

## **Caldwell on Kampuchea**

In December of last year, when Malcolm Caldwell was murdered in Kampuchea, the Kampuchean revolution lost one of its most valued friends, and at the same time Britain lost one of its most original and interesting socialist thinkers.

One of his last works, written in April 1978, was entitled *Kampuchea: rationale of a rural policy*. The following review of this pamphlet was written by Gail Omvedt for the Indian journal "Economic and Political Weekly", June 23 of this year (we have abridged it):

It can no longer be denied that the Communist Party of Kampuchea (known in the bourgeois and revisionist press as the "Pol Pot regime") was overthrown not by a popular uprising but by over a hundred thousand Vietnamese soldiers.

The justification has been on moral principles – by claiming that the Kampuchean communists were "mass murderers" responsible for the deaths of millions of their own people and for serving imperialist interests in wanton attacks on Vietnamese borders.

Unfortunately this justification has convinced very few – it has not convinced the majority of Third World countries; it has not convinced even independent neighbouring Asian communists such as the Democratic Peoples' Republic of Korea (which condemned the invasion) or the Communist Parties of Thailand and Malaysia.

### **CALDWELL DEFENDS KAMPUCHEA**

And it has not convinced the independent Marxist or progressive scholars in Europe or the US who first analysed and replied to the propaganda against Kampuchea when it was originated by the imperialists – scholars such as George Hildebrand, Gareth Porter, Noam Chomsky and many others who showed not only that these slanders had little basis in fact but that to the contrary the Kampuchean revolution was laying the basis for avoiding starvation and disease.

Most of the scholars have come to the defence of Kampuchea recently – out of a simple loyalty to the facts, because the Vietnamese have produced no evidence to justify their actions, and not because they themselves are committed to a "pro-Chinese" or any other position.

Of these Marxist scholars, certainly the most committed in terms of his long-term service to the Asian revolutionary cause was Malcolm Caldwell. Caldwell paid for his convictions with his life last December, but his voice is not so easily silenced.

### **KAMPUCHEA'S LINE OF DEVELOPMENT**

The book deserves to be widely read, not simply by those who want to "defend Kampuchea", but because it discusses the fundamental issue of the model of development (perhaps "line" would be more accurate) which should be followed after a revolution, a line which determines the nature of the "transition to socialism", which may even determine whether this transition is to occur at all.

For Caldwell himself does not simply "defend" the Kampuchean revolution; he sees it as going on the path which must be followed, as "one of the most significant early indications of the great and

necessary change beginning to convulse the world in the later 20th century and to shift from a disaster-bound course to one holding out promise of a better future for us all”.

Why is this? Because the Kampuchians were following a policy in which the development of industry and trade were to be organically linked to a self-sufficient agriculture – and hence autonomy in food production – as a necessary base.

#### **POVERTY AND OVERDEVELOPMENT**

Caldwell is clear that such a path has become necessary today, if even the primary goal of feeding a nation's people is to be achieved. The alternative, according to him, is to be caught in the net of international imperialism which in its current stage necessarily involves agricultural export-dependence and the depressing of living standards of the rural majority (and urban poor) to the point of starvation.

For example, India exports beef, goats, vegetables, fruits and a projected one million tons of food grains a year while countless numbers of agricultural labourers survive on one meal a day.

Caldwell's thesis links this argument with issues raised in the fight against 'overdevelopment' in imperialist centres (now highlighted in the antinuclear movement in the US).

This is an important work, even if in many ways an unfinished one – and the tragic significance of the present famine and food dependence of Kampuchea is precisely to highlight this significance.