

Democratic Kampuchea— CIA to the Rescue

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As Noam Chomsky has pointed out, press accounts about the non-western world, in particular Cambodia, are often as interesting for themselves, as "works of art," as for information about conditions within the country concerned. For over three years the mainstream western press generally treated the regime of "Democratic Kampuchea" (DK) and its leader, Pol Pot, as very nearly the worst known to human history; and calls for intervention to displace them were heard even from usually responsible quarters. Yet when they finally were displaced, following a war largely provoked by their own actions, and by a polity whose record on human rights had always seemed much better, not only was little rejoicing heard, but the remnants of the DK regime became recipients of recognition and support by the powers who had cried out most loudly against them. Clearly concern with human rights or atrocities was of secondary importance to considerations of international power politics; and if no one was willing to suddenly declare Pol Pot a bulwark of the Free World against Godless Communism, the atrocities over which he had presided tended to be implicitly forgiven as his role in an anti-Vietnamese coalition was emphasized.

Of course, even in the United States the fraction of the public who regularly read newspapers are too sophisticated to accept an overnight about-face on the DK regime, and a certain amount of ideological preparation, or *agitprop* work, was required to justify American support for the regime "worse than Hitler's." This first took the shape of increasingly negative assessments of Vietnam rather than any direct effort to rehabilitate DK; and by the end of 1979 serious writers had been led to repeat that even if the worst stories about DK were true, it was *now* (1980) that Cambodia was in danger of extinction.¹ It would have been only a short step—although no one took it explicitly—to the position that DK killings, to the ex-

Note

The *Bulletin* dialogue on the difficult issues that grew out of the inter-communist conflicts of southeast Asia in the 1970s continues with this issue. The Editors invite others to participate with essays or other works which present new evidence and documentation, approach the questions from a fresh perspective, and proceed in a comradely fashion.

The Editors

tent that they were directed against pro-Vietnamese elements, represented a benign bloodbath.

Since the total factual picture of DK had never become clear, and since, as John Pilger once remarked, "the Vietnamese case has always been better than their propaganda," it was difficult even for those with some experience in Cambodia studies to judge the conflicting information.²

In March 1980 it became possible for me to travel to Thailand for a closer look, and from April to the end of September I worked with and interviewed Cambodian refugees in the largest camps in Thailand or along the Thai-Cambodian border (Khao I Dang, Nong Samet, Nong Chan)—and was able to speak to them in their own language, unhindered by interpreters, guides, or administrators of any kind. The information supplied by those people, most of whom are former town-dwellers, some of whom I knew well before 1975, and all of whom reject both DK and the Salvation Front (Heng Samrin) regime, has been of great help in beginning to construct a more coherent picture of Cambodia in 1975–80 than was earlier current.

CIA Kampuchea

On returning to Canberra in October, after that contact with the sources, I was finally able to obtain a copy of the famous CIA research paper, "Kampuchea: A Demographic Catastrophe." Its compilers claim it to be based on "the expert interpretation of events," and, in consultation with "analysts of Kampuchean affairs," to have come up with estimates that "should be considered reasonable." It opens with a statement that ten years of war and

1. For example, William Shawcross, "The End of Cambodia," *New York Review of Books*, 14 January 1980, an article full of errors of both fact and interpretation, which are not all Shawcross' fault, since he was led astray by people such as Francois Ponchaud, whom he believed reliable.

2. John Pilger in Letters to the Editor, *New Statesman*, 29 August 1980, p. 14. As examples of Vietnamese propaganda which tend to discredit their own case: (1) their repetition of the wildest western estimates of DK deaths, such as 3 million; (2) republication of atrocity photographs long known to be fakes, in *Kampuchea Dossier* I, plate [10]; (3) their presentation, as Malcolm Caldwell's assassination site, of a room in the *Samakki* hotel where Caldwell had never been.

other disasters "have played havoc with the Kampuchean population," who now (since January 1979 that is) "may be threatened with virtual extinction as a people."³

With the "havoc" I am sure there is full agreement in all quarters concerned with Cambodia, but with "virtual extinction" somewhat less, or at least not on the basis of the "statistics" and "estimates" bandied about since 1975. Naturally, much of the information I obtained from refugees related to conditions of life and death, and since the first rumors which reached me about the CIA report indicated that it might show an unexpectedly, perhaps even embarrassingly, large number of surviving Cambodians,⁴ I opened the report with no little interest.

Those rumors proved to be inaccurate. Although not repeating the worst charges of 3 million deaths and only 4 million survivors, the report shows a very high level of destruction of human life. Its conclusions are presented in three series representing best case, worst case, and a "Medium Series," which the authors consider the most probable figures and which are the only ones I shall discuss here. Starting with a little over 7 million as the population estimate for 1970, they figure 7.3 million just before 17 April 1975, subtract from that 200,000 Vietnamese who returned immediately to Vietnam leaving 7.1 million Cambodians (including Chinese) to face the rigors of the communist regime. They divide these into 4 million urban, soon to become "new" (new to the DK regime) people, and 3.1 non-urban or "old" (villagers already under Khmer Rouge administration, or more precisely "base") people. They conclude that as a result of starvation, illness, execution and flight, the population on 1 January 1979 was 5.8 million and by December of that year only 5.2 million, with the decrease up to January falling entirely within the "new" group which would have declined from 4 to 2.7 million.⁵

Those human losses are further broken down into 400,000 dead on the first exodus from the towns in April 1975; 400,000 more dead on the "second population displacement" in late 1975 and early 1976; 250,000 more deaths during 1976; plus 100,000 former military, civil servants and teachers executed in 1975-76; and one death for every successful escape into Thailand. Executions, they claim, ended by January 1977, and living conditions improved somewhat, but the number of "new" people continued to decline because of illness and lack of proper food, while the "old" people, who had somewhat better treatment, increased their number slightly in 1975 and maintained it until 1979.⁶

As the authors of the report admit, and this is probably the only perfectly honest bit in the entire report, any estimates about the Cambodian population at any time are fraught with possibilities for error, since the only complete census, which itself left much to be desired, was

taken in 1962. Every figure since then has been the result of applying various standard rates or more or less sophisticated demographic techniques to the 1962 data.⁷ Thus, any estimate for the total population when the war started in 1970 could, I would say, be wrong by as much as half a million either way, and extrapolations beyond that date are even more risky.⁸ Probably the only figures which can be accepted as almost entirely accurate are those for Phnom Penh and the provincial capitals in 1962, and as fairly accurate the estimates for those same places for subsequent years up to 1970.

The purpose of this hasty CIA report is to put the pro-Vietnamese Heng Samrin regime in the worst possible light.

In an apparent effort to overcome that difficulty, the report includes a long "Methodology" section (eight out of fourteen pages plus several more pages of tables) in which the reader finds impressively scientific descriptions of how things like "birth rates," "death rates," and "vital rates" were calculated and applied year by year to the remainders from the 1970 estimates to reach the estimate for 1979. However, when I got to the paragraphs concerning the number of estimated deaths resulting from execution or from being moved about the country or trying to escape to Thailand, I experienced a troubling sense of *déjà vu*. This was also true of their estimate of total urban population in 1975, about one million more than most other published figures.

And sure enough, as I allowed my mind to pass in review the literature on Cambodia to which it had been exposed, it came up with John Barron and Anthony Paul's *Murder of a Gentle Land*, based on information available in late 1976. There we find virtually the same global figures as cited above from the CIA report. The only differences are an estimate of 430,000 for deaths on the "second forced population displacement," and a different total for escaped refugees, since Barron and Paul were dealing with refugee figures of November 1976, while the CIA report includes the total through 1978.⁹

Up until now I had always assumed that Barron and Paul were nothing more than what they claimed, a couple of hacks from *Reader's Digest* who interviewed a few refugees with stories which satisfied their preconceived notions about life in Cambodia and who then concocted, from those stories, figures which also fit those notions. If that were true, then all of the CIA's impressive calculations would be nothing more than an effort to work out an apparently scientific cover for Barron's and Paul's crude

3. National Foreign Assessment Center, "Kampuchea: A Demographic Catastrophe," (CIA, May 1980), based on research completed on 17 January 1980, quotations from p. 7. (Hereafter cited as CIA report.)

4. Elizabeth Becker, "The Famine is Easing in Cambodia," *The Boston Globe*, 7 February 1980, p. 3.

5. CIA report, pp. 2, 5, 10-11.

6. CIA report, pp. 9, 10, 12, 17.

7. CIA report, p. 1.

8. The best study of Cambodian demography is Jacques Migozzi, *Cambodge faits et problèmes de population* (Paris: Editions du CNRS, 1973).

9. *Murder of a Gentle Land* (New York: Reader's Digest Press, 1977), pp. 203-206.

guesses and to carry the extrapolations out to obtain a total for 1979.

Otherwise, and giving the CIA credit for more finesse than that, we have to imagine that back in 1976 a nice man from the company passed Barron and Paul those figures, pointed them in the direction of Thailand, and said, "Now get on over there and find us some refugee stories to back this up." The stories, true ones, were not hard to find. Some people did have horrible experiences and if those selected by Barron and Paul represented faithfully the totality of refugees and were valid for the entire country, the extrapolated figures would not be unreasonable.

Of course, to be honest, we must take note of still a third possibility: Barron and Paul, as they claimed, independently got their refugee stories and then simply, in guise of extrapolation, used the total figures which the CIA had derived from their own, presumably accurate, intelligence sources. Whatever the case, we have evidence of an embarrassingly close cooperation between them and the CIA, justifying the view that from 1975 to 1977 there was a calculated effort to smear the Cambodian regime, whatever the truth might have been.

I was one of those who in 1975-77 was inclined to doubt the reliability of the popular press accounts of Cambodia and the refugee stories on which they were based, and my doubts are on record in Noam Chomsky and Edward S. Herman, *After the Cataclysm, Postwar Indochina and the Reconstruction of Imperial Ideology*.¹⁰ At the same time I had no reliable alternative picture and wondered, also on record, whether the truth could ever be determined. Moreover, my doubt about my doubts was compounded by my one source within the American Embassy in Bangkok (not Charles Twining or Timothy Carney), who said that even if the refugee stories were not entirely reliable, which he admitted, the CIA was picking up absolutely authentic information through sophisticated electronic eavesdropping and their information confirmed the very high estimates of executions. He also said, however, that all of the CIA information was highly classified and would not be published, and the only specific examples I ever wormed out of him were; (1) an American agent caught and executed inside Cambodia, and (2) leaders in a Cham village in central Cambodia executed on orders from Phnom Penh. Both of these stories could reasonably have been obtained by electronic snooping, but do not confirm the picture of generalized atrocities against the population as a whole.

That experience only increased my suspicions about the whole area of super-secret CIA data. Since it was safe to assume, at least up into 1977, that the CIA thoroughly disapproved of the Cambodian regime and wished to damage it in any way possible, one could expect that if they had had hard data on atrocities they would have found some way (and some way more convincing than Barron and Paul) to publicize them. My private thoughts on the matter then were that CIA electronics had in fact not obtained evidence of large-scale massacres and perhaps would even serve, if the evidence were published, to

contradict such stories. At the time, however, nothing more than speculation was possible.

Refugee Kampuchea

Now, after five months interviewing refugees, I believe I have better information about the policies of the Cambodian regime and about what the CIA might have picked up with their special equipment, including some information which was probably unknown at the time the report was compiled, or at least unknown to anyone likely to talk to the CIA. Although the number of executions or the total number dead from hunger can still only be very roughly estimated, information from large numbers of refugees establishes some general patterns which cannot be put in doubt.

First, conditions varied widely from one zone to another and also from district to district within a zone and even among contiguous villages. An acknowledgement of this was always squirreled away somewhere in the sensationalist press, but its implications were never inserted into their calculations. Such an acknowledgement even finds a line in the CIA report.¹¹ There were areas, fairly large, where conditions were as bad as portrayed. There were other areas where neither death from starvation nor from execution exceeded what might have been expected in the good old days of Sihanouk and Lon Nol. In between were places where hardly anyone was killed but many died of hunger and illness and other places where the opposite was true.

Thus, throughout most of the Southwest Zone, the East until 1978, the Kratie Special Region 505, and the exceptional Region 3 of the Northwest, the food situation was relatively good and there were few deaths from starvation even among the "new" people. In those areas executions throughout most of the DK period were selective—in some places, such as Region 3, minimal—and only Republican officers were targets simply because of their background. Teachers, doctors, engineers, and most civil servants were never marked as such for extermination. In the North and Central Zones as well starvation was rare, but here cadres were more murderous, and large-scale arbitrary killings a much more clear and present danger. Probably the worst areas for starvation were Regions 2 and 6 of Pursat province, and Region 5 of Battambang. Since hunger often led to protest or diminished work incentive, executions as a disciplinary measure could also occur in such areas more frequently. Even in the worst regions, though, there were still individual villages where no one starved and few were killed. Conversely, some of the otherwise good areas showed shocking death tolls from illness, particularly malaria.

Next, the large majority of the refugees in Thailand are from the former urban population, who obviously would have suffered most from the revolution however one wishes to view it. The large majority also spent 1975-79 in the Northwest Zone, where, as a whole, conditions

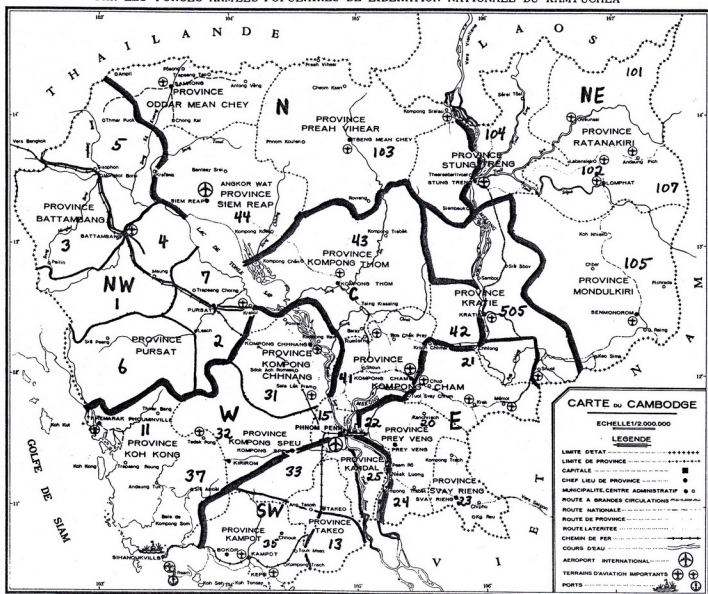
10. Noam Chomsky and Edward S. Herman, *The Political Economy of Human Rights* (Boston: South End Press, 1979), Vol. 2.

11. Francois Ponchaud, *Cambodia Year Zero* (Penguin Books, 1978), pp. 71-74, 78; Barron and Paul, p. 130; CIA report, p. 8.

កម្ពុជា

CAMBODGE

SITUATION (MAI 1971) DE LA LIBERATION DU CAMBODGE
PAR LES FORCES ARMEES POPULAIRES DE LIBERATION NATIONALE DU KAMPUCHEA



Administrative Divisions of Democratic Kampuchea 1975-79

Zones: Designated by compass point initials and enclosed by heavy lines.

Regions: Subdivisions of Zones, designated by number, and enclosed by lighter lines where boundaries determinable.

Below the Regions were Districts (*srok*) and Sub-Districts (*khum*), usually identical to cooperatives and villages.

were worse throughout those years than in any other of the five or six zones into which Cambodia was administratively divided. Thus the refugee reports have generally come from the roughly forty to fifty percent of the population which as a group suffered most and from that portion of them who lived in the worst fourth or fifth of the country.

The refugee reports nevertheless reveal a number of important things about country-wide patterns of executions and unusual deaths from other causes. Right after April 1975 there was a wave of large-scale killings of Lon Nol officers and, in some places, more or less highly-placed civilian officials. These were part of a central government policy which had been decided before the surren-

der of Phnom Penh, but which was carried out everywhere on local initiative, uncoordinated from central headquarters, and the details of which were therefore not likely to have been picked up via electronic snooping. The way in which the executions were carried out shows that what probably was central policy was a decision that the higher levels of officers and perhaps most of the highest levels of civilians could never be trusted, would always be actively dangerous, and must be killed. This general policy was then understood in different ways as it was communicated, possibly verbally, down to various lower administrative levels, and the results were very different. There were places in which a systematic effort was made to hunt

Any attempts to judge the Heng Samrin regime must start by emphasizing that there have been no massacres at all beyond some killing of Pol Pot cadres in early 1979 immediately following the invasion.

down all officers and all civilians who had any kind of official position at all, including teachers, and in which even Lon Nol enlisted men might be in danger. In other places execution was restricted to officers while civilians, even important ones, were expressly assured that they were not in danger as such. There were also places where the search and killing, however the policy was understood, were haphazard, leaving many who were real objects of the original policy untouched.

Barron, Paul and the CIA claim a figure of 100,000 executions in 1975-76, and this is based on an assumption of 200,000 military, 30,000 civil servants and 20,000 teachers who were targets of extermination policy, and of whom twenty percent died of hunger and disease and half the remainder by execution. We now know, however, that of the military only officers, perhaps ten percent of the total, or about 20,000, were designated targets.¹² As for teachers, professionals, and civil servants, central government policy is less clear, but, as described above, there were large areas where they were not in danger as such; and they were only singled out in some of the worst places, such as parts of the Northwest, North and Center, where cadres apparently interpreted policy as a license to kill anyone they disliked.

Thus, if we hypothesize that in the exodus from the towns about one-third to one-half of the civil servants and teachers went to the bad areas, we can only add up 20,000 officers, plus 10-15,000 civil servants, and 7-10,000 teachers for a grand total of between 37,000 and 45,000 targets,

not all of whom, even in the worst places, were killed. This relatively low death toll obtained from more refined extrapolation than that indulged in by Barron, Paul and the CIA fits well with a phenomenon which astonished people dealing with the large emigration of refugees after January 1979 and who found themselves confronted by thousands of these "targets of extermination" who had survived. And not all of them even tried to come out as refugees. According to Stephen Heder's investigation, the Heng Samrin regime, after the first efforts to reorganize local administration, were discomfited to find that they ran the risk of parts of the country being taken over at that level by military and civil servants of the Sihanouk-Lon Nol period.¹³

What the CIA gadgets could have picked up about the first wave of executions was a central government order in October 1975, and possibly an earlier order already in May,¹⁴ to stop them. Thus those objects of the original central policy who had been overlooked, or neglected, or who had concealed themselves, got a reprieve. The reprieve, like the initial policy, was not total and was understood in different ways, but at least it cut down the numbers, for further executions had to be more furtive, in small numbers, and generally only after some provocation. The report reflects this at least to the extent of stating that executions in 1976-77 were fewer than in 1975.

According to my information, among the general population, whether "old" or "new," killings in 1976 and at least the first half of 1977 were many fewer and, in fact, individual, sporadic, carried out in secret, and often illegal even in terms of DK justice. Many of them were the settling of old scores, either personal or because of class hatred.

The heavy killings in those years, which could have been noticed by the CIA since they involved policy decisions in Phnom Penh concerning outlying areas, were the purges of other factions of the revolutionary forces by the Pol Pot group. These purges hardly touched the "new" people at all, but were known to many refugees, and they have been confirmed by the records of the Tuol Sleng prison in Phnom Penh which show that the numbers were somewhere between 10,000 and 20,000. Perhaps in connection with these purges there began in the latter half of 1977, in some places, a new search for the surviving Lon Nol officers.

Finally, the last and worst wave of mass executions began in May 1978, and must have been picked up by the CIA, since it followed the most serious of all revolts against the regime. It was initiated suddenly by the central government and accompanied by troop movements, all of which required radio communication, including some an-

12. The consensus of refugee information is that only officers, and perhaps originally only officers above the rank of captain, were designated targets in central policy. This was already clear from the Barron-Paul (pp. 64-68) and Ponchaud (pp. 58-61) accounts of the massacres in Battambang in April 1975.

13. Stephen R. Heder, *Kampuchean Occupation and Resistance* (Bangkok: Institute of Asian Studies, Chulalongkorn University, January 1980), pp. 12-16; and Heder, "From Pol Pot to Pen Sovan to the Villages," (Bangkok: Institute of Asian Studies, June 1980), pp. 21-31.

14. Two refugees, one a former DK village chief, from different parts of the country, told me separately of the October order. Ben Kiernan, "Conflict in the Kampuchean Communist Movement," *JCA*, 10:1/2 (1980), p. 51, indicates that there may already have been such an order in May.

nouncements to the populace over the domestic service.

One of the most intriguing things about the CIA report is that this affair is not mentioned at all and the execution estimates end at January 1977. For the following period it merely says "living conditions most likely did not vary during these two years [Jan. 1977 to Jan. 1979] from the conditions during 1976."¹⁵ The continuing decrease in the total population which it postulates to have continued on into 1979 would have been due to hunger, illness and escape to Thailand and Vietnam.

The 1978 affair is something about which *all* refugees from the zones concerned have the most vivid memories. For them it represented the largest number of killings over a short period of time and killings performed in the most revolting manner. Most of the mass graves probably date from it. Following a rebellion of East zone cadres in April-May 1978, not only were all such cadres who could be found killed, but large numbers of the ordinary population were rounded up on the pretext that they were potentially pro-Vietnamese traitors, taken to the West or Northwest zones, and there most of them were killed. This exercise was the worst spate of killings in the refugees' memories, yet the Heng Samrin regime, in its trial of Pol Pot and Ieng Sary in early 1979, could put forth an estimate of only 40,000 victims.¹⁶ The figure may really have been higher, since eastern people were also evacuated to other provinces than Pursat, mentioned at the trial, and many others were killed on the spot all over the Eastern zone. Whatever the total, the 1978 massacres represent the worst wave of systematic executions. Their exclusion from the CIA report, which states that executions had ended by 1977, a time when in fact they were on the increase, merits close attention.¹⁷ If the omission was merely an accident, it shows that the report is nothing more than a careless dressing up of the old Barron-Paul figures, wherever they came from, and means that this CIA "research paper" may forthwith be dismissed from further consideration as a serious contribution to Cambodia studies.

Perhaps even more difficult than execution estimates is an accurate assessment of those who died either in the first exodus in April 1975 or the second displacement at the end of the year. The CIA figures have again been taken from Barron and Paul, or are perhaps figures which the CIA fed to Barron and Paul in 1976-77 to reclaim later as results of research by "analysts of Kampuchean affairs." Those figures are certainly inflated, but any efforts at lower estimates can be no more than relatively well informed guesses. It is important to emphasize that refugee accounts of the first evacuation from the towns are in general agreement on two points; (1) there were few killings, little brutality of any kind beyond the rigors of suddenly being uprooted, and (2) there was virtually no starvation, except possibly in the case of those who were already close to starvation, in Republican Phnom Penh—no doubt a subject into which the Barron-Paul-CIA crowd would just as soon not delve.

Barron and Paul state, and the CIA report "follows" them in relating, that both on the first exodus from the cities and during the second movement in late 1975, no food or water was provided. That is quite untrue and one need go no further than Ponchaud, or even Barron's and Paul's own pages to find different information.¹⁸ If the food provided was not entirely sufficient, people on the first exodus were free to forage, or bargain with peasants, in an often well-stocked countryside. In general the pace was leisurely, on most routes people were allowed to take as many supplies as they could carry, and if executions did occur, particularly on the roads northward, they were few.

For the CIA, however, and for U.S. policy in general, the specific conditions in any given country are of less importance than that country's position in a larger geopolitical context. . . . Democratic Kampuchea, it was seen, could be used in the international power game to weaken Vietnam—the strongest and best-organized of the Indochina states—and ultimately the position of socialism in Southeast Asia.

Barron and Paul are at their most dishonest and their informants exceptionally well selected in their description of the southward evacuation, relying on the tale of a pampered adolescent girl from a wealthy family. Given the composition of the refugee population in Thailand, the first exodus to the south is an experience about which the most abundant documentation is available. Few people recall it as a particularly terrifying experience. In fact it was en route to the south that conditions were most benign, and most refugees, when questioned carefully, substantiate the assessment of Pin Yathay—whose *L'Utopie Meurtrière* is not at all pro-DK and who himself fled in 1977—that the exodus from Phnom Penh to the south (Southwest Zone) "had taken place without police brutality, without administrative harassment."¹⁹

Although any kind of accurate count is now impossible, it seems unlikely that any but people who were already very ill would have died from conditions en route. It seems clear that deaths in excess of a normal rate, and due to the conditions of evacuation, could have been no more than a tenth to a fifth of the Barron-Paul-CIA estimate, or about 40-80,000 rather than 400,000.

Next something needs to be said about the so-called "second exodus" or "second population displacement," from which there are thousands of survivors in the refugee

15. CIA report, pp. 13, 17.

16. Kiernan, "Conflict," p. 44.

17. CIA report, p. 17.

18. Barron and Paul, pp. 106, 114, 138; CIA report, pp. 4, 12; Ponchaud, pp. 41, 44, 77.

19. Pin Yathay, *L'Utopie meurtrière*, (Paris: Editions Robert Laffont, 1980), p. 60; Barron and Paul, chap. 4.

camps in Thailand. This movement affected a large number of former Phnom Penh residents, probably numbering in the upper tens of thousands, or even over 100,000 (although any really accurate figure is impossible) who in April went first to the countryside south of Phnom Penh and then several months later, sometimes on order and sometimes in response to a request for volunteers,²⁰ were taken into the northwest. The Barron-Paul figure of 430,000 deaths was extrapolated from a few of the worst accounts of this second wave, assuming that it had been a country-wide experience affecting the entire "new" population. It involved their application of a death rate of twelve percent to their figure of 3,600,000 "new" survivors of the first exodus. In fact, since the total number of people involved was probably no more than 400,000, the number of deaths, even ignoring the question of the validity of their rate, was a fraction of what Barron-Paul supposed.

The second move was worse than the first, but not the total disaster implied by Barron and Paul, and not an experience which affected the entire country. Food was provided, though often not enough, and death from starvation does not seem to have been a generalized menace. Even if, again, an accurate count is impossible, one-tenth to one-fifth of the Barron-Paul-CIA figure, or another 40–80,000 is all that can reasonably be estimated.²¹

Having seen how much faith can be put in the Barron-Paul-CIA methods and in some of their estimates, let us take a look at their total population figures which I cited at the beginning of this article. For the sake of discussion I will accept their figure of 7.1 million for the total population in April 1975 after removal of the Vietnamese, even though the true figure could have been significantly lower. I will also start by accepting their figure of 4 million urban people even though it is even more subject to caution; and I will provisionally accept that the number of "old" people slightly increased from 3.1 to 3.2 million by the end of 1975 and no more than maintained that strength until 1979. Neither will I dispute 32.5% as a useful factor for estimating the decline in the number of "new" people in the worst areas, roughly one-third of the country, between 1975 and 1979 (4 million minus 2.7 million 1979 survivors = 1.3 million dead, or 32.5% of 4 million).²²

The modifications I will introduce are, first, that the Vietnamese who were evacuated were overwhelmingly urban and the 200,000 should be subtracted, not from the population as a whole, but from the 4 million urban segment, leaving 3.8 million "new" versus 3.1–3.2 million "old." Next, since the Barron-Paul-CIA extrapolation concerning the new people was based on testimony from the worst areas, the percentage derived should be applied only to an estimate of the number of "new" in such areas; and I shall postulate that one-third of them were in the northwest and bad pockets of other zones. One-third of 3.8 million is 1.27 million to be diminished by 32.5%, or a little over 412,000, leaving roughly 875,000. I will assume

that the remaining two-thirds of the "new" people maintained themselves as well as the "old," that is at least 2.54 million survived until January 1979. We then come up with a total January 1979 population of 3.2 million "old" plus 2.54 "new" from good areas plus .857 "new" from bad areas or altogether 6,597,000 within Cambodia, down half a million from 1975, which roughly approximates some of the more cautious estimates made 2–3 years ago.²³ One might also wish to question the figure of 4 million townspeople with which the calculation began; and if a more reasonable 3.5 million were taken, and treated as above, the resulting estimate for 1979 would be around 6.7 million, probably unacceptable *a priori* for Barron, Paul and the CIA.

Just one more thing needs to be said here about these population figures. The CIA estimates for the best case, that of the "old" people, were predicated on an assumption of zero population growth as a result of various kinds of hardship and reduced fertility. Such must certainly have been true in some places, but observation of the refugees indicates that it cannot have been true over the entire country.

As I emphasized above, the population of the Khao I Dang refugee camp is composed in majority of "new" people from the worst zone of the country; and although the UNHCR statistics leave much to be desired, their figure for the total camp population in mid-1980 was probably fairly accurate, as was the number of births recorded within the camp. From those figures a birth rate sufficient for our purposes can be calculated. Furthermore, in June 1980, when the total population was around 130,000, the CARE organization operated supplementary feeding centers for mothers and children in eight of the camp's Khmer sections with a total population of 93,491. Because of the nature of the operation, rather accurate count had to be kept of the numbers of children in those sections, and in particular of children under five years of age. Those figures offer a possibility of calculating the number of children born to that segment of the population between 1975 and 1979. I first took the total of all children under five, which of course included all those born through May 1980 and conceived well after the end of the Pol Pot period. To find those who at the latest were conceived under Pol Pot conditions (no later than January 1979, born in September 1979), I applied the June Khao I Dang birth rate, which must have been higher than previous months as a result of improving health and nutrition, to all months from October 1979 through May 1980 and subtracted that number from the total of children. The resulting total of children under five, born or conceived under Pol Pot conditions was 16% of the relevant population sample, comparing favorably with the situation in Malaysia (14.3% under four) or Thailand (14.8% under four).²⁴ This would seem to show that the birth rate for this part of the population must have been close to normal, and

20. Pin Yathay, pp. 81–82, 110; Barron and Paul, chapter 7; CIA report, p. 12.

21. See Pin Yathay's description, pp. 110–134.

22. CIA report, pp. 2, 4, 5.

23. Chomsky and Herman, pp. 159–160.

24. For Malaysia and Thailand see *Illustrative Projections of World Populations to the 21st Century*, U.S. Dept. of Commerce, Bureau of the Census (January 1979). All other information is from my own research in the Khao I Dang refugee center.

means that the "old" people, and the most favored two-thirds of the "new," not only maintained their numbers but increased.

The above calculations were not intended to represent any kind of final assessment of the population of Cambodia, but only to indicate how the CIA figures, used more honestly and in a more accurate historical framework, would produce quite different results. There is a possibility, for example, that the massacres of 1978, not included in the report, were much more terrible than suggested above. However that may be, two estimates made public by international organizations at the end of 1980, and based in part on observations within the country, approach my own rough calculations. In November a "senior UN official" in Bangkok was quoted as saying that the Cambodian population was "6 million, 25% higher than previously estimated;" and a month later the FAO announced that its projections for food requirements in 1981 were based on an estimate of 6.5 million.²⁵

We must conclude that the CIA report is a fraud, utterly without value for assessing the true extent of the havoc which has without doubt been wrought on Cambodia. At best its authors were naive in relying solely on Barron and Paul for their information, or at worst they were dishonest, cooking the figures and planting them on Barron and Paul to be taken up three years later as research by serious analysts. Indeed their omissions with respect to 1978 may be downright sinister, if deliberate.

As for Barron and Paul, at best they were naive in allowing themselves to become tools of a CIA disinformation ploy; at worst they entered knowingly and enthusiastically into the game. In either case we may now definitely write their book off as no kind of serious contribution to the Cambodia question.

Heng Samrin Kampuchea and CIA Objectives

The purpose of the *Reader's Digest* project at its original date in 1976-77 and the subsequent CIA report is clear. It was to discredit Cambodian communism in the assurance that no one then could come up with a convincing alternative picture. Unfortunately, a more honest alternative, some of the aspects of which I have sketched above, is no cause for rejoicing. Even in my own best case scenario I consider the Pol Pot regime to have utterly discredited itself, to have deserved overthrow, and to be unworthy of any further support. The alternative analysis of the CIA figures, however, is not a scholastic or useless exercise. We must now ask why, in early 1980, the CIA decided to dust off the old Barron-Paul figures as their own and to publish a document which, for the period up to 1979, provides no data not already published in 1977, deliberately ignoring important incidents of 1977-78 which should have contributed further to their portrayal of an arbitrary, murderous regime. It cannot have been to convince skeptics as far as the 1975-79 period is concerned, for anyone who would take a CIA report uncritically would already have swallowed Barron and Paul.

The reason must lie in what it has to say about the post-January 1979 Heng Samrin regime, which the report seems to imply may be worse than the Pol Pot group, perhaps spelling "the demise of the Khmer as a people." The only statistic offered — which is partly based on the "birth rates," "death rates," and "vital rates," the nature of which we have already seen — is that the population declined during 1979 by another 600,000, a larger drop than in any year after 1975.²⁶

Of course, the war in early 1979 and the subsequent change of regime disrupted the lives of many people, destroyed the agricultural organization of the previous regime, and thereby caused a certain, but indeterminable number of deaths from hunger and illness which might not otherwise have occurred. Study of these questions is very incomplete and there is room for honest disagreement, but the report's estimates of people facing starvation (3.5 million) and deaths over births (ten to one) seem no more solidly based than their estimates for earlier years. In particular, if those figures represent some kind of extrapolation from "the great westward movement" of people "from all areas of the country" toward the Thai border, they are certainly wrong. For we know now that in late 1979 and early 1980 observers at the border, sometimes through honest error, sometimes deliberately, were exaggerating the numbers of people involved, which was probably around half the 400,000 estimated by the report.²⁷ We also know, as described above, that most of them were from the northwestern provinces close to Thailand, and what is more important for an assessment of the Heng Samrin government, we now know that only a fraction of them were moving westward from fear of imminent starvation. The rest were coming for all sorts of other reasons—to trade, to join the Khmer Serei guerrillas, to send mail abroad, to try to go abroad themselves, or occasionally just for the adventure of freely moving about after three-and-a-half years of strict control. When the Khao I Dang camp was opened in November 1979, UNHCR officials, on the basis of reports from the border, expected to be engulfed in a rush of 300,000 starving and ill Cambodians. The rush in the first three weeks, those people who really wanted out of the country at once, amounted to less than 75,000, of whom few were starving. During the next three weeks only something over 3,000 per week more showed up.²⁸

Any attempts to judge the Heng Samrin regime must start by emphasizing that there have been no massacres at all beyond some killing of Pol Pot cadres in early 1979 immediately following the invasion. With respect to violence, the new regime is probably the most benign Cambodia has had for over ten years. The CIA report takes no note of this, but does emphasize "the destruction of the agricultural system," a type of system which one would have imagined the CIA would want destroyed, particularly since, in their own analysis of 1975-1977, it was given responsibility for the death of several hundred thousand

26. CIA report, pp. 2, 5, 6.

27. CIA report, pp. 3, 13, 14.

28. Information from UNHCR officials present at the time, and from members of the first refugee groups. Weekly statistics provided by the UNHCR office, Khao I Dang.

people.²⁹

Whatever the real condition of agriculture in 1979, the people were *not*, pace the report, (p. 6), "urged to leave communes," and thereby neglect food production. Without using the same kind of force as the old regime it was impossible to keep the former urbanites down on the farm growing crops. In a few outlying areas it was attempted and caused great resentment. The new regime gave people almost complete freedom of movement and choice of occupation, which one would expect the CIA to approve. If the result proves disastrous, it will not be due to nefarious policies, but because of the poor quality of what they had to work with. It seems now, even from the reports of recent refugees who are in principle opposed to Heng Samrin, that conditions have been steadily improving in 1980 and 1981.

It appears that the purpose of this hasty CIA report is to put the pro-Vietnamese Heng Samrin regime in the worst possible light. The statistical picture is still contrived. It starts with the inflated estimates of 1975-77 which reflect the CIA policy of that time. Then suddenly the brakes are applied and the worst violence of the Pol Pot regime, which would be more in line with the picture presented up to 1977, is ignored, apparently in order to show steady relative improvement interrupted only by the Vietnamese invasion and a Heng Samrin year which was demographically more disastrous than the Pol Pot period. This analysis of the report also sheds new light on a couple of details in earlier published material which puzzled me at the time, but which now gain new meaning and in turn give support to my conclusions.

In a book completed in June 1978 Jean Lacouture, in a discussion of Cambodian communist origins, remarked that "up to 1977 . . . the CIA considered the PCK [Cambodian Communist Party] as a simple appendage of the Vietnamese party." Although noting that the CIA opinion might possibly still be the same, Lacouture suggested a change at that time, no doubt prompted by some contact he had. If that is really what the CIA thought, they were far behind all other serious observers of Cambodian affairs, including some in the employ of the U.S. government.³⁰ But in any case, why a change of views in 1977?

Someone with even better CIA contacts than Lacouture, Guy J. Pauker, in a book devoted to predictions and policies for Southeast Asia in the 1980s and published in 1977, revealed a very interesting nuance in the conventional wisdom about DK.³¹ One of Pauker's topics in the chapters he wrote was "population and development." He evoked the problems of growing populations, need for more food, increasing scarcity of land, and insufficient urban employment for the hordes of peasants moving into the cities. He showed some concern that voluntary migrations within Southeast Asia were "not from overpopulated villages into

the wilderness" as they should be, in order to develop new land, "but from the countryside to the cities," and that "the noncommunist countries use only mild administrative measures to slow down the flow." Indonesia's "transmigration" program, for instance, was too modest. In this connection one would expect some reference to Cambodia, and Pauker wrote: "The forced migration inflicted on the Cambodians after April 1975 . . . is certainly not a desirable model." That was all—not that the Cambodians were doing the wrong thing, or that Cambodia was being destroyed by inhuman murderers, but only that they were not taking apparently necessary steps in the best way. This is the only comment on the Cambodian revolution in the entire book.

There is one more detail of relevance to study of the Cambodian revolution. Pauker showed his respect for CIA research in quoting several times from their various compilations of statistics. Yet when presenting projections of population statistics he cited the UN figures, which, as mere extrapolations from the 1962 census, are inherently unreliable even in the best of circumstances, and told his readers, without comment, that the Cambodian population in 1975 was 8.1 million and in 1980 would be about 9.4.³²

This indicates that Pauker, and probably the CIA, disregarded the wilder stories of excessive deaths in Cambodia, even those prepared by the latter for Barron and Paul in 1976 and republished in the 1980 report. Pauker's book, after all, was intended as a serious work on policy, not a propaganda tract for the general public, and it must therefore reflect what its authors believed to be the most accurate information available rather than trumped-up figures suitable for dissemination via the *Reader's Digest*.

The CIA position on Cambodia apparently did undergo a change around 1977, although perhaps not in exactly the way Lacouture suggests. At the end of the Indochina wars in 1975 it would have appeared that Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos were forming a new, cohesive, fraternal socialist group which would have a reasonable chance of success and which would attract favorable attention from discontented peasants in other Southeast Asian countries, first of all in Thailand. It was essential to discredit the new Indochina governments, and Democratic Kampuchea lent itself perfectly to the propaganda campaign by taking measures incomprehensible even to many peasants and workers, measures much more brutal than anything which occurred in Vietnam or Laos.

The Barron-Paul book, which must be seen, at least in part, as a CIA project, was the first mass media effort to discredit Democratic Kampuchea in the United States, and probably to advance justification for policies against it which might be initiated. The same sort of material was also used in Thailand throughout 1975-76 to undermine all movements working for greater economic and social justice in that country.

For the CIA, however, and for U.S. policy in general, the specific conditions in any given country are of less importance than that country's position in a larger geopolitical context, and thus increasing murderousness in DK

29. CIA report, pp. 4-5, 12.

30. Lacouture, *Survive le peuple cambodgien*, (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1978), p. 54; Kenneth M. Quinn [U.S. State Dept.], "Political Change in Wartime: the Khmer Kraham Revolution in Southern Cambodia, 1970-74," *Naval War College Review*, Spring 1976, based on research completed in 1974.

31. Guy J. Pauker, Frank H. Golay, and Cynthia H. Enloe, *Diversity and Development in Southeast Asia*, The Council on Foreign Relations, (New York: McGraw-Hill), p. 33.

32. Pauker, et al., pp. 34, 35, 36, 40.

would be of less concern than Cambodia's relations with other countries. It soon became clear that fraternal socialist relations did not prevail between Cambodia and Vietnam. The CIA, whatever their earlier views on DK, realized that it was not only not subordinate to Vietnam, but anti-Vietnamese above all else. Democratic Kampuchea, it was seen, could be used in the international power game to weaken Vietnam—the strongest and best-organized of the Indochina states—and ultimately the position of socialism in Southeast Asia. The new American policy is clearly revealed by what has happened since 1979. The U.S. has not only expressed no enthusiasm over the removal of the “regime worse than Hitler’s,” but also supported its continued presence in the U.N. and abetted efforts to provide the DK remnants with material aid across the Thai border and to discredit and destabilize its rivals in Phnom Penh.³³

The DK forces have responded in kind. Declaring that socialism is unviable in Cambodia, and that the first task must be the combat against Vietnam, they call American diplomats “comrade,” and offer their services in what they conceive to be an American effort to restore reactionary regimes in Laos and Vietnam. Never was the old “running dog” epithet more apt than applied to these relics of *Angka*.³⁴

This is why the CIA has produced such a blatant propaganda tract in the guise of a research paper. This is why such documents must be carefully scrutinized and dissected, even if the alternative picture is less than cheerful. For the CIA are still cooking the books and are even

willing partially to rehabilitate Pol Pot in support of their new position.

The CIA report on Kampuchean demography began by reproducing the estimates of human destruction in 1975–76 which had appeared in the sensationalist press of that time in order to discredit the DK regime, and which are now known to have been both selected and inaccurate. The report then ignores, even whitewashes, the murderous events of 1977–78, in particular the latter year, in which there were possibly more executions than during all the rest of the DK period. This cannot have been due to ignorance, but must reflect a precise propaganda goal.

That goal emerges from the treatment of 1979, the first year of the Heng Samrin regime, which is made to appear worse than any DK year except the first. Democratic Kampuchea, however brutal its methods and disastrous its policies, is shown achieving steady progress interrupted only by the Vietnamese invasion and the change of regime.

Since a new pro-Vietnamese regime in Southeast Asia was regarded as inimical, Democratic Kampuchea was seen in a new perspective which had already begun to take shape in 1977 or 1978. By then it was clear that the DK regime was not going to be a Marxist success which would turn Cambodia into a strong, if isolationist, peasant state and serve as a pole of attraction or launching pad for peasant revolutionaries in neighboring countries. Its worst massacres were for non-communist, racist, and in particular anti-Vietnamese reasons. Finally Pol Pot's Cambodia was really becoming bloody enough to attract some positive American interest.★

33. On U.S. activities at the Thai-Cambodian border see John Pilger, “America's Second War in Indochina,” *New Statesman*, 1 August 1980. Unfortunately Pilger blunted the thrust of his article with unnecessary sensationalism and petty innuendo directed against sincere and innocent, even if naive, volunteer workers in the refugee camps. His main points, though, the magnet effect of the refugee operations, and U.S. involvement in the campaign to destabilize Phnom Penh and Vietnam, are valid. Morton Abramowitz, U.S. Ambassador to Thailand, was reputed to have

prepared an answer to Pilger's article, but I was unable to obtain a copy of it from the embassy.

34. This information, beyond what has frequently appeared in published interviews with DK leaders, is from an interview of Thiounn Mum, a leading DK intellectual, with Stephen Heder, who generously provided me with a transcript. I refrain from naming the American diplomatic “comrade.” Of course, DK conceptions of American policies do not prove that such policies exist.

Comparative Death Estimates

This table includes only the categories of casualties treated in the CIA report and discussed in the accompanying article, and is not intended to represent any kind of definitive statistical treatment. It involves only the scaling down of CIA estimates in accordance with areal variations in living conditions as described by refugees, accepting in some cases CIA rates for the worst areas.

	First Exodus	Second Exodus	Deaths 1976	Executions/Targets 1975–76	Executions 1978
CIA	400,000	400,000 ¹	250,000	100,000/250,000 ²	0
MV	40–80,000	40–80,000	80–120,000	< 30,000/37–45,000	> 100,000

Estimates of Total Population after End of DK Period

CIA–Jan '79	CIA–Dec '79	MV–Jan '79	UN–Nov '80	FAO–Dec '80
5.8 million	5.2 million	> 6.3 million ³	6 million	6.5 million

Notes:

1. The Barron-Paul estimate was 430,000. Otherwise they agree with the CIA.

2. See discussion above.

3. See discussion above. This figure also includes the over 100,000 estimated deaths in the 1978 massacres. The discrepancy which still remains between the estimate here and those above, where the 1978 figure was not included, reflects executions in 1977 and the inherent unreliability of all Cambodian population statistics.