



Kampuchea August 1978

**Records from a journey made by a delegation
from the Swedish-Kampuchean friendship association**

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Swedish-Kampuchean Friendship Association

INTRODUCTION

The following reports are eye-witness accounts from Democratic Kampuchea in August 1978, four months before the Vietnamese invasion.

The authors were members of a delegation from the Swedish-Kampuchean Friendship Association which visited Democratic Kampuchea at the invitation of the Committee for Relations with Friends of Democratic Kampuchea.

During two weeks the four had the opportunity to cross the country from Kompong Som in the South to the temples of Angkor in the north-west. They visited agricultural cooperatives, factories, schools and hospitals - nowadays said to have been nonexistent in Democratic Kampuchea.

Originally published in leading Swedish newspapers in autumn 1978 the articles presented a picture to the Swedish public different from the vast amount of desinformation being spread by the enemies of Kampuchea.

The articles are presented exactly as they were published including minor changes sometimes made by the editors. We reproduce also the original headings set by the newspapers.

In order to make these reports available to an international public we are here republishing them in English.

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Swedish-Kampuchean Friendship Association

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WHEN THE PEASANT WAR TRIUMPHED by Jan Myrdal

THE 17TH OF APRIL, 1975, GUERILLA SOLDIERS MARCHED INTO PHNOM PENH, CAMBODIA'S CAPITAL. THE UNITED STATES HAD BEEN DEFEATED AND A DRAMATIC TRANSFORMATION OF THE COUNTRY COULD BEGIN.

BUT WHAT HAPPENED THEN? FEW FOREIGN JOURNALISTS HAVE BEEN PERMITTED TO VISIT THE COUNTRY. MANY MORE HAVE INDULGED IN CONJECTURE AND SPECULATION.

THIS IS THE FIRST SWEDISH REPORT FROM INSIDE KAMPUCHEA. FOLKET I BILD'S CONTRIBUTORS SPENT TWO WEEKS TRAVELLING AROUND THE COUNTRY. THEIR PICTURE DOES COINCIDE ON ONE POINT WITH THE MANY RUMOURS:

KAMPUCHEA IS TOTALLY UNLIKE ALL OTHER EXISTING SOCIETIES!

Eleven years ago, too, I approached Phnom Penh from the south, after having been out in the border region near Viet Nam. On the whole I travelled the same roads from Siem Reap in the north to Kampot in the south. It is a poor country now as it was then.

Eleven years ago, this was one of the poorest and least industrialized countries in the Third World. The average age was low. Almost half of the population was fourteen or younger.

Its poverty had not been that of great famine as in the Bengal. The people were hungry but did not starve to death. It was a poverty lacking in natural catastrophes and famine.

That time, I drove into a rural, peaceful Phnom Penh, a French colonial city with broad avenues and large villas. The market place was crowded with women and, when I later wrote about this city, I wondered how many of these women would still be alive by the time the text was published.

Because, that time, the war stood at the country's border, and the question was not whether the big war would also hit this poor country but when it would hit.

Now, after the war, I travel up the same road, This time the country is not just poor. Its poverty has been ground down under five years of systematic devastation by war. More bombs were dropped here than over all of Europe during the 2nd World War. Villages and towns have been wiped off the face of the earth. Cities which are still to be found on the map are nothing but ruins. In the countryside, there is hardly a single undamaged house remaining from before the war. The big cities are abandoned and almost empty.

The people look the same today as they did then. The girls in the rice paddies laugh now as they did then, and the average age is young as it was eleven years ago. I don't have any statistics, but my guess is that even today half of the population is fourteen or younger. But many are dead. No one knows how many died during the war: one and a half million... one million... eight hundred thousand. Estimates vary. No one counted. But, no one knew what the population was before the war, either. It is all conjecture: more or less knowledgeable. That is the way it is in the poor countries of the Third World, despite all the cleverly arranged statistical tables. At present, the country is believed to have approximately eight million inhabitants.

However, it is not just the devastation of war which has changed the country. The old society is gone. In those days, there was luxury, good wine and gracious living for a chosen few. But the people suffered. Today everyone can still his hunger and hide is nakedness. There is rice and clothing, although there is not much meat to be had. But, it is said that twice a month everyone can eat a sweet. A few people have things worse today. while the vast majority have it better. Justice reigns.

An entirely new and different society has begun to take shape. Its own representatives say that they are building the kingdom of justice and equality. And it is true that it is totally unlike all other existing societies. Even money has been done away with. If you take an afternoon walk through an almost deserted Phnom Penh you can, in fact, pick up money from off the street. It is still lying there littering in the gutter.

Equality has been introduced. Those who would eat shall work, unless prevented by sickness and age. The cadres, too, must work. Even those who hold important office must till the soil in the sweat of their brow. That is the theory. But even in practice it is that way, here, more than anywhere else.

Common Dining Rooms

The kingdom of righteousness is being built. And now, when everyone can still his hunger and hide his nakedness, all shall have a proper roof over head for protection from the rain and sun. All over the country new houses are being built in the villages, and in the near future every family will have a new house with a tile roof of its own. These houses stand there on their poles, radiantly new, lighting up the area around the large common dining rooms with their splendid redtile roofs. The people have a roof over head made of tile which only rich could previously afford.

The new houses look pretty much alike all over the country from north to south. And they are all without a kitchen since the people now eat in the villages' large dining rooms. These dining rooms, built of wood in monumental splendour, serve as the village center. The monsoon winds sweep refreshingly through the rooms, while one eats his fill. And sometimes there is meat. It is there the people gather in the evenings for deliberation.

Why do I write in this manner? Because I know what the dreamers would say. Surely this is history's troisième age!

Thomas Münzer and his German peasants of the 16th century would have felt at home in this place. Wat Tyler has won the day here. Jacques Bonhomme rules here. For here the wretched of the earth and poor peasants joined in struggle against a host of enemies and drove them all off. They began to build the kingdom of their dreams, based on justice, equality and solidarity. It all fits, including the collectivism and continual consultations; the unwillingness to stand out with one's own name and person.

Metaphysical marxologs and trotskyites become upset and condemn. For them the peasantry is reactionary and history follows a key. Others who do not wish to condemn would tone down, however, the millennial aspects of authentic peasant wars. They are not ideologically orthodox. But they are. And Marx, who was a revolutionary and a democrat, and not a marxolog, supported China's and India's peoples when they rose in struggle. It is right to rebel against famine and oppression.

I see no reason to shilly-shally with words. We have here a victorious peasant war; the peasant war which was defeated and crushed in Germany, France and England. Here the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom has been established. But this is not 13th century Europe or 19th century China. It is a victorious peasant war in our own time; a war led and guided by communists who have attempted to concretize the peasant visions into development beyond the common dining rooms and new houses to a new and modern society in which science and technology will serve the people.

Democratic Kampuchea holds no other country as its model and no guiding international political headquarters has given the Kampuchean leaders instructions for the construction of society. One can find certain features which remind

one of Jugoslavia in the 1940's or China of the 1960's. There are elements which are related to Fanon's The Wretched of the Earth and others which reflect thought from European leftist debate. But characteristic for Kampuchea is that its Communist Party has listened before all else to its own people and has tried through practical policy to realize their demands. That is also why questions concerning marxist theory in Kampuchea are answered by reference to revolutionary practice and the people's experience. Even important questions are still open to discussion and will be solved "step by step". It is not just in foreign policy declarations that Democratic Kampuchea is non-aligned and free. Its communists are also unfettered ideologically. And that, despite the fact that they have friends, comrades---yes, brothers.

But those who believe that this means that rural utopianism has swept over Kampuchea and who believe this to be history's first rural and peasant communist country are mistaken. To see Kampuchea's future one should study its new state seal.

Straight irrigation canals lead off to the factory whose chimney's belch smoke as in the romanticism of the 1930's. One can almost feel how the sooty smoke stings the nose with welfare and a new world. Kampuchea, too, is going the industrial road, but doing it on its own legs.

At present, the entire population is working to put the rice growing peasantry's rich experience to use and rebuild the irrigation system of ancient Angkor on a giant scale. The peoples' experience and knowledge will be used scientifically. Kampuchea is already exporting rice. The export of rice will increase

several times. This growing surplus will not be used for the construction of tempels and magnificent buildings nor to buy luxury items for the upper class. With the help of the surplus Kampuchea will industrialize for the benefit of the people. Basing itself on its own experience and using its own forces, Kampuchea's people will in this way take a great stride into the future. This is not rural utopianism.

But there is not just the cultivation of rice. Out in the cooperatives the new houses are being built with the lumber of the native forests by collectives of carpenters who gain ever greater construction experience through the production process. In the cooperatives' smithies the bombs and tanks of the expelled enemy are beaten into sledge hammers, carts, knives and ploughshares by craftsmen who previously worked in the cities.

The Cities Emptied

The roads linking the cities have been repaired. But the emptied cities are not entirely abandoned. They have begun to be repopulated. In the midst of the urban decay, land is being cleared for new factories. The cities are not dead. They have gone into hibernation and in their shells new city cultures are already growing up. Streets and vegetation are already being beautified. Habitable houses are being made ready. In the workshops which are already open in the old cities' abandoned warehouses and schools, twelve and thirteen year olds from the country who have just learned to read are being trained as lathe-operators, electricians and machinists.

The abandoned cities do raise questions. Yes, large sections of Phnom Penh resemble a ghost town. But it is entirely possible to discuss these questions rationally.

It is not impossible to understand what has happened. Kampuchea's cities have been evacuated. In the liberated areas they had been evacuated while the war was still going on. There were reasons of security. Experience showed that the enemy bombed the cities it abandoned. The civilian population should be evacuated in time. But there were also other reasons. No rice grows in the cities. Phnom Penh was overcrowded with refugees. Mass starvation threatened at the moment of liberation, the 17th of April, 1975. A million people would starve to death. But Phnom Penh was evacuated and mass starvation was avoided. The city dwellers dug and cultivated and thus, most of them survived. The evacuation saved their lives.

The evacuation was hasty and the planning deficient, but it was necessary and it saved lives. That is how I saw it then and I still see it that way. But that is not the whole truth. The cities would very probably have been evacuated even had there not been danger of bombing attacks or famine. Perhaps it would not have happened as precipitously but it would have taken place, because it was based on an analysis of the role of the city in the old society. The city and its population were exploitative. Even the urban poor were dependent on the exploiters and thus participated in the exploitation. Thus, they constituted a potential base for reaction and counterrevolution. It was only working together with the poor peasants that they became one with the people.

The above is considered anti-marxist by many. But it is based on a concrete analysis of Kampuchea's own reality. This analysis resembles the analysis that Gramsci made in his notes on the history of Italy about the character of Naples at the time of the revolutionary movements at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Let me add that I discussed with a responsible

cadre on the ferry over Tonle Sap about this analysis by Gramsci of the policy of the Parthenopean Republic in 1799. The truth is concrete and these are concrete truths precisely about Naples around the year 1800 and Phnom Penh 1975. Personally, I am inclined to believe that a correct assessment was made of Phnom Penh. But that is a question worth further discussion.

Thus, there are important questions concerning Kampuchea's development to discuss. Are there other Third World countries where this analysis of the relationship between town and country would be correct? It is possible for Kampuchea, using its special conditions--the knowledge of irrigation technique and the prospect of rice production far in excess to domestic needs--to use the entire population (that is even the former urban dwellers) for meaningful labor, thus making possible a large and rapid leap forward! Is something similar possible in other Third World countries?

Propaganda

But instead of dealing with these questions, the propagandists in Moscow, Washington, Hanoi and the Vatican seek to concentrate interest around "terror in Kampuchea". Wretchedly poor Kampuchea, which needs all resources for construction, is now forced to engage its little army and use its resources to defend its national existence against a Viet Nam many times greater. At the same time, propagandists in Moscow and Hanoi attempt to make plausible that Kampuchea with her 60,000-80,000 soldiers has embarked on a war of conquest against Southeast Asia's mightiest military machine, and that fanatically non-aligned Kampuchea has turned itself into a Chinese satellite and allows itself to be ruled from Peking.

My choice of words indicates generally how I see this question. But I also hold opinions on the question of whether genocide is taking place in Kampuchea and on the

background to the war between Kampuchea and Viet Nam. I will take up these questions at another time. But I intend to reason. I am not about to wallow in sentimentality and torture-pornography. But it should be made clear that if Kampuchea were to decide to conduct its propaganda the way Viet Nam conducts its propaganda, there is testimony to how Vietnamese soldiers rape and murder young girls, gorge out the eyes of old people, chop people into pieces and tear Kampuchean children apart. This war is every bit as cruel as any Balkan war. But that does not prevent one from discussing what is right and what is wrong.

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KAMPUCHEA DOES ALL TO REBUILD AFTER THE WAR by Hedvig Ekerwald

From the aeroplane the water-filled bomb craters can be seen lying like a carpet across the countryside. On the ground we travel through a verdant countryside where before there lay villages and towns which have been levelled to the ground. Only from time to time do we see a remaining stairway leading up towards the sky. Every bridge we drive over has been bombed asunder, often several times. The United States's bomb war marks Kampuchea.

In the cotton fields of Kompong Cham province, where people are spraying the plants with DDT, we meet the peasant Kan. He tells us that his home was bombed to pieces and a nephew died during the war. He is 46 years old and has a son who is 12. We asked him what he wants his son to become when he grows up.

"I want him to understand what great sacrifices have been made for liberation so that he cherish our society. That is the important thing."

Everywhere on our trip we see work being done to build up a new Kampuchea from out of the ruins. Tile factories work at high pressure, saw mills deliver boards, on the roads short horses pull wagons carrying large logs from the woods: all for the building of houses. The old society's straw and grass huts are to be replaced by new wooden houses with tile roofs, just as the temporary shacks from after the war are replaced. Before in Kampuchea it was a sign of wealth to have a tile roof for protection against the monsoon rains. Now all houses are being built with tile roofs and all families will live under one before 1980. It is single-family dwellings which are being built, on poles and with decoration around the roof. A private plot goes with every house. The size of the houses varies depending on the poverty of the area.....

Tourists

Down by the sea in the deepwater harbour at Kompong Som, the chairman of the municipal committee tells us that they are building guest houses on the hill overlooking the harbour in order to be able to accomodate visiting tourists from the cooperatives. The peasants who produce Kampuchea's most important product, rice, will be able to travel to Kompong Som and see with their own eyes their rice disappear out over the sea and then see what the country receives in return: petrol for the village water pumps so they will no longer have to pedal the water-weels, and steel for agricultural implements.

The country's economy shall be comprehensible for the common citizens. Now, when we were at the harbour, a Chinese cargoship was just leaving loaded with rice bought by Madagascar from Kampuchea.

Thanks to the great dams which have been built and dug (especially during the dry season, a time when previously agricultural labour did not take place) all over the country, and thanks to cooperative labour, Kampuchea's rice production has increased in a revolutionary way during the first post-war years. The first year, the mass starvation predicted by American researchers was avoided. The second year, a little rice could already be exported, and the 1977/1978 harvest resulted in a large export. This despite the fact 1977 was a difficult year with uneven rainfall which started late. The irrigation systems helped against the unfavorable weather.

We visited a large dam construction site between Kompong Cham and Kompong Thom, in the interior of the country. 4000 young people were working there. Getting marries usually means leaving the construction brigade and moving to a cooperative and into one's own family dwelling.

Yoke with Earth

Earth is carried in baskets with the help of a yoke, from the future reservoir site to the future dam site. Each basket carries only a little earth but taken together a giant work was accomplished. This collective labour makes up for Kampuchea's lack of capital, petrol and machines.

The work stops when we appear and everyone looks at us with curiosity. We look back at them just as curiously. Someone says "Let us continue." But they do not care to, and, instead, we stand and look at each other.

On the whole, work is done at a calm pace in Kampuchea. People seem to be able to stop working, rest and leave when they want to. The work does not seem to have the compulsion over the people that it can have at an average Swedish factory. There is, instead, the same working pace as in other Third World countries.

The calm working pace does not tally with the atrocity propaganda directed against Kampuchea. Other parts of it, too, fall to pieces upon visiting the country. All these old people who were not supposed to be alive any longer stand along the roads in the cooperatives, labour in the workshops of the villages weaving baskets and making tools, and make up Kampuchea's day nursery staff. It is the grandmothers who care for the children when the parents are working.

Security

We saw nothing of the soldiers who supposedly watch over the work. We looked for the Kampuchean army but our hosts told us that they were engaged in battle with the Vietnamese in Eastern Kampuchea.

We heard over the Thai radio about rebellion in Kampuchea,

but although the army was not there to suppress any rebellion, we travelled in perfect tranquillity, could stop anywhere and speak with anyone. Public safety reigned in those parts of the country through which we travelled.

Letters can be sent from one cooperative to another now without stamps since there is no money, and transportation is arranged for those who work at a factory or the harbour and who wish to travel to their home villages for a visit. A health care network is being built up with health assistants out in the villages. They are called to three courses in Phnom Penh each year for the acquisition of additional knowledge. Doctors of old standing work at the province or zone level.

A functioning social service is beginning slowly to take shape in post-war Kampuchea. The main impression is that Kampuchea is a developing country which is moving forward, where all its citizens receive enough to eat, clothing without holes, and decent housing, and where everyone participates in discussing the future development of the country. It will be a rapid development considering the explosive increase in rice production.

That is if the war with Viet Nam does not put a stop to it.

Pol Pot, Kampuchea's leader:

"Victory over Viet Nam, the Best Thing that has happened"

"We fled here under very difficult conditions. We walked at night over the mountains and it was only after three nights that we reached Kampuchea. My son was shot by the Vietnamese soldiers who tried to prevent our escape."

This is told us by the fifty-five year old Neang Fron. She is one of the 20,000 refugees from Viet Nam who are now located in this district in the border province Takeo.

She and the other refugees have come during the spring and summer. They are Khemers, the native population of the southern part of Viet Nam, and one of Viet Nam's largest minorities. During the war against Kampuchea the living conditions for this Vietnamese minority have become very difficult.

We are the first foreigners who have been allowed to meet these refugees. We spoke with six of them, four women and two men. They come from An Giang province, where they had been involuntarily transported from their villages when the area had been reserved for the army. They had refused to move.

"They Shot"

"Then they came at night. We don't know how many they were, but there were many of them. They shot at us, at our houses and at our village," said the seventy-five year old Mey Som.

Meang Kan, aged fifty, continued, "While we moved, they took our possessions and our clothes. We were forced to pay the soldiers and officials so that they would not beat us up. It went on like this day after day. On the way my child fell very ill. I asked for medicine, but they refused. They killed my child so that it would not hinder my moving. He was nine years old."

She was upset when she remembered this. She and the others gave an account of discrimination, arrests and disappearances.

They were all peasants. Here in Kampuchea they had all received a house, tools and land. They spoke the Khemer language and greeted us in the old manner with the hands together and with bows.

During our tour in the border province, Takeo, we visited a totally newly built village in the cooperative Ang Knol. The village was formerly two kilometres from the border but had been completely wiped out, burned down by the vietnamese

army during its invasion in December. The newly built village now lies 18 kilometres from the border. The leadership of the cooperative told us how they had divided up the tasks during the invasion. The chairman had taken responsibility for the distribution of food to the army units which worked together with the people's guerrillas to wipe out the Vietnamese, and the vice-chairman had led the guerrillas and coordinated action with the army. The Vietnamese army had been forced to leave the district on January 6.

Plunder

They also told of violence committed by soldiers from the Vietnamese army against the civilian population in the village and in other villages in the district. They told of rape, dismembered children and gouged out eyes. They told of Vietnamese civilians coming in the wake of the army to plunder the villages.

We asked them about what was being said: was the invasion provoked by Kampuchean raids against Viet Nam? Then, spontaneously, they smiled for the first time during our serious interview, and it was obvious that they thought it a preposterous accusation.

"Our army has never, not even for one second, planned to drive into Viet Nam, into its territory. We were all happy to be able to concentrate on rebuilding the country and we have been very busy. Besides, here in Takeo province the destruction was especially great."

They also spoke of the friendly relations between the border inhabitants during the war of defence against the United States. The NLF and North Viet Nam had bases here in the district and the Kampucheans had helped them with food, lodging and transportation.

"We guarded closely the secret of where they had their bases on our territory."

Even after the war they continued to help Viet Nam.

"Although we did not have much rice we sold rice across the border to them, and for the sake of solidarity we looked between our fingers when they came over here to fish."

But now there is war. According to the reports we have from both countries, it appears that atrocities have been committed on both sides of the border even if both parties deny responsibility.

We did not visit the areas where war was now taking place, namely the two northern provinces and Svay Rieng province (the Parrot Beak). The limited war which is now going on is taking place on Kampuchean territory. Viet Nam has during the summer intensified its bombings of Kampuchea. The day before we arrived in the country two MIG planes had been shot down over Svay Rieng province.

The background to the present warfare, according to Kampuchea, is that Viet Nam has tried to make Kampuchea enter into an agreement of cooperation with Viet Nam. "special relations" in both the economic and military spheres, in the way as Laos has been associated with Viet Nam. Kampuchea has rejected this. Its leadership stands in the way of Viet Nam's plans in this direction, and Viet Nam presently gives active military support and training to groups working to overthrow Kampuchea's government.

As our hosts in Kampuchea said to us: "Compare with Czechoslovakia."

Viet Nam's attitude towards a socialist country's right to intervene in another country is shown, it is felt, by a statement made on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the Soviet Union's invasion of Czechoslovakia, on the 21st of August this year.

There, Viet Nam spoke of "the Czechoslovakian people's victory over the counter-revolutionary coup" 1968, and the ten years which have passed as having been "a brilliant

period in the history of socialist construction in Czechoslovakia."

During our talks with Kampuchea's prime minister Pol Pot we asked what he saw as the main accomplishment achieved by Kampuchea since its liberation in 1975. We expected him to say that it was the victory over the famine, the irrigation systems or the teaching of the people to read and write.

"It is that we have been able to cope with Viet Nam," he answered.

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THE FIRST REPORT FROM THE CLOSED COUNTRY by Marita Wikander

We stand in the large kitchen of the cooperative Preus Meas in Kompong Cham province. It is clean and neat.

Rice is cooking on the stove, piles of shiny eggplants are lying in a corner and fruit fills baskets on the floor. In Kampuchea food is no longer cooked at home with the family. All meals are served in the common dining rooms. Rice, fish, vegetables, fruit, and, once in a while, meat, is eaten on workdays. Rations were meagre the year following the end of the war, but today there is food for all to have enough to eat.

"But, of course, we still have problems in our cooperative", says a woman. "Many families still live in bad houses. But come back in a few years. Everyone will then have a new house with a tile-roof".

And the new houses are already standing there. Rows of neat, single-family dwellings are being built in every cooperative. A cooperative is like a miniature Kampuchea, the social and economic foundation of society. Peasants make up for more than 90 % of Kampuchea's population and all of them live in cooperatives. The land is collectively owned, but around their own houses, the peasants cultivate a little tobacco or a few banana trees for private consumption. A cooperative is made up of several small villages. Besides common dining rooms and houses there is also a school, a cottage hospital and a repair shop in each cooperative. There is no store. There are no shops, markets or private commerce in the whole country. And there is no money. This seems almost natural when one is in Kampuchea; for what would one need money? Everyone receives housing, food and clothing free of charge, whether one works in a cooperative, a factory, a hospital or other place. At present there is not much to be had besides the bare necessities and Kampuchea's peasants have lived for

centuries almost completely outside a market economy.

Rice is Exported

The cooperative's surplus, mainly rice, is exported. The central authorities collect the rice and provide the cooperatives with agricultural machines, cigarettes, medicine, school books and newspapers.

"But will money be used in the future when there are more products?" we ask.

"We shall see. Perhaps we will need money. In that case we will use it, of course. This matter has been discussed in the cooperatives. At present it is not needed. But the people shall decide how it will be in the future."

Rainy and Warm

During two weeks in August we travelled by car through Kampuchea's most densely populated area: from the Ankor tempels in the northeast to the coast and the Gulf of Siam in the south.

It is the rain period and it is warm. Kampuchea lies near the equator and the climate is determined by the monsoon rains which half the year give abundant precipitation, cause the rivers to overflow their banks and transform the small roads into a mass of mud. The remainder of the year is dry and burning hot. Kampuchea is a poor agricultural country and today, three and one half years after the liberation army's entry into the capital, Phom Penh, I see everywhere unbelievable destruction by war left after the intensive bombings of the United States. Henry Kissinger's talk of bombing Kampuchea to bits was not just an idle threat. Outside of the big towns there is hardly a single undamaged house still standing from before the war.

A Town of 10 000 Inhabitants Stood Here

"Here lay the town of Skoun with 10 000 inhabitants," says our interpreter and points at several heaps of stone and bare, shot-up house walls along the roadside. There are more than thirty such towns which were completely destroyed. All that is left of the university at Kompong Cham is the front gate.

But Kampuchea is not just a poor, developing country where the peasants still plough with oxen, plant rice in the muddy water by hands and harvest with sickles. The century-old agricultural machines and traditional tools are to be seen everywhere, but so too great advances: the giant dams, the long canals and the vast green rice paddies. United Nations' experts and native French-educated engineers studied for a long time the possibilities of building an effective irrigation system in Kampuchea - a system which would prevent floods, provide water during the dry season and thus increase rice harvests. But years of designing and planning remained pretty much on paper. Today, dams, embankments, floodgates and canals, which no one thought possible, are being built.

"We are building here a new canal and a floodgate." says a young man and points out over a tremendous worksite with several thousand people. "We use what we have: our hands and simple tools. There is no other way."

It is a sunny day. Young girls in long lines carry up sand to a large embankment. They balance the baskets over the shoulder. The work appears well organized and effective, but the work tempo is slow. Further along, a large floodgate is being built of cement. The work partially comes to a halt when we arrive. The girls look surprised at us and laugh. We are probably the first Europeans they have seen in years.

One evening we sit on the veranda of a guest house in Kom-

pong Thom. We are listening to the radio. The peasants have just gone home with their buffalo after the days's work in the paddies. The children are splashing in the pond. Some old women sit in front of their houses and chat. All is calm. But the surrounding world reaches us through the air waves. On the Voice of America, Mc Govern is demanding international military efforts to free Kampuchea's suffering people from a genocidal regime. On another wave length, Radio Moscow's English broadcast talks of rebellion in larger areas of Kampuchea. Surprised, I look around. Are they really talking about this country?

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THE FIRST REPORT FROM WITHIN -
 KAMPUCHEA'S PEASANTS CREATE A TOLERABLE EXISTENCE

by Gunnar Bergström
 Svenska Dagbladet, 1 October, 1978

How does a society which does not use money and where the cities have been evacuated function?

In today's Kampuchea the cooperatives are society's foundation. Each is a political and administrative unit made up of between 1000 and 10 000 people.

We visited three such cooperatives, including Ang Trasom, one of the richer cooperatives, often shown to visitors. We could see that this is one of the more well to do cooperatives by the new houses which stand on poles and have roofs of tile, while most people still live in straw huts.

The houses stand in a row around a large dining-room building where all the members of the cooperative eat their meals together. On the wall of the dining-room hangs the Kampuchean state seal and music and news comes from a loud-speaker.

Ploughshares from Bombs

In the kitchen a pig was just being cut up. More meat is eaten at Ang Trasom than is usual in Kampuchea. The everyday food is rice, vegetables and soup. A few times a month they eat chicken.

9000 people live in Ang Trasom cooperative. A few of them work in the smithy where old bombs are made into ploughshares. Many work building houses since the state has decided that all families shall have a new house within a few years. But most people in Ang Trasom work in the rice paddies.

It is rice which has made possible the feeding and clothing of the Kampuchean people. Before the war the country had one of the lowest yields on its land, but it is probable that within a period of several years Kampuchea will experience an explosion in rice production.

The Giant Dam "The 6th of Januari"

The explanation for this explosion is that the huge water resources of the country are better managed now than in the past. An irrigation system was formerly an unusual sight. That is if one does not go back to the time of the Angkor Empire which was based on the cultivation of rice in great abundance.

After having been neglected for 800 years, this know-how is now being put to use. Everywhere in Kampuchea ditches and canals are being built. We saw girls sit and pedal on an old-fashioned devices so that the rice paddies got their water and we also visited the giant "6th of January" dam where 3000 people worked to build a reservoir.

Rice is the household stapel. In 1977 everyone received an average of 850 grams a day, but the ration varies according to age and labour performed. Ang Trasom was self-sufficient in rice and delivered a 200 ton surplus to the state besides. The jute produced by the cooperative also went to the state.

Abandon Egoism

On the roads we often met lorries on the way to cooperatives to pick up their products and deliver clothing, cigarettes, medicine, petrol and other things needed by the cooperatives. I never got a clear answer as to how these things were divided up among the people. The clothes were rationed, but what about the cigarettes or the beer which was brewed in the old brewery in Kompong Som? What happened if someone wanted to have more than the others?

"In that case we talk with him," was the answer we got.
"In that case we try to explain that we must give up being egoistic."

Some kind of rationing certainly exists but it does not seem to be particularly severe. Everyone had plenty of cigarettes and also rolled the tobacco they cultivated around their houses.

Off Every 10th Day

In Ang Trasom, as in the whole country, one is off work the 10th, 20th and 30th each month. Work in the cooperative begins at 6:00 a m and continues until lunch. After lunch follows a long siesta. The work begins again at 3:00 p m and at 6:00 p m the working day is over. These times are the same all over Kampuchea-- a nine hour working day and off every 10th day. We observed that these hours were followed at the different places we came to.

We also visited the empty towns. They have been empty since 1975 when the Communist Party's central committee decided that they should be evacuated. It was thought necessary so that the three million people massed in Phnom Penh might survive. Work with the rice harvest was late and cholera raged in the capital.

Overgrown Houses

There is no escaping the fact that the towns make a strange impression with their almost empty streets and overgrown houses. Phnom Penh seemed the most empty. Perhaps that is because it has such a large area. But the towns are not completely empty. If you drive through Phnom Penh you see people sitting and smoking on the pavement, some cleaning the flower beds and others riding around on bicycles.

In certain suburbs every house seemed occupied. It has been said that the city is empty at night but this is not correct-- those who work in Phnom Penh live there. We saw day nurseries and schools, wash on the line and chickens around the houses, all signs of a settled population.

In Kompong Cham, formerly the third largest town with 20 000 inhabitants, there reportedly now live 5000 people. When I walked around there on my own, I could see that the town seemed much more alive than Phnom Penh. What had formerly been shops had been turned into sewing cottages where women sit and sew clothes, and the vegetable market is being used to dry maize.

Money on the Street

But even if there is a certain bustle in the towns, they make a peculiar impression. Large areas are quickly overgrown. Refrigerators lie on the street rusting. Most cars are now in use but old wrecks lie here and there. In Phnom Penh the roll-fronts are pulled down over the windows of the shops but sometimes one can look through the cracks and see how all sorts of rubbish lies littering about. And money can still be found on the street.

The revolution in Kampuchea bears a strong stamp of peasant revolution and it is possible that there formerly was a certain hatred of the peasants for the towns. It was also there that the money-lenders to whom the peasants were indebted lived, they who could demand an interest of up to 240%. "The fruit grows in the country but goes to the towns," wrote Hou Youn, one of the leading resistance fighters during the war.

Peasants: The New Working Class

Now the towns are being repopulated, not by those who previously lived there but by former peasants who are becoming the new working class of Kampuchea. But why have the towns even been emptied of their former working class? Why are those trained in the old society used to such a small degree?

The answer given by Sok Rim of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs was: "Those who were educated in the old society were not trained to cope with the new situation, to rely on our own forces. They could only think about how they could get ahold of foreign spare parts and experts. Now they must learn from the people. Then their knowledge can partially be used."

In the factories we visited all the workers who were former peasants. In the schools the teachers had previously been peasants. At the electrician school in Phnom Penh all the students came from poor peasant families which had formerly lacked the means to send their children to any school.

But in any case, I must ask myself if the policy of letting the educated people work out in the rice paddies is not a waste of education and capital. Even another question comes up: did not the evacuation of Phnom Penh take place overhastily and did not it result in unnecessary victims?

Bomb Threat...

We asked commander Seng, who took part in the evacuation, if the threat of bombing had hastened the evacuation of the capital.

"Yes," answered Seng. "They had bombed other towns during the war and Kissinger had, to the Vietnamese, threatened to bomb Kampuchea to pieces in 72 hours."

Seng said that it had not been the leadership's policy to

evacuate the city in an unplanned fashion. He denied that the hospitals had been evacuated, but said that there were many patients who did not wish to remain when their families left Phnom Penh. The fact that those who wished to remain were able to do so was confirmed by French doctors who at the French embassy reported that Calmette Hospital continued to function but with Cambodian doctors.

We asked several questions about the re-uniting of families separated when Phnom Penh was emptied. Sok Rim from the Ministry for Foreign Affairs answered: "The first year we were unable to devote much time to this matter. Now when we have solved food supply the situation is different. By way of the cooperatives it is relatively easy to search for a missing person."

Lessons Out of Doors

The schools in Kampuchea are very primitive and we did not see many school buildings. Ang Trasom cooperative had been able to afford to build special school houses but in other places teaching often took place out in the open. The children are taught their mother tongue, geography and mathematics. There are two basic courses in each subject and a third is being prepared. The importance of everyone learning at the same rate all over the country is strongly stressed.

The children go to school for one hour in the morning and one hour in the afternoon. During the rest of the day they do simple chores and a favorite passtime is chasing the birds from the rice paddies. A few children in the towns worked in industry and some of them had tasks which I did not think fit for children.

Many Music Programs

There do not seem to be many books in Kampuchea, but there are school books and books with short stories about the war. In addition, there is the monthly periodical "Kampuchea" and "Phadivat" (Revolution) which is published three times a month. The predominant mass medium is therefore radio.

It sends many music programs and a great deal of traditional folk music, since there is an effort to preserve the roots from the old peasant society and the cold culture, whether it be the Angkor Temples or folk music.

Kampuchea is a country where a visitor meets both happiness and grief, progress and difficulties. The peasant revolution which was carried out contained a great deal of the old peasant revolutionaries' dream of swift justice, but Kampuchea is a very poor country and is a long way from any heavenly existence without contradictions and problems.

A Tolerable Existence

But among all the impressions, from the empty towns which seem strange, to the progress with the irrigation works and the achievement of being self-sufficient in food and clothing three years after the war, the lasting impression is that Kampuchea's peasants, who make up 90 % of the population, have begun creating a tolerable existence from out of a life which according to Sihanouk's advisor "could not be worse".

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