

3. Looking Back at Cambodia, 1942-76 by Michael Vickery

It rarely happens that a historian can look back over the recent past of any contemporary society with the feeling that a curtain has been rung down on the play and that what happened up to that time may be studied without regard to what is going on at present or what may happen in the future. Such is the way Cambodia appears. The appearance is misleading, of course, as the development of other revolutionary countries over the past 30 years clearly shows; but there is no doubt that the end of the 1970-75 War marked for Cambodia the end of an entire way of life - something which was dramatically confirmed by the unexpectedly rapid removal of Sihanouk from even a figurehead role. A black-out on information was imposed by the new government; what the refugees, the only first-hand source of news, say is contradictory; and contributions from other sources, principally the Cambodian community in Paris, alternate between the trivial and the absurd.² Revolutions have occurred elsewhere, but seldom within such an absolute void of information, or in a manner so contrary to all predictions. For all wise old Indochina hands believed that after the War had been won by the revolutionary forces - and there was no doubt by 1972, at the latest, that they would win - it would be the Vietnamese who would engage in the most radical and brutal break with the past. In Cambodia it was expected that both sides, except for a few of the most notorious leaders, would be reconciled and some sort of mild, tolerant socialism instituted. Certainly most of the Phnom Penh elite expected this, even imagining that the new socialism would

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drift back into something resembling the old Sihanoukism, which is why so many of them stayed on until the end. Among the Indochina countries only Laos has come out of the War true to form, while Vietnam and Cambodia have behaved in ways nearly the opposite of what had been expected.

What this means first of all, of course, is that the Vietnamese and Cambodians were misunderstood and that the facets of their culture and history, which might have revealed an unexpected capacity for tolerance in the one and vindictiveness in the other, were missed. In the case of Cambodia much more was missed - that the position of the royalty, headed by Sihanouk was not after all so solidly rooted; that, in spite of its heady atmosphere as the last exotic Asian paradise, Cambodia was rent by political, economic and class conflicts; that the War did not begin suddenly in 1970; and that the conflict which seemed to explode at that time proceeded naturally from trends in the country's political history over the preceding 25 years, a period characterized by intense efforts of the traditional elite to frustrate any moves towards political, economic or social modernization which would threaten its position.

The Struggle for Independence and the Democratic Party

The raising of the curtain on the scene which ended in 1975 began, I would say, on 9 March 1945, when, after over three years of co-operation, the Japanese suddenly interned the French colonial forces and soon after encouraged the Indochina countries to declare independence. The Cambodian Government, under Sihanouk, duly followed this suggestion, and existing treaties with the French were abrogated.

On the whole, up to that time, the Second World War had not been a very traumatic experience for Cambodia. The Japanese occupation was cushioned by the French administration which remained in place, there was no leftist

or anti-fascist resistance to stir up trouble, and the only nationalist movement of any importance, although anti-French, had co-existed comfortably with the Japanese.

The last was a group of fairly prosperous urban Khmer, with French education and a commercial orientation, organized around Son Ngoc Thanh, a Cambodian from Southern Vietnam. In 1936 they had founded the first Khmer-language newspaper and through it advocated very moderate reforms - more Cambodian participation in commerce, greater educational opportunities, equal treatment for Cambodians and French - developments which probably worried the traditional Cambodian elite more than the French, since their realization would have meant bringing more new men into positions of wealth and power and thereby undermining the old oligarchy.

During the first years of the War, under the tolerant eye of the Japanese, they organized propaganda activities to undermine support for the French among Cambodian soldiers and monks. The French broke this up in 1942; most of the leaders were arrested and the newspaper was closed down, but

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Son Ngoc Thanh himself escaped to Japan. Although little-known outside the country, these men were considered thereafter as heroes of the first Cambodian independence movement, and Sihanouk seriously misjudged the mood of his people when he attacked them in later years as traitors for attempting to subvert their, and his, colonial masters.

When the Japanese took over all authority from the French in March 1945, Son Ngoc Thanh was brought back and imposed on the government as Foreign Minister, and in August, after a palace coup by his followers, was made Prime Minister. Thus the first independence may have been, for the traditional elite, the most traumatic moment of the whole War period, since it meant the emergence into leadership of their most dangerous local opponent; and the return of the French was probably welcomed. Indeed, oral tradition of the time, which cannot be proved wrong by any published records, affirms that Son Ngoc Thanh was betrayed to the French by Sihanouk and the ministers loyal to him.

This occurred in October 1945, less than a year after Cambodia's first independence had been proclaimed. Thanh was carried off to exile in France, becoming the first martyr for what, at the time, was termed the Cambodian 'Left', and for the next 25 years he remained, for much of the educated youth, a hero, a man under whom things might have been different. Such confidence was probably misplaced. Thanh's own principles appear never to have developed beyond his position of the 1930s, and his ultimate espousal of the American cause may have kept a lot of his followers in Phnom Penh after 1970, at a time when they might otherwise have moved elsewhere. But any study of Cambodian politics in the 1940s and 1950s must keep in mind that he was a hero for an important section of the progressive forces who had been betrayed by Sihanouk and the conservative elite. Although the French returned easily in 1945, this did not mean a simple restoration of the pre-war situation. Due to decisions taken by the Free French during the War, Cambodia became an autonomous state within the French union and acquired some of the trappings of independence. Among these was a Constitution to be 'granted' by the King, and a National Assembly. The first election was held on 1 September 1946 for the purpose of choosing a Constituent Assembly to discuss and vote on the Draft Constitution which had been drawn up by a joint Franco-Khmer committee. Three parties plus a number of independent candidates contested this election. The Democratic Party, headed by Prince Sisowath Youtevong and other young men who had recently returned from university studies in France, took 50 of the 67 seats in the Assembly. Their goal was the achievement of a European-type parliamentary system with a maximum of democratic

rights. It was well known that they intended to work-for full independence, and they made little secret of their admiration for Son Ngoc Thanh. Many people also thought, perhaps correctly, that the Democrats were secret, anti-monarchists who dreamed of establishing a republic. In the election results, they were followed by the Liberal Party whose candidates won 14 seats. Strongly pro-royalist, and led by another prince, it was favoured by

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many of the Phnom Penh bourgeoisie and considered by its opponents to be pro-French. The third organized party, was a small, conservative group of old-fashioned bureaucrats, the personal friends and clientele of its leader, also a prince. Its programme was very vague and urged moderation on all questions. It won no seats, and the remaining three were taken by independent candidates.

After lengthy, often stormy, discussion of the Draft Constitution, which the Democrats considered insufficiently democratic, the Assembly produced a revised text which was accepted by the King in July 1947 and, with a few minor changes, became the country's first basic law. Although stating that 'all power emanates from the King' and that the Constitution had been 'granted' by him, it nevertheless contained the proviso that the King 'must use his power in conformity to the Constitution', and in fact set up a system of government in which the National Assembly was dominant.

Since the work of the Constituent Assembly had been limited to drawing up a Constitution, it was dissolved and elections were held in December 1947 for the first National Assembly. The same three parties were still contestants, but by this time ideological and interest lines had been more sharply drawn and two new parties appeared on the scene, one of them being Lon Nol's 'Khmer Renovation'. Drawing members both from among the independents and from the older parties, these two new groups were strongly pro-monarchist, traditionalist and authoritarian, although, in contrast to the Liberals, probably as strong on independence as the Democrats. Their leaders were men of the traditional elite who had already achieved positions of authority before the War and within the colonial system and who were probably unhappy with the rapid rise of the relative newcomers among the Democrats. The election results were much as before, Democrats 54, Liberals 21, with the new parties completely out in the cold, and the new National Assembly was convoked in January 1948. The parliamentary game, however, proved hard to play. The Democrats' leader, Prince Youtevong, had died in July 1947, and the party in any case contained too many disparate elements.

Ever since the appearance of their first newspaper in the late 1930s, the ideology of Cambodian nationalists had never gone much beyond the advocacy of Cambodians going into business in order to take control of the country's economic life from the French, Chinese and Vietnamese, and for a number of prominent Democrats parliamentary and eventual independent government were simply extended means to this end. Some of these people considered ministerial power to be a green light for self-enrichment; a number of scandals came to light. The Democrats also continued to make a hero of Son Ngoc Thanh, and hardly concealed their sympathy for the Issarak, anti-French *maquis* cum bandits who controlled much of the countryside and in some cases probably had contact with the Viet Minh. This naturally displeased the French, who still had ultimate power in Cambodia and were trying to put all rebels into the Communist basket; and it angered the King and local conservatives who preferred to put law and order before either parliamentary government or independence.

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The inevitable conflicts resulted in the dissolution of the Assembly in September 1949, occasioned by the Democratic Party's attitude towards the Issarak. A new government, responsible only to the King, was formed

around a group of conservative Democrats who split off to form their own party under Yem Sambaur (who was to become prominent again in 1970 as a *Renovation* supporter) .. Even with the Assembly out of the way, ministerial stability proved as elusive as before, and six Cabinets followed one another until the date of the next elections in September 1951. In the interim, the country's political life had been embittered by the assassination of the Democrats' new leader in January 1950, an attempt on the life of another, and an effort by the King to push a revision of the Constitution through the Council of the Kingdom, the parliamentary upper house which had continued to remain in session. As time for the elections approached there was a good deal of manoeuvring, in which the King came out clearly in favour of the conservatives, to prevent the Democrats from repeating their earlier victories. Insecurity due to rebel activity was a major problem throughout the country. At a meeting of the King and leaders of the by now seven political parties in October 1950, four of the parties, including the Democrats, declared that elections could not be held because of the lack of security. About a month later, when party leaders met again to discuss proposals submitted to them by the King as alternatives for the country's political life in the immediate future, two of the parties, including Lon Nol's *Renovation*, reversed their policy and voted to have elections. The Democratic Party newspaper of the time suggested that their strategy was based on the belief that the Democrats would not take part in the elections and the field would be clear for the other groups.

As alternatives to holding elections the King had also proposed: 1) temporary suspension of the Constitution, which would have meant the end of party activity and government by Cabinets responsible only to the King, and 2) re-establishment of the old National Assembly. For obvious reasons the Democrats supported the latter, and the Government, led by the King's uncle and dominated by non-Democrats, favoured the former. Interestingly, the only party which found the first proposal acceptable was the *Khmer Renovation*, since its leaders obviously knew they would be the beneficiaries of dictatorial government. Since the holding of elections on time was the only proposal to receive the support of a majority of the parties, it was adopted and an 'election government' was formed under the leader of one of the conservative parties. The task of this government was primarily to prepare for the elections and, to ensure that the preparations were fair, it was supposed to include ministers from all political parties. However, the Democrats, because of their conviction that security was too threatened, refused to take a seat in the Cabinet and announced that they would take no responsibility for incidents which might occur during the campaign. They nevertheless participated in the elections and won handily against the seven other parties which were now on the

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scene, even though voter turn-out was very low and they received less than half the total vote. The composition of the Assembly showed little change from 1947, with 55 Democrats and 17 Liberals. In addition, four seats went to the party of Dap Chhuon, a former *Issarak* who had rallied to the Government at the end of 1949, and Lon Nol's *Renovation* finally got into the Assembly with two seats.

The election results did not give a true picture of the balance of forces, however. In the voting itself the six parties of the far Right polled a total of 100,477 to the Democrats' 144,728, with the Liberals getting over 72,000 and independent candidates, mostly conservatives, over 8,000. It was already clear that any movement which could unify the Right could immediately cut the ground from under the Democrats.

The Democrats had also gradually been losing ground in other ways. At the end of 1949, after the Democratic National Assembly had been dissolved,

Dap Chhuon, the most powerful of the Issarak leaders, rallied to the King and was left in control of his territory, which included Siemreap and parts of Battambang and Kompong Thom - in all a large portion of northern Cambodia. Soon afterward one of his men formed the 'Victorious Northeast' political party, which found its place as one of the group of small parties opposing the Democrats. This coup alone assured that a large piece of territory would not again be under the effective control of a Democrat government and gave the Right the support of an experienced military force with a proven leader.

Thus the Democrats, in spite of controlling the Cabinet, were really on the defensive. They were trying to negotiate with the French for independence, but the latter accused them of aiding the Issaraks and thereby the Viet Minh. In effect, the Democrats refused to take strong action against the Cambodian Issaraks, considering them to be genuine, if somewhat misguided patriots, but also drew a distinction, which their opponents refused to accept, between the Issaraks and the Viet Minh. The internal opposition took up the accusation, and added to it the charge that the Democrats were striving for absolute power in the manner of Mussolini and Hitler. Lon Nol's newspaper was particularly voluble on the latter subject, but there seem to have been no real grounds for the charges, for the Democrats tolerated strong criticism from their opponents and never harassed opposition newspapers in the manner of the Cambodian Right after it won power.

The return of Son Ngoc Thanh in the Autumn of 1951 did nothing to calm the situation. He began publishing a newspaper, *Khmer A wake*, which pushed strongly for independence, and in the spring of 1952 suddenly left Phnom Penh to form a new Issarak group on the Northern Khmer-Thai border. The Democrats were accused of aiding him - a charge which they did not take great pains to deny.

In June 1952 the trouble came to a head. An army jeep drove around Phnom Penh scattering leaflets signed by Dap Chhuon and calling for the King and the people to take action against the Government. The latter, evidently assuming that the other right-wing parties were also involved, sent

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police to search the houses of their leaders, including Lon Nol and Yem Sambaur, and some of them were taken to Police Headquarters for questioning. The searches, in fact, turned up nothing incriminating. Lon Nol had permits for the three machine-guns and three cases of hand grenades found at his house, which says something about the supposedly totalitarian regime imposed by the Democrats on other parties. The arrested men were released after questioning and the whole procedure, as the Democrats emphasized, and as their opponents could never deny, was carried out with scrupulous legality.

Nevertheless, the incident provided the opposition with a chance to pillory the Democrats for their allegedly dictatorial methods and to charge them with attempting to destroy all other political parties. Again it should be emphasized that the opposition newspapers were not harassed and their charges were answered in the Democrats' own party organ. King Sihanouk then entered the fray with a message true to the type of logic he was to use against political opponents in the future. He charged that the Democrats had refused to work against criminals (read Issaraks), alleging constitutional guarantees against search without warrant and indiscriminate arrest, but now it was clear that the Democrats only observed these rights for their own people. Since it was clear, according to Sihanouk, that the Democrats intended to use power indiscriminately against present and future opponents, contrary to the Constitution which 'I gave to the people', he asked the Government to resign. In this speech Sihanouk placed himself squarely on the side of the right-wing parties and let the Democrats know that those parties' leaders were not to be treated as run-of-the-mill

citizens.

Sihanouk himself headed the new Government and asked the Assembly to grant him full powers to rule personally for three years, within which time he promised to achieve full independence. The Assembly refused on constitutional grounds, which refusal the King apparently accepted for the time being, and the body continued to meet. The Democratic Party, however, suspended political activity and closed down its newspaper at the end of July 1952.

Another crisis came in January 1953 when the King asked the Assembly for a special law declaring the nation in danger, and when this was refused by the Assembly, both it and the Council of the Kingdom were dissolved. Then the King proclaimed the special law and he and his right-wing supporters finally ruled alone with such powers as indiscriminate right of arrest, the right to forbid publications and meetings and the right to censor mail. Many Democratic Party members and members of the Assembly were arrested because, according to Lon Nol's newspaper, 'there was clear proof that they were following the orders of Son Ngoc Thanh and Ea Sichau who are certainly communist and who are allied with the Viet Minh'. This line was repeated in February by Sihanouk in an interview with foreign journalists. He also added that there was 'documentary proof that Son Ngoc Thanh and Ea Sichau were working with Ho Chi Minh and Mao Tse-Tung.'³

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Their highhanded methods in internal politics notwithstanding, Sihanouk and his supporters made good their boasts about independence. Obviously the French preferred to grant it to the Cambodian King, and by the autumn of 1953 the major attributes of independence had been transferred.

It was also in this period that Lon Nol established himself solidly as a power figure. In 1952 the important rice-growing region of north-western Cambodia, Battambang Province, was reorganized as the 'Battambang Autonomous Region', French military forces withdrew from there, and military responsibility was transferred to the Cambodian army. Lon Nol switched from civil service to the military and assumed command of the region with the rank of colonel. After this he was never to be far from the top of the military establishment. During the next two years this area was the scene of operations by the Government forces against Issarak and Viet Minh, characterized by gratuitous brutality. A participant told me how they would move into villages, kill the men and women who had not already fled and then engage in individual tests of strength which consisted of grasping infants by the legs and pulling them apart. These events had probably not been forgotten by those of that area who survived to become the Khmer Rouge troops occupying Battambang in 1975 and whose reported actions have stirred up so much comment abroad (see *Time Magazine*, 26 April 1976).

The 1955 Election

With independence achieved and the Democratic Party apparently destroyed, power seemed to be securely in the hands of the King and his supporters. But the Geneva Conference of 1954 added a new dimension to the Cambodian political scene. At the Conference Cambodia had guaranteed that general elections would be held in 1955 and that all political groups, including the former pro-Viet Minh *maquis*, would be allowed to participate. Moreover, the International Control Commission was to be present to supervise the fairness of the electoral process.

In the meantime, a new generation of university graduates began to return from France and enter the political scene with an entirely different outlook from the founders of the Democratic Party. Whereas the latter had specialized in politically neutral subjects (Youtevong was a mathematician, another had a degree in literature) and had been in France during the last pre-war years and the Vichy period, the new group was made up of lawyers and political economists and had seen Paris student life during the radical

ferment of the early post-war days.

Several of them soon achieved prominence by getting themselves elected to the Executive Committee of the Democratic Party, which in the post-Geneva political freedom was able to resume activity. The new Secretary General of the Party was Norodom Phurissara (who joined FUNK in 1972 and emerged after the 1970-75 War as Minister of Justice), and among his

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colleagues was Thiounn Mum, who also opted for the anti-Lon Nol forces from 1970. In reaction to this new leadership some of the older Democrats resigned, and one, Sim Var, denounced the new group as Communist.

Another group to take advantage of the 1954-55 situation was the Khmers, who had fought along with the Viet Minh against the French right up to the end of the War. They formed a party, the Pracheachon, 'citizens', and began publishing a newspaper. A third group which benefited from Geneva were the members of the non-Viet Minh *maquis*, Son Ngoc Thanh's followers, who also came out of the woods. Some of them formed a political party, the Khmer Independence Party, whose very name was a challenge to Sihanouk, and published a series of newspapers which, like those of the Democrats and Pracheachon, were generally critical of the Government. The other political parties on the scene after Geneva were the old Liberal Party and the small right-wing groups which had been present for previous elections. It appeared that a revived Democratic Party would repeat its previous victories, especially with electoral freedom guaranteed by Geneva and the International Control Commission.

The Right was determined not to let this happen. In October, four of the small parties, including the important groups of Lon Nol, Yem Sambaur, and Dap Chhuon, formed an alliance and published a newspaper which announced that they were rightist, monarchist, traditionalist and in principal opposed to party politics. In February 1955, this alliance broke up and most of its members joined another political formation which appeared in the same month and was to have a much longer life. This was the Sangkum Reastr Niyum, or Popular Socialist Community, as it was usually translated. Its supreme counsellor was Sihanouk and among its prominent members were leaders of the old right-wing parties. Within the first few months of 1955 all of these groups, except Yem Sambaur's, dissolved in favour of the Sangkum. As Hou Yuon, one of the important FUNK leaders between 1970 and 1975, wrote in his "doctoral thesis in 1955, 'the Popular Socialist Community of ex-king Norodom Sihanouk and ... the Liberal party of Prince Norindeth' are 'the political representatives' of the large landowners, who made up less than 10% of the population but whose influence was very great.⁴

The unification of the Right was nearly complete and from the beginning the Sangkum made its conservative ideology clear. In the first issues of its newspaper, which began publication in June, it set forth an authoritarian philosophy according to which natural leaders should rule and those less fortunate should not envy them. The natural leaders were the rich and powerful who enjoyed such a situation in the present because of virtuous conduct in previous lives (a common belief in South East Asian Buddhism). The poor and unfortunate should accept their lot and try for an improved situation in the next life through virtuous conduct in the present. The Sangkum was also strongly anti-Communist, desired close relations with the United States and American military aid, and felt that Cambodia should not really be bound by the Geneva Accords because she had achieved independence before the

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Conference.

The Sangkum's main opposition, the radicalized Democrats, the Pracheachon and the Thanhists, held closely related positions on major issues.

They emphasized the importance of the Geneva Conference in securing Cambodia's independence, the undesirability of American military aid (an agreement was signed on 16 May 1955), the dangerous situation in Vietnam and imperialist, i.e. American, responsibility for it (in the light of the 1970s their analyses seem extremely prescient), and the necessity for free elections as guaranteed by Geneva and according to the Constitution of 1947.

Once the Democratic Party had reorganized, it asked for a Cabinet post, since the Cabinet was an 'election government', supposed to contain representatives of each party in order to assure the fairness of the election. This was refused because of the suspicion of Communism cast on them by Sim Var, a former Democrat who had become prominent in the Sangkum. Naturally, this attitude also meant that there was no chance of a Cabinet post for anyone from the Pracheachon.

Thus, as the 1955 elections approached, all Government power was concentrated in the hands of the pro-Sangkum Right, formed of parties which had never been able to achieve any success in the generally free elections held previously.

The election had at first been set for April, but at that date it was almost certain that the Democrats would win. Then delegations from the provinces began turning up at the palace with petitions asking for an end to elections and parliamentary rule and for Sihanouk to rule the country personally. Sihanouk claimed that these petitions represented the will of the people exasperated by the abuses of party government. Of course, with the International Control Commission present, outright abolition of parties and Parliament was impossible, but Sihanouk tried to get around this obstacle with a constitutional reform which would have taken power from the National Assembly and, under the guise of returning it to the people, given it to the Right. The reform would also have prevented the *ex-maquisards* from participating in the election. The ICC disapproved and the subject was dropped. The election was then postponed until September, which was still within the limits set at Geneva and gave the Right more time to prepare.

From then on the 'local news' columns of the anti-Sangkum newspapers were filled with accounts of campaign irregularities. The Sangkum had the administration in its hands and was making full use of it. Villagers were threatened with punishment, including death, if they did not vote for the Sangkum. People were coerced into taking out Sangkum membership cards, and then told that if they voted for any other party they would face punishment. Another technique was to force villagers to take an oath to supernatural powers that they would vote for the Sangkum, after which they would not dare to do otherwise.

Are these accounts all true, or simply dishonest left-wing election

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propaganda? The answer is based on indirect evidence. The left-wing papers were constantly harassed throughout the summer of 1955. One Thanhist paper was suspended in Februar/ In May another, representing a group which had just come from the Thanh *maquis*, was closed. ~till another paper in the same cam~ opened on 7 June and was shut down after its second issue on 10 June. Its energetic editor immediately started another paper on 17 June, but it only lasted for a few issues~The Pracheachon paper published its first number on 1 April and was suspended after number 19 on 10 June. Its place was taken by a successo[on 24 June and it lasted for

39 issues, until 25 October, and thus covered the election. It devoted a good deal of space to the incarceration of three editors whose papers had been closed down.⁵ When they were finally brought to trial they were sentenced, on 6 August, to three months each for 1) claiming that independence had been obtained at Geneva through the efforts of the whole population; 2) *lese-majeste*; and 3) false statements about United States military aid. Thus the reports of election irregularities did not figure in the charges and it may be inferred that the Government did not consider it expedient to make an issue of them. Moreover, the Democratic Party paper, which was somewhat more moderate on the above subjects, was able to survive the election campaign, although it too chronicled the election abuses. Harassment of candidates was also common. Three Pracheachon candidates spent most of the campaign period in jail, as did two Democrats, and others were arrested for brief periods or brutalized.

The results of this election are well known. The Sangkum took all the seats with the Democrats coming in a very poor second. The Pracheachon did surprisingly well with five of their candidates getting over 25% of the vote in their districts, including one who had spent the entire campaign period in prison. The LC.C. certified the election as 'correct', which only shows how little such inspection may mean.

The Sangkum victory was the victory of the traditionalist Cambodian Right, chiefly the Renovation group. Lon Nol entered the Government as Minister of National Defence, and from then on, except for brief periods, retained control of the military establishment in one post or another.

The Sangkum System

After this election the Sangkum never again had any real challengers. The Democratic Party dissolved itself in 1957 after its leaders had been called to the palace for a friendly conference with Sihanouk and then were beaten up on departure by Lon Nol's soldiers. They later asked for admission to the Sangkum, as did any one whose future lay in public life or administrative work. The elections of 1958 and 1962 were rubber-stamp affairs with candidates hand-picked by Sihanouk. Only the Pracheachon feebly contested the 1958 elections, and before the 1962 contest its leaders were arrested on charges which may or may not have been true. The timing is suspect, and it

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looks as though even this negligible opposition was more than Sihanouk could tolerate. His true feelings about electoral opposition bubbled up in the heat of a speech in 1965 in which he berated his adversaries of 1955 for unfair tactics - using the question of American military aid and SEATO to discredit the Sangkum - and, because of this, '16% of the voters, normally attached to me, voted against the Sangkum.'⁶

Power throughout these years remained solidly in the hands of the old Right, although a number of young intellectuals were allowed into the National Assembly in 1958 and 1962. This has given rise to the illusion among Sihanouk apologists that 'the politicians of the extreme right were progressively confined to strictly honorific posts', where they waited in 'hibernation' for their hour, the coup of 1970, to come.⁷ Nothing could be further from the truth. Throughout the 15 years from 1955 to 1970 the same old names recur constantly in the key government posts: Lon Nol, Nhiek Tioulong, Penn Nouth, Kou Roun, Huot Sambath, Sirik Matak, Tep Phan, Son Sann, to name only a few of the more prominent. As for the new intellectuals, Sihanouk clearly wished to make use of their abilities if they were willing to offer him absolute loyalty. He recognized that they were of much greater value than the conservative rank and file which had cluttered the Assembly after 1955. Co-operation between them and the old guard proved impossible though and, when the chips were down, Sihanouk always opted for the latter; members of the new

intellectual elite were never allowed to hold one job long enough to work effectively or develop power positions.

Thus, for example, Hou Yuon was in the Ministry of Commerce and Industry from April to July 1958, in the Budget Office from July 1958 to February 1959, in the Planning Ministry from February to June 1959, then in the Ministry of Public Health from June 1959 to April 1960. He was again in Finance from August to October 1962, and in Planning from October 1962 to February 1963, at which time unexpected events made possible a nearly permanent and complete exclusion of 'leftists' from the Government.

Chau Seng, whom many foreign observers in the 1960s considered the *eminence rouge* behind Sihanouk, is a special case, which perhaps proves the rule. He was on the Left, although distrusted by those who eventually went into the *maquis*, but was able to ingratiate himself with Sihanouk in a way the others either would not or could not do, and remained prominent in the Government throughout the 1960s.

Another case which shows where the road to power really lay is that of Mau Say. Of the same generation and academic attainment as Hou Yuon or Khieu Samphan, he threw in his lot from the very beginning with the extreme Right, and held important posts, mainly connected with financial affairs, in numerous Sangkum cabinets up to 1967, at which time his involvement in financial scandals forced his resignation. Sihanouk then rewarded his loyal servant with appointment to the *Haut Conseil du Trone*, one of the kingdom's highest honorific positions.

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In contrast, but to prove the same point that Sihanouk's Sangkum favoured the worst elements of traditional Cambodian society - there is the case of Douc Rasy, one of the same generation of French-educated intellectuals, born into an elite family and trained as a lawyer. Choosing his position on what could be called in the Cambodian context the 'progressive right', he favoured the development of a capitalist economic system and Western-style parliamentary democracy, but insisted on the necessity for honesty in public life and strict adherence to legality in the exercise of power. This would not do in Sangkum Cambodia, and Douc Rasy, although probably never in physical danger, due to his personal situation, was the object of nearly as much Sihanoukian invective as Hou Yuon.

Once the Sangkum had given the Right a vehicle with which to rule absolutely and with Sihanouk as permanent Chief of State after 1960, constitutional reform was no longer a major issue, and in its essential provisions, such as assembly government with regular elections, the Constitution of 1947 remained in effect.

The style and ideology of internal politics remained the same throughout the Sangkum years, although it was never again expressed so frankly as in the early numbers of the Sangkum newspaper. Power was to remain in the hands of the traditional elite with new blood accepted into the system as long as they did not attempt to introduce any significant changes. The interest groups which had organized earlier as political parties became cliques within the Sangkum, and meaningful political activity lay in inciting Sihanouk against one's enemies. Thus, proposals for policy were not

discussed so much in terms of specific goals related to Cambodia's gover-

that their rivals were hatching treasonable plots. "

The rewards in this type of political life were what they had always ' been in traditional Cambodia - personal wealth and power for those who

found favour with the sovereign. Before the French Protectorate, officials were rewarded, not with regular salaries, but with a cut of the fees or taxes they collected for the crown. The provinces into which the country was divided were distributed in *apanage* to certain members of the royal family, each of whom headed a chain of officials extending down from the palace to the district level. Although this system formally ended over 70 years ago, the mentality which went with it persisted, and all state employment, which was the only employment with prestige value, was ranked on a scale of desirability according to the possibility it provided for private profit, now termed graft. The Cambodians even found that socialism could be integrated into this system. The value of the term in modern international relations had soon been apparent and the official translation of the party name Sangkum Reastr Niyum was Popular Socialist Community. Of course, it was not to be Marxist socialism, but rather a 'Royal Buddhist socialism' - without class conflict, which was declared non-existent in Cambodia - and dependent on the 'ancient' Cambodian practice of the sovereign always providing for the welfare of its people. Since the sovereign, by definition, JOI

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always did provide, any kind of criticism was seen as subversive and antimonarchist.

The State industries and nationalized enterprises became in effect *apanages* for Sihanouk's mandarins, who grew wealthy while the accounts were in the red. Periodic scandals served to spread the wealth around, placing some individuals in temporary eclipse, while others took their turn at the trough. Never was any high official forced to repay or attempt to repay what he had taken from the State till.

Within such a context 'progressive' or 'radical' meant not only the Left as it is usually understood, but any position seeking to rationalize and depersonalize the economic and administrative systems. This explains why the group around Douc Rasy, whom I have termed progressive rightists, came in for almost as much criticism as the Marxists, and why Sihanouk in his more excited moments accused the Thanhists of working both for the CIA and the Viet Congo

Sceptics might ask why did the system not break down, since those in power were continually taking wealth out of the public purse without doing anything in return? In fact, it did break down, and that is why Cambodia passed through a war and revolution. Breakdowns occurred even in pre-modern times, although a good deal of wealth was redistributed then through conspicuous consumption within the economy and by the support of the large clientele which every wealthy and powerful figure collected. In those days a breakdown resulted in a palace coup or replacement of the royal family by a new dynasty.

As a mid-20th century operation, such a system is much more fragile, and, without special props, unlikely to last more than a few years. The conspicuous consumption indulged in by the elite is no longer chiefly within the economy, but involves expensive foreign products, frequent trips abroad, and hard currency bank accounts; and the large clientele which in former times resulted in the redistribution of much wealth is no longer necessary. Besides what is spent abroad, perhaps even more serious for a country like Cambodia is the way in which the consumption patterns of the richest foreign societies become norms to which everyone aspires. The elite insist on living like their counterparts in Paris or New York, stores are filled with consumer goods which are of doubtful value anywhere and sheer waste in a country with a level of income such as Cambodia's; everyone tries by hook or by crook to obtain the status symbols he feels are his due and which, on the whole, the country cannot afford.

Certain special features of the Cambodian situation, which represented

non-material returns to the general welfare, prevented the breakdown from coming even earlier. First, there was the character of Sihanouk himself. For most of the Cambodian peasantry a monarch was essential to the wellbeing of the country and even for the maintenance of Buddhism. Any king properly enthroned and who maintained the traditional rituals would serve the purpose (indeed a major error in 1970 may have been the failure of Lon Nol to immediately proclaim another king), but Sihanouk went beyond this

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and attempted to become a popular sovereign, for in spite of his 1955 abdication, for the people, he was still a king. With frequent trips to the countryside and entertaining speeches in popular idiom he largely succeeded and, as a result, the mass of the population, who feared and detested the administration, felt that if only they could get to Sihanouk he would solve their problems.

Another return from the system was a few years of complete peace and internal security, something which the country had not known within living memory. Throughout the 19th Century Cambodia had been plagued by warfare, and the colonial period had seen whole regions ridden by endemic large-scale banditry, that is, outlaw bands who would raid, rob and burn entire villages with impunity. In the years following the Second World War, these bands turned themselves into 'Issarak's', and fought for independence against the French and the last of this activity wasn't ended until 1958-59. By 1960, when I first arrived, one could travel anywhere without danger from outlaws or hindrance from the authorities, and the Sangkum Government, in the eyes of the people, received credit for this. Even the wasteful expenditures of the elite had certain psychic returns peculiar to Cambodian beliefs and attitudes. Since a feature of Buddhist belief is that one's situation in future existences is conditioned by behaviour in the past and present, wealth and power are the results of virtuous conduct in previous lives, and even their misuse in the present need not be too severely criticized, for punishment will be sure to follow later. Moreover, the opulent living of a Phnom Penh functionary served as an example of what the poor peasant might hope to attain in the future if he was virtuous in the present.

These beliefs matched, or perhaps conditioned, the general Cambodian attitude towards what modernization really meant. For all but a tiny minority who had truly absorbed European intellectual values, modernization meant the type of growth exemplified by Bangkok and Saigon - lots of chrome and concrete, streets clogged by cars, a plethora of luxurious bars and everyone dressed in Western clothes. Countless times I heard Cambodians comment favourably on the progress of Bangkok 'because it has so many bars and hotels', and one of the main objections to Sihanouk's 1963 rupture with the United States was that he was depriving Phnom Penh of 'development' equivalent to Saigon. At least Cambodian concern with external show resulted in Phnom Penh becoming one of the most attractive, and certainly the neatest, of Asian cities, and although the money spent on it was irrelevant to economic development, most Cambodians observed it with pride and gave the credit to Sihanouk and his Sangkum. However, without props, the Sangkum could not have survived as long as it did, and the props were in the form of foreign aid. American military aid began in the early 1940s and was then distributed through the French. After Independence, in 1955, a Khmer-American military aid agreement was signed and made the U.S. the chief supplier of the Cambodian army. This agreement was bitterly opposed at the time by the Sangkum's opponents,

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the Democratic Party, the former Son Ngoc Thanh *maquis* and the Communists. At the time Sihanouk and the Sangkum sought U.S. support and

had to defend themselves at home against charges of selling out to the imperialists.

Very intelligently Sihanouk set out to improve Cambodia's image and normal diplomatic relations were established with the socialist countries, including China, between 1956 and 1958. Diplomatic relations were accompanied by aid - China, for example, building factories and the Soviet Union a hospital. Neutrality was to be Cambodia's foreign policy and Sihanoukian rhetoric, for foreign consumption, at least, was full of 'socialism'. All of this was very disturbing to U.S. officials, still in the grip of Dullesian hysteria and hopeful of drawing Cambodia into SEATO. American embassy personnel in Phnom Penh spoke darkly of the red prince and his Communist policies, although it should not have been so difficult to distinguish rhetoric from substance. Within the country anti-Communism was still the rule. In his speeches to the populace Sihanouk made it abundantly clear that Russia and China were good friends, but their economic systems were not for Cambodia. He emphasized the point that Communists were against religion, something sure to carry weight with his listeners.

The whole point of the manoeuvre was to obtain the maximum possible aid from competing foreign countries without allowing Cambodian society to be influenced either by modernizing capitalists or revolutionary socialists, both of whom were equally subversive to the Cambodian system. Thus the U.S. was to be frightened just enough by talk of socialism to keep the aid coming, while the socialist countries were to be convinced that their aid might bring Cambodia closer to them. The aid itself was the cushion which permitted the Cambodian elite to extract more from the country than they redistributed and to avoid any of the basic reforms which must be undertaken by a developing country relying mainly on its own resources. Strains on the system began with the recrudescence of the Vietnam War in 1958-59. There was pressure from South Vietnam and the U.S. for Cambodian support, which even the Cambodian right-wing wished to refuse, for in spite of their anti-Communist stance they had no sympathy for Diem or any of his successors, who were feared (or their territorial demands on Cambodia and detested for their alleged oppression of the Cambodian minority in South Vietnam. Ultimately, Saigon and the U.S. accused Cambodia of providing refuge for Communist troops, and frequent raids across the Cambodian border caused many casualties.

At the same time, the Cambodian Left urged support for the N.L.F. and closer ties with the socialist world, and accused Sihanouk and his clique of secretly selling out to the U.S. Sihanouk's policy, from 1958 to 1962, of using talented intellectuals in the Government gave some of them, for example, Hou Yuon and Khieu Samphan, prestigious platforms for promoting their ideas, and the general diplomatic rapprochement with the socialist countries often made it appear that they were only following Sangkum

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policy. The Right, of course, reacted vigorously, probably assuming that with foreign policy oriented towards the socialist camp, there would be no objection from that side to suppression of the domestic Left. The Pracheachon leadership (Non Suon and 12 others) was arrested just before the 1962 elections, and, in the beginning of 1963, as a result of student demonstration in Siemreap which was allowed to grow into a mini-rebellion, for which they were blamed, the left-wing ministers were forced to resign. Thus, after early 1963, with the exception of Chau Seng, important left-wing participation in Sangkum ministries came to an end. These events also convinced some of the Left that gradualist efforts within the system would not succeed, for in the early summer of 1963 Ieng Sary, Saloth Sar (Pol Pot) and Son Sen disappeared from their jobs and, as we now know, fled into the *maquis*.

With respect to Vietnam, the basic policy of the Sangkum leadership was to calculate the likely outcome of the war, and by 1963 they had apparently become convinced that the U.S. would give up and the N.L.F. would win.

A propaganda campaign against the U.S. and its aid missions was begun, which sometimes looked like an effort at blackmail to get even more aid, but with less control by the donor over its ultimate disposition. If it was blackmail it failed, and at the end of 1963 American aid in all forms was rejected.

This break cannot be put down to left-wing agitation, as many Americans seemed to think. The grass-roots leftist leaders of the Pracheachon had been jailed or driven underground in 1962, the intellectual elite were cut out of all power in early 1963 and during the entire period of what was seen as the Sangkum socialist era, from 1963 to 1969, the Government was solidly in the hands of Sihanouk and his supporters of the traditional elite.

The end of American aid was accompanied by much rhetoric about Cambodia preferring to aid itself and the necessity of a policy of austerity, accompanied by the development of local industries to avoid importing foreign products. Austerity, however, was not for the Cambodian elite. Cars and other luxuries continued to be imported at an ever increasing rate and luxury construction in Phnom Penh showed no signs of slowing down. In fact, the number of bars and elite restaurants doubled and it could no longer be said that they were for the entertainment of American aid personnel and diplomats. Among the most conspicuous clientele were Cambodian army officers who were obviously not living on their salaries - the U.S. accusation of collusion with the N.L.F. was finally coming true, and it is now estimated that it became a large enterprise around 1965. Besides being diplomatically expedient, it provided one of the props needed for the Sangkum system after American aid had ended.

In itself it was not enough, though, or perhaps the problem was that it benefited chiefly the military rather than the groups who had profited most from American aid. Thus at the same time, in the years immediately following the end of U.S. aid, attempts were made to squeeze more out of the countryside by buying up the rice crops at artificially low prices and selling them through State outlets to retain the profits for the budget, or at least for those in charge of the government agencies through which the transactions passed.

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As could be expected, discontent in the countryside increased, although it was directed towards the local administration rather than Sihanouk. Discontent also spread among teachers and urban intellectuals, who knew where to place the ultimate blame. The discontent was accompanied by repression; the secret police were omnipresent, people mysteriously disappeared and by 1966 Cambodia, though still smiling and pleasant for the casual visitor, was a country in which everyone lived in fear. 8

If the elections of that year showed rifts in the Sangkum system, it was because it was failing, not because of plots organized by its enemies, either external or internal, but simply because Sihanouk and his closest advisers refused to face any of the basic problems. They had established a system which required constant infusions of external aid in order to exist, had lost some of the aid through greed and then tried to make up for it by squeezing the country harder.

Sihanouk tried a new tactic in the 1966 elections, the purpose of which is not entirely clear. Instead of choosing single Sangkum candidates for each seat, as in 1958 and 1962, he threw the election open, allowing all Sangkum members to stand in districts of their choice; and in some districts as many as 10 candidates competed. At the same time, the official Sangkum newspaper began publishing attacks on a number of young representatives who had incurred Sihanouk's ire, such as Hou Yuon, Bu Nim and Khieu Samphan on the Left and Douc Rasy of the progressive Right. In earlier years this would have resulted in 'spontaneous' demonstrations or petitions against these men, to force their withdrawal from, or defeat in, the election. Surprisingly, nothing happened - one of the first indications that Sihanouk was losing his magic - and when the votes were in these enemies of

Sihanouk were among the few who won with large majorities in an election distinguished by the enormous number of narrow pluralities and contests whose legality was later questioned. The victories of the three leftists, two of them in rural areas which were among the first to go to the anti-Phnom Penh forces in 1970, are clear-cut cases of popular support in the face of official opposition.

Otherwise, the characteristic feature of the new Assembly was the reappearance of some of the riff-raff of the Renovation Party, who had been absent from the political scene since the 1950s. Six seats were won by Sangkum conservatives of 1955, who had been passed over in the elections of 1958 and 1962, while 13 others had last been seen in the 1951 elections, mostly as candidates of right-wing splinter parties. The re-emergence of these reactionaries, however, in no way affected the balance of power, since the Sangkum had always been the vehicle for the Right, chiefly the Renovation.

Sihanouk apologists have tended to portray this election as a sort of unexpected coup by the Right which opened the way to the real coup of 1970. Jean Lacouture quotes Sihanouk himself as saying that he had opened up the elections against the advice of the 'best leaders of the youth' and that, instead of an Assembly which 'up to then [was 1 in majority young

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men, I let them elect the most corrupt and reactionary Chamber I was ever subjected to'.⁹

Corrupt and reactionary the Assembly certainly was, but the evidence of the contemporary press shows that Sihanouk had cut himself off from the advice of 'the best leaders of the youth' and hoped for nothing so much as their defeat. Since his major anxiety in internal affairs, since 1963 at least, had been the influence of, first, the intellectual Left in Phnom Penh, and later, leftist exploitation of peasant discontent in the countryside, a better explanation is that Sihanouk had decided that salvation lay with the extreme Right and by allowing them to win through their own devices he could later, should it prove necessary, avoid the onus of having delivered the country over to them.

When certain statistics of all the elections are examined closely it almost seems as though Sihanouk and his Sangkum advisers had been planning this as far back as 1958. The eady Sangkum had been frankly reactionary, but such a posture was dangerous both at home and abroad. Therefore, in the 1958 elections, in order to answer criticism that he discriminated against younger men, for the 62 available seats Sihanouk chose 33 candidates who were under 40, including 11 aged 30 or under, and favoured those with university degrees. Although this would seem to be a progressive measure, real power remained concentrated in the hands of the same conservative coterie who held most of the important Cabinet and advisory posts. The conflict between Assembly and Government which resulted allowed the conservatives to say that in spite of their degrees the younger men were incapable of solving the country's practical problems.

In the 1962 elections only 25 of the deputies were maintained as candidates, and although this group included the most notable of the leftists it was heavily weighted with proven supporters of the Right. Thus the 1962 Assembly was planned to be both older and more conservative than its predecessor, and by 1963 the younger Left had been shorn of all power and influence.

The election of 1966 is then nothing but the logical culmination of Sangkum politics and Sihanouk must bear full responsibility for it.

Breakdown, War and Revolution

As the American build-up in Vietnam became more massive, an N.L.F. victory became less certain, and the Cambodian leaders must have begun a painful reassessment of their situation. Perhaps it seemed that they had been

betting on the wrong horse. After 1967 even Sihanouk's public declarations became more nuanced. He several times mentioned the need for a stabilizing American presence in South East Asia, and, for domestic consumption at least, asserted that Cambodia's chief enemies would always be the Vietnamese, of whatever stripe, and that U.S. military activity in Vietnam was good since it got rid of so many of these hereditary enemies. Some Khmer-language

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newspapers devoted most of their space to anti-'Viet Cong' news and articles, and the desirability of resuming relations with the U.S. was reconsidered.

In domestic affairs the years after 1966 saw a steady decline economically and politically. Prices rose, corruption increased and finally, in an effort to squeeze more out of the population, a State gambling casino was established in Phnom Penh. The first large peasant revolt broke out at Samlaut in Battambang Province in the Spring of 1967 and was suppressed with bloodshed reminiscent of the 1950s and prefiguring that of 1975. The military tried to link the Phnom Penh intellectual Left to it and soon afterwards two of the most important of this group, Hou Yuon and Khieu Samphan, disappeared and were presumed to have been murdered by the police or military. **In** the autumn a third, Bu Nim, also disappeared.

There were more revolts in 1968, and more disappearances, and by 1969 one of Sihanouk's own French-language publications was devoting a large amount of space to details, with maps, of 'Red' and 'Khmer-Viet Minh' activities in different parts of the country. **In** some cases blame was placed directly on the N.L.F. or North Vietnamese, who were charged with attempting to take over certain border areas. Finally, official contact ~ ~ e' "sumed

in July 1969. Cambodia seemed to be swinging back, not just 'to its position of the middle Sangkum years, but even to that of the early, pro-Western Sangkum of 1955. Why, then, the Lon Nol coup that overthrew Sihanouk on 18 March 1970? Since Sihanouk was already moving towards the U.S., it is unlikely that it was directly inspired from that direction. Indirectly, of course, it means that the U.S. Government was promising, or at least suggesting, to Asian allies and potential allies that it intended to win in Vietnam, no matter what methods were required. There is also the fact that although both Sihanouk's supporters and those who overthrew him were rather close ideologically, they represented different economic cliques within the country. The so-called 'socializing' reforms of 1963 had in fact turned over the direction of the economy to a group personally close to Sihanouk at the expense of another right-wing faction who would have preferred a more rational, modern, capitalist-type of economic organization, and this latter group was one of the important elements behind the coup. There is also the possibility that some of the moves were unplanned and that no one expected Sihanouk to react as he did. **In** any case, it must be emphasized that the leaders who emerged were by no means new men, fascist opponents of the Sangkum or disgruntled nonentities who had been in 'hibernation'. Lon Nol, Sirik Matak, Yem Sambaur and Sim Var had always been among the big guns of the Cambodian Right who had sabotaged democracy, opposed the Geneva Accords, organized the Sangkum and helped maintain Sihanouk's absolute rule from 1955. Lon Nol had been the military strong man, Yem Sambaur had managed Sihanouk's campaign to break the Democrat-led National Assembly in 1949 and Sim Var switched noisily to the Sangkum from the Democratic Party when the latter became so radical as to denounce a Khmer-American military aid agreement, foresee the development of a dangerous situation in Vietnam and insist on the observance of the Geneva

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Accords.

Although Son Ngoc Thanh, who also returned after the coup, had been an old opponent of Sihanouk and the Sangkum, their enmity had originated at a time when Thanh was considered a left-wing radical, and if his later drift to the Right led to his rehabilitation with the Sangkum conservatives, he was not completely trusted. His well-trained troops were much desired in the fighting, but they were split up under different commands. Thanh himself was kept out of political power as long as possible, and his debacle as Prime Minister in 1972 was partly because of lack of support from his old enemies among the Phnom Penh leadership.

Of the main Cambodian parties to the 1970-75 War, Sihanouk, the *maquis*s, the population on the government side and the Phnom Penh leadership, the role of the last is easiest to assess. To a large extent it lost out of sheer greed and incompetence. With an army larger than its opponent's and continually replenished by volunteers (full conscription was never instituted, and could not have been enforced), adequate food (if it had been equitably distributed) and superior military equipment supplied by the United States, the Lon Nol Government nevertheless succeeded in demoralizing its army and civilian population and losing the War largely by default.

As for Sihanouk, in retrospect, it looks as though his moves throughout the War were calculated to bring him back eventually as a hero who could confound his enemies both of the Left and Right.

When he arrived in Peking and issued his declaration establishing the anti-Phnom Penh resistance movement, FUNK, in March 1970, he probably had no very clear idea of how it would be received, what the organization of the *maquis* was, possibly not even which of the vanished leaders were still alive. It is, however, clear where his sympathies lay with respect to the men whom he believed, or knew, to be among the insurgents, and his declaration must be understood as an attempt to divide them. Thus he spoke of Khieu Samphan, Hou Yuon and Hu Nim as leaders of the forces within the country, and the response from the *maquis* appeared over the names of those three. The group which had disappeared in 1963 - Ieng Sary, Saloth Sar (Pol Pot) and Son Sen - was not included, and did not appear until Ieng Sary journeyed to Peking in 1971 as the representative of the FUNK forces.

It is possible that Sihanouk may not have known the situation of the 1963 group, but his later relationship with Ieng Sary shows more animus than towards the 1967 defectors and the latter had no lack of opportunity of cooperation with the Sangkum, while the former, possibly more intransigent, had written the Sangkum off just when Sihanouk was trying to give it a socialist facade. Among the FUNK leaders themselves, the late public appearance of the 1963 group may have indicated less the internal split, which we now know existed, than consideration for the feelings of Sihanouk, whom they still needed for his international contacts, and who, as they well knew, was capable of making his own arrangements with Phnom Penh and the United States if he became disillusioned with leftist objectives. As a result, the real importance of Ieng

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Sary, Saloth Sar and Son Sen was not clear to the outside world until after the Waf, and their apparently sudden elevation to prominence prompted misplaced speculation about their supposed role as agents for the Vietnamese. Among the politically-conscious part of the population on the Phnom Penh side, the new alignment of 1970 produced a good deal of confusion. There was a brief period of euphoria occasioned by the disappearance of Sihanouk and several of his most hated henchmen plus the return of freedom of speech and press. In a general liberation of political prisoners even the Pracheachon leaders were released, but they, having no doubts about what was what, took off for the *maquis* soon after their speeches of thanks to Lon Nol.

For the less doctrinaire, Sihanouk's switch from head of the reactionary

government of Phnom Penh to leader of a progressive government in exile was extremely disconcerting. Had he remained in Phnom Penh as head of a government allied with the United States against rebel forces led by Hou Yuon and Khieu Samphan, masses of the dissatisfied youths who remained under Lon Nol would have defected to the *maquis*, and Sihanouk's move at first rallied support to Lon Nol which the latter had no right to expect. The euphoria quickly gave way to disillusionment. At first the Government was the old Renovation-Sangkum group of the 1950s, whose policy turned out to be Sihanoukism without Sihanouk. When it proved incompetent, Son Ngoc Thanh was finally brought back as Prime Minister early in 1972, and this was the moment of truth for all those who had considered Sihanouk and Lon Nol as equivalent evils and who imagined there could be a progressive solution without the ideological Left. When Thanh also proved incompetent/disillusion was complete, and by mid-1972 nearly everyone was convinced that without a thoroughgoing reformation of the Phnom Penh Government, the other side would win.

It was also clear by this time that the opposing forces, rather than the Vietnamese invaders depicted in government propaganda, were Khmer, and that some, at least, of the missing leftist intellectuals were leading them; and the demoralization which increasingly gripped those on the Phnom Penh side was probably compounded by guilt over supporting one's declared enemies against one's erstwhile friends. Although a considerable number of well-known figures left Phnom Penh for the other side in 1972 and later, thousands of others remained to work for, half-heartedly, and by their actions support, more or less, a regime which they made no secret of hating. The hope of such people, who probably made up a majority of the population on the Government side, was that Lon Nol would be overthrown by someone who would arrange an end to the War and a moderate socialist coalition with the other side - a solution which would save them from the difficult choice of remaining under a regime with which they had little sympathy or engaging in the dangerous career of a guerrilla fighter. Their position was made even more uncomfortable by the fact that FUNK offer-

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ed no encouragement towards this solution, and made little effort to explain its position to the urban population or offer them any particular incentive to overthrow the Government. It almost seemed as though FUNK had already written off the urban areas, seeing them as hopelessly corrupt and enjoying the luxury brought in by U.S. aid and the sense of adventure offered by an anarchic city given over to the pursuit of pleasure.

The FUNK leaders must also have observed that colonial reflexes were being reinforced by the War. Increasingly people were convinced that Cambodia could only exist as the client of a more powerful state, and common opinion held that it was better to be a slave of the United States than of the Vietnamese. Particularly during the severe U.S. bombing which lasted throughout the first eight months of 1973, and which produced no reaction in Phnom Penh other than relief, it must have seemed to FUNK that their urban compatriots were quite willing to see the entire countryside destroyed and plastered over with concrete so long as they could enjoy a parasitical existence as U.S. clients.

It is certain that FUNK policy became much harsher after the bombing. Whereas in 1971-72 they made considerable efforts at conciliation and, in general, Cambodian villagers did not fear them, from 1973-74, with all allowance for government propaganda, there are authentic accounts of brutal imposition of new policies without adequate ideological preparation of the population.

A major mystery over the last two years of the War was what U.S. goals

were in Cambodia. In spite of repeated protests by their own subordinates and by responsible Cambodians, the American leadership insisted on preserving Lon Nol, even when it was certain that a change of regime offered some possibility of renewing morale and turning the War around. Of course, the latter could only have meant a temporary advantage, and perhaps a position strong enough to force the other side to compromise, for any leadership capable of rallying strong support would have seen that the ultimate solution lay in a coalition between the best elements of Phnom Penh and FUNK and the establishment of a moderate socialist regime.

This was probably the last thing the U.S. Government wanted. Recently some publicity has been given to the 'Sonnenfeldt Doctrine', named after a Kissinger protege in the State Department, and according to which pluralistic and libertarian Communist regimes will breed leftist ferment in the West.¹¹ Thus, for these people, it was a good thing that the Prague uprising was crushed and, I would say, when it became clear that they could not win in Cambodia, they preferred to do everything possible to ensure that the postwar revolutionary government be extremely brutal, doctrinaire and frightening to its neighbours, rather than a moderate socialism to which the Thai, for example, might look with envy. The success of this policy may perhaps be seen in the 1976 Thai Election, in which the defeat of the socialist parties has been attributed in large measure to fear of a regime like that of Cambodia. It would be unfair to conclude without some remarks about the chances for success that the post-1975 Cambodian society enjoyed.¹² First, the Phnom

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Penh Government had been unpopular for so long, and the population had become so demoralized, that the final defeat must have come as a relief, and eyewitnesses reported the massive, spontaneous welcome which the first FUNK troops received in Phnom Penh in April 1975. Probably few revolutionary governments have taken over amid so much goodwill. Opinion abroad, however, always held that the new government, by its gratuitous brutality, destroyed this goodwill and ruled only through terror. The first such allegations, throughout 1975 and 1976, were often dishonest and nearly always exaggerated, although it now seems that the worst predictions eventually came true; and for a full understanding of what happened we require careful, honest analysis of the increasing amount of first-hand information which is becoming available.

The basic policies of the new regime seemed clear enough, though, and they may be usefully compared with the recommendations of a 'Blueprint for the Future' prepared by an anonymous group of Western and Thai social scientists and published in the conservative *Bangkok Post* in February 1976. For Thailand to avoid a breakdown of its society and a revolution, they suggested that people should be taken out of the cities and put back on the land, decentralization should give more power to local authorities, much more investment should go into agriculture and the old elite should lose some of its wealth and political power. This is precisely what Cambodia did from 1975, though of course on a much more massive scale than envisaged by the 'Blueprint', but it illustrates that the basic policies are considered by 'bourgeois' economists and political scientists to be rational and practicable for a country with problems similar to those of Cambodia.

In short, there was nothing in the early actions of the revolutionary regime which argued against ultimate success. Even the rigid exclusion of nearly all foreign contacts and the 'hermit republic' stance could have become an acceptable norm for Cambodians, for, in spite of the generally open attitude towards strangers which characterized pre-1970 society, there was agreement among all classes and factions that Cambodian affairs were of no legitimate concern to foreigners and the country would be better off if they all went away. The post-1975 leadership would certainly have had no trouble teaching their people that Cambodian suffering was mainly due to foreign intervention,

and although one may legitimately ask whether the new egalitarian society could not have been established with less deliberate destruction of the old, there are ample reasons why that leadership might answer in the negative.

References
I. A French translation of this article was prepared and was to have appeared in a special Indochina issue of *Les Temps Modernes* (January 1980), but the editorial board of that journal became uneasy about the article for reasons that were never made clear, but were probably political, and decided to reject it at the last minute.

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2. For example, see Edith Lenart's reports in the *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 7 May 1976, pp.22-3, and 28 May 1976, p.14. I take for granted that such sensationalist treatments as Francois Ponchaud's *Cambodge Année Zero* are not acceptable as serious analysis; see the discussion of Ponchaud in Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman, *The Political Economy of Human Rights*, (Boston, South End Press, 1979) Vol 2: *After the Cataclysm: Postwar Indochina and the Reconstruction of Imperial Ideology*.

3. Ea Sichau was perhaps the first genuine Cambodian leftist of unequivocal identity to have become prominent in national politics. Description of his character and intellectual qualities by former acquaintances reminds one of Khieu Samphan. He died in the 1950s.

4. Hou Yuon's thesis, *Le Paysannerie du Cambodge et ses projets de modernisation* (Paris, 1955). [Part of this thesis appears in translation in Part I of this book.]

5. One of them was Saloth Chhay, of *Samakki*, supposedly a brother of Saloth Sar (Pol Pot). *It's so true... .M...L...I...c...L...~...!u...*

6. Speech to the 14th National Congress, 31 December 1965.

7. Charles Meyer, *Derrière le Sourire Khmer* (Paris, Pion, 1971), pp.136-7; although Meyer himself should not be classified as a 'Sihanouk apologist'.

8. *Ibid.*, p.149, speaks of the 'terreur sacrée' which was never far behind the smile.

9. Jean Lacouture, *L'Indochine vue de Pékin*, p.82.

10. Some details of Ieng Sary's relationship with Sihanouk may be found in Milton Osborne, *Norodom Sihanouk: A Leader of the Left?* in Joseph J. Zasloff and MacAlister Brown (eds.), *Communism in Indo-China: New Perspectives* (Massachusetts, 1976).

II. *Time*, 12 April 1976.

12. This was written before the overthrow of the Pol Pot government; but unless the new leadership wish to reintroduce bourgeois institutions, which seems unlikely, there is very little they can do to alter the path set by their predecessors.

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