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THE KAMPUCHEAN COUNTER REVOLUTION

Kampuchea , a small country with an estimated population of 6 millions, has be. receiving a lot of media attention recently in comparison to the almost total lack of coverage given to it before the coup d'état of I970. Until ther ,when one talked of Indo-China , one thought almost exclusively of the Vietnam war or of Thailand. Yet the other States of the area , and Kampuchea (or Cambodia) especially have a history as long and complex as those of any other state , nation or race on Earth .

Until the mid fourteenth century, Kampuchea was one of the great Asian empires and had traded with Imperial Rome during its heyday. A memorial to that lost splendour is the great complex of religious buildings known as Angkor. This empire was based upon a set of agressive wars against both Vietnam and China which provided the slaves for the massive building and irrigation projects of the God kings of the khmer people. At the height of their power these kings ryled over the territories now known as Thailand, Laos, and Kampuchea and they controlled parts of Burma and Malaysia; but by the fourteenth century the ceaseless wars and a failure to maintain the vital irrigation system had left Kampuchea economically weaker than the emerging powers of Thailand and Vietnam .Until the arrival of the French in the nineteenth century, the history of Kampuchea was to be a series of disputes between these economically, and hence military, more powerful nations.

By the nineteenth century Kampuchea was one of the most backward countries upon Earth and the French considered to be of importance only as a buffer State between their other interests in South Eastern Asia and the British influence in Thailand and because it controlled, via the Mekong river, the route into the vast markets of Southern China. This low estimation of Kampuchea's value can be seen in France's almost total failure to develop the country. With the exception of a few amenities, such as roads and schools, and the rubber plantations started by Mi helin after the Great War they left Kampuchea just as they had found it, as late as 1953; when the country gained independence, Pochenkong the great war they are runways.

Independance itself was something of a misnomer . The central government controlled only the plains . In the mountains lived a series of tribes : Por , Yothea , Ya , etc.. generally known as the Montagnards who practised slash and burn agriculture, worshipped their own animist spirits in preference to the State's Buddhism and owned only the most nominal allegiance to anyone except themselves . The new government made no attempt to bring these tribes under its authority until the mid sixties when the attempt ,unsurprisingly provoked a revolt from the Montagnards . As well as this ethnic division , Kampuchea was also split sociologically between the countryside where peasants farmers worked their own lands in the fertile delta of the Mekong and the cities where capitalism and its "civilisation " was concentrated . Here lived the educated middle class , the proletariat the bureaucracy and the emerging entrepreneurial class . These functions were almost totally controlled by non-khmer races , for instance the capital city Phnom Penh was fourty per cent Vietnamese, fifty per cent Chinese, three per cent européan and seven per cent other races . The majority of government officials were of mixed origin (both Lon Nol and Pol Pot were of Khmer and Chinese blood) or came from the large khmer population of South Vietnam (such as Iang Sary who was number two in the Khmer rouge regime) This deeply divided country remained economically one of the most backward countries in the third world; its 2,46 Millions acres maintained a population of around eight millions at the end of the war while Vietnam fed its 60 millionscitizens from an acreage only twice that of Kampuchea 's. This backwardness has been reflected in the history of the country .

In 1945 the Japanese persuaded the ruling monarch Norodom Sihanouk to declare independence. He immediately attempted to force a return to the feudal absolutism of the Gold kings. The middle classe retaliated by gaining Japanese backing for a counter coup against Sihanouk and his Vichy French supporters. This move was successful and the nationalist middle classe formed a government led by a french educated lawyer Son Ngoc Tan (again from the Khmer's of South Vietnam)which unlike that of Ho Chi Minh failed to

to apolish the monarchy, contenting themselves with demanding greater autonomy ! Dnly when the French launched a war to regain their Asian colonies did Son Ngoc Tan demand complete independ nce . The weaknesses of the middle class were well illustrated in October 1945 when the French had reentered Saigon but had not set foot in Kampuchean territory. A minister in Son Ngoc Tan government, one Khim Tit , flew to Saigon to negociate with the French commandant in chief , general Leclerc . There he was bribed by followers of Sihanouk and upon his return to Phnom Penh General Leclerc and two other officers flew into Kampuchea , arrested Son Ngoc Tan and carried him off to Saigon without any interference at all . The middle class government collapsed immediately and made no further attempt to challenge the monarchy until 1970 .

In 1952, the Buddhist hierarchy began to support the nationalist demands for indépendence . In order to forestall a nationalist uprising king Sihanouk "rebelled " against the French who were deeply engaged at Dien Bien Phu and then allowed Kampuchea independence In interviews at the time Sihanouk explained that he had acted to prevent the nationalists being allowed to appear as Liberators and abolishing the monarchy . Yet eventual declaration of a republic in I970 revealed how far from being radic 1 nationalist movement the middle class were as power after Sihanouk 's overthrow passed into the hands of one of his long term supporters , Lon Nol (see next line) rather than genuine radicals such as Son Ngoc Tanh or Sirik Matak . Lon Nol , a deeply superstitious person who once suggested that Phnom Penh would be best defended by sprinkling holy sand round its outskirts , was once said to practise Sihanoukism without Sihanouk . From the beginning of his government in 1970 the country entered a period of almost total collapse. The countryside was unsafe and in consequence food production dropped drastically . Industrial output too failed and the economy came to dep upon lavish American grants . The huge scale of American investment produced widespre corruption. Honest administrators, officiers or politicians either fled to France or joined Khmer Rouge . Often United State weaponry passed straight from Lon Nol's forces into the hands of the Khmer Rouge and although the Nixon administration was aware of the state of affairs it made no effort to alter them since they regarded their cambodian operations as a side showto tie down Victnamese forces and thus prolong the Thieu regime in Saigon for a little longer . With the American pullout of troops in 1970-1971 from Indochina , the United States began to rely upon massive air strikes against the Vietnamese supply lines through Kampuchea (the Ho .hi Minh trail) to slow down the Viet Cong take over, it is estimated that almost half a million tons of high explosive were dropped on Kampuchea between February and Aügust 1973 . This bombing campaign shattered the already feeble economy and totally disrupted the fabric of society . Thousands of villages were destroyed, families separated and ten of thousands of refugees driven from their homes . During this period the rage and hate of the khmer people helped Pol Pot to gain control of the Khmer rouge .

The Khmer Rouge had its origins in the struggle for independence of the years I94 1955 . The Vietminh , who were fighting the French in their own country began seeking contacts in Kampuchea in an effort to relieve some of the pressure on themselves by forcing the French to extend their forces. At first, they used their country men living in Kampuchea as well as Khmers from South Vietnam but this movement was defeated in I954 and fragmented with only a small group known as the Pracheanchon remaining both partly legal and in opposition to Sihanouk . This group was later joined by students returning from France where they had been in contact with the French Communist Party and with radicals from other third world countries , such Samir Amin an Egyptian economist who now lives in Senegal . Pracheanchon included many people who later were to form the hard core of the Khmer Rouge: Khieu Samphan , Khieu Thirit , Khieu Ponmary , Pol Pot (who's real name is Salath Sar) , Ieng Sary and Son Sen and although some books did circulate amongst them they had little real knowledge of Marxist -Leninist theories and they remained essentially chauvinistic. For instance , Ieng Sury issued a proclamation against racially mixed marriages and Pol Pot was wont to describe himself as the "original khmer " when signing documents. Pol Pot also revealed a lack of understanding about bolshevik theory when he visited yougoslavia with some trotskyists at a time when Jito was being denounced as fascist by the orthodox communist line - during this visit , Pol Pot was a member of the French Communist Party . Such people could not help view the Vietminh influence with Pracheanchon except with distrust and , in view of the historic enmity between Vietnam and Kampuchea , it should not be too surprising to find that the Pol Pot clique quickly gained the ascendancy over " the agents of Vietnamese imperialism"

Sihanoukist repression during the sixties forced Pol Pot et al to flee the cities . At first they sheltered in the lowland but they had to move into the highlands amongst the Montagnards who became , so Pol Pot later claimed , their most ardent followers . Such an alliance of middle class radicals and primitive hill tribes could not of course have taken control of Kampuchea under normal conditions . The Khmer farmers in the lowlands did not support them because fertile soil and the absence of landlords guaranteed

the peasants survival . However , in the confusion that followed the American interven tion , the Khmer Rouge became the major force in the country . Intellectuals who had previously sided with Lon Nol either fled abroad or joined the Khmer Rouge where they helped to fuel the leadership struggle and often lost their lives - Hou Yuon , Hu Nim , So Phim , Koy Thuon and Poc Deuscomar along with many other notalbe figures all disappeared at this time , in which Pol Pot emerged supreme and unchallenged especially after the Kh er Rouge conquered the whole country in 1975 .

Once established in power the policy of Pol Pot and his Montagnards followers were ruthlessly pursued: the middle class was eliminated, the farmers repressed and techno logy even at the primitive level of irrigation pumps discarded, education . medical services even communications were annihilated . The Khmer people ware even forced to discard their colourful national garb in favour of Montagnard black cloth .

This iconoclasm was not the result of a bolshevik middle class striving towards the establishment of State Capitalism; Lenin and Trotsky used tsarist officers to build the Red Army and Mao used "capitalist " engineers to run the Chinese economy after 1949 . Instead it was the result of the most primitive group in a society seizing power and caxrying their hatred of capitalism to illogical extremes . Just as UN intervention in the Congo in the early sixties allowed the Simbas to saire control of large areas of the country and indulge in a frenzy of destruction which at times led to the reduction of stone built houses because they were foreign symbols , so the American bombing raids of 1973 produced a dislocated society in which the Montagnards - the least affected groupwere able to dominate the country . Allied with a small radical and nationalist middle class these tribes were able to prevent the intellectuals from exercising any control over them . Indeed , many of the intellectuals themselves fell victim to Pol Pot theories Thus , far from instituting State Capitalism , the Khmer Rouge became an instrument

of one of the bloodiest counter -revolutions yet witnessed . As a direct result of foreign intervention the revolution collapsed and reaction was established . Now the Kampuchean route to State Capitalism will take place under Vietnamese direction .

Willy Van Damme - II- I980

INTERNATIONAL GET TOGETHER

An international get together will be organised for Easter 1981 (18,19 and 20 April 81) at Osnabrück (West Germany) to discuss :

- Eastern countries mainly on East Germany , Poland and Soviet Union .

For information , it is better to write directly to the German address - and as soon as possible . No text or summing up will be put in circulation before the meeting .

are still working on a pamphlet concerning the struggles in Poland . A rough draft walk circulate among some comrades ; the definitive text will include criticism and discussions including the Easter debates on the subject . We still invite everyone to send any original material and to take part in the discussions about the points raised in the issue nº 23

SUBSCRIPTIONS

The cost and the work of duplicating and postage impose on us a strict limitation of the circulation of Echanges: we will send Echanges only to subscribers having reror their subscription .

PUBLICATIONS

in French : Liaisons dangereuses n ° 3 - Besson BP 30 75861 Paris Cedex 20 Day to day struggles and strikes in France - Strikes in Poland -Temporary work .

> Jeune Taupe n° 34 - Librairie Parallèle - 47 rue St Honoré - 7500I Paris I2 pages out of 20 on the "Faurisson defence" and its surrounding (and a leaflet on the same subject) and only 3 pages on Poland . We have to believe that the ideological struggle (and which one ...) is four times more important than the class struggle of the Polish workers . Agora n ° 4 BP 3187 - 31027 Toulouse Cedex - A lot of very well presented

articles on various but of unequal importance subjects .

in English: Root and Branch: n° 9 Box 236 - Somerville - Ma 02143 -Steel: can rationalisation cure old age (without causing depression)? Let a dozen flowers bloom : TheBeijing free speech Movement . The red Brigades between stalinism and leftism - Notes on the concept of class .

A Fresh Look at Lenin .by Andy Brown with a postface by Ian Pirie and A.A.

Raskoln_kov. The last issue of Solidarity includes a separate small pamphlet on Poland .

from <u>Cienfuegos Press</u> (Over the Water - Sanday - Orkney - books and pamphlets : The Christie File (Stuart Christie - The First Mayday , The Haymarket speeches (Voltairine de Cleyre) - Anarchism and Marxism (Daniel Guérin) - Anarchy (JRWhite)

We have received some materials from Barcelona dockers, on their strike, their autonomous organisation and their international contacts. We will come back on this subject in a next issue of Echanges.