the PDK, and like

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<sup>860</sup> This appeared in *The Nation* (Bangkok), 24 June 1994, "Sihanouk and Hun Sen at opposite ends", text of Hun Sen's letter to Sihanouk concerning Sihanouk's desire to assume power.

<sup>861</sup> See *PPP* 3/14, 15-28 July 1994, much of it sympathetic treatment of Chakrapong and Sin Song and otherwise tendentious reporting by Nate Thayer, on which see letter by Michael Vickery, *PPP* 1/19, 23Sept-6 Oct 1994, p. 9.

the PDK he has made anti-Vietnamese xenophobia an important theme in his political propaganda (see p. 451 and below). Finally, in October 1994, Prime Minister Ranariddh expelled him from FUNCINPEC, and then on this basis the National Assembly voted to deprive him of his seat.

### **The Sam Rainsy case**

There have been objections from Western Human Rights groups and press that the expulsion of Sam Rainsy was illegal, and an example of violation of human rights. The situation, however, is far from clear, and is a good illustration of the chaotic state of the legal system.

When Rainsy was expelled from the National Assembly, Amnesty International issued a statement that “international legal experts expressed the opinion that the expulsion was illegal”, without, however, naming the experts or where their opinions were published.<sup>862</sup>

In answer to a request for further detail about the international legal experts and their expert opinions, Amnesty answered with a clipping from the newspaper *The Cambodia Daily*, published in Phnom Penh. It quoted Michael Kirby, “chief UN human rights representative to Cambodia and the top legal adviser during the ... elections”, as saying “removal of a Member of the National Assembly would cause concern to the many friends of Cambodia”.

It also quoted the opinion of V. Krishnadasan, “UNTAC’s senior legal adviser”, that “dismissal or expulsion (due to expulsion from the Party or otherwise) does not appear to be specifically provided for” in any of the relevant documents, that is, in the Constitution, Electoral Law or Internal Rules of Procedure of the National Assembly.

Krishnadasan also wrote that, “it is opined that a member of the National Assembly cannot be expelled from the National Assembly unless specific legislation is adopted in this regard in accordance with the relevant positions of the Constitution”, and that the Constitution emphasizes the “representative nature” of the National Assembly.<sup>863</sup>

In a letter accompanying the *Cambodia Daily* clipping Amnesty also cited an opinion of Reginald Austin, head of UNTAC’s Electoral Component, that, in the words of the Amnesty writer, not quoting Austin directly, “expulsion or resignation of an elected MP from the Party upon whose provincial list he was placed, is not a proper or sufficient ground for his replacement by the Parliament under the electoral law”.<sup>864</sup>

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<sup>862</sup> *AI Index*: ASA 23/11/95, 22 June 1995, “Kingdom of Cambodia Concern for the safety of elected representatives”.

<sup>863</sup> Gretchen Peters, “Kirby, Krishnadasan Back Rainsy’s Fight”, *The Cambodia Daily*, 2 June 1995.

<sup>864</sup> Letter from Amnesty International, Ref: C-GCF, dated 4 October 1995, signed by Kelly Dowling, Southeast Asia Team.



Given Prof. Austin's well-known precision and care for accuracy, Amnesty must have garbled his words, for according to the Electoral Law, resignation, at least, of an elected MP was "proper and sufficient grounds" for replacement, and if not specifically "by the Parliament", by his party, as was done in the case of Rainsy.

Immediately after the election there was a "proper and sufficient" test case: the mass resignation of 32 elected CPP candidates, who were replaced by their party. Likewise, when just before the election Son Sann told UNTAC that Ieng Mouly's name should be removed from the list of candidates, "UNTAC officials said that Mouly would have to be expelled from BLDP for him to be removed as a candidate".<sup>865</sup>

Ranariddh has expressed the view that "it is FUNCINPEC's right under UNTAC Law and the internal regulations of the National Assembly which is a sovereign and independent organization".<sup>866</sup>

The opinions expressed by Kirby, Krishnadasan and Austin are considerably weaker and more nuanced than Amnesty's dramatic claim that legal experts called the expulsion "illegal under the electoral law". They very carefully avoided saying any such thing. There do indeed seem to be contradictions between the UNTAC Electoral Law and the Constitution.

The latter (art. 76) first implies election of individual deputies, but then concludes with, "the organization of the elections and the type of balloting is determined by a law", allowing the possibility for future elections by party slate. As for the "representative nature" of the Assembly, to which Krishnadasan alluded, it only relates to the position of the Deputies as representatives of the entire nation, not just of their own constituencies (art. 77), and has no bearing on the question of expulsion. Krishnadasan would seem to be playing with words in denying that there was any provision for expulsion.

Article 80, which gives Deputies the usual parliamentary immunity, says that Deputies may only be accused, arrested or detained "with the consent of the Assembly" or its Standing Committee, but it would seem that accusation, arrest and detainment, if approved by the Assembly, imply expulsion.

One more relevant provision is Article 95, which says that "In case of death, resignation, or loss of the quality of member of the Assembly [emphasis added] at least 6 months before the end of the term, the election of a replacement must be carried out according to the procedure contained in the Internal Rules of Procedure and the Electoral Law".

In its comment on this case, the report of the UN Centre for Human Rights also shows lack of precision about the constitution. In suggesting that Rainsy's

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<sup>865</sup> *PPP*, 4/19, 22 September-5 October 1995.

<sup>866</sup> Ranariddh, "Vital Issues", dated 3 August 1995, published in *PPP* 4/17, 25 August-7 September, pp. 8-9.

expulsion was not strictly legal, the report said article 95 of the Constitution “provides for only three cases of removal ... death, resignation and departure (i.e. from the National Assembly)”.<sup>867</sup>

The third circumstance, however, is not ‘departure’, but loss of the quality of member of the Assembly, as I noted above. There is no specification of the ways in which that quality may be lost. Since the report of the Human Rights Centre accepts, “that the issue is one of internal politics of Cambodia”, it would be better not to mix it up with Human Rights. Advice could be given, however, in bringing about agreement among the Constitution and other relevant documents, and inserting language relating to such cases.

After expulsion, Sam Rainsy formed a new opposition political party named ‘Khmer Nation’. One of the themes of his party program is an extreme chauvinist position against Vietnamese, a very dangerous policy. The government has denied the legality of this party and on 7 December 1995 ordered it dissolved and its offices closed, claiming that no new party may yet be formed because a law on associations and political parties has not yet been passed by the National Assembly.

Mr. Rainsy and his supporters argue that formation of new parties is permitted by the Constitution, and that they have followed the procedures for party formation in the UNTAC electoral law, which is still valid. That view is not uncontested. It is true that Article 42 of the Constitution permits the formation of political parties, but this right is “to be determined by a law”, and there is not yet a law on associations which would prescribe how a political party should be organized and registered.

As for the UNTAC law, its status in the view of some Western legal advisers in Phnom Penh is unclear. It still appears in a collection of “Laws in Force” provided by the UN Center for Human Rights, although its validity is sometimes denied. In December 1995 the director of a prominent international organization concerned with legal questions told me that the UNTAC electoral law was no longer valid when the constitution was promulgated.

It is piquant that when Ranariddh argued that Rainsy could be expelled from FUNCINPEC and the Assembly on the basis of the UNTAC electoral law, supporters of Rainsy argued that the UNTAC law was no longer valid, but that law mysteriously acquires new validity for them when its provisions can be used to legitimize formation of a new opposition political party.

### **The Norodom Sirivudh case**

Following the Sam Rainsy affair came the events surrounding Prince Sirivudh, Foreign Minister from July 1993 to October 1994, when he resigned at the time

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<sup>867</sup> “Human rights Questions: Technical Cooperation in the Field of Human Rights”, A/50, September 1995, p. 19.

of the expulsion of Sam Rainsy. He was a close associate of Sam Rainsy, and like him had spent most of his adult life in France.

On the night of 17 November 1995 Sirivudh was suddenly placed under house arrest, transferred briefly to prison, and then to confinement in the Ministry of Interior, accused of having made threats to kill Second Prime Minister Hun Sen. There seems to be no doubt that he made such statements, and there is a tape recording containing the threat on which his voice has been clearly identified.

Those who object to his arrest say first that he was only joking, and that he was known for making thoughtless rash statements. This is not a serious argument. Threats to kill a President or Prime Minister are illegal in many countries, and in the charged political atmosphere of Cambodia, with the known hatred for Hun Sen among some of the royalists, and given the country's history of political violence, the authorities certainly had justification to act against Sirivudh.

The second objection to the treatment of Sirivudh concerns its allegedly dubious legality in terms of the laws now in force. This is a stronger case. Sirivudh was entitled to parliamentary immunity, and thus his first detainment was possibly illegal. After the Assembly voted to remove immunity however, there could be no further objection to his comfortable detainment in the Ministry of Interior while preparations were made for his trial, which seemed to be proceeding within legal norms.

Then an extra-judicial solution was reached in an agreement between King Sihanouk and Second Prime Minister Hun Sen by which Sirivudh would go to France and promise to abstain from further political activity. Later, a trial convicted Sirivudh in absentia of conspiracy and illegal possession of weapons and sentenced him to ten years imprisonment.

In the eyes of many foreign observers, including diplomats, NGO personnel, and journalists in Phnom Penh, these three incidents, Rainsy's expulsion from the National Assembly, the prohibition of his new political party, and the arrest and exile of Prince Sirivudh, together with the aggressive tone of Hun Sen's recent speeches, signal the end of Cambodia's fledgling democracy, after an alleged "Phnom Penh Spring" following the 1993 election.<sup>868</sup>

Such a conclusion is unfair and exaggerated. Not only is 'Phnom Penh Spring' inappropriate, except for those who could accept a mere facade of electionism as evidence of democratic politics, but this abusive comparison of the arrest of a prominent politician who had threatened to kill a Prime Minister, with the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, is a good example of the efforts by foreign interests to demonize the Cambodian government.

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<sup>868</sup> The expression "Phnom Penh Spring" was used by Michael Hayes, "The politics of fear: what's next?", *PPP*, Vol. 4, No. 24, 1-14 December 1995, p. 1.

Hun Sen, moreover, has adequate reasons to believe that plots against him are being organized. One coup was launched just after the election, one more was nipped in the bud in 1994, and a member of the royalty, Prince Chakrapong, was involved in both. The US began wooing the rival CPP faction, even though its leader Sar Kheng, together with Sin Song, Chakrapong's ally in both plots, had been blamed for pre-election violence.

Throughout 1994 King Sihanouk quite obviously had been trying to undermine Hun Sen, moreover in favor of the Khmer Rouge, and then, to end the Sirivudh affair, the King wrote a letter whose tone can only be termed obsequious, which suggests admission that the statements attributed to Sirivudh were meant seriously, and that he may have been involved in a wider plot.<sup>869</sup>

Hun Sen, in his most arbitrary moves, is behaving according to the norms of traditional Cambodian politics that he, and most of his colleagues, learned under Sihanouk in the 1960s, and under the US-backed Khmer Republic in the 1970s. These norms were legitimized when the international negotiations insured that Sihanouk would return as king or chief of state, and they were legitimized again when Sihanouk engineered a coalition which was outside, and in part contrary to, the UNTAC election.

Cambodian politicians today are acting according to the only model they know, and if Hun Sen were replaced by his rivals, they would act in the same way.

At the moment all factions are organizing their positions for the next election, due, according to the constitution, in 1998. The first question is whether FUNCINPEC and the CPP will campaign as a coalition or as separate competing parties. The second is to what extent new parties will be allowed to organize and compete

Genuine pluralistic politics can only come in Cambodia when there are parties formed outside the bureaucracy, with interests outside the state apparatus, strong enough to challenge the existing coalition. Mr. Sam Rainsy's Khmer Nation Party seems to represent real opposition, and in that sense could be the first step toward a more genuine pluralism, although Rainsy's record, and the identities of the persons forming the party committee, suggest that it will be a clique party of former officials, not a party representing any genuine segment of Cambodian civil society.<sup>870</sup>

Nevertheless, Cambodian political traditions, which favor coalitions and are against party-state separation, may inhibit the change, even if the next elections are totally free. An example was the statement of General Dien Del, Honorary

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<sup>869</sup> The exchange of letters concerning Sirivudh was published in *PPP*, Vol. 4, No. 25, 15-28 December, 1995, p. 12.

<sup>870</sup> See Jason Barber and Ker Munthit, "Former Minister [Kong Korm] jumps over to new Rainsy party", *PPP*, Vol. 4, No. 23, 17-30 November 1995, p. 3. Khmer Nation Party launched 9 November 1995.

President of the Liberal Democratic Party, who has said that his party planned a Party Congress to prepare for the 1998 election, but “the party was not yet ready to become an opposition, and would prefer to cooperate with other parties to serve the country”.<sup>871</sup>

Several members of that party, a group with more or less higher education and experience abroad, have already made their own entry into a grand coalition, serving as advisers to Minister of Interior Sar Kheng.

### **The press**

Critics of the Cambodian government have focused on alleged harassment of the press, citing four murders of journalists, three in 1994 and one in May 1996, newspapers closed and editors charged in court with slander and fined. These incidents are true, but are rarely placed in perspective.

Since 1993 the press enjoys more freedom than ever before. The rapid growth, and near total freedom to establish a newspaper, has meant that most of the new journalists lack education and any conception of what responsible journalism means. Their writings frequently violate laws on slander, racism and incitement to violence in force in western European democracies, and it is believed that many of them have only been published for the purpose of slandering the political opponents of their financial backers.

No doubt the authorities have sometimes overreacted, the most serious incident being Hun Sen’s expressed sympathy for the sacking of a newspaper office by people from a village development project which he sponsors, because they felt the paper had slandered Hun Sen and their village.

Here too, lack of clarity about laws in force has complicated the situation. UNTAC promulgated its own criminal law which outlawed slander and incitement to certain crimes and in some cases provided for imprisonment of journalists; in 1994-95 this was the law under which the new Cambodian government prosecuted the press. It has now been superseded by a new press law which does not include imprisonment.

Presumably, further charges against journalists, if the new law is followed, cannot result in imprisonment. There is still some confusion, however, as to whether the UNTAC law, which is not a press law *per se*, but which outlaws certain forms of journalistic extremism, is superseded and void, or whether it is still in force alongside the new press law.

In spite of occasional heavy-handed reactions from the authorities, it must not be forgotten that there is more press freedom today than at any time since the first year of Cambodia’s independence in 1954-1955.

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<sup>871</sup> *PPP*, Vol. 4, No. 17, 25 August- 7 September, 1995, p. 4, Ker Munthit, “ ... while another political faction rises”.

Among the most troubling manifestations of the irresponsible free press, is the re-emergence of violent anti-Vietnamese xenophobia. This was a dark side of Cambodian politics throughout the independent kingdom and Khmer Republic (1954-1975), and it reached its murderous high point under the regime of Pol Pot's Democratic Kampuchea.

The PRK-SOC, after 1979, became the first government in modern Cambodia to renounce anti-Vietnamese chauvinism as a bedrock of Cambodian nationalism and patriotism, and to actively promote friendship with Viet Nam and with Vietnamese in Cambodia. Their opponents in the CGDK, encouraged by the support of the US and China (who saw the CGDK as a tool in their own anti-Viet Nam policies), continued the chauvinism of the Khmer Republic and the Khmer Rouge.

One result of the Paris Agreement was to bring chauvinist politics back into Cambodia, where in the election campaign, FUNCINPEC and the BLDP, particularly the latter, indulged in anti Vietnamese propaganda as violent as that of the PDK. Some elements of the new foreign community, apparently intoxicated by the emigré propaganda to which they had been exposed in the US or France before arriving in Cambodia in 1992-93, and perhaps also sympathetic to US regime goals, did little to discourage this resurgence of racism.

In its first issue the American-owned *Phnom Penh Post* ran an article on Vietnamese within Cambodia. Interviewing only representatives of FUNCINPEC, BLDP, and PDK, whose anti-Vietnamese positions were well known, *Phnom Penh Post* repeated without comment such assertions as, "UNTAC is ignoring the reality of Cambodian history", it was the Vietnamese presence which was causing the war, "we have to get our country back from foreign occupation", "we just cannot mix with these people ... the Vietnamese are warmongers", "at stake here is the issue of a 'Cambodian' Cambodia, and not a 'Vietnamized' Cambodia where foreigners were to be given the right to take part in the elections".<sup>872</sup>

These were quotations respectively from Ieng Mouly of the BLDP, Veng Sereyvuth of FUNCINPEC, and Khieu Samphan of the PDK. There were no opinions from Cambodians or foreign Cambodia specialists known to be more sympathetic to Khmer-Vietnamese friendship.

Now that anti-Vietnamese racism has again become rooted in Cambodian politics, foreign critics blame the government when Vietnamese suffer, yet also blame the government when action is taken against newspapers which incite racism. The darling among the dissidents favored by the foreign community and press, Sam Rainsy, is the most vocal of all in propagating anti-Vietnamese chauvinism.<sup>873</sup>

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<sup>872</sup> Sara Colm, "Factions, UNTAC Debate Electoral Law", *PPP*, 1/1, 10 July 1992.

<sup>873</sup> *PPP*, Vol. 2 No. 9, 23 April-6 May 1993, p. 4; Kevin Barrington, "Rainsy Bemoans Censorship, UN Cites Racism". The prominent FUNCINPEC member, Mr. Sam Rainsy

Although people ill-disposed to the government allege that it is responsible for widespread human rights violations, the problems in this area seem to be rather because of state weakness and the effects of a runaway free market economy. Armed robbery, both on the highways and within Phnom Penh is common, often accompanied by murder. Such crimes are even more common in those border provinces where there are concentrations of soldiers to combat the PDK threat.

These human rights violations are the direct result of the continuing civil war, an economy in which no state salaries are adequate, and the state's inability to impose gun control. Among the most common complaints of individuals which come to the attention of human rights organizations are disputes over land ownership in rural areas, inevitable after it was decided in 1990 to return land, which had all been state property after 1975, to private ownership.<sup>874</sup>

Undoubtedly, as is the practice in Cambodia's capitalist neighboring countries, those who are already wealthy, or with influential state positions, take advantage of their situations to illegally accumulate land.

Part of the Human Rights problem is the very weak position of the judiciary, and the lack of defense lawyers. When the PRK was established in 1979, the previous judicial system had been destroyed and most legally trained people had disappeared. Valiant efforts were made during the 1980s to establish new courts, train judges, and promulgate new laws. When UNTAC came in 1992, most of

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was refused permission to broadcast one of his election speeches because it was considered too racist in his attacks on Vietnamese. UN officials said "the text did not take into account the responsibilities involved in the freedom of expression" ... "The freedom of expression also has responsibilities". "It was racist in the extreme"; "He used it [the word 'Yvon'] repeatedly, insistently, emphatically, and with some degree of venom".

The four points Rainsy raised in his script were also the straight Khmer Rouge line. (1) the present regime was installed by the Yvon, (2) the regime was therefore indebted to the Yvon, (3) they must give compensation to the Yvon, and (4) the regime leaders will use the sweat blood, wealth and territory of Cambodia to pay, in order to stay in power and keep the support of the Yvon. Already in 1993 Rainsy showed his true colors. Interestingly, the PPP article said that "some members of the UN Information and Education sympathize with" Rainsy's complaint that he was being treated unfairly. This is not surprising given the political tendencies of UNTAC 12, discussed above.

<sup>874</sup> This was a surprise, and disappointment, to some of the 'Human Rights activists' in UNTAC and the post-UNTAC United Nations Center for Human Rights in Phnom Penh, who were always hoping for stories of police brutality and torture. They wanted cases which could be immediately and directly used against the government, not cases which were the objective effects of the changes forced on Cambodia by international pressure. See Hanne Sophie Greve (see above note 703, "Land Tenure and Property Rights in Cambodia", unpublished report, Phnom Penh, 1993, quoted in Jan Ovesen, Ing-Britt Trankell, and Joakim Öjendal, *When Every Household is an Island*, Uppsala Research Reports in Cultural Anthropology, No. 15, 1996, p. 20.

this was disdained as 'communist', yet the new structures set up during the UNTAC period bear much resemblance to those of the PRK.

According to Human Rights activists, the judiciary lacks independence and corruption is rife. This may well be true, but judges are paid only \$30 per month. Unfortunately the foreign NGOs (and most NGOs in Cambodia are foreign-organized or working to foreign agendas) and the international press which expresses concern about poor legal standards prefer to complain about alleged domination of the judiciary by the Ministry of Justice under a CPP (i.e. 'Communist') minister, rather than the absurdly low pay scale which may oblige a judge to be corrupt to feed his family.

### **Women and children**

When last in Phnom Penh in December 1995, I discovered that much of the NGO and international organization community was troubled by a new problem: the poor situation of women and children, which they tended to see as the effect of a malevolent government, rather than proceeding from objective economic and political changes of recent years.<sup>875</sup>

Because of the demographic changes of the DK years (that is, the heavy death toll above normal, particularly among men), Cambodia was left in 1979 when the PRK was formed with an excess of women. This has been variously estimated, from a high of 60% to a more accurate figure of 52.2% in the latest statistical study.<sup>876</sup>

Whatever the statistical truth, many more households are headed by women than was usual in pre-war Cambodia. This is not entirely the result of disappearance of males during DK, but also of the weakening of the old rural society. It has been found that among the squatter communities in Phnom Penh, women are often the actual heads of households, even when living with a husband; and it is likely that many rural households are usually headed by women because husbands spend long periods elsewhere, usually in urban areas, earning extra income. Probably many military households are also headed, in fact, by the wives.

Regardless of ideology, which being socialist insisted on gender equality, the PRK was forced to give more attention to women because of need for their labor.

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<sup>875</sup> I became involved in investigation in this area because, together with a colleague from the Peace and Conflict Resolution Department of Uppsala University, Dr. Ramses Amer, I was engaged by SIDA (Swedish International Development Agency) to prepare a report on "Democracy and Human Rights in Cambodia". Our research in Cambodia was in December 1995, and we finished writing the report early in 1996. Some of the findings are included here.

<sup>876</sup> Royal Government of Cambodia, Ministry of Planning, National Institute of Statistics, "Report on the Socio-Economic Survey of Cambodia 1993/94", Phnom Penh, 1995.



There were more kindergartens and day-care centers, including at factories, than before 1975 or since 1991. Since then, the number of pre-schools has declined from 689 in 1985-86 to 203 in 1993-94.<sup>877</sup>

In rural areas the agricultural 'Solidarity Groups', working on state-owned land, gave some protection to poor and widowed women, whose situation has declined since the introduction of free market policies and land privatization after 1989.

Besides this, the PRK offered more women opportunities to assume more responsible positions in political, administrative, and economic affairs than had been possible in pre-war Cambodia. There were a number of women in ministerial positions, and as province and district chiefs, where there had been none before, and at lower levels far more women than had been customary, over one-third of the lower level civil service positions.

In industry, where there had already been many women workers in the 1960s, they were moving into management positions under the PRK. Now, in the formation of new village-level organizations foreign NGO workers have noted that women who were formed in the PRK Women's Associations are the most articulate, confident and active speakers.

In comparison to the prominence of women in prestigious positions under the PRK/SOC, it was notable that there was no female minister in the new Royal Government formed in 1993 after the election. Even the State Secretariat for Women's Affairs, one of the positions given to FUNCINPEC in the division of posts in the coalition, was headed by a man. This situation changed in March 1996 with the elevation of the State Secretariat to Ministry, and a woman, Mu Sochua, appointed as Minister.<sup>878</sup>

A new law on Family and Marriage was passed under the PRK in 1989, and is still in force. This law prohibits polygamy, which was legal in Cambodia before 1975, and gives both parties equal rights in divorce.

Nevertheless, divorce proceedings are very slow, requiring three efforts at reconciliation involving one after the other recourse to commune, district and provincial authorities, and this may be disadvantageous to women who have no alternative residence. Alimony and child support payments are provided for, but with the decline of purchasing power of the currency since the 1989 leap into a capitalist free-market economy, they are worthless.

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<sup>877</sup> Edward B. Fiske, *Using Both Hands, Women and Education in Cambodia*, Manila, Asian Development Bank, 1995, p. 32.

<sup>878</sup> Mu Sochua spent the Democratic Kampuchea period in the United States, then worked in the refugee camps on the Thai-Cambodian border from the early 1980s, and returned to Cambodia at the time of the Paris Agreement. She associated with FUNCINPEC, and at the time she was nominated by that party to be Minister she was an adviser to Prince Ranariddh. In the 1998 election she was elected as a FUNCINPEC deputy from Battambang; but after the 2003 election she defected to the Sam Rainsy party.

Most sources agree that domestic violence has increased with the leap into a free market economy and the destruction of the PRK social safety net after 1989, and in late 1995 concerned foreign NGO workers were incensed that after six months of research in Phnom Penh (population of over half a million) and three provinces, one group of investigators had managed to discover 50 cases of battered wives. Unfortunately, rather than seeing this in relation to Cambodia's post-socialist economic and social collapse, they preferred to relate it to the allegedly inherent chauvinism of Cambodian society.

In general, critics in foreign NGOs and international organizations list domestic violence, rape, and prostitution as the main problems, whereas women who worked in Cambodia throughout the 1980s emphasize poverty, education, illiteracy, health, and employment as the main problems. Of course domestic violence and prostitution are directly related to poverty and lack of education and rape seems to occur in direct relation to proximity of combat zones where there are large numbers of unruly soldiers and police.

Women appear disfavored in the educational system. Numbers of boys and girls are nearly equal (45% girls) in primary schools. Thereafter the proportion of girls drops in secondary schools to around 33%, and in tertiary institutions to 23% in teacher training and the Foreign Language Institute, 12-15% in the University and Medical School, and under 1% in the institutions for architecture, electricity, hydrology, law, and economics.

This is partly the effect of old tradition which has re-emerged since 1991. Girls are considered by many parents as homemakers and mothers who require only basic literacy, and are expected to be married not long after puberty. There is also pressure on girls to stay home to care for aging parents.

Nevertheless, it is more difficult for girls who desire to enter tertiary institutions, all located in Phnom Penh, even if they have parental support, unless they are from wealthy families, because of the lack of suitable housing. Male students can live without payment in the Wats (Buddhist monasteries), but there is no comparable institution to accommodate women, who, if they cannot rent private accommodation must renounce tertiary education.

Most of the special problems facing women are related ultimately to education and employment, and these cannot be separated from the precarious economic situation of the country as a whole. Fortunately, this is the position taken by the new Minister of Women's Affairs, Mu Sochua.

In an interview after her appointment she identified the "priorities" as: "universal education; health care, looking specifically at safe motherhood, which includes access to primary health care, which includes the prevention of HIV/AIDS and STDs; economic development and others ... lastly, we must look at access to legal services ...". Two months later she said, "My four priorities are

to ensure gender equality in education, equal opportunity in economic development and free access to health care and legal services”.<sup>879</sup>

Related to the problems of women is the situation of children, and there is general agreement that sexual exploitation of children and child trafficking, previously rare, are rapidly increasing. This is another example of post-PRK decline and free-market poverty.

Cambodia has signed, and recognized in its constitution, the UN “Convention on the Rights of the Child” (CRC); and a “Programme for Children and Women in Cambodia, Plan of Operations 1996-2000”, has been adopted by the government in cooperation with UNICEF. Some of the provisions of the CRC, however, are radically contrary to Cambodian mores. As one UNICEF expert recognized in a December 1995 interview, “the concept that children have rights is not self-evident in traditional Khmer society, which tends to see children as the property of their parents, who have every right to make decisions regarding the lives of their offspring”.

Contrary to Cambodian morality are those provisions which give the child independence against the family, such as Article 12 giving the child “the right to express ... views freely in all matters affecting the child”, Article 13, the right to “seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds”, Article 16, “no child shall be subjected to arbitrary or unlawful interference with his or her privacy ... or correspondence ...”. Foreign do-gooders must realize that **attempts by the state to directly intervene in family affairs to enforce such provisions would be met with near revolt, and accusations that the government was implementing ‘Khmer Rouge’ principles.**

Other provisions, such as the right “to benefit from social security, including social insurance”, seem utopian, not only because of Cambodia’s recent history and ruined economy, but because in the type of extreme free-marketism which has been forced on Cambodia, social insurance is one of the first things to be sacrificed.

Certainly no Cambodian government could enforce all the provisions of the CRC on its population. Here is a contradiction between post-UNTAC Western insistence that Cambodia implement a capitalist free market and blame for not at the same time ensuring social justice.

### **In conclusion**

It would seem that the very real problems of Cambodia in the areas of welfare, human rights, corruption, and a precarious democracy are directly related to the way in which Cambodia was forced too rapidly into political and economic change for which the country and its leaders were not prepared.

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<sup>879</sup> “Mu Sochua: the long fight for women’s rights”, *PPP*, 22 March-4 April 1996, p. 7; Pang Yin Fong, “Mu’s vision for a new Cambodia”, *New Straits Times* (Kuala Lumpur), Life and Times, p. 1, 30 May 1996.

The alleviation of all of these problems requires state intervention in the interest of social justice and to maintain basic living standards. There was a good beginning under the PRK, when the state controlled the major economic sectors.

Foreign institutions genuinely concerned with Cambodian development, rather than just carping about corruption, lack of political pluralism, and free market virtues, should be helping Cambodia strengthen state institutions to enforce mobilization of domestic resources and foreign aid into channels of benefit to the entire society.

Instead of focusing only on those articles of the constitution which define democratic formalism, they might pay attention to the other articles of the constitution which require the state to maintain education, culture and social affairs.

## Chapter 8: the 'coup' and beyond

### Whither Cambodian democracy? (1997) <sup>880</sup>

As the date for the next election, 1998, approaches, there is growing concern about the viability of democracy in Cambodia. But what kind of 'democracy' is meant – the political practices in northern and western Europe, with multiple parties representing clear ideological and policy differences, a press which reports those matters accurately, and a public well enough educated to understand and vote intelligently?

Or is a mere facade of electionism sufficient, or perhaps 'demonstration elections', such as those promoted by the US in wartime southern Viet Nam, and in Central America. <sup>881</sup>

Democracy of the western European type will not be seen in Cambodia soon, if ever. Moreover, it was never intended that UNTAC would bring Scandinavia to Cambodia. As Stephen Heder, Deputy-Director of UNTAC's Information and Education Component, and thus a very important UNTAC official, has written, "in fact, the Paris Agreements did not place a high priority on the consolidation of liberal democracy in Cambodia ... all they insisted on was the achievement of a new political arrangement via a free and fair electoral process ...".

That is, a facade of electionism or a demonstration election. In the words of another UNTAC Cambodia expert, David Ashley, "the elections were intended not so much to introduce democracy as to create a legitimate and thus diplomatically recognizable government". The existing government was declared illegitimate because it had been brought into existence with Vietnamese aid, and had remained close to Viet Nam, a situation intolerable to the US. <sup>882</sup>

The prospects for some kind of election, probably a facade or demonstration like that of 1993, look fairly good. There are at least two parties, and neither has denounced the election, although party organization has not enjoyed sufficient freedom to rate as 'democracy'. In spite of incidents of violence, the press, whose activity serves to define the level of democracy, has been extremely free, even irresponsibly so, and there are more newspapers published (around 40) than ever before, but few of those newspapers fulfil the task of informing the public. The prospects for going beyond a mere facade or demonstration are not good.

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<sup>880</sup> Published in *PPP*, 15-30 May 1997, and in an abbreviated version in *The Nation* (Bangkok), 16 May 1997.

<sup>881</sup> Edward S. Herman and Frank Brodhead, *Demonstration Elections, US-Staged Elections in the Dominican Republic, Vietnam, and El Salvador*, South End Press 1984.

<sup>882</sup> Heder, *PPP* 4/4, 24 Feb-9 March 1995, p. 19); and Ashley, (*PPP* (4/11, 2-15 June 1995, p. 6.

But why be so concerned about Cambodia? Democracy is not doing so well anywhere in Southeast Asia, the neighbors from which Cambodian politicians take their cues and observe that some of those neighbors enjoy great respect and support from the major Western powers. In most of those countries which hold regular elections, one-party rule and authoritarianism have been gradually gaining ground over the past few years.

Although Thailand seems different, political parties there are hardly more than collections of personalities on the make, changing from one year to the next, and elections are won through almost open marketing of votes, which in its own way insures a type of authoritarianism.

Cambodia does not, even less than Thailand, or Malaysia, or the rest of Southeast Asia, show the preconditions for democracy as that system developed in the West. In summary (I follow Barrington Moore, *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*), in those countries where democracy prevails, it came about through centuries of often violent changes, as newly influential classes competed for power with old dominant ones.

In the last classical stage a capitalist bourgeoisie wrested political power from feudal, or post-feudal, aristocrats and/or absolute monarchs, while at the same time uneducated peasants were becoming more educated urban workers. Capitalist victory, however, was not sufficient for democracy. Capitalists would have been happy with a restricted vote enabling them to take over the state from kings and aristocrats, but leave the mass of the population excluded.

Real democracy came about through the efforts of non-capitalist and anti-capitalist groups, classes, and parties, who achieved, often with some violence, voting rights for all, in societies where there was sufficient education for the exercise of some intelligence in voting.

In Cambodia around 80% of the population are poorly-educated peasants with little previous experience of voting, or of any kind of political participation. Such parties as have existed have been coterie of personal supporters of one or another prominent personality, or bureaucratic parties, and the very idea of taking power from a monarch, or his aristocracy, or from any entrenched government a crime.

During 1979-91, at least, there were 12 years of developing and expanding participation in public affairs, the "modernization and democratization of many social ... relations", which Heder in the article cited called a prerequisite for "the task of building democracy". UNTAC put an end to this, first of all by ensuring Sihanouk a dominant place as Chief of State, President, or King.

The Cambodian people were not asked to vote on this most important matter. It was decided in advance. Thus was restored a system of "patrimonialist politicians" (Heder), in which old attitudes and practices have become dominant. Eventually, a necessary step toward democracy will be to either make Cambodia a republic, or to exclude the monarchy entirely from politics, as has been done in those western democracies which are still monarchies. Then Cambodia needs

new political parties based on distinct economic and social interests. I do not expect, however, to see an opposition capitalist party.

In any case, the rise of a new capitalist 'bourgeoisie', unlike what happened in Europe, will not promote democracy, because as in most of Southeast Asia, they will not try to gain power through elections, parties, and parliaments, but by inserting themselves within the old structures, somewhat modified. This has been called 'Ersatz (phony) Capitalism' by some writers studying countries such as Thailand and Malaysia,<sup>883</sup> and it could just as well be called 'Ersatz Democracy'.<sup>884</sup>

Nevertheless, the recent, and surprising, victory of striking Phnom Penh factory workers, reported in detail by 'Karen Fleming' in *Phnom Penh Post* 7-20 February, suggests that there might be a chance for an effective new party based on industrial workers, which might expand its interest towards the peasantry.<sup>885</sup>

Interestingly, the Phnom Penh workers were young women, which brings up another matter given much attention by international critics of Cambodia. As the line goes, there is no democracy, and the government deserves to be flayed because of the oppression of women and children. The examples cited are always taken completely outside the political, social, and historical context, as though Cambodia had not been, any more than Sweden, the victim of war, revolution, and economic collapse.

One such statistic, allegedly proving that women are marginalized, is the number of women members of parliament, only 7 out of 120, under 6%. This may not look good compared to Scandinavia, but it is not out of line with Thailand (24/393, or 6.1% women) or Malaysia (15/190 for 7.8%). What the critics should be looking at is the comparison with pre-UNTAC Cambodia where 21 of 117 members of parliament, 17.9%. were women, and where all aspects of health and education policies, in particular affecting women and children, were

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<sup>883</sup> Yoshihara Kunio, *The Rise of Ersatz Capitalism in South-East Asia*. Singapore, Oxford University Press, 1988.

<sup>884</sup> The emergence of Sam Rainsy and his party as third strongest after the 1998 election does not invalidate the remarks above. Although Rainsy claims to be for capitalism, and democracy, he himself is not an active capitalist, and his party is not made up of capitalists, or even of small businessmen. The real capitalists in Cambodia are people like Teng Boonma, who have achieved their success in alliance with politicians, or have remained entirely out of politics (see Jason Barber and Christine Chaumeau, "Teng Boonma: The man with the money", *PPP* 5/10, 17-30 May 1996, pp. 20, 18.). They are perfect cases of the *ersatz* variety.

<sup>885</sup> In fact, this comment was far too optimistic. While I still think that would be a desirable development, and would be a step toward democracy, there is no hope for it at present. It seems rather that the Phnom Penh factory workers were taken in by the populist and chauvinist ravings of Sam Rainsy.

far superior to what has resulted from the facade of democracy introduced at the price of 2 billion dollars by UNTAC.<sup>886</sup>

But as pointed out by 'Fleming', efforts to win power by workers or women get no support from the Great Power activists who claim to be concerned about democracy. In this case the US, and its official union representatives were more interested in facades than substance, and it might be expected that an emerging worker-peasant party in Cambodia would suffer the same fate as similar movements in Nicaragua, El Salvador, or Guatemala.

Which reminds me, having mentioned Central America, one person wounded in the attack on Sam Rainsy's demonstration in March was an American from the International Republican Institute, a semi-official activist group. They came to Cambodia in 1993 to teach democracy, and as a teaching tool they imported a vice-president of the US-backed ARENA party of El Salvador, confirmed just then by a UN Truth Commission as mainly responsible for the death squads and massacres during the civil war in El Salvador.<sup>887</sup>

After the original version of this article was published a person from one of the US labor organizations working in Cambodia reproached me for relying on the allegedly unfair and inaccurate comments of the pseudonymous 'Karen Fleming'. I intended to check this out on my next visit, scheduled for the beginning of July 1997, but this had to be postponed because of the fighting and subsequent cancellation of flights to Phnom Penh; and when I was able to make another trip, in December, both 'Fleming' and the person who had objected to my interpretation, had left Cambodia.

Thus, I may have been in error about US labor representatives in that particular case, but I would still stand by my general observations. Incidentally 'Fleming' was Brad Adams (on whom see pp. 514, ff., pp. 522) in drag.

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<sup>886</sup> This distorted presentation of the statistics came to my attention in, of all places, the *BCAS*, 28 February, 1996 by Pamela Collett, pp. 27-8; and I answered with the comments offered here, which were received with some asperity, in again, of all places, *BCAS*.

<sup>887</sup> The IRI has remained a strong backer of Rainsy, and after the July 1998 election energetically supported his efforts to overturn the election results and to destroy the Cambodian government and economy. On IRI see below, p. 521, and in *Cambodia: A Political Survey*, *passim*.



During July 5-7, 1997, there was fighting in Phnom Penh between armed units of FUNCINPEC and CPP. Most journalists have treated it as 'bloody coup by Hun Sen to oust Ranariddh', even though some of them do not believe it.

### A non-standard view of the 'coup' (1997) <sup>888</sup>

Back in 1993 it was said that journalists swarmed into town hoping to see blood, and left disappointed. Now they have seen some blood, and they certainly know what to do with it – grease their own personal Viet Nam syndromes by kicking a Cambodian leadership which, like Viet Nam, has refused to kowtow.

'Strong Man' Hun Sen, they say, moved to wipe out his opposition because he feared the results of next year's election. UNTAC's 2 billion was wasted, because it didn't buy compliance with what the West wanted in Cambodia. Those FUNCINPEC figures who chose Hun Sen over Ranariddh are 'quislings', although when they returned to Cambodia after 1991 they were hailed as the best elements of FUNCINPEC, as they no doubt are.<sup>[889]</sup>

Totally ignored is the build-up to the events of July 5-6. Although journalists cannot always be historians and sociologists, they must pay some attention or their simple-minded recording of the 'facts' of the moment (always partial because choices must be made, and therefore inevitably partisan) leads them into gross misinterpretations, not to say disinformation.

No doubt for journalists the 1980s are such ancient history that they cannot be accused of bias for forgetting them. All Cambodian political figures, however, know, and do not forget, that the entire so-called peace process evolution was intended to get rid of the CPP, even at the risk of giving the KR a place in the government.

The Paris Agreement and the 1993 election only came about because the PRK/SOC managed to defeat cruder schemes. And in spite of 2 billion dollars and a whole gaggle of experts, the conduct of balloting and counting was sloppy enough to give the CPP reason to claim fraud.

It is, however, disinformation just to say that Ranariddh won but Hun Sen refused to move out. Representation was proportional and the coalition was mandated by Paris and UNTAC rules concerning the new constitution. The modalities of forming the coalition, of course, were not parliamentary, but the

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<sup>888</sup> Published in *PPP* 6/17, 29 August-11 September 1997, p. 11; and in *Nation* (Bangkok), 25 September 1997, p. A5, with the title "The real story of Cambodia cries out to be told". See also *PPP*, 16/15, 27 July-9 August, 2007, p.7; and Vickery, *Cambodia: A Political Survey*, pp. 159-166.

<sup>889</sup> I was thinking in particular of Ung Huot who returned to Cambodia after over 20 years in Australia, was elected on the FUNCINPEC ticket in 1993, and became Education Minister, earning much praise both from Cambodians and from foreign observers for his efforts to improve the schools, in particular wiping out corruption.

position retained by the CPP was in accord with its votes, 38% against 45%. This is the minimum background

It was disinformation not to at least acknowledge in passing that weeks ago Ranariddh boasted that he would use new KR allies to further his own policies, especially and most dangerously, against Viet Nam.<sup>890</sup>

It was disinformation not to note that ever since 1993 the royalists had been plotting to undermine Hun Sen as much as he, no doubt, had been plotting to stay ahead of them. The post-election secession was under Ranariddh's brother Chakrapong, just dumped by the CPP, and directly instigated by an important non-CPP higher-level personality.<sup>[891]</sup>

Hun Sen outplayed them and got credit for putting down the secession. All through 1994 various royalist schemes were hatched to undermine the CPP by bringing the KR into the government via a back door; and in July of that year a royalist coup was barely nipped in the bud.

The royalists, moreover, seem to have got what they asked for. As said in the CPP White Paper edited by a US legal expert, and as supported in Mike Fowler's presentation of the case, the royalists had been trying to provoke such an incident, apparently overconfident of success, and Hun Sen had a good legal case against them, if only he had resorted to the courts rather than to violence.<sup>892</sup>

I wonder what courts he could have used. The Phnom Penh foreign community and the international press have already condemned the Cambodian courts as nothing but rubber stamps for the government, and they would have

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<sup>890</sup> *PPP*, 5/10, 20 September-3 October 1996, "Ranariddh dismisses rumored CPP scheme", and interview with Matthew Grainger, "Ranariddh: 'KR will be very tough'". The same theme was implicit in the formation of the 'National Union Front' of FUNCINPEC and Sam Rainsy's 'Khmer Nation Party', with participation in the celebration by 20 Khmer Rouge delegates from Ieng Sary's 'Democratic National Union Movement'. See Ker Munthit, "Smiles all round as one-time foes join hands in NUF", *PPP* 6/5, March 7-20, 1997, p. 4.

<sup>891</sup> See my *Cambodia: a Political Survey*, pp. 86-100 and pp. 501 ff., above. Naturally, a strong objection to my interpretation of the secession came from the palace ("Secession attempt", *The Nation*, 2 July 1993, signed by 'The Office of Samdech Preah Norodom Sihanouk'), but a journalist writing from Phnom Penh a month later found that what was perhaps my most controversial point was widely shared.

See "The 'mercurial prince' keeps them guessing", *The Nation*, 'Focus', 26 July 1993, p. C1, and *Christian Science Monitor Weekly*, 9-15 July 1993, "Despite Bickering, Royal Family Holds Key to Peace in Cambodia", by Kathy Chenault, who wrote, "Observers in Phnom Penh speculated there was never any serious intention for any of the provinces to break away and said Sihanouk was behind the move, perhaps as a ploy to make his leadership look more attractive to the international community as well as Cambodians".

<sup>892</sup> Fowler wrote in *PPP*, 12-24 July 1997, p. 11. Trained as both lawyer and journalist, Fowler came to Cambodia with an Asia Foundation program as an adviser to the new post-election National Assembly in 1993.

denounced any verdict in Hun Sen's favor as dishonest; and probably no international court would have taken the case.

Incidentally, the White Paper remarks were already widely held among serious diplomats during my last visit to Phnom Penh in December 1997.

Of course, we should all rejoice in the overthrow of Pol Pot by Nate Thayer and the emergence of the Khmer Rouge as born again liberal democrats. Nate, a volunteer PR man for the Khmer Rouge since, at least, his "Cambodia: Misperceptions and Peace" (*Washington Quarterly*, Spring 1991, pp. 179-191) has outdone himself with "Cambodia's Peace was Just a Day Away" (*Washington Post* 17 Aug), which goes beyond the usual PR. It is the most devious and dishonest piece of pseudo-journalism I have seen in a long time.<sup>[893]</sup>

In order to present the scene as "a watershed moment" which would have meant peace for "this country's tortured history" (a cliché, usual among hacks apologizing for the torturers) Nate talks about the KR abandoning "their war against Cambodia's government" and agreeing "to a formal 'surrender' ceremony in which their forces would join the Cambodian army".

That is straight Nate PR hype. In the finer print further on the KR themselves, at least, appear more honest.

In his *FEER* special (7 Aug) Nate was less devious with, "the Khmer Rouge finalized their alliance with Ranariddh's FUNCINPEC party on July 4", after negotiations between Ta Mok and FUNCINPEC general Nhiek Bun Chhay in which the KR "agreed in principle to join in alliance [with FUNCINPEC]".

In the *Washington Post* Nate put a different spin on the story, "the guerrillas finally had agreed to integrate their troops into the army [*sic*] and recognize the government [emphasis added]". Nate deviously substituted 'the government' for 'FUNCINPEC' and turned its armed faction into 'the [Cambodian] army'.

However, further on, Nate says that the KR were adamantly opposed to working with Hun Sen, whom they kept calling a puppet, and what they agreed to was not integrating forces and joining the government, but only that "the military units changed into government uniforms and pledged allegiance to the king, the government and the constitution, but were not forced to disperse from their territory [emphasis added]".

They would keep their own strategic base in Anlong Veng. Similarly it was agreed, not that the KR would join with the government, but "could join the National United Front coalition of anti-Hun Sen political opposition parties".

It was precisely what Hun Sen claimed: a FUNCINPEC-KR alliance against him, along with delivery of weapons and ammunition by FUNCINPEC to the KR.

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<sup>893</sup> Brown and Zasloff, *Cambodia Confounds the Peacemakers 1979-1998*, p. 261, n. 68, called it an "excellent report".

It is thus egregious to say that only now, after Hun Sen's coup, "the forces loyal to Ranariddh have begun to form a military coalition with former Khmer Rouge fighters". That was what they had agreed to on July 4.

Not only would the Ranariddh-KR coalition not have brought peace to Cambodia, it could have embroiled Viet Nam as well, for reports of KR radio broadcasts indicate that nothing of their traditional policy has changed. Hatred of Viet Nam as the main enemy continues; and several weeks ago Ranariddh boasted of using defecting KR in his own anti-Vietnamese plans.<sup>[894]</sup>

The Pol Pot trial scam shows again that the KR, as I wrote in 1991 (*Indochina Issues*) are adroit at winning the hearts and minds of the western press corps. As Thayer wrote, Tep Kunnal, a new KR front man, "is knowledgeable about US politics".

The scam has some chance of success because for various reasons all opponents of DK have personalized its record with the name Pol Pot, ignoring that what happened in 1975-79 could not have been the work of one man, but was influenced by Cambodia's history and the structure of its society.

For Viet Nam and the new PRK state in 1979, it was simply the easiest way to quickly assure the demonization of their enemies; for other Cambodians it was a way to avoid examination and self-criticism of their own society; for concerned western regimes it was a way to escape from their own responsibility in the destruction of Cambodia; and for academic specialists, at least in English-speaking milieus, concentration on personalities rather than social and economic structures was an ingrained habit in their work.

Thus both among the Cambodian population and western observers 'Pol Potism' as an aberration of one evil man, or at most a small coterie, replaced 'Democratic Kampuchea', which should have been viewed as an unfortunate episode in Cambodia's integration into the modern world requiring close study and explanation in its totality.

Contrary to Thayer's hype, a number of persons who viewed his film, including both Cambodians and foreigners, and one leading Cambodia scholar, did not think Pol Pot appeared tearful or contrite, and at the end he was shown considerable deference by his 'accusers'.

The audience was mostly women and children chanting slogans; key leaders – Ta Mok, Khieu Samphan, and Nuon Chea – were not present; Thayer could not (whether for linguistic or political reasons is not clear) ask Pol Pot any questions, and he simply reproduced what he was told by the directors and producers of the show concerning the alleged splits in the KR.

Even then it is clear that not much is new. Peasantism and nationalism are still the KR themes, as they always were, and now they claim to be for liberal democracy and the free market. So, one might ask, and this is indeed what they

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<sup>894</sup> See above, note 890.

want us to ask, what is wrong with a KR-royalist alliance based on peasant welfare, nationalism and the free market?

For one thing, we have seen much of it before. Their policies were always in principle pro-peasant, yet they severely damaged peasant livelihood. Now, with a small population dependent on them, and vast wealth from timber sales over the years, it is easy to subsidize their way into popularity among those peasants within a limited area. This gives no clue to what they would do in agriculture if they again controlled the country, or whether they have learned the requisite lessons from their previous experience.

So far, their free market activity has meant stealing the national forests and selling them across the border, and if this is what Cambodia has to hope from them, the country might just as well stick with its current rulers. As for their commitment to liberal democracy, I think we may fairly disbelieve.

Moreover, in a poor country with an overwhelming majority of poor peasants in its population, a free market and liberal democracy work counter to peasant welfare, as may be seen from several examples in the real world.

As for nationalism, that means aggravated hatred of Viet Nam, which was probably the single most destructive element of DK policies, and the motive for most of the officially sanctioned executions.

Those Phnom Penh diplomats who last December indicated that their worry for next year was an unholy alliance of Ranariddh, Rainsy and the Khmer Rouge which might do well in the election on a platform of anti-Vietnamese chauvinism were correct, and if Hun Sen has averted that we should all be pleased.

Nate Thayer, however, has put his finger on certain matters which deserve attention. Unlike those journalists who just want to see blood in Phnom Penh, and who time and again reserve their worst invective, not for the real KR, but for Hun Sen because once upon a time, before 1977, he was in the Khmer Rouge army, and unlike the western statesmen who throughout the 1980s publicly excoriated the KR while facilitating backhanders to them across the Thai border, Thayer believes in what he promotes.

He sees that most of Cambodia's population, who are poor peasants, live in misery, ignored by most of their political and economic rulers; and Thayer thinks that what he sees as the new reformed KR may have some of the right answers.

At least, the Phnom Penh government and the interested foreign organizations should be giving serious attention to the social problems of large impoverished groups in the Cambodian population, including peasants, the urban mass, and the soldiers. In the events of July 5-7, 1997 there were disturbing reminders of April 1975.

As reported by Robin McDowell of AP on 7 July, "Doctors at one hospital said patients were being discharged early to go home to protect their belongings. At another, struck by shelling over the weekend, doctors had abandoned their patients. By today, all the hospital's mattresses, furniture and equipment had been looted". Let us not forget that one of the reasons for the dispersal of

hospitals by the victorious KR was because over half of Cambodia's doctors had fled the country before 17 April.

The looting which accompanied the coup was not in order to reward the troops. Quite obviously it could not be controlled, and civilians were involved as enthusiastically as soldiers. It showed a violent hatred by the poor, both soldiers and civilians, against the small privileged sector which has become indecently and pretentiously rich since 1991.

The Khmer Rouge won in 1975 because they had the support of those poor sectors of Cambodia; Phnom Penh as a city, abstracting from the fate of particular individuals, deserved what happened in April 1975. The events of July 5-7 (1997), indicate that it might all happen again, whether or not Pol Pot has been put away, and whether or not the Khmer Rouge have reformed.

Indeed, if a KR-royalist alliance should win an election, and put into effect the liberal democracy and free market they now praise, they might in the end find themselves victims of popular rage from out of the depths.

After the anti-Vietnamese chauvinism which seems to be growing, what most worries me is that all factions, the KR, the royalists, the CPP, and the prominent dissident Pen Sovann, have been touting the same economic doctrines, which in the former Soviet Union have led, since 1991, to the realization of the old Cold War cliché, about regimes making war on their own people.

On 1 November 1997, in the Foreign Correspondents Club in Phnom Penh, I met Nate Thayer, who objected to the charges of dishonesty and deviousness in my comparison of his *Washington Post* article on the Pol Pot trial with that published in *Far Eastern Economic Review*. He said he had sent exactly the same article to both publications.

Taking him at his word I sent letters to both *Phnom Penh Post* and *The Nation* to explain the misunderstanding and to state that the dishonesty and deviousness, as well as the ludicrous title, "Cambodian Peace Just one Day Away" in the *Washington Post* should be attributed to them, not to Nate Thayer personally.

Perhaps the only journalist who attempted at the time to look at evidence from both sides was Barry Wain, who wrote, "In circumstances that remain disputed, Mr. Hun Sen's military forces last July defeated Prince Ranariddh's troops in Phnom Penh". The pro-CPP interpretation has found its most prominent international supporter in Tony Kevin, Australian Ambassador in Phnom Penh, who was in Phnom Penh at the time.<sup>895</sup>

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<sup>895</sup> *AWSJ*, 20-21, February 1998, p. 10, by Barry Wain, entitled "Salvaging Elections in Cambodia". For a serious discussion of the contrary position, that the 'coup' may have started as an attempted putsch by Ranariddh's forces, see Tony Kevin, then Australian Ambassador in Phnom Penh, "US Errs in Cambodia Policy", *FEER* 21 May 1998, p. 37; "Cambodia Prepares for National Elections", *The Asia-Pacific Magazine* No. 9/10, 1998; and "Support Cambodian Elections", *Christian Science Monitor* Weekly 24-30 July, 1998, p. 16. David Chandler, *A History*, fourth edition, p. 290, supports the simplistic

The *Guardian* (England) had a few inadequate lines from Nick Cummings-Bruce, and when later, in Phnom Penh, I asked why his treatment was so inadequate he pleaded the priority being given to Indonesia.

Further support for the CPP interpretation came with the sudden discovery of Khmer Rouge documents on their negotiations with Ranariddh and his colleagues, on which see *Cambodia: a Political Survey*, pp. 162-3.

Whatever the precise details of the July events, they had an immediate, if perhaps, to be seen, short-term beneficial effect on internal conditions. Security in general was vastly improved, and casual travel could be taken to places which had been considered risky. I experienced this on my next two trips to Cambodia, in October 1997 and March 1998.

### Cambodian Impressions (October 1997) <sup>896</sup>

In June of this year an American archeologist wrote to me about his recent visit to the seventh-century city of Sambor Prei Kuk some 20 km north of the provincial capital of Kompong Thom in central Cambodia, an area long considered unsafe for casual travel because of Khmer Rouge presence, and where a Japanese UN volunteer was killed in 1993.

He had to hire a jeep and two armed guards from the provincial authorities and take plenty of cigarettes and small change for the numerous patrols and roadblocks by all sorts of soldiers of varying allegiances which would be encountered along the road.

But when I went there on October 18th no armed guards were thought necessary, and the rains had reduced the road from Kompong Thom to such a mud track that the three of us had to ride pillion on motorcycles for the two hours to Sambor Prei Kuk. There were no soldiers, pseudo soldiers, roadblocks, or beggars en route. Everything was as it had been when I made my last visit to the ancient city in 1962 – villagers going to and from Kompong Thom, or busy in their fields and around their houses.

At the ancient city itself most of the temples (about 100 sites have been recorded, with around 20 still in fairly good condition) have been cleared of brush and neat paths lead from one temple to another. A caretaker asked to see our letter from provincial authorities, a measure to identify visitors and prevent theft, and then he showed us around to the best preserved sites.

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anti-Hun Sen position, that the latter “launched a preemptive coup against FUNCINPEC troops and followers”.

<sup>896</sup> Published in *The Nation* ( Bangkok), 18 November 1997, with the title, invented by the editor, “Flip side view of Cambodia’s woes”.

This new care for ancient sites, superior to the 1960s, was instituted under the PRK in the early 1980s, and most of the young caretakers, then and now, show a surprising acquaintance with the standard history of their ancient sites.

Indeed, more of Cambodia is now safe for travel on main roads than at any time since Lon Nol's coup in 1970. Some of it is directly attributable to the outcome of the 'July events' as the shoot-out of 5-6 July is usually called.

As my motorcycle driver remarked as we rode along, the road to Sambor Prei Kuk used to be very dangerous, even when the Khmer Rouge were not around. Local men en route who had been armed in the 1980s to defend their villages, then used their weapons for private enterprise after the KR danger receded; but after the July events "Hun Sen sent word that all those weapons were to be withdrawn in 3 days, and in 3 days they were gone".

Until heavy rains washed out stretches of it, the entire route 6 beyond Kompong Thom to Siem Reap, which even in the relatively safe early UNTAC period of 1992 had been considered too dangerous for civilian traffic, had become passable, and western NGO workers had started taking river boats all the way to Kratie and Stung Treng in the Northeast.

Some of the improvement antedated the July events. Route 5 to Battambang, also a no-no in 1992-3, became generally safe for normal traffic after the split in the Khmer Rouge in which those in the Pailin area under Ieng Sary made peace with the government, or with Hun Sen, as some commentators would have it.

Calm after the storm has also come to Phnom Penh. No longer do armed groups of rival forces drive around showing their weapons, and most foreign residents consider the city somewhat safer, although, as in New York, attacks and robberies late at night are not unknown.

The improvement is in part, of course, simply because there is now only one source of official power, in place of two competing forces. The same improvement would not have come about, however, if the July events had gone the other way, if only because FUNCINPEC, even had they won in Phnom Penh, could not have imposed the same authority over the provinces because they have never had sufficient personnel to take over administrative responsibility; in Phnom Penh they would have had to be far more bloody to impose their single-party rule at the center.

Another positive impression was the condition of the local press. There are 30-40 newspapers, with a very wide spectrum of political opinion. The variety and level of criticism of the government and its leaders by newspapers supporting opponents, such as Ranariddh, Sam Rainsy, and the Khmer Rouge, make the Khmer press at present one of the freest in Southeast Asia, and the level at which criticism is pitched is generally higher than in previous years, more concerned with comment on political, administrative, and economic issues, rather than just personal insults.

Unfortunately, equivalent improvement is not evident in the foreign press corps reporting from Phnom Penh. Rarely has reporting about Cambodia been



very praiseworthy, but at the moment it has fallen to its lowest level. Without considering any of the evidence there is a nearly universal conclusion that what happened on July 5-6 was a premeditated coup by Hun Sen.

When I sought to engage the Southeast Asian correspondent of a major European newspaper in a discussion, saying "let's go through the government white papers on the events and you tell me which points you object to and on what grounds", his answer was, "I haven't read the white paper". Three months after the event that is inexcusable from Nick Cummings-Bruce, correspondent of the *Guardian*.

Cummings-Bruce also brushed aside my suggestion that if the 'KR papers' (see above) had pointed the other way, to Ranariddh's complete innocence and Hun Sen's total responsibility for the July events, they would have received much more international interest.

Our international free press works overtime to put a negative twist on everything. When forced to face the increasing security of travel, they respond with concern for the poor highwaymen, who now disarmed and chased from the roads will be forced to turn to some other form of crime, and instead of noticing the numerous newspapers full of political criticism, they focus on the two or three interventions by the authorities against free expression.

No doubt the improvements will not last if the economy declines. Much foreign investment did withdraw after July, and much foreign aid was suspended. The poor may be forced to turn to crime. Fortunately, those business and legal circles who remained in Phnom Penh feel that the results of July should have made for a better investment climate and they are advising colleagues and clients to return.

Unfortunately, one of the most powerful players, the US government, seems to be giving in to a strange coalition of VWRs (Vietnam Warmonger Retreads) who wish, through continued suspension of aid, to kick Cambodia back to an economic stone age in which US favorites may be imposed again on Phnom Penh. That would be as disastrous as what happened in 1970.

Perhaps because the lackadaisical attitude of their own correspondent, noted above, threw the *Guardian* off guard, its editors allowed the *Washington Post* to impose an editorial on them reflecting the views of US regime hardliners toward Cambodia. I offered them this correction which went unpublished.

### The *Guardian's* Stolen Objectivity (1997) <sup>897</sup>

The editorial in the *Guardian Weekly* of 26 October 1997, p. 17, entitled "Cambodia's Stolen Democracy", might well be termed 'The *Guardian's* Stolen

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<sup>897</sup> Michael Vickery, unpublished letter (via e-mail) to *Guardian Weekly*, 11 November 1997.

Objectivity' for the way the *Washington Post* imposed on the *Guardian* the distorted vision of a band of American VWR (Vietnam Warmonger Retreads).

The assumption that the affair of July 5-6 was a one-sided coup by Hun Sen, not at all certain even then, is not held by most serious international observers resident there. In a recent three-week visit (10 October-2 November) I became convinced that it was more likely an attempted coup by FUNCINPEC which was defeated.

Junketing newspeople, and not only those with the *Washington Post*, take an extremely obtuse view. When, on October 18, I suggested to the *Guardian's* own Southeast Asia correspondent that we go through the government's white paper and that he indicate the points with which he disagreed, and the reasons why, he answered that he had not read the white paper. Indeed – three months after the event.

At least, both sides had been preparing equally for an armed confrontation and it is mischievous to say that "the elected prime minister was deposed". One of the elected prime ministers fled the country in advance, and when his side lost he was charged with a crime and replaced. Those executed were all military, in what was probably a settling of scores among gunmen going back years.

No civilian supporters of Ranariddh were forced into exile, but some were terrorized and persuaded to leave by a member of the UN Center for Human Rights. Those who kept their heads could immediately resume work in their respective government offices, including You Hockry of the Interior Ministry, who had been in the thick of activity in FUNCINPEC's command post on the 5<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> (as seen on a FUNCINPEC film captured by the government), yet returned to his ministerial post on the 7<sup>th</sup>.

It is a peculiar assault on the press which allows over 30 newspapers to function; including those in support of Hun Sen's enemies, Ranariddh, Sam Rainsy, and the Khmer Rouge, which day by day print the strongest possible criticism of the government and its policies.

This seems to go unnoticed by both the resident foreign reporters and the junketeers, who to be sure are illiterate in Khmer, and who report only the isolated incidents of state displeasure with the press. Interestingly, the critical press now is more serious than in previous years, with more discussion of issues, and less diatribe calling political rivals pigs or dogs.

Security conditions have vastly improved. There are no more improvised road blocks demanding bribes, and travel to distant provinces, except for the northern and northwestern borders and the Khmer Rouge area, is nearly as safe as in the 1960s (when I also traveled there).

It is true that much foreign investment stopped, but expert advisers on the spot are urging their business clients to return, and argue that the defeat of the FUNCINPEC generals has improved economic possibilities and security. The stoppage of foreign aid is mainly an effort by US Neanderthals to starve

Cambodia back to an economic stone age, without even the minimally rational Cold War purpose which motivated them in earlier years.

The anti-Cambodian campaign out of Washington is now no more than a relic of a Vietnam Syndrome, ongoing hatred of the small country which defeated US aggression, and of its erstwhile Cambodian allies.

The letter below is my response to a letter by Stephen Heder to the *Phnom Penh Post*.

From Info-Ed to the UN Center for Human Rights (1998) <sup>898</sup>

It hardly matters whether anyone can produce a record of some member of the UNTAC Information Component saying they considered their job to be to undermine the SOC. <sup>899</sup>

The Paris Agreement and the documents issuing from international participants in negotiations leading up to it are sufficient evidence that the goal of the UNTAC project was to replace SOC/ CPP with its enemies, even to the extent of raising the international prestige of the so-called Khmer Rouge.

Thus the components of UNTAC, to the extent possible, were filled with anti-SOC partisans, and what was a real disqualification from working in UNTAC was a record giving the impression that one would not go along with that one-sided project.

I am surprised that Heder wants to get once again into a public discussion of this matter, since Information-Education was the most blatant example of UNTAC politics. The composition of its leadership throughout 1992-93 was a subject of either high humor or shock in the knowledgeable international community of Phnom Penh, depending on the degree of cynicism of the beholder.

Timothy Carney, the director, was an ambitious officer in the US foreign service whose career depended on furthering US regime policy, which at that time was to remove the SOC. Although 'seconded' to UNTAC, there was no possibility that Carney would deviate from that policy. When policy changed soon after the election, and the important State Department officials concerned with Cambodia decided to "support the parties that had won the election", as one of them said to me, Carney quickly disappeared from the scene.

Heder, throughout the 1980s, had become a professional enemy of the PRK-SOC, first in a warmongering presentation to the US Congress in 1981, in which he advocated increased US military support to the Cambodian contras, then as

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<sup>898</sup> Michael Vickery, *Phnom Penh Post*, vol. 7, no. 7, April 10-24, 1998. Text and footnotes in square brackets were added later.

<sup>899</sup> Stephen Heder, letter, *PPP* 7/4, 27 Feb-13 March, p. 13, 1998, in answer to Raoul Jennar.

co-author of a dishonest ‘human rights’ report produced for the New-York-based Lawyers’ Committee for Human Rights.<sup>900</sup>

This enabled him to be infiltrated into Amnesty International (it should have been grounds to disqualify him), where in 1985-1988 he was responsible for reports which were little more than propaganda tirades against the Cambodian government. And that made him a natural for an important post within UNTAC.

There he interpreted the ‘Information’ role to be not only to inform Cambodians about elections, but to ‘inform’ selected friends in the press corps, via leaked ‘United Nations’ documents, of how they should view Cambodian politics, and to disinform the rest of UNTAC about certain key events.

For apparent examples of the first, see my “Son Sen and all that”. For the second, I am thinking of the so-called ‘secession’ in June 1993, when Heder’s confidential memo to the 9 top UNTAC officials was uncomfortably leaked, enabling other than Heder’s buddies to play the UN document leak game.<sup>[901]</sup>

The Lawyers’ Committee and Amnesty were not the only ‘Human Rights’ organizations to interpret their duty as overthrowing the Cambodian government. Asia Watch also joined the fray, and before negotiations reached the Paris stage Asia Watch was advocating implementation of the US Nicaragua strategy (condemned on one count by the World Court) to effect the same results in Cambodia.

Along those lines, that is, bringing Central America to Cambodia, not a peep was heard from any UNTAC component, certainly not Info-Ed nor Human Rights, when the (US) International Republican Institute (IRI), under the patronage of USAID, brought a vice-president of the El Salvador ARENA party, just then condemned by a UN Truth Commission report for major responsibility in gross violations of human rights, including torture and mass murder by death squads, to Cambodia to teach ‘democracy’.<sup>[902]</sup>

For the Human Rights component of UNTAC, condemnation of human rights violations meant those committed by the SOC. It was not considered politically correct to speak of Khmer Rouge atrocities, and when Heder’s own research revealed a renewed policy of genocide being applied by the Khmer Rouge in 1992-93, in fact the first and still only absolutely clear evidence of genocidal **policy**, it was hushed up – although probably not by Heder alone, but on orders of higher UNTAC levels. Heder finally revealed this in detail in the book he

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<sup>900</sup> “Statement by Stephen R. Heder, Ph.D. Candidate, Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University”, before the Subcommittee on Asian and Pacific Affairs, on “US Policy in the Indochina Region Since Vietnam’s Occupation of Kampuchea”, 21 October 1981; Vickery, “A Critique of the Lawyers’ Committee for International Human Rights, Kampuchea Mission of November 1984”, *JCA* Vol 18, No 1, 1988, pp. 108-116.

<sup>901</sup> “Son Sen and all that – challenging the KR pundits”, *PPP*, vol. 5, no. 24, 29 November-12 December, 1996, p. 7, and above, pp. 406 ff.

<sup>902</sup> On IRI see further below, and *Cambodia: A Political Survey*, *passim*.

edited with Judy Ledgerwood, *Propaganda, Politics, and Violence in Cambodia*.<sup>[903]</sup>

The Human Rights bias is being honorably continued by the United Nations Centre for Human Rights in Phnom Penh. In violation of their own *Memorandum of Understanding* with the Cambodian government, in which the intention is clearly that UNCHR would have a largely advisory and educational role within the judicial and legislative branches of the government in order to build up legal and judicial capabilities, UNCHR has been following the old UNTAC policy of undermining the Cambodian government whenever possible.

Their reports, in particular those issued after the events of 5-6 July 1997 under the name of Thomas Hammarberg, have been full of exaggerated allegations, while clear violations of human rights by other agencies than those of the government have been ignored.

A salient example was the refusal of the luxury hospital in the palace, just a short walk away, to open its doors to people wounded by grenades on 30 March 1997. In most western democracies that refusal would have constituted a crime. Those reports signed by Hammarberg are White Papers in favor of the opponents of the CPP.

Likewise, UNCHR should have loudly objected when the International Republican Institute resumed work in Cambodia, because of their gross lack of sensitivity towards Human Rights when they brought an El Salvador death squad patron to teach democracy during the 1993 election. But IRI works in support of anti-government Cambodian parties, and thus serves the same interests as UNCHR.<sup>[904]</sup>

Responsibility for drafting these 'white papers' would seem to belong to David Hawk, who has a record of anti-PRK/SOC bias going back to the early 1980s, and which should have disqualified him from holding such a post in Cambodia today.<sup>[905]</sup>

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<sup>903</sup> See details above, p. 465.

<sup>904</sup> This has appeared most clearly since the 1998 election when IRI, after at first finding themselves obliged to issue a relatively positive report on the voting, then said, in the words of their then president Lorne Craner, that the elections are "among the worst we have seen since 1993" (testimony before the House International Relations Committee Subcommittee on East Asian and Pacific Affairs, September 28, 1998).

They have become the strongest foreign supporters of Sam Rainsy's efforts to subvert the results of the election, destroy what is left of the economy, and overthrow the government. Piquantly and disgustingly, Craner, a former, and subsequent ranking State Department officer, referred proudly to his and IRI's activities in Central America in the 1980s, one of the filthiest periods of US diplomacy.

<sup>905</sup> This was just a guess based on my reading of the language and style. I understand that Hawk has denied responsibility. If so, he could do us all a favor, and get this monkey off his back, by revealing who was responsible. Certainly one or more subordinates who had

Perhaps more important, however, in furthering UNCHR's peculiar policies, is the return of Brad Adams for a second tour of duty after an interim in which he laid out an anti-CPP, in particular anti-Hun Sen, propaganda tract in the form of a submission to the US Senate (4 Sept 1997).

Adams began his presentation to the Senate with distortions of the 1993 election results, saying "the royalist FUNCINPEC party and its allies won a clear majority of seats ... 69 of 120", and "62% of the Cambodian electorate voted to replace Hun Sen and the ... CPP". Adams here was mesmerized by the myth of the 'anti-communist resistance', that strange creature slapped together by US and Chinese pressure in 1982.

Perhaps the one seat won by MOULINAKA might legitimately be added as a FUNCINPEC ally, but the KPNLF, from which BLDP descended, had a history perhaps more anti-royalist than even the CPP. Once they left the battlefield, BLDP, and LDP, the other descendent of the KPNLF, were in no way natural allies of FUNCINPEC, as we have seen in the shifts in parliament since 1993.

Half of BLDP has joined in alliance with CPP, and the leaders of LDP, which did not win any seats, have been working with one or another CPP leader. An honest assessment would be that FUNCINPEC and its allies won  $58 + 1 = 59$ , against CPP with 51, and both were faced with 10 BLDP representatives who might go either way.

Even more distorted is Adams' claim that 62% of the voters were anti-CPP, a total obtained by taking all non-CPP votes as in favor of FUNCINPEC. The latter got roughly 45%, CPP 38%, BLDP 4%, and 16 minor parties altogether 11%.

Some of those minor parties, however, were expressly in favor of cooperation with CPP, if they won any seats, and even more of them were outspokenly anti-royalist and republican, thus not at all potential allies of FUNCINPEC. Counting the votes party by party shows that slightly over half of the voters chose parties which were historically, or explicitly, anti-royalist.

Contrary to the picture Adams foisted on Congress, the election was very close, fully justifying a coalition government such as is common in Western European parliamentary democracies. There was no "landslide victory" (Adams' words), and to say that "the UN and the international community capitulated and allowed the rules to be changed in the middle of the game", shows either that Adams is faking it or that he never read the relevant documents.

One great defect of the Paris Agreement was that it did not provide clearly for a transition to a new government after the election, but following the Paris and

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been continuously present in Cambodia drafted them for Hammarberg, not usually present in Cambodia, to sign.

UNTAC rules it would not have been possible for FUNCINPEC to immediately form a government, even if they had won over 50% of the votes and seats.

In fact, the CPP had an absolute right to remain in power alone for up to three months; the quick formation of a coalition was of more benefit to FUNCINPEC than to CPP, and the top UNTAC leadership had considered the possibility of such a coalition in the event of a close election result as early as the beginning of May.<sup>[906]</sup>

Adams then lied to Congress in stating that the National Assembly “within a year ... had been reduced to a rubber stamp institution ... To debate a draft law was simply pointless”.

[A researcher who discovered, and published, information concerning the press law debate in 1994, and well before Adams's performance before Congress, was Raoul Jennar. Jennar wrote, “many Westerners said at that time that the members of the National Assembly had been pressured and that they had become servile to the instructions of the government. Having read the 417 pages of the analytical review of the debates enables me to state the contrary, to emphasize that there was a genuine debate”.<sup>907</sup>]

Of course Adams had to tell Congress that “since 1993 four journalists have been assassinated”. True as a matter of fact, but what should be emphasized is that this is a better record than in some of the West's favorite capitalist countries of Southeast Asia which have not gone through Cambodia's cycles of violence and social breakdown.

The latest statistic I have seen concerned the 33rd (yes, **thirty-three**) journalist murdered in the Philippines since 1986, for an average of about three per year for the last 12 years (*Bangkok Post* 31 March, p. 6). In no country of ASEAN would an opposition press as violently hostile and defamatory as the Cambodian be tolerated.

One should ask on what grounds Adams can claim that the allegation against Prince Sirivudh was “transparently phony”. Does Adams have some secret source of information about all the facts of that case? If so, he should lay them out.

Adams seems also quite wrong in saying that “virtually all Cambodians, diplomats and other observers believe the attack [on Sam Rainsy's demonstration] was ordered by Hun Sen”.

My own experience is that outside of Adams' UNCHR clique virtually no one believes that, including some of the more important diplomats in Phnom Penh.

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<sup>906</sup> See my “Revisiting the legalities of ‘93”, *PPP* vol. 7, no. 10, 22 May-4 June 1998,; and in *Cambodia: A Political Survey*, pp. 78-83.

<sup>907</sup> This is my translation from the French of Raoul Marc Jennar, *Cambodge: une presse sous pression*, Paris, Reporteurs sans frontières, juin 1997, p. 61.

Moreover, according to the latest *Phnom Penh Post*, which we know we can always trust, Sam Rainsy himself does not believe that either, but now blames “a ring of mafia-style leaders within the business community and the CPP”.<sup>908</sup>

For Adams, the mini-civil war of July 1997 was nothing but a putsch by Hun Sen, totally ignoring the evidence that the other side was equally prepared and that they may well have started the action. At least, in the absence of inside knowledge, a foreign observer can go no farther than to describe the action as an explosion resulting from simmering hostility between the two sides which had been obvious for months.

As the usually right-wing, pro-American *Asian Wall Street Journal* put it, “In circumstances that remain disputed, Mr. Hun Sen’s military forces last July defeated Prince Ranariddh’s troops in Phnom Penh”.<sup>909</sup>

Whoever was to blame, it was not “extremely violent and bloody”, but, comparatively, as such affairs go, very limited. No one I have talked to thought that “for two days the entire city shook with the impact of artillery and mortars”, or that “entire neighborhoods in Phnom Penh were bombarded with heavy weapons”.

It is true that “the home of ... Ranariddh was surrounded and attacked”, but then it was serving as a command post for the anti-government forces, as is clearly seen in a film which they shot of themselves, later found by the government (Ranariddh himself had bugged out on July 4th and was on his way to France).

There they appear relaxed and confident of their coming victory. Ly Touch was on the phone, to foreign journalists, saying that Hun Sen had been killed by his bodyguards, evidently in preparation for an extra-judicial execution which they were planning.

This is a good piece of evidence that it was a coup planned by the FUNCINPEC military which turned sour; and it was not only, to quote Adams again, “senior FUNCINPEC military officials who were targeted for execution”. FUNCINPEC had its own list of targets too, if they had won.<sup>[910]</sup>

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<sup>908</sup> *PPP*, Vol 7, No. 6, 27 March-9 April, p. 4.

<sup>909</sup> *AWSJ*, 20-21, February 1998, p. 10, by Barry Wain, entitled “Salvaging Elections in Cambodia”.

[For a serious discussion of the contrary position, that the ‘coup’ may have started as an attempted putsch by Ranariddh’s forces, see Tony Kevin, then Australian Ambassador in Phnom Penh, “US Errs in Cambodia Policy”, *FEER* 21 May 1998, p. 37; and “Cambodia Prepares for National Elections”, *The Asia-Pacific Magazine* No. 9/10, 1998); and “Support Cambodian Elections”, *Christian Science Monitor Weekly* 24-30 July, 1998, p. 16.]

<sup>910</sup> I have discovered that this view is widespread among diplomats in Phnom Penh, although they refuse to make it public; the evidence is also well-known to the journalistic herd who, nevertheless, continue to bray on about ‘strongman Hun Sen’s bloody coup to oust Prince Ranariddh’.



During the events of 5-7 July 1997, Adams went far beyond the mandate of UNCHR, inciting Cambodian politicians and journalists to leave the country, even when they were not in danger. Notwithstanding the contradictory evidence on responsibility for starting the shootout, Adams thinks the US embassy should have immediately taken one side – against the CPP – and given extraterritorial sanctuary to anti-CPP figures. This hardly shows the calm, unbiased assessment of evidence required of a legal officer working for the UN.

Incidentally, as an example of the quality of person eager for sanctuary, one individual who was encouraged to leave by another foreign agency, not by Adams, took away a five-figure US dollar sum from the till of his organization, which is financed by foreign donations, and left a similar debt to a bank. Although he has returned to Cambodia without any sign of danger to himself, he has refused to make restitution, arguing that the money is to help Ranariddh's election campaign.

It must be such dubious figures as this who have persuaded Adams that Cambodians are “one of the most terrorized people in the world”.

This is not the impression one gets travelling around the country on provincial roads, which have improved weekly in physical state and in security since the disappearance of the main contra warlords last July, talking to local people who show less sign of political terrorism than during the ‘golden years’ of the 1960s (examples in the past month [March-April 1998]: Kompong Thom and Sambor Prei Kuk, Kompong Cham and Hanchey, Kirivong and Kampot near Phnom Voar with 30 students from Phnom Penh).

Adams concluded that “All aid to the Cambodian government should be halted indefinitely, including any aid from multilateral institutions which requires the approval of the US government”, an effort to bomb[ast] Cambodia back to the stone age.

The degree of blind prejudice and dishonesty shown by Adams should disqualify him from working in UNCHR. Mr. Hammarberg needs to pay more attention to the activities of his subordinates. As an admirer of Swedish ways since my first visit there in 1950, I hate to see a good Swedish liberal

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One detail which has been difficult to pin down is the statement in the government's first White Paper about the July 1997 events that at 5 A.M. on July 5, Voice of America broadcast a taped message from Ranariddh that a coup against him was underway in Phnom Penh. At that time Ranariddh was on a plane to France, and nothing had happened in Phnom Penh. If the story was true it meant that FUNCINPEC was preparing a cover story for the putsch they were planning, and that some Americans were in on it.

In December 2001 the ambassador of a respected western country which has no strategic, economic, or vengeance interests in Cambodia told me he was convinced that the story was true, because it had been confirmed for him by a person close to Ranariddh, one of the people seen clearly in the video which the FUNCINPEC leaders made of themselves early in the fighting when they were convinced of winning.

maneuvered into a position where he cannot be distinguished from a classic American Cold Warrior.<sup>[911]</sup>

The following piece was requested in April 1998, by Editor-in-chief Marc Victor, for publication in *L'Asie*, where it appeared in French translation.

### Upcoming Elections (1998)<sup>912</sup>

Of course, Cambodia must hold elections this year. Elections are mandated by the constitution, and if there is one point on which all Cambodian parties agree with foreign interventionists, it is that Cambodia must be a constitutional regime.

Will the election be 'free and fair'? As 'free and fair' as the recent Indonesian election, which not even pretentious 'human rights' groups who intervene in Cambodia saw fit to denounce? As 'free and fair' as the Thai elections in which massive vote buying is widely reported in the Thai press? Will there be violence – murder of political activists and journalists?

No doubt, there will be such incidents, but that will prove nothing more than that Cambodia has reached the level of political maturity of most of the Western-favored capitalist states of Southeast Asia.

Will the election be multi-party? Indeed, it will be, with a vengeance, as was the election in 1993 with its twenty parties, of which only four entered the National Assembly, one of those with only one seat. In the end the 1998 election may be too multi-party for the taste of the foreign interests who wish to prevent a victory of Hun Sen and the CPP. Their main rival FUNCINPEC has split into at least three, each under a leader who no longer wished to be associated with Ranariddh, nor, implicitly, with Sihanouk.<sup>[913]</sup>

The dissolution of FUNCINPEC is not the result of the violence of July 1997. It was predictable in 1993, when, clearly, some of the younger, more intellectual, returnees from the post-1975 or even post-1970 Khmer diaspora did not belong with the old royalist courtiers, and would have been more comfortable with their peers in CPP, but had joined FUNCINPEC in the 1980s out of ignorance of the

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<sup>911</sup> The circumstance that, even after my complaint was published, and after similar complaints were made privately, Adams was being considered for re-employment in UNCHR indicates that my accusations about their bias are accurate. In the end, however, Adams was not reinstated.

In its following issue, the *PPP* published a craven apology, in spite of no offer by any of the persons concerned to publish a complaint or refutation. Michael Hayes, publisher of *PPP*, told me they had threatened to sue, and he could not risk that. This illustrates the view of press freedom held by UNCHR.

<sup>912</sup> Michael Vickery, *L'Asie*, April 1998 (published in French translation).

<sup>913</sup> Finally thirty-nine parties were registered for the 1998 election; with seven led by men who had split off from FUNCINPEC, for example, Sam Rainsy, Toan Chay, and Ung Huot.

internal situation in Cambodia, and as victims of inaccurate reporting by the international press.

Perhaps only Sihanouk was fully aware of the weaknesses of FUNCINPEC in 1993, and perhaps only he had read carefully the fine print of the Paris Agreement and the UNTAC election rules, which permitted the government in power – that is Hun Sen's CPP – to continue to govern for up to three months after the election, until a new constitution was promulgated. Only then would another party, if victorious in the election, be entitled to take over.

It should have been clear to everyone then, as it no doubt was to Sihanouk, that in such a three-month interim, FUNCINPEC, with its extremely narrow win, and consisting of disparate elements (some of them, as we now see, hardly royalist at all), would probably have broken up, even giving the CPP together with new, ex-FUNCINPEC and ex-BLDP allies, a legal, constitutional, majority vote in the Assembly.

This, and not CPP pressure, explains Sihanouk's haste to form the strange, two-headed government which plagued Cambodia until July 1997.

Who will win? As in 1993, the strongest party will win, whatever its total vote. No Cambodian party, except the early 1950s communists, has been willing to remain in opposition for the sake of principle. If they cannot have it all, and eliminate their opponents, they prefer to coalesce with them.

The FUNCINPEC splinters will work with CPP, and recent noises made by Hun Sen's most violent opponent, Sam Rainsy, show his awareness of the impossibility of his party to run the country, even if they should win a majority of votes. Thus he too, if he cannot achieve power by violence, will bow to Cambodian tradition and cooperate with the dominant faction.<sup>[914]</sup>

In the first week of July Sam Rainsy, on a visit to Malaysia, was quoted in the Malaysian press as saying that Malaysia was a desirable model for Cambodia to follow. This is not indicative of a commitment to democracy. Even if Rainsy merely meant, as one of his remarks indicated, that Malaysia was at peace while Cambodia is torn by conflict, we need to be reminded that the Malaysian peace which Rainsy admired is because for 30 years or so, people who tried to make political waves against the regime, as Rainsy is doing in Cambodia, were quickly put away without trial.

To be sure, the worst years were the 1970s; most political prisoners began to be released when Mahathir became Prime Minister, and the last major sweep-up of political figures was more than 10 years ago. But the laws permitting arrest without

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<sup>914</sup> Subsequent events proved my remarks here about Sam Rainsy to have been incorrect. On the two days preceding the election he stated (1) that it would only be free and fair if his party won, and (2) that the only real contest was between his party and the CPP, FUNCINPEC being already crippled. Then his efforts to overthrow the election results indicate that he believes he could run the country.

trial are still on the books, and opposition activists know how to modulate their statements and actions to stay on the safe side. If the Malaysian system were overnight implanted and enforced in Cambodia, Rainsy would suddenly disappear and not be heard from again for at least two years.

The most worrisome element of the 1998 election campaign, Sam Rainsy's whipping up of hatred against Vietnamese, did not have the feared effect; perhaps because most ordinary Khmer live and interact with Vietnamese neighbors and tradesmen every day, and know they are not the dangerous outsiders depicted by Rainsy. They also know that removal of all Vietnamese from Cambodia would mean violence, and if there is one thing nearly all Khmer want, it is an end to fighting.

Moreover, the 'traditional hatred of Vietnam' evoked by chauvinist politicians and foreigners with their own peculiar Vietnam Syndrome is something cranked up by politicians in times of crisis. It is not something always close to the surface in ordinary Cambodian life. Most Khmer live peacefully and cordially with their Vietnamese neighbors, and perhaps Rainsy, really more French than Khmer, does not realize this.

It is noteworthy that the Khmer who have most insistently beaten the anti-Vietnamese drum since 1992 have been returnees from 10 to 20 years abroad, who seem to have learned their 'traditional hatred of Vietnam' in western universities. It resembles the situation in Israel where, as Noam Chomsky has described it, many of the most fanatic activists against the Palestinians are persons who grew up in the United States and then migrated to Israel.

### Troubling conjunctions (2001) <sup>915</sup>

In the last couple of weeks we have seen a conjunction of episodes, the possible interrelation of which points, if they are indeed interrelated, in a troubling direction.

There was the CFF [Cambodian Freedom Fighters] shootout, with its overt US linkages admitted both by participants here and by their leaders and supporters there; the prestige-enhancing entertainment of a US-based CFF figure by the National Press Club in Washington,<sup>916</sup> sympathetic coverage on Radio Free Asia; and their announced purpose to disrupt good relations with Vietnam just when a new newspaper named "Cochinchina" began publishing the worst sort of anti-Vietnamese racism and a certain politician tried to provoke an incident on the border with Vietnam.

Saddest, but not surprising, was the knee-jerk reaction of so-called Human Rights organizations, both here and in Washington, against the Cambodian government for proceeding energetically to neutralize the terrorists. The

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<sup>915</sup> Michael Vickery, *Phnom Penh Post* 10/1 (Jan 5-18, 2001), p. 13.

<sup>916</sup> *Newsweek*, December 18, 2000 "Cambodia: Fighting for Justice?"; By Adam Piore, With Kevin Doyle in Phnom Penh.

measures were 'directed against opposition figures' they say. Well, who else were likely to be among the CFF anyway – certainly not Hun Sen loyalists?

It may also not be strictly coincidental that all of this happened just when it looked like the US was going to have President Dubya as new Dear Leader. Right-wing Cambodians both here and there had already proclaimed support for him, and in fact their hopes may be well-founded. Under him it will not be surprising if US Cambodia policy returns to the Cold War mode of the first Bush regime.

Finally, and also not surprisingly, an *Asian Wall Street Journal* article of 12 December, retransmitted to all of us here by Cam Clips e-mail, sounded off with a wild screed by the International Republican Institute which was nothing but a rehash of the propaganda of a certain local political faction. And it included – of course, they are Republicans – a plea for Bush regime II to make a sharp shift in policy toward Cambodia.

I shall not waste time trying to argue against it in detail, for the background of the IRI is such that it discredits a priori whatever they say about promoting democracy, human rights, or justice. Their denunciation of the 1998 election is laughable. Observers, including at first, as I recall, the IRI people on site, generally saw it as much better than the UNTAC intervention of 1993. I was happy to note however that “the US State Department does not recognize [Hun Sen’s 1997 coup] as such”, since I know of five western ambassadors who do not accept that those events were a Hun Sen coup.

We might note briefly that their demand for a complete change in KR trial preparation is contradictory. It should be conducted outside the country, they say, yet “the process for formulating a tribunal should be open and inclusive to Cambodian civil society”, the last no doubt defined as those Cambodians wealthy and influential enough to travel to Europe to help organize the type of show trial desired.

The IRI, and all others who insist Cambodia must have the kind of trial foreigners want regardless of its effects on Cambodian society, need to be reminded that the first amnesty, de facto, for the Khmer Rouge was issued by the international community in the 1991 Paris agreement when they wanted the KR on side to help overthrow the government of Hun Sen and the CPP.

Had the UNTAC game plan for Cambodia been realized as intended, we might see Pol Pot, Khieu Samphan, Ieng Sary, Son Sen, and, who knows, even Ta Mok, sitting in the National Assembly. Where would the genocide careerists and human rights groupies be with their trial if such had come to pass?

Even if everything in the IRI statement were true and uncontroversial as stated, the IRI are hardly the people to make these complaints. Their “democracy-building” and human rights records are tainted and should exclude them from any influential role in Cambodia or anywhere else.

In 1993 they came to Cambodia as a USAID-supported education-for-democracy group, and as a teaching tool they imported Raul Garcia Prieto, vice-

president of the ARENA Party of El Salvador, just about the time the UN report on human rights in El Salvador was published, confirming that ARENA was mainly responsible for the death squads and massacres during the civil war in El Salvador. Another of their democracy-teaching crew was a Pinochetist Chilean, although he was not a high-profile type like Prieto.

In mitigation, I must acknowledge that when I interviewed them in 1993 they seemed to be so politically immature (I almost used another word beginning with 'd') that they did not even realize their gaffe. They averred that Prieto was a 'charming fellow', and, with a straight face, that he was able to "tell Cambodians about the organization of elections in the midst of violence".

So far as I know, not a single democracy-loving journalist, even after the story was virtually forced down their throats, tried to bring it to the wide international attention it deserved, and not the slightest peep of objection was heard from any UN agency, let alone the Human Rights Component.<sup>917</sup>

El Salvador under ARENA was the type of US-friendly fascist regime the IRI likes – 'Free World' free market capitalists with their Tuol Sleng equivalents, as evoked in the measured remarks by Philip Short (*PPP* 9/25, p. 13) against Henri's howling harrowing hysterics (*PPP* 9/24, p.12). We might also consider whether IRI favors certain Cambodians because they are convinced their heroes would institute ARENA-type El Salvadorism here, as I believe they would.

I might add that IRI were not the only US organization who wished to bring US-style Central American politics to Cambodia. Asia Watch, before negotiations reached the Paris stage, was advocating implementation of the US Nicaragua strategy (condemned on one count by the World Court) to effect the same results in Cambodia (See Sidney Jones, "War and Human Rights in Cambodia", *New York Review of Books*, 19 July 1990, pp. 15, ff.)

In September 2002 I offered *PPP* the following in answer to another of Brad Adams's rants. At first Hayes said he liked it, but then on the advice of his wife, who said Adams would sue, refused to publish it.

### Adams on the Gravy Train (2002)<sup>918</sup>

'Human rights lawyer' (see Allen Myers in *PPP* 9/10, May 12-25, 2000) Brad Adams has made a couple of valid points in his "Time to put the brakes on the gravy train" (*PPP* 11/18, Aug 30-Sept 12, 2002), but they have been made in the wrong way, and will no doubt evoke a misplaced knee-jerk reaction against alleged international fat cats, particularly among those who were taken in by an another ill-informed and disingenuous piece some months ago.

<sup>917</sup> For a description of their first workshop to train Cambodians see Chantou Boua, "Development Aid and Democracy in Cambodia", pp. 280-281.

<sup>918</sup> Michael Vickery, unpublished letter to *Phnom Penh Post*, September 2002.

“What would you do with 500,000 a year?” (*PPP* 10/26, Dec 21, 2001-Jan 3, 2002), by Malcolm Innes-Brown, was never adequately answered by those who should have been responsible for a reply. Indeed, the pitifully weak and equally disingenuous answer from Etienne Clement, Representative of UNESCO in Cambodia, 11/1, Jan 4-11, 2002) may have given undeserved credence to Innes-Brown.

Before jerking their knees too high, however, readers of Adams' screed should be aware of his hidden agenda, at least hidden in this article, but transparent in earlier statements.<sup>919</sup>

There are two legitimate concerns with respect to the 'gravy train', (1) are the foreign employees necessary, (2) are they being paid too much?

The first question can only be answered by someone with expertise in the relevant fields, and even when citing remuneration which seems to us plebes and proles shockingly high, Adams did not try to argue that the personnel in question were redundant. I shall not comment on that aspect.

Is the remuneration too high? This is a matter of relativity – high, appropriate, or low in comparison to what? With payment for equivalent work in the person's home country, or with Cambodian living standards and levels of remuneration?

Adams insinuates that remuneration for foreigners is far too high with respect to costs of living in Cambodia and the very low wages of Cambodians (“it is ridiculous when the average Cambodian only gets \$200 a year”, according to Adams' chosen local spokesman; or a certain foreign salary is “600 times their [Cambodians'] monthly wage”). Such emotional statements are mostly irrelevant, even dishonest, on the part of Adams' local spokesman irresponsible populist rabble rousing, and reveal efforts to set up an argument for a certain political, and for Adams, hidden, agenda.

No foreigner could live and adequately perform the specialized work for which most of them are hired while trying to live like those Cambodians who survive on monthly incomes of \$200-\$500, not to speak of those who have even less. I speak on this point with some special knowledge, because in earlier years, before the war, when local living conditions were better than now, I lived for long periods in typical Cambodian village housing eating only local food.

The only fair way to judge income levels for international employees is with reference to normal salary levels and non-salary benefits, such as state-subsidized health care, in their countries of origin, and the standard of living which they are required to maintain in Cambodia. It must be recognized that the cost of living in Cambodia is not necessarily low for foreigners who come on short-tem contracts to perform specific work which requires that they not have to

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<sup>919</sup> See his submission to the US Senate 4 September 1997, and my comment in, “From Info-Ed to the UN Center for Human Rights”, *Phnom Penh Post*, vol. 7, no. 7, April 10-24, 1998; *Cambodia: A Political Survey*, text with notes 142-3; and above p. 514.

spend part of every day wondering if they have enough to pay bills at the end of the month.

Rental, especially if they are accompanied by dependents, may be higher than at home; medical care and health insurance, depending on their countries of origin, may be higher than at home; education of school-age children will almost certainly be higher; and, let us not forget, they may require, legitimately, a salary which permits them to contribute to whatever pension or retirement plan they have.

And if knee-jerkers should retort, “let them leave spouses and kiddies at home during their short-term employment, say 2-3 years, and live in Phnom Penh in the Sidney Hotel”, maintenance of double households only adds to the amount of necessary expenses.

For TA’s at the higher levels, representational expenses must also be taken into account. Advisers to ministries, or judicial mentors, must occasionally entertain local counterparts, and they cannot take them to lunch at the Central Market. Such foreigners require what is, in fact, luxury housing in local circumstances, or enough money to entertain in luxury restaurants. This is what the Cambodians concerned demand, and if TA’s do not come up to that standard they will be despised.

The reference to volunteers who accept \$300-\$1,500 per month is hardly relevant. Most such volunteers are young students or new graduates looking for new experiences or older persons who have retired with an assured income to return to. In general they have no representational expenses, and, if willing, they may lunch in the markets and seek cheap single-room quarters.

UN volunteers, moreover, often are quite unfamiliar with Cambodia, and coming from countries where they have only been exposed to anti-Cambodian government propaganda, they may have pre-conceived programs which they wish to impose. We had just such a disastrous experience last year in the institution in which I was working in Phnom Penh. (Faculty of Archaeology, Royal University of Fine Arts, see above, Malcolm Innes-Brown)

It is true enough that, even taking the above into consideration, some of the salaries and benefits cited by Adams seem excessive, but without information on remuneration for that type of work in countries of origin, and more specific details about the local circumstances to which he is referring, any serious comment is impossible, and it was dishonest of Adams to avoid those details. I doubt, however, that all of the payment levels he cited are higher than in countries of origin, and some may be lower.

Too many of Adams’ examples lack clarity, and sound like barroom gossip.

If TA expenditures in certain ministries exceed their local budgets, is that perhaps simply because their budgets are far too low?. Take the ministry for which Adams has perhaps the greatest expertise, Justice. Adams is known for asserting that the Ministry of Justice and the courts in Cambodia perform badly, to say the least. If so, perhaps a high TA input is necessary. If Adams hopes to



make a valid argument, he must provide details on the precise uses of TA, and where the amount could be cut without adversely affecting the work of the institutions concerned.

In fact, there Adams seems to be arguing for more money, for judges' salaries, which he says the World Bank has refused to provide. Why the refusal? Could it be that the World Bank, where US pressure is strong, has been influenced by the propaganda of Adams' favorite Cambodian politicians, who have a strong special relationship with influential right-wing Americans, and who have loudly argued at times against all foreign aid, on the grounds that it gives support to their rivals.

If, as Adams seems to be saying, the problem in administration of justice, courts, etc., is salaries, is he tacitly admitting that earlier strictures against the competence or honesty of judges were misplaced?

Now, just to head off expected time-wasting interventions about my personal situation and interest in this controversy, I note here that my own salary, during the last four years, from a foreign aid grant, not loan, has been at the low end of the TA salaries cited by Adams, that is, at a level which he approves, and is less than I was offered two years ago to perform identical teaching duties for a year at a major US university.

It is enough for me to live comfortably in Phnom Penh, but only because I have no dependants, and long ago gave up hope of ever accumulating a retirement fund. I suspect that such is the situation of some who receive even more than I, unless they come from one of those lucky semi-socialist countries of northern Europe where health care and old age pensions are state supported.

My choice, moreover, has nothing to do with "commitment to the welfare of Cambodians", which, *pace* Adams, has no business as "part of the job description". The only criterion should be the person's willingness to carry out duties competently.

My choices have been utterly selfish. I find living in Phnom Penh more pleasant than in the US city concerned, and as a professional student of Cambodian and Southeast Asian history and current affairs, it is advantageous to be here rather than there.

Now what does Adams really want?

Would he suggest that TA expenses be eliminated and the money dumped into the ministries' pockets? I dare say he would not. Is he suggesting that such foreign aid be simply eliminated?

Let us not forget that, as Adams agrees, Cambodia is in the clutches of greedy international bankers and capitalists, and local businessmen and politicians who feed off them, because this type of unrestricted free market was part of the package imposed along with the 1991 Paris Agreement and UNTAC, in Adams' words, an "internationally prescribed cocktail of laissez-faire economics and large-scale international aid" (although I do not recall Adams complaining loudly about this back when it was being proposed and imposed).

His choice of Cambodian spokesman is instructive – a member of parliament of a party whose leader has in the past stated that foreign aid to Cambodia be cut off because it helps a government which he opposes. He did not argue that Cambodia did not need the foreign aid. He just wanted to turn the aid question into a political tool for his own advantage.

It is clear from earlier interventions by Adams that his goal also is the elimination of the present Cambodian government, and probably in favor of the party whose MP he chose as a representative Cambodian opinion leader.

It is time for Adams to ‘come out’, come out of his political closet, and, as long as he wants to intervene in Cambodian politics, do it honestly. Then we could respect him for choosing his side on the basis of his principles, even if we disagreed. He should stop trying to hide behind the now raddled facade of ‘human rights lawyer’, and acknowledge that he is, and for years has been, a promoter of the cause of a certain party whose goal is the overthrow of the present government, and which for that purpose violently criticizes foreign aid.

In ‘coming out’ Human Rights lawyer Adams would be forced to admit that his favorite Cambodian faction has always been closely linked to, and probably receives material support from, a US political faction which in 1993 brought an El Salvador fascist death squad organizer to Cambodia to teach democracy, and which has never been willing to disavow that action.

If Adams’ friends win, say next July [2003], will we hear them denouncing international bankers and laissez-faire economics, demonstratively rejecting ADB loans, and passing fine-tooth combs through lucrative aid agreements going to their own ministries? Don’t hold your breath.

For an amusing analysis of another bit of dishonest propaganda by Adams, concerning Cambodian government policy toward punishment of KR leaders, and involving an effort by Adams to use a patently faked document, see Allen Myers, “Letter”, *PPP* 27 Sept-10 Oct, 2002, p. 13, referring to Adams, “Comment”, *PPP* 13-26 September 2002.

Several of the matters discussed above were given attention by journalist Luke Hunt in a review of Evan Gottesman, *Cambodia After the Khmer Rouge*. I wrote a letter criticizing the review, which was published in the *Phnom Penh Post* in 2005.

### Gottesman and Hunt (2005) <sup>920</sup>

Luke Hunt's review of Evan Gottesman (Dec 31-Jan 13, 05, p. 13) was one of the most dishonestly prejudiced things I have seen (except for Julio Jeldres and Stephen Morris, and occasionally Heder).

The first paragraph is not factual. In 1979 there was not yet an 'elite' and no warning was then issued about them being "blinded by wealth". "Rape and violations against women" were probably fewer than at any time in Cambodian history, except possibly under the KR, who, whatever their own sins, managed to keep those things at an absolute minimum. Not only are Luke Hunt's statements inaccurate, they are not even what Gottesman, who is often dodgy on his own, said.

As for Gottesman "stamp[ing] his credentials on a period (1978-79) few authors have dared to touch", Luke Hunt here exhibits ignorance of the rather voluminous literature on the period. In particular, the identity and role of Mat Ly, a Cham leader, is well known to all students of the period and is described in existing literature.

Luke Hunt got it wrong again in calling him "the spiritual head of Cambodia's Cham Muslims, the mufti Mat Ly". He was neither a spiritual leader nor a mufti, nor does Gottesman say that. Mat Ly, as well as his father, were old-time Cham communists, who of course at first joined the KR, just like everyone with leftist sympathies in 1975-76.

Again Luke Hunt goes beyond the facts with "The Vietnamese edited a new constitution beyond any recognition of its Cambodian authors", which is non-factual, and not what Gottesman's rather careful treatment of the constitution-drafting process permits. It is true that Gottesman edits his sources to give as anti-Vietnamese a picture as possible, but his treatment does not permit Luke Hunt's conclusion.

Luke Hunt might take a look at my analysis of the three drafts of the constitution in my book, *Politics, Economics, and Society in the Peoples Republic of Kampuchea*, which, to be sure, has long been unavailable (although Gottesman knew it).

Even if one Cambodian told Gottesman in 1997, repeat 1997 (his page 110), that the first draft was Cambodian and the next one 'Yvon', the comparison I made shows that was not true. Great care is needed in using post-1993 oral

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<sup>920</sup> Michael Vickery, published as "Wrong on Gottesman", *PPP*, 14/2, 28/1-10/2, 2005, p. 13. Footnotes have been added.

information about events of the 1980s. Not only are new attitudes projected back on the past, but occasionally informants change their own stories.

As for currency, whoever controlled it, they did a good job. The new currency quickly replaced the Vietnamese *đồng*, was generally accepted in the markets, and maintained its value better than the *đồng* until undermined in the post-1991 great leap into an uncontrolled free market, and the impact of UNTAC [see pp. 64, 71].

French and English were not banned, although not introduced immediately into the schools (although the medical school taught in French), but private tuition gradually developed, especially in English, and by 1984 there was an entire street full of small private English schools, and the then Minister of Economy, Meas Samnang, boasted to me, in front of his Vietnamese adviser, that one of his assistants was spreading his knowledge of English to young people through such work [see p. 237].

Hun Sen 'reading the charges' against Pen Sovann seems unlikely, for, officially, Hun Sen did not yet have such an exalted position. This may be Pen Sovann's special pleading, about which more below.

The "rumors about foul play" in Chan Si's death no doubt came to Gottesman from Pen Sovann, and reveal one of the weak points in Gottesman's book. Gottesman relied too much on interviews in the 1990s, with people who revised the history of the early 80's. The worst is Pen Sovann, whose May 1999 interview with Gottesman is one of his most important sources.

One certain lie in Pen Sovann's late testimony is his insistence (to, among others, Margaret Slocumb) that Chan Si was killed by Hun Sen at a banquet in Phnom Penh in 1987; when the truth is that he went, in 1984, very ill, to Moscow where he died in a hospital.<sup>921</sup>

Gottesman's treatment of Chan Si's death is embarrassing. He obviously got the same story from Pen Sovann, and apparently did not believe it. He wrote, on p. 134, that "to this day, Chan Si's death ... is clouded by rumors of foul play". To some extent this is true. There are people who think his death was not natural, but I have heard of no one but Pen Sovann who denies he died in Moscow, but was killed by Hun Sen in Phnom Penh.

Gottesman could not treat this subject honestly because it would have undermined Pen Sovann as a source, and thus undermined other details which Gottesman needed. Another relevant reference in Gottesman to Chan Si, p. 204, is "in December 1984, as Chan Si lay ill, Hun Sen began speaking ...". It is peculiar that Gottesman would not say, "... lay ill in Moscow ...", no doubt through misplaced fidelity to Pen Sovann.

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<sup>921</sup> Margaret Slocumb, *The People's Republic of Kampuchea 1979-1989, the Revolution after Pol Pot* Chiang Mai, Silksworm Books, 2003, pp. 143-144.

Luke Hunt calls Chan Si “Hanoi-friendly Chan Si”, but those who think his death was arranged impute it to his opposition to Vietnamese policies.

Calling the 1980s “not always unlike the decade before” is perverse exaggeration. There were no serious “attempts to banish urban populations”, although it would have been rational to do more to limit rapid immigration into the city. The K5 program was certainly unpopular, and resulted in too many deaths. But Luke Hunt goes far beyond Gottesman in comparing it to the KR, and Gottesman himself relied too much on the worst propaganda sources, such as Luciulli [see my review of her in *Phnom Penh Post*, Vol. 4, No. 8, 21 April-4 May, 1995, pp. 6, 19, and discussion pp. 307 ff.].

Moreover, no western, especially American, critic of K5 should speak of it without acknowledging that Cambodia, and its Vietnamese supporters, were in fact forced to fight, even to the death, against enemies supported by the US, China, Thailand, etc.<sup>922</sup>

Luke Hunt’s deepest descent into scurrility is, “throughout the Vietnamese occupation, Cambodia was a reclusive state that ranked alongside North Korea”. Evidence against that is in the writings of the numerous foreign, western, journalists, researchers, and aid workers, who traveled in and out of, and around, Cambodia starting even in 1979, and increasingly from 1980-81, with ever-greater freedom, including yours truly who in 1981 was able to drive with a colleague (Serge Thion) and an aid worker (David French, Church World Service) in his private vehicle from Phnom Penh to Battambang then to Siemreap, visit some of the temples there and return, with 3-4 days in each town, and in Battambang a long interview-conference with the local governor, Lay Samon, one of the Hanoi Khmer.

Once more, the propaganda scam is not from Gottesman, whose only mention of North Korea was with reference to the KR.

Gottesman, like many late-comers (since mid-to-late 90s), has sucked up stories from Cambodians with the anti-Vietnamese animus which has been growing in the last ten years, forgetting or denying what Viet Nam did for them when they were recovering from the KR. At its most extreme, this now leads some Cambodians, and increasingly, to blame even the disasters of the KR period on the Vietnamese (Khieu Samphan’s line).

Gottesman then, in spite of his extended research into genuine PRK documents, which treating specific problems of the day are not always clear about the total context, was able to interpret them as support for the anti-Vietnamese scene depicted by his informants, most of whom he met in 1997-1999.

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<sup>922</sup> For a scholarly, objective treatment of the K-5 program see Margaret Slocumb, “The K-5 Gamble: National Defense and Nation Building under the Peoples’ Republic of Kampuchea”, *JSEAS* 32/2, June 2001, pp. 195-210.

One example is on Gottesman's page 93. Writing of the refugee outflow in 1979, he says: "Cambodians voted with their feet. The lack of food compelled tens of thousands to head for the cities or for Thailand ... . Peasants too, had no choice but to leave the cooperatives in search of food ...".

First, this is not what the refugees at the border were saying when I talked to them in 1980;<sup>923</sup> and second, the 1980 PRK document quoted by Gottesman, and which from my research seems factually true in the details it reports, is not, however, evidence for his statements. He has simply interpreted it to support oral information he got from some unreliable source.

A technical problem with Gottesman concerns his sourcing. Lacking a bibliography and without explanation of the locations of the documents he used, it presents great difficulty to other researchers who might wish to recheck the same situations.

Another dubious facet in Gottesman is his reliance on *Why Vietnam Invaded Cambodia* by Stephen Morris, a longtime right-wing hack and proven falsifier of documents.

Whatever the problems in Gottesman's treatment, Hunt has gone far beyond him in pursuing his anti-PRK and anti-Vietnamese line. His review is unworthy of even the *Phnom Penh Post*.

### More Floorcross (2006)<sup>924</sup>

In his quest for market journalism success, and, in order to ingratiate himself with the world's great power, poor floorcrossed Shawcross has gone beyond Cambodia. Even now, when there is near universal condemnation of the Iraq war, Shawcross speaks out in its favor ("I was and remain in favor of the decision to remove Saddam Hussein", which could only mean war), damns Kofi Annan with faint praise, and has something positive to say only about John Bolton.<sup>925</sup>

Then, a few months later in a caper which for dramatic floorcrossing and jacket switching he has gone beyond even my most scathing sarcasms and predictions about him, in joining forces with the person who most viciously attacked his *Sideshow*, Peter Rodman, to argue that "To Understand What US Defeat in Iraq Will Mean, Look at Indochina".<sup>926</sup>

<sup>923</sup> See Michael Vickery, "Refugee Politics: The Khmer Camp system in Thailand".

<sup>924</sup> Michael Vickery, unpublished comment, 2006. See discussion of 'floorcrossing,' p. 445.

<sup>925</sup> Shawcross, "Kofi Annan and the limits of the United Nations", *The Nation* (Bangkok), 30 Dec 2006, p. 8A, reprinted from *The Washington Post*.

<sup>926</sup> Article with that title by Peter Rodman and William Shawcross, in *The Cambodia Daily* (Phnom Penh), 8 June 2007, p. 27, reprinted from *The New York Times*, date not noted, with a comment that Shawcross has also written *Allies: Why the West Had to Remove Saddam*. On earlier relations of Rodman and Shawcross see above note 489.

They claim that they “agreed even then [during the Vietnam war]” and still now agree that “the outcome in Indochina was indeed disastrous, both in human and geopolitical terms, for the US and the region [and] “today we agree equally strongly that the consequences of defeat in Iraq would be even more serious and lasting”.

“The 1975 Communist victory in Indochina led to horrors that engulfed the region ... Khmer Rouge ... genocidal, ideological rampage. In Vietnam and Laos, cruel gulags and ‘re-education’ camps”.

To say this, one must pretend that history began in 1975, and pass over French colonial efforts to re-impose themselves against Cambodian, Lao, and Vietnamese resistance, which resulted in one long war in Laos and Viet Nam from 1946 to 1954, ending in French defeat, independence for the Indochina countries, which the US sought to weaken, if not block, leading to another long war (1960-1975) in which Cambodia was also directly involved, with its heavily peasant-populated central zones smashed by American B-52s.

The economies of all three countries were shattered, and probably millions of people killed by that American violence. By 1975 the rural population of Cambodia hated the cities and were often happy to inflict punishment on their inhabitants pushed out into the villages.

It is intellectually illegitimate to comment on the post-1975 violence without taking into consideration all that transpired in Indochina after 1945. The three countries of Cambodia, Laos and Viet Nam would certainly have been better off if the US had fully respected the 1954 Geneva Accords, allowed the 1956 election in Viet Nam which would have reunified the country (although of course under Ho Chi Minh), and not tried to interfere in the formation of a Lao government.

There would have been no Khmer Rouge in Cambodia, whose rise to power was directly related to the war in Viet Nam and the enduring destruction of Cambodia between 1970 and 1975, although Sihanouk’s own effort to repress local leftists might have produced a long-simmering low-level rebellion resulting in his own removal, but by urban moderates, not peasants traumatized by their experiences over the previous five years.<sup>927</sup>

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<sup>927</sup> Note that this is not the argument Chandler was making (above, pp. 445 ff.) about Viet Nam ‘dragging’ Cambodia into the war from 1963. Rather, the ‘dragging’ began in 1956 and was at American initiative. The hatred of urban Cambodia by the rural majority has been too little studied as the source of violence against the post-1975 urban evacuees to the countryside. Most literature on the period has focused on the experiences of the urban middle and upper strata unused to peasant life.

This is recognized by even such a violent anti-DK writer as Theary C. Seng in her *Daughter of the Killing Fields*, London, Fusion Press, 2005. She writes, p. 79, “the new people faced visible contempt from the indigenous villagers”, p. 123, “the Khmer Rouge peasants, it appeared, were unleashing their pent-up indignities felt over the years from the snobbishness and arrogance of city dwellers, which until now [they] were powerless

Concerning Iraq and the need for a US victory there, Rodman and Shawcross seem to exist in cloud-cuckoo fantasy land, writing of “millions of Iraqis today [who] see the US helping them defeat their opponents as the only hope for their country”, and “committed to working with us and with their democratically elected government”.

Another parallel with Viet Nam which they evoke is the ‘loss of credibility’ which warmongers then claimed as a reason not to quit and which Rodman and Shawcross charge would result from defeat in Iraq, demoralizing moderate governments in view of the “looming threat from revolutionary Iran”.

Really, in view of Shawcross’ 180 degree shift on Cambodia, and his adoption of the almost universally discredited Bush-Cheney line on Iraq and Iran, I have often wondered if *Willie* Shawcross was not kidnapped by his enemies in 1979 and since then held incommunicado, with the anti-Cambodia propaganda attributed to him in fact written by his evil twin *Billie*.

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to do anything about. In their mind’s eye, my relatives represented all that they envied and hated of the bourgeois class”. Such hatred of the rural for the urban even cut through families in which some had remained rural while others became urban. As she writes, p. 97, “old family grudges of generations past came back to haunt them [from the city] ... many of the indigenous base people in that region had worked at one time or another as hired hands on the farm of my grandfather [a rather wealthy person in that area]”; and a distant relative who had become a DK cadre “sarcastically snickered ... where are all your big cars, small cars, long cars, short cars” referring to a funeral cortege previously organized by Seng’s grandmother.

See also, Sathavy Kim, a young adult at the time, in her *Jeunesse brisée*, Arles, Actes Sud, 2008, pp. 48-9, 52, 55-56, 108, including, pp. 48-49 the story of an apparently well-treated young female servant of her well-off family, who, as soon as they were out of Phnom Penh, demonstratively joined the KR. As Sathavy writes, “I had the impression of seeing a bird liberated from her cage”; and on p. 52 she describes how a poor peasant girl under the Khmer Rouge had become self-confident and her own master. See also her p. 108, describing the contempt of base people toward the urban evacuees.



## Chapter 9: The Vietnam Syndrome – Conclusion

Is this still a relevant term and issue? Does the Vietnam Syndrome still require kicking? The answer would seem to be ‘yes’, seeing the way Shawcross and Rodman link Viet Nam and Iraq, although Viet Nam itself is becoming respectable, official Cambodian-Vietnamese relations are improving, and Hun Sen has outplayed his rivals for good relations with the US.

Although the US is still out to smash disrespectful small countries, Viet Nam itself is no longer at issue. The Vietnam Syndrome, in a strict sense, is now seen mostly among historians and journalists who seem eager to show that the unpleasant features of DK and post-DK Cambodia are because of Vietnamese influence, either imposed or desired.

Some examples have been noted above – David Chandler’s tortuous efforts to argue that DK attacks on Viet Nam were really the fault of the Vietnamese (as the Pol Pot line had it), and that it was the fault of Viet Nam that Cambodia was drawn into the war as early as 1963.

Stephen Heder has gone farther and devoted rather long studies, including his Ph.D. thesis, to Vietnamese responsibility for Cambodian communism. Heder is correct, of course, that the first Cambodians who would become communist, and the first Cambodian Communist organizations, followed Vietnamese models in the beginning.

But the Cambodians then, taking the road that would lead to the extremes of DK, rejected Vietnamese advice, although Heder still insists that their rejection constituted fidelity to a Vietnamese template which they had absorbed. Thus Viet Nam may still be blamed for what happened in Cambodia in 1975-1979, and, with respect to Vietnam syndromes, the post-DK Cambodia of PRK, SOC, CPP and Hun Sen may be tarred with the Vietnamese brush.

In journalism, the old Elizabeth Becker has come to the surface again, blaming Hun Sen for the alleged delay of the Khmer Rouge trial – “the last thing Hun Sen wanted was a fair trial ... his regime had cemented its own power and wealth by ignoring justice and the rule of law”.<sup>928</sup>

Four months later Barbara Crossette took up the same line, and, with respect to the theme of this book, showed her own Vietnam Syndrome in a wild claim that after the Khmer Rouge Cambodia was “ground down and isolated by a Vietnamese occupation”.<sup>929</sup>

More of the syndrome is, “Mindful of its own history, the government abjures the terms Khmer Rouge or Communist and labels the disaster that overtook the country simply the ‘Pol Pot regime’, thereby absolving itself of guilt”. She avers,

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<sup>928</sup> Becker, “Justice too long delayed”, *International Herald Tribune*, 22 November 2007, p. 6.

<sup>929</sup> *International Herald Tribune*, 20 March 2008.

contradicting her own assessment that Hun Sen has cornered “political and military power”, that “there is little more [central government] now” than under the Khmer Rouge, when “in the eyes of most Cambodians there was no central government”.

Crossette seems to have read none of the serious or purportedly serious literature about modern Cambodia and to have uncritically gobbled up current cocktail-party gossip. Otherwise she would at least know that blaming the disasters of the 1970s on just the ‘Pol Pot regime’ is an almost universal popular interpretation now, and has been general throughout historical and journalistic writing since 1979; and that Cambodia’s current leaders have been absolved of personal guilt by Stephen Heder, otherwise a nearly professional enemy of the post-1979 regimes.<sup>930</sup>

If there is any argument that Cambodia under the KR lacked a central government, it comes rather from a minority of foreign historians who now see that much of the disaster was due to arbitrary decisions by zonal and regional cadres interpreting what they understood as central policy according to their own situations and prejudices.

For once, Crossette got it right, saying, “during the Khmer Rouge years... Cambodians suffered most at the hands of local zealots...the level of horrors ...varied from place to place.” This is not, however, being made “ever more evident” by “discussion around the tribunal”, which itself is one of the venues for exclusive attention to the ‘Pol Pot Regime’.

Nor is that a point being given weight by the critics of the trial whom Crossette could have met in Phnom Penh. It is true that some of them have hoped, since the idea of a trial was first floated in the 1980s, to turn it against the current regime in Phnom Penh, which is not the same as a serious historical argument that in 1975-1979 “Cambodians suffered most at the hands of local zealots”.<sup>931</sup>

Writing as she has, Crossette, no doubt unwittingly, places herself in the same camp as Michael Vickery, whose *Cambodia 1975-1982* was intended to demonstrate the responsibility of local zealots and peasant hatred which indeed “varied from place to place”.

She also, piquantly, in blaming ‘local zealots’ for most of the suffering which “varied from place to place”, places herself implicitly with the defense in the KR trial against the concept of an ‘alleged common criminal plan’, in the KR trial, a sort of guilt by association scam with which it is hoped to convict all five accused of acts with which some of them were never associated.<sup>932</sup>

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<sup>930</sup> See above, p. 531 and note 606.

<sup>931</sup> See comment above, p. 521, and note 927.

<sup>932</sup> Douglas Gillison, "KR leaders' case Forwarded to Trial Chamber", *Cambodia Daily* 14 January 2010, p. 27.

A blurb accompanying her article said, “Barbara Crossette, a former bureau chief of *The New York Times* in Southeast Asia, was in Cambodia in January and February [2008] helping local journalists prepare to report on the Khmer Rouge trials”. Given Crossette’s own confusion, it will be interesting to see what comes out of this.

Barbara Crossette just cannot give up. In the *International Herald Tribune*, 15 January, 2009, p. 6, “2009 in Vietnam, Letter from Saigon”, she depicts Vietnamese suffering under heavy-handed government, corruption, repression of critical journalists, policing of the internet, and suppression of a novel critical of Ho Chi Minh; and claims that its author, incredibly, during the war, never knew that the enemy was not only the Americans, but pro-American southern Vietnamese.

Even assuming that all of Crossette’s strictures are true as presented, ‘2009 in Vietnam’ appears no worse than ‘2009 Thailand’ as seen in daily reading of the *Bangkok Post* during the past three years.

I shall terminate this discussion of the Vietnam syndrome with some attention to the field of ostensibly serious history, where a continuing Vietnam Syndrome is evident in David Chandler’s *A History of Cambodia*, and increasingly from one edition to the next.

### David Chandler, *A History of Cambodia* (2010)

In addition to what has been noted above, David Chandler’s entire final chapter 13, “Cambodia Since 1979”, represents the ‘Vietnam Syndrome’ as defined in this book in its purest form. With too little genuine sourcing, it is Chandler writing off the top of his head from the most superficial post-1979 journalism and what I termed, in *Cambodia 1975-1982*, the ‘Standard Total View’.

My comments on Chandler are still first of all from his third edition, which is now the most widely known. It is particularly important because, published in 2000 and translated into Khmer in 2005, the chapter in question had not been revised. Thus the defects of Chandler’s 2000 third edition have been maintained in the translation intended to provide Khmer students with the latest treatment by the “doyen” of Khmer studies (Short, *Pol Pot*, p. 290).

There are some changes in the fourth edition of 2008, which will also be noted here in order to fairly present Chandler’s latest views. However, these hardly differ on the points given importance here; consonant with the gradual shift in Chandler’s position already noted, they present a more negative picture of post-1979 Cambodia than the third edition.

As an excuse for his method he begins chapter 13 of the third edition with a “problem with analyzing this period (after 1979) in Cambodian history stems from the narrow range of primary sources”. If he just means that the government “conducted its business in private ... debates among the leaders of the Peoples

Revolutionary Party of Kampuchea or among their Vietnamese advisers are not accessible”, this is like the internal business of every regime in the world.

Are the discussions between American presidents and their cabinet members always available to historians and journalists? Is there no state secrecy in the United States, for example, concerning investigation into the 9-11-2001 attacks? And are not documents relevant for a study of sensitive matters, such as the assassination of President Kennedy, sometimes embargoed for 30, 50, or 75 years? In recent years we have seen that even normally legitimate requests by Congress for information from the executive branch are stalled.

Chandler seems to wish to deny Cambodia the right to conduct government business as normally done by major western powers. That is the Vietnam Syndrome with a vengeance.

In any case, in 2000, there was a rather wide selection of studies, based on primary sources, including debates among the leaders of the Peoples Revolutionary Party of Kampuchea, available to Chandler about post-1979 Cambodia.

Examples are chapter 4 in Vickery, *Cambodia 1975-1982*, published in 1984, and analyzing recent studies of internal Cambodian affairs by Stephen Heder, of whom Chandler approves; Vickery, *Kampuchea Politics, Economics, and Society*, published in 1986, and to a large extent based on local PRK publications; Eva Mysliwiec (who had worked within Cambodia in close collaboration with the government for several years), *Punishing the Poor, The International Isolation of Kampuchea*, Southampton, Oxfam, 1988; Grant Curtis, *Cambodia A Country Profile*, Stockholm, Sweden, 1990, which extended the treatment of Vickery, *Kampuchea*, up to 1988; and particularly impressive, with respect to use of PRK primary sources, the work of Vivianne Frings, some of which is cited in Chandler’s note 13, but which has never been given the attention it deserves, perhaps because Ms. Frings attempted where possible to give a sympathetic treatment of the PRK.<sup>933</sup>

Chandler does, in fact, cite most of this work in footnotes, but does not allow these often positive treatments of 1980s Cambodia, largely based on local printed sources and personal observation, to obtrude on his negative ‘Vietnam Syndrome’ which they would not well serve.

In his fourth edition, Frings is omitted, and the note to the text in question (third edition p. 235, fourth edition, p. 284, note 10) is largely irrelevant. What is

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<sup>933</sup> See, for example, Viviane Frings, *Le socialisme et le paysan cambodgien*, Paris, L’Harmattan, 1997, and other writings of hers cited there. Ms. Frings was perhaps the most interesting of the young scholars trying to work on post-1979 Cambodia, and the most assiduous in attention to local sources, of which there was no lack. Some of her work was done at Monash University, but she was unable to find financial support to work toward a Ph.D.

interesting here is that in addition to cutting Frings, Chandler also cut reference, in the same note, to Esmeralda [not 'L'.] Luciulli, *Le mur de bambou*.

No doubt, by the time of preparing the fourth edition, Chandler realized, perhaps because of my review (pp. 307 ff.) that Luciulli's treatment of PRK Cambodia, although consonant with his ideology, was impermissible, but he was unwilling to give star treatment to Frings, even though he had recognized the quality of her work in edition three. The unpleasant details in the text of edition three, however, are from Luciulli.

In edition 4, Chandler cut the text into two paragraphs, referring, in a new note 9, the part about border defense, to Margaret Slocumb's study of the K-5 program, which, in terms of sourcing was better, but it should be noted that whereas Luciulli was totally negative about the PRK and its defense efforts, Slocumb tried to be objective about the need for defense, even when methods were harsh.

Then, for the second part of the original paragraph about creation of a PRK army, and privileges for children of the elite, in note 10 to edition four, Chandler inserted reference to a long selection, pp. 336-350, in Gottesman, quite irrelevant for the context in question, but which would have been useful in connection with the arrests of several men for allegedly trying to form a new political party, mentioned inaccurately in Chandler, edition three, p. 238, but cut from edition four (see comment note 608).

One might suppose, even, that Chandler first drafted this chapter based entirely on his preconceptions, without trying to consult sources. Then, becoming aware that considerable published material existed he realized that it had to be cited, but he did not let his text be influenced by that material. As Louis Paulsen wrote in his review (see my note 264), "Part of the historiographic problem I have with Chandler is that it seems that if he doesn't like what X says he will let you know that X exists but then just go on citing other sources without engaging X".

Real evidence that this was Chandler's procedure is where the footnotes are not really relevant to the text with which they are associated. Besides note 10 in the fourth edition, see notes 2 and 4 of the third edition (pp. 228-9). Note 2 cites three treatments of the post-1979 period, but the text of the paragraph is about Vietnamese and French domination of Cambodia in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The paragraph with note 4 contains remarks on two subjects, the 1979 Cambodia-Viet Nam treaty, and an allegation that in the first months of 1979 the "Vietnamese kept foreign visitors away from Cambodia and denied their own military presence there".

Well, for those first few months there was a war going on – a situation in which outside observers are normally discouraged everywhere. But there were

some – who made it impossible for the Vietnamese to deny their own military presence, as Chandler claims without offering a shred of evidence.<sup>934</sup>

Footnote 4 cites “vivid accounts of these early months” by two journalists sympathetic to the PRK who certainly did not provide the negative picture Chandler presents in his text. The Vietnamese presence then was so evident, that no one could reasonably deny it. By July 1979, Nayan Chanda, unmentioned by Chandler, arrived in Phnom Penh, and wrote clearly of the heavy Vietnamese military presence there, but, peculiarly, did not note the 1979 treaty.<sup>935</sup>

Footnote 8 to a paragraph summarizing several subjects, is relevant, cursorily, to only one, the 1979 show trial of Pol Pot and Ieng Sary.

One change in his fourth edition is the elimination of the introductory material noted above (pp. 227-228 third edition, p. 277 fourth), and also the elimination of footnote references to sources which were contrary to Chandler’s assertions. Slocumb and Gottesman have been added to the footnotes, and the latter has become one of Chandler’s important sources for negative assessments of the PRK.<sup>936</sup>

Even when the details are accurate enough, they are given a negative (with respect to the new-post-1979 regime) twist. The end of Pol Pot and the new state power which immediately restored some degree of humanity to Cambodian life is characterized as control of Cambodia again by a foreign power, “reminiscent of the 1830s insofar as the power was Vietnam”; “it treated political opponents severely”, mischievous in that context given that the severity was much less than under Pol Pot or Lon Nol, or even the last years of Sihanouk, and similar to what prevailed in most of the rest of Southeast Asia; “no elections were held until 1981”, abstracting from the total social and administrative breakdown in Cambodia, and indicating extreme efforts by the new regime to return to political normalcy, even if the 1981 elections “were not contested by political parties”.

There are other contexts in which Viet Nam is treated as colonizer or occupier: p. 245, Cambodia, after 1979 was “under the Vietnamese protectorate”; p. 246, “Vietnam invaded the country and established a protectorate ... disguised as an alliance ... For all intents and purposes, ‘Indochina’ was reborn ... Imitating France, Vietnam embarked on a ‘civilizing mission’”; p. 247, “a decade of Vietnamese occupation”; and p. 228, “gradual decline of Vietnamese military and political influence” and increase in Cambodian autonomy “particularly after 1987”.

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<sup>934</sup> Third edition, p. 229. These remarks have been removed from Chandler’s fourth edition, 2008, p. 278. See note 261, above, on *FEER* reports of visitors moving around in Cambodia as early as December 1979.

<sup>935</sup> Chanda, *Brother Enemy*, pp. 371-372.

<sup>936</sup> Margaret Slocumb, *The People’s Republic of Kampuchea 1979-1989*, and the better known, although negative, treatment by Evan Gottesman, *After the Khmer Rouge*.

The ‘decline’ was evident at least by 1985, if not earlier, and if Chandler wishes to argue for 1987, a precise source reference is required. Remarks such as these are distortions of the historical record and can only be intended to denigrate the PRK, whatever the facts – the new Vietnam Syndrome.<sup>937</sup>

Without any effort to explain what it was about, Chandler (229) writes that the “treaty of friendship and cooperation” signed with Viet Nam in 1979 helped to convince “many Cambodians that they would be better off outside the country and persuaded many who stayed behind that the Vietnamese planned to annex Cambodia or at least dominate its politics for an indefinite period”.<sup>938</sup>

This treaty was not among the reasons I heard from Cambodians whom I interviewed in 1980 in the Khao-I-Dang refugee camp; and one wonders if Chandler has even taken a close look at its text. There was much falsification of the provisions of this treaty in the international press and by anti-PRK propagandists in France, as I have noted elsewhere (*Cambodia: A Political Survey*).

The first false claim was that the treaty permitted the stationing of 200,000 Vietnamese troops in Cambodia for 25 years, and the second was that its article 4 called for dissolution of the borders between the two countries, thus implicitly integrating Cambodia with Viet Nam.<sup>939</sup>

Chandler’s remarks on the Vietnamese presence in 1979-1980, and on the 1979 treaty, particularly when incorporated in the Khmer translation, can only be designed to encourage the chauvinist hostility to Viet Nam which has been on the increase and which is dangerous for Cambodia’s continuing political development.<sup>940</sup>

An absolutely gratuitous manifestation of the Vietnam Syndrome is (third edition, p. 229, fourth edition, p. 278) the offhand comparison of Viet Nam in 1979 with DK, “like those of DK in 1978, Vietnam’s leaders [in 1979] believed themselves surrounded by enemies”, right after Chandler has correctly outlined how China in 1979 was attacking Viet Nam, while Thailand, “encouraged by the United States”, had “a similar alliance with China, all of which “was beneficial to the DK remnants filtering into Thailand” where they were to be revived with generous R & R for more combat against the PRK and Viet Nam.

In contrast, DK in 1978 enjoyed the overt friendship of China, more covert support from Thailand, and growing positive interest on the part of the US.

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<sup>937</sup> Third/Fourth editions, pp. 228/277, 228/277, 228/277, 228/277, 246/297, where in the last Chandler toned down the emotional rhetoric somewhat, “Vietnam ... imposed a protectorate that was reminiscent in some ways of French colonialism and the 1830s”.

<sup>938</sup> Third edition, p. 229.

<sup>939</sup> See Vickery, *Cambodia: A Political Survey*, pp. 178-179.

<sup>940</sup> See Vickery, *Cambodia: A Political Survey*, pp. 183-192. In his fourth edition of 2008, p. 278, Chandler, no doubt having finally recognized that Viet Nam had no intention to annex Cambodia, omitted that remark about the 1979 treaty.

Chandler is also confused about the alleged famines in 1979-1980, stating first (229) that “by the middle of the year [1979] a famine had broken out”, and “very few Cambodians stayed put long enough to plant the 1979-1980 rice crop”, stored rice was “appropriated by Vietnamese forces”, “famine conditions were exacerbated by drought”; but (230) in 1980 “the rice harvest doubled in size”, apparently miraculously, and apparently without Chandler being aware of his incoherence.<sup>941</sup>

Readers should not be misled, as Chandler may have been, into imagining that the “skeletal Khmers stumbling into Thailand or dying of starvation beside Cambodia’s roads” were just victims of a famine. They were mostly remnants of the fleeing KR forces and their civilian followers.

Amusingly, where Chandler, in his third edition, cited evidence from sources relatively sympathetic to the PRK and its problems, he has removed it in the fourth. Thus third edition, note 6, to the paragraph on famine, p. 230, cites contrasting accounts in Shawcross, *Quality of Mercy* and Vickery, *Cambodia*, the former concentrating on “bureaucratic infighting” associated with the aid program, and the latter arguing “that the Vietnamese and the PRK did the best they could under the circumstances”.

In the fourth edition, note 4, Chandler omits the Vickery citation, and adds a reference to Stephen Morris, *Why Vietnam Invaded Cambodia*, Stanford 1999, which more than anything indicates fidelity to the anti-Viet, anti-PRK position of the Vietnam syndrome.

Also cut from the fourth edition is Vickery’s assessment (third edition, p. 230) that “the policies of the PRK regime and its Vietnamese backers [were] humane, pragmatic and unoppressive”. Perhaps Chandler wished to omit this because there I said that my views were supported by the research, although not the conclusions, of Stephen Heder, one of Chandler’s favorite scholars, who certainly did not like the way I deconstructed his work in *Cambodia*, chapter 4.

Chandler’s rightward, anti-Vietnamese progression has led to purging of sources potentially sympathetic to the PRK and emphasis on antagonistic sources.

Chandler criticizes the PRK for “blaming the 1975-79 catastrophes on these two individuals” (Pol Pot and Ieng Sary), pp. 231/280; but what else is seen in most of the treatments of Democratic Kampuchea by journalists and historians, starting with the writing of Ben Kiernan, and including all editions of Chandler’s own *History*, the plethora of popular memoirs by survivors of the period, and the work of the Documentation Center of Cambodia in Phnom Penh, continuing now

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<sup>941</sup> This is repeated in the fourth edition, pp. 278-279. On the ‘famines of 1979-1980, and the perpetrators of that info-ganda, see above, pp. 118 ff., 140, footnote 261, *FEER*, Dec 28, 1979 [emphasis added], pp. 10-11, reported that western observers traveling around Cambodia could not see the picture of general starvation which had been reported; and this was confirmed later by Shawcross in “Kampuchea Revives”.



with the so-called Khmer Rouge trial in the Extraordinary Chambers of the Courts of Cambodia, where the concern is with the guilt of a small number of individuals, now expanded from two to five.

So far as I know, the only work attempting to treat the catastrophes as results of objective conditions rather than cruelty by malevolent personalities is my *Cambodia 1975-1982*, although it seems that some journalists, such as Barbara Crossette (cited above), now appear to recognize, even if inadvertently, that what happened was not just the work of Pol Pot and Ieng Sary.

The new constitution of 1981 is characterized as “modeled to a large extent on Vietnam’s” (pp. 233/282), without citing any relevant source, not even Gottesman, whose assertion, criticized above, would have served Chandler’s purpose; and without giving any thought to the complex drafting process, on which see Vickery, *Kampuchea*, pp. 89-105.

Another throwaway line is that in the 1993 election “for the first time in their history a majority of Cambodians had voted against an armed incumbent government ... they had courageously rejected the status quo” (240/288).

Chandler seems to have forgotten that in the first three elections in 1947, 1948 and 1951 the electorate did just that, in giving very clear majorities (not the very narrow anti-government plurality of 1993) to the Democrat party which opposed both the very armed French and King Sihanouk. Then in 1955 the ‘armed incumbent government’ imposed its will much more brutally than has occurred with any post-1979 election. A more careful examination of the total vote in 1993 also shows that over half the electorate voted against monarchy and against Sihanouk.<sup>942</sup>

In his conclusion (247/299) Chandler added that in the 1993 election Cambodians “voted for change but chose to look backward rather than ahead”, meaningless word-mongering without more explanation. Of course, voting for the royalists, as nearly 50% did, meant looking back, but looking ahead could only mean voting for the CPP which had overseen enormous progress during 1979-UNTAC; but of course, for Chandler, that would not have been desirable.

In the fourth edition, he adds, “this tendency has altered in recent years, especially in the towns”. Does he mean that the increasing urban vote for Sam Rainsy means looking ahead? If so, it shows an utterly perverse view of what ‘looking ahead’ should be.

He added, “but deep conservatism persists among older people [a very small and declining percentage of the population] and in rural areas”, where, however, in each election after 1993 (1998, 2003, 2008) CPP has gained over

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<sup>942</sup> Vickery, *Cambodia: A Political Survey*, pp. 70-71.

FUNCINPEC.<sup>943</sup> Chandler seems not to have looked closely at election statistics, nor to have thought out his own ideological position carefully.

As is usual in the literature, both scholarly and journalistic, the 1993 election is not presented honestly. It was not an election to choose a new government, but a constituent assembly to write a new constitution, based on which a new government would form three months later.<sup>944</sup>

Chandler says “the SOC refused to accept defeat”, without explaining what that meant, since there was no requirement that the government change right after the election; and he should have given some attention to how “a fragile compromise was reached”, “by the end of 1993”, and whose machinations were crucial.<sup>945</sup>

One example of Chandler’s prejudice, and carelessness in research is (p. 236) that, apparently, “prior to the [Vietnamese] withdrawal” (date not supplied, but in 1989), “the death penalty was abolished, in response to criticism of Cambodia’s human rights record”.

This is false. The death penalty had been strictly limited from the very beginning of the new post-1979 government, and the law in question was much more lenient than in other Southeast Asian countries. Punishments for serious offenses had been established by Decree-Law no. 02 of 15 May 1980 issued under the authority of the same proclamation of 8 January 1979 establishing the new PRK, and it remained in force after the constitutional changes of 1981.

Some of the offenses for which it prescribed penalties were treason 10-20 years, espionage 5-15 years, murder 10-20 years, theft of private property 6 months-15 years; and death sentences were allowed for leadership of a treason or espionage network, “many crimes against the population in the past” (obviously aimed at former DK personnel), or for rape followed by murder.<sup>946</sup>

Thus offenses which, without attracting comment from foreign ‘human rights’ groups, regularly invite the death penalty throughout capitalist Southeast Asia were not to be punished in that way. Cambodia’s death penalty was abolished by constitutional changes in 1989, and confirmed in Article 35 of the new SOC constitution of that year.<sup>947</sup>

The overly political ‘Human Rights’ enthusiasts had not had an easy time with this subject. Amnesty International had had to resort to obfuscation to try to

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<sup>943</sup> For the results in 1998 and 2003 see Vickery, *Cambodia: A Political Survey*, pp. 173, 181. For 2008 see The Electoral College Network, COMFREL “Cambodia: Final Assessment and Report on the 2008 National Assembly Election (2008)”.

<sup>944</sup> Vickery, *Cambodia: A Political Survey*, pp. 78-83.

<sup>945</sup> Vickery, *Cambodia: A Political Survey*, pp. 82-126.

<sup>946</sup> Michael Vickery, *Kampuchea, Politics, Economics and Society*, pp. 118-122.

<sup>947</sup> Raoul M. Jenner, *The Cambodian Constitutions (1953-1993)*, Bangkok, White Lotus, 1995, pp. 111, 119.

make a case against the PRK on this score. In their “Kampuchea Political Imprisonment and Torture” of 1987 [for which Stephen Heder was mainly responsible], the statistical detail in question is only amusing. On page 8 PRK tribunals are said to “have sentenced five defendants to death since 1979 ... after trials which apparently lacked internationally recognized safeguards”.

On page 69 it is revealed that two of them were Pol Pot and Ieng Sary, sentenced in absentia in 1979 for genocide. Although one can agree with Amnesty’s call to abolish the death penalty everywhere, this was a cheap shot against a poor victimized country whose record of death sentences, at most five in eight years, was hardly a matter for international condemnation, and was far superior to the record of any other Southeast Asian country.

When the death penalty was abolished, Cambodia became the only country in Southeast Asia without such punishment.

The comments on Cambodia’s development from 1979 to UNTAC are mostly negative, whereas Chandler could have cited, if he had really wished to look for sources, “Development Planning in the State of Cambodia” by Cheriyan and Fitzgerald, 1989; “Report of the United Nations Fact-Finding Mission on Present Structures and Practices of Administration in Cambodia” (April-May 1990); and “Cambodia Agenda for Rehabilitation and Reconstruction”, The World Bank, June 1992.<sup>948</sup>

They would not have served Chandler’s purpose, being cautiously optimistic. For example, “Report”, p. 138, “considering the devastation inherited from war and internal strife, the centrally directed system of economic management ... has attained unquestionable successes”. Or, World Bank, p. i., “paddy production had by 1990 been restored to the level of the late 1960s, and in 1987 the bovine population overtook the 1968 level ... life expectancy also exceeds the level achieved before the war ... this comeback was due [besides international effort] to the dedication that the authorities mustered to put the country back on its feet”; p. v, “the situation of public administration ... is better than might be expected after the hardships that the country endured”.

Contrary to Chandler’s totally negative picture, particularly concerning health and education, pp. 236-7, World Bank, p. iv, wrote, “Social sectors, after their near-destruction at the hands of the Democratic Kampuchea regime, have shown considerable progress in quantitative terms in resurrecting social services ... an extensive education system in which an estimated 82 percent of the population of school age is enrolled...similar efforts, although more unevenly successful ... [in] basic health structures ... one physician per 12,800 population, one nurse per 6,300 population, and one hospital bed per 1,440 population”.

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<sup>948</sup> Dr. K.C. Cheriyan and Prof. Dr. E.V.K. FitzGerald, “Development Planning in the State of Cambodia”, Report of a Mission organized by the NGO Forum on Cambodia, Phnom Penh and The Hague, November 1989; The World Bank, East Asia and Pacific Region, Country Department 1, June 1992.

To be sure qualitatively the results were less impressive, but “impressive under the circumstances”, and “Cambodia fares better than some Asian countries which have not yet experienced any of the devastation that Cambodia has suffered”. As I noted (p. 180 ff.), in my critique of Elizabeth Becker, Cambodia in the 1980s compared well with Thailand.

They also warned of the dangers of a too rapid leap into uncontrolled capitalism, into which Cambodia was forced by the operations surrounding UNTAC, and which led to what Chandler said, p. 244, “conditions in Cambodia at the end of the 1990s were worse than ever”. Thus, World Bank, p. ii, warned that increasing privatization “has, unfortunately, been akin to the ‘spontaneous privatization’ of Russia and Eastern Europe”; p. ii, “the liberalization of the economy starting in 1989 has acted to hinder revenue mobilization and inflate expenditures”.

Perhaps Chandler’s most careless and most prejudiced treatment is of the 1997 violence. For him it was simply “a preemptive *coup de force* against FUNCINPEC” launched by Hun Sen. (243/290).

This ignores all evidence to the contrary, in particular the three articles by Australian ambassador Tony Kevin (see note 909), exposing a view fairly widely held in the diplomatic community, and transparent in a book for which Chandler published a gushingly positive review, Benny Widyono’s *Dancing in Shadows*, but dismissing Widyono’s take on 1997 with the snide “Widyono left in April 1997, shortly before the ‘events’ of July, so his reportage on them is necessarily second-hand” – as are all the other sources cited by Chandler.

Chandler here also descended to his most scurrilous, comparing Hun Sen’s conduct in 1997 with Pol Pot’s murder of Son Sen and family<sup>949</sup>

In his remarks about the general situation in the 1990s Chandler has simply adopted the negative assessments of touring journalists, such as Shawcross, Becker, or Crossette. There is, p. 236, the obligatory comment on a pretentious new elite with expensive cars, forgetting that they were able to arise because of the pressure on Cambodia in the 1980s and by UNTAC to drop all socialism and leap into an unrestrained free market.

This is followed by statements about the poor quality of health, education, and living conditions of the rural population, implicitly because of the PRK, rather than because of continued warfare after 1979 between the new government and the US-supported remnants of DK. This is repeated on p. 244, adding that “violent crimes, rare in prerevolutionary times, were now [end of the 1990s] frequent”, probably not true—Cambodia had always been a violent

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<sup>949</sup> Chandler, “Shadow Boxing”, *PPP*, 30 November 2007. In addition to the comment by Tony Kevin, see Vickery, “A non-standard view of the coup”, *PPP*, 6/17, 29 Aug-11 Sept, 1997, above, p. 501, ff.; and Vickery, *Cambodia: A Political Survey*, pp. 159-166. Chandler, *Brother Number One*, second edition, pp. 180-181; Chandler, *Voices From S-21*, p. 198.

society. At least for Phnom Penh, the period when violent crimes were rare was the period of PRK socialism, 1979-1989.

Chandler has given a very biased negative picture of Cambodia's development since 1979, which was dubious when he first published it, and even more egregiously tendentious in the 2005 translation destined for Khmer students and 'confirming' from the pen of this 'doyen' of Cambodian studies, some of the worst prejudices which have been put about in their milieu by local chauvinists.

Chandler's portrait of Cambodia is especially a caricature now when in the view of one of the most experienced reporters on Southeast Asian affairs, Philip Bowring, Cambodia along with Viet Nam, "have exceeded most expectations in combining stability and increasing prosperity", while "the two leading middle-sized, middle-income states, Thailand and Malaysia [with which Cambodia has, by too many western observers, been invidiously compared since 1979] are casting a shadow over the region" as their regimes and societies are collapsing into farce – indeed to the extent that the Thai Foreign Minister, in a talk at Johns Hopkins University, characterized his country as "behaving like a banana republic", while Hun Sen increasingly appears as a wise statesman.<sup>950</sup>

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**END**

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<sup>950</sup> Philip Bowring, "Farcical, maybe, but serious too", *International Herald Tribune*, 12 September 2008, p. 7. On Bowring see above pp. 203, 374-5, note 317; Foreign Minister Kasit Piromya, *IHT* 15 April 2010, p. 3. And as noted in an earlier publication, "one of its senior statesmen has warned of collapse into a 'failed state'". See Vickery, *Cambodia: A Political Survey*, p. 197, n. 218.

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