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June 1978. Fluor Corp of the USA got a \$ 500 million contract for the construction of a pipeline. Siam Cement got a \$ 50 million loan arranged by the Chemical Bank and Guaranty Trust of the USA.

Neither these facts nor their implications can be unknown to the Soviet Union and China. The truth is that

both the countries are wooing these states in the interests of global strategy, and, in doing so, resorting to time-honoured diplomatic rules, even if they — that is, the Soviet Union and China — may have to overcome in the process their Marxist squeamishness over the Kautilyan or Machiavelian origin of these diplomatic rules.

mated 26 million craters were created by bombing and 20 per cent of the land surface of Indochina is said to have been contaminated by missile fragments.<sup>2</sup> In Cambodia itself, between March and August 1973, 50 per cent more American bombs were dropped than on Japan during World War II, though Japan is twice as big in area as Cambodia.<sup>3</sup>

## Malcolm Caldwell and Kampuchea

Gail Omvedt

THE death of Marxist scholar-activist Malcolm Caldwell on December 23 in Cambodia (Kampuchea) is a shocking event, not simply because he was deliberately assassinated as the most well known friend of the Cambodian revolution, but because it happened in the context of a war between the two Indochina countries who had triumphed over the most vicious assaults of American imperialism.

Caldwell was the author of several books, including "Cambodia in the South-East Asian War" and most recently "The Wealth of Some Nations" on underdevelopment in the Third World. He edited "Ten Years Military Terror in Indonesia" at the request of the Indonesian communist party, and was an editor of the *Journal of Contemporary Asia* which publishes articles and documents from liberation movements in Asia. He was not simply a writer, but gave generously of his time and energy in speaking and other fund-raising tours to fight imperialism in Asia and the growing racist and fascist movements in Britain itself.

Before his death Malcolm had written a number of articles, which were undoubtedly preparations for a book, on Kampuchea since liberation. He believed that the Kampuchean revolution was the "most maligned revolution in the world". He argued that because the country had been kept so backward by the processes of colonialism, so 'isolated' from any of the benefits of modernisation, so idealised by Westerners as a kind of untouched land of Buddhist repose and the fairyland of Angkor Wat, that the very speed and thoroughness and overwhelming popular support of the revolution when it came was a worse shock than even the defeat in Viet Nam.

Perhaps a really fitting tribute to Malcolm Caldwell then would be a close look at the development of the Kampuchean revolution and the forces which have shaped it. Even if the imperialist-originated depiction of the revolution — as the most barbaric, ex-

tremist and despotic regime in history — has no basis in fact, it is important to understand why such stories could be spread and believed.

French imperialism raped and exploited the Indochinese countryside, turning countries like Viet Nam and Cambodia into exporters of rice and maize to Europe while their peasants starved (two million Vietnamese peasants died of famine during World War II) and while cities like Saigon and Phnom Penh flourished as centres of parasitic bureaucrats and traders who lived in their luxurious villas to the very end. "The Great Prostitute on the Mekong" is what the Cambodian peasants called Phnom Penh<sup>1</sup> where the situation was even more extreme than in Viet Nam because the country was kept under 'indirect rule' (through puppet princes) and no industries of any sort had developed.

American imperialism intensified — deliberately — the parasitic and cancerous growth of the cities. The Americans had early recognised the truth of the saying, "the guerilla lives among the people as a fish lives in water". The 'solution' of course is to drain the water, and this — i.e., the removal of the people from their land — is what counter-revolutionary warfare has been about from the beginning. The most 'normal' form, of course, is the familiar 'relocated' or 'protected' village, where the people are taken away from their homes and put behind barbed wire in a new environment where the guerillas can have no access to them; whether Kenya and the 'Mau Mau' or Malaysia or Algeria the story is much the same.

In Indochina, though, the American government took a further step: a deliberate attempt to bomb the people out of the land altogether and into the cities. Total US and allied air munitions expended in Indochina were seven million tons, compared to a total of two million tons expended during the entire second world war; an additional seven million tons of ground munitions were also expended. An esti-

The effect was to swell the already overgrown cities, and by the end of the war the South Vietnamese urban population had grown to 40 per cent of the total while in Cambodia the single city of Phnom Penh grew from 700,000 to three million. The people of the cities generally could find no productive work but lived instead in service and parasitic occupations (including prostitution, which was said to have employed 400,000 women in Saigon by the end of the war, equivalent to the pre-war population of the city) financed by American dollars. And they were fed, not by the agriculture of their own country which had been shattered by imperialism and war, but by imports of American rice under the ironically named PL-480 'Food for Peace' programme.

The entire social structure of these countries was thus warped, and the withdrawal of American money and American rice necessarily meant a grave, if temporary, crisis — resulting in some decline in living standards and a need for some relocation in the countryside. In Viet Nam, which had after all some industrial basis and infrastructure and a socialist economy in the North, the process could be gradual. Even so, thousands of the frustrated urban dwellers — who had had no experience of country living for 15 years and were unwilling to try and who had been given a mirage of America as the land of unlimited wealth — fled in confusion from the new hardships of socialism, to become the so-called 'boat people'.

Cambodia's situation was worse. Phnom Penh, with three million out of seven million people in the country, had — according to US AID officials — only a six-day supply of rice on hand at the time of liberation and the US departure.

In these circumstances, it is not surprising that the Kampuchean communists chose to vacate the parasitic city, the 'great whore', and take its population to the food rather than *vice versa* and, more important, to give them the only productive work available in the present state of country, that of food production.

The evacuation of Phnom Penh and the setting up of agricultural communes

whose exchange was based on a barter system (little indigenous banking infrastructure existed) was what led to the charges of 'massacres', purges, forced labour, and the general depiction of the regime as some kind of incredibly primitive combination of Asiatic despotism and Orwell's totalitarian nightmare. Such picture has almost no basis of reality.<sup>4</sup> The massacre stories were concocted: the last journalists and priests who left the country reported that they "were not witness to any cruelties". There were unverified Thailand pictures of armed soldiers guarding peasants (Thailand at that time was the most anti-communist country in the area) which were used to prove 'atrocities'. A Vietnamese refugee who crossed the country during three months in 1976, speaking the language, working for food in various villages, heard no atrocity stories till he reached Thailand. It is somewhat dreary to go on refuting baseless evidence, particularly when such stories themselves go on being published in widely circulating dailies after their refutation. The main point is that, while there was undoubtedly some 'force' used in evacuating Phnom Penh, this consisted mainly of the population being told that the alternative was to starve in an empty city. The greatest 'atrocities' of the Kampuchean revolution was probably that the middle class and upper middle class people of the great city were made to live and work like the peasants of their own countryside.

But the evacuation of Phnom Penh was not simply an *ad hoc* response to an objective necessity. It was also a revolutionary strategy. As Malcolm Caldwell argued, "the leaders of the Cambodian Revolution had evolved both short-term tactics and a long-term socio-economic strategy, based upon a sound analysis of the realities of the country's society and economy, in the years before liberation... and the chosen course is a sound one whether one judges it in terms of its domestic appositeness or in terms of its reading of the future of the international economy."<sup>5</sup>

This means that there was a deliberate refusal of an alternative strategy which might have been to stay in Phnom Penh, accept the massive imports of food aid from Russia or China that this would have necessitated, maintain a commercial economy, and maintain their country's ties with the international market. Instead, the Kampuchean leaders chose a peasant-oriented self-reliance, an 'autarkic' strategy of development which involved a temporary

but total withdrawal from the world market, an intensive effort to build up agriculture in co-ordination with the industries which served agriculture, and only after their base was well established to slowly extend their attempts to industrialise and re-build their world trade links.<sup>6</sup>

"Our objective is to make our country a modern agricultural and industrial nation", said deputy premier Ieng Sary in a UN speech in 1975. Just as everywhere — but the Kampuchean revolutionary leaders were convinced that this involved basing themselves on and rebuilding the country's devastated agriculture rather than going for faster, more glamorous aid and 'development' projects. This leadership was a peculiar combination of peasant and scholar (there being almost no real working class in the country). Many — most of these of peasant background themselves — had degrees from Paris, like president Khieu Samphan, who had a PhD in agrarian economics from the Sorbonne, working with other marxist scholars there at the time like Samir Amin. The conclusion of their youthful Marxist scholarship was that premature integration into an international economy simply perpetuated the mechanisms of underdevelopment: a theoretical expression of the raw experience of the Cambodian peasant who saw his rice and labour drain from the country into the city and from Asia out to Europe.

From 1971, in liberated areas, the Khmer Rouge began organising peasants to construct intensive irrigation works which eventually made possible double and even triple-cropping, while mutual-aid groups and production solidarity groups were developed into agricultural co-operatives. By 1975, in spite of the ferocious bombing, the absorption of an additional three million people had been prepared for — and the first achievement of the Kampuchean revolution was indeed to be able to feed all its people at a growing level of quantity as well as increasing diversity with new methods of growing fruit, vegetables and raising livestock and fish. With this as a basis, the development of small industries and a growing export programme could begin. According to Caldwell writing in April 1978, the regime's economic policies have been a substantial success and recent evidence — including testimony from a visiting Japanese delegation in August — has confirmed the stability of the regime and a well-organised agricultural and small-scale industrial economy. Malcolm Caldwell himself was undoubtedly preparing much

more to say on this matter.

As far as I know, Malcolm had had very little to say publicly on the growing conflict between Kampuchea and Viet Nam by the time of his death. Like most Western anti-imperialists, he was incredibly pained by developments in Indochina and felt that public condemnation of any country was out of place. Indeed, his mood was to focus more on developments in Britain: the growing anti-racist struggle and his favourite cause of Scottish nationalism. But it is hard to know how he could have avoided saying something about the role of Viet Nam: a popular and ultimately rational revolutionary regime does not crumble before mass insurrection, though it may be driven back into the jungles by superior firepower. In the end, Malcolm did go to South East Asia, and his voice has been silenced. And more than ever, huge question marks hang before the future of the revolutions not only in Kampuchea but in Viet Nam and Laos as well.

### Notes

[Much of the information here is taken from the draft of Caldwell's most recent paper available to me: "Cambodia: Rationale for a Rural Policy", read at the Seminar on Underdevelopment and Subsistence Reproduction in Southeast Asia at Bielefeld, West Germany, April 21-23, 1978. Also see George Hildebrand and Gareth Porter, "Cambodia: Starvation and Revolution", New York: Monthly Review Press, 1976; Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman, 'Distortion at Fourth Hand', *The Nation*, June 25, 1977 — an excellent critique of the anti-Cambodian propaganda; and Denzil Peiris, 'Cambodian Version of Socialism: Strong Rural Bias', *The Times, of India*, May 29, 1973.

- 1 Caldwell, "Cambodia..."; p 5.
- 2 See "Viet Nam: The Legacy of War", a factsheet prepared by the American Friends Service Committee Indochina Programme.
- 3 Caldwell, "Cambodia..."; p 21.
- 4 Caldwell, "Cambodia..."; pp 32-34; Chomsky and Herman, "Distortion at Fourth Hand". The overwhelming majority of anti-regime propaganda is based on refugee accounts, which are notoriously unreliable by any scientific standards (the refugee not only has natural reasons for exaggerating the brutality of the regime he/she flees from, but also as a helpless sojourner in a foreign land is almost forced to the kind of stories people in power want to hear), and even here Caldwell argues that refugees of worker and peasant origin gave significantly different accounts.
- 5 Caldwell, p 1.
- 6 Caldwell, "Cambodia..."; see also *Far Eastern Economic Review*, June 2, 1978, pp 40-4 and October 13, 1978, pp 10-11, for some accounts of reopening of international ties.