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MODERN KAMPUCHEA
by Hamad Abdul Aziz al Aiya

I was in Peking seated with some of Kampuchea leaders when news of the liberation of Phnom Penh and the surrender of the remainder of the puppet regime came -- news which fired me with visions of a new future for the Kampuchean people. My notice in writing this report comes out of the integration of the Palestinian struggle with that of Kampuchea -- our two people have been in unrelenting struggle against puppet regimes and the same imperialist supporters. It also arises the constant solidarity and moral support the Palestinian and Kampuchean revolutionaries have given each other during war times. This militant integration continues to be strengthened. As a result, I had the chance to visit Democratic Kampuchea in Feb. 1976 on the invitation of the Kampuchean Government. The visit left with me very deep, unique and inforgetable impressions gathered in two successive weeks among the workers and peasants -- and the wreckage, battlefields and bomb craters. These impressions are my strong motive in writing the following few pages.

In this preface I would like to say that my report is confined to the struggle of the Kampuchean people within the borders of Kampuchea. But this does not mean that the Kampuchean revolution is separate from the world revolution. Its specific experience, sufferings and the consequences of their victorious revolutionary line have a direct relationship to the struggle against imperialism, racism and racist zionism.

My reader will find no extracts from recorded references, quotations from history books and files of international conferences. Here I have given real facts which I saw among the people, their land and their activities in the ten months after liberation. All my references are facts and feelings gained from talks with cadres of the revolutionary organization and with peasants, and workers and soldiers.

Though I am proud that my modest report is among the first to be written for abroad from across the Kampuchean land itself, from my own eyewitness experience in a number of provinces where the liberated people were rebuilding their country, I do not presume that it covers the full breadth and significance of the Kampuchean cause, for the country is still at the beginning of its march. But Democratic Kampuchea is being guided by a firm and clear political line. It will certainly develop through the tremendous efforts which I could see, becoming an example among the third world family and the sister non-aligned countries.

I am sure that rapid developments in Kampuchea will soon overpass this report many times. I might have made higher estimates and portrayed wider pictures of the future on the basis of analyses of facts given my by Kampuchean friends. There is a glorious future ahead of Kampuchea.

I hope that my readers will pardon me for shortcomings in this report and I wish to remind them again that my writing is based only on information concerning the first ten months after Kampuchea's liberation.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The first landing site for the visitor is the Phnom Penh Airport near the modern capital on the west bank of the Mekong River. I visited other modern Kampuchea cities and towns as modern as Phnom Penh. However, ancient Angkor, 6 kms. west of Siem Reap, reflects the old civilization which existed in Kampuchea. Here strong fortresses, pagodas, engraved drawings and the five systematic pagodas date back to the Angkor Empire of the 9-13th century. These monuments are treasured by the Kampuchean people. From 1970 until liberation in 1975, they fought from them in defence of the honour of their ancestors in spite of the fact that Angkor was the target of intense bombing. I could see the effect of napalm on the road leading west from Angkor Wat. In spite of the concentrated attack, however, the flags of the revolution remained flying over these fortresses defying American bombing and the guns of their lackeys.

It is bitter fact that the real history of Kampuchea has never been written -- for no Kampuchean has ever written about his country's past. All available material was prepared by French, English and Vietnamese scholars who wrote as they chose and according to their own background and analysis - hence their works cannot be taken as dependable. The government of Democratic Kampuchea and its revolutionary organization, however, are preparing themselves for the task of writing the country's history. I was struck by the tremendous research already undertaken and the marvelous results already achieved. Much work is being done to compile narratives of villagers. Good information is being revealed from documents found in Bhuddist temples and from other old and detailed documents dating back to the seventh century.

The Kampuchean-Thai borders were demarcated according to agreements reached between France and Thailand in 1904 and 1907. To the east and south, Vietnam recognized the present borders of Kampuchea. The Kampuchean people are sentimentally attached to the areas and islands annexed by France to Vietnam because they are parts of their homeland. Yet the democratic state of Kampuchea had asserted that it has no intention of expanding her present territory and that here policy does not incorporate any regional ambitions. On the contrary Kampuchea has the sincere intention of living within her present borders. Since the Kampuchean people's ancestors secured what is now in the hands of their descendants, they are determined to preserve and defend it at all costs.

I had the rare and valuable opportunity of seeing those historical places with the remains of the war, sunken vessels in the river and traces of fierce battles still obvious on the banks in spite of the growth of farms along the river. I was lucky to be in the company of Comrade Ieng Sary and other cadres touring by boat from Phnom Penh to Neak Luong and then continuing by car along Highway No.1 and Highway No 15 to Panam. Here they answered my questions and referred to the war wreckage and losses the peasants and soldiers still suffered when they ploughed the land around the former enemy military bases and positions where numerous plastic mines had been laid on the eve of their collapse. I shall never forget the serious but smiling features of a cadre in military uniform who stood between a new farm and an old runway at Neak Luong to tell about the farm and how they had dealt with the

related the incidents that took place in the area during the war. Our return along Highway no.1 enabled us to see the signs of the war's destruction -- burned vehicles, collapsed houses and bomb-cut trees. But there were also the sights of the new life -- neat, precise rows of wooden houses for both new and old peasants. We enjoyed seeing the collective labor of young men and women so enthusiastically devoted to the land. They were in groups plowing, digging canals, irrigating the land in many different ways more often by the primitive wooden waterwheels moved by human feet. Others were gathered under the thick trees attending regular discussions and lessons regarding their new life. Where-ever you go in the countryside, you see vigorous livelihood and activities of the liberated masses.

In the war, many people did not understand the reasons for the struggle. After the nationalization of trade in 1972 in the liberated zones, blackmarketing still remained. To counter this, the revolutionary organization set up co-operatives in the countryside and abolished the currency. By the virtue of those co-ops massive accommodations for city evacuees were prepared without much complication before liberation. Constant ideological education was carried out in the co-ops during the war, particularly effective from the end of March 1975, when the revolution was reaching final victory, with a view to getting the peasantry of the early liberated areas ready to receive evacuees from cities to be liberated such as Phnom Penh.

I would like to point out that the present co-operative system in Kampuchea is not a new and sudden creation. All that happened after the complete liberation of the country was that the newly liberated areas followed the example of the previously liberated areas. Some of the western press tried to give the impression that the people of Phnom Penh were taken to unknown experimental fields. But the reality is that they just joined their compatriots who had built for them, through strenuous labour and struggle, a new and mature social community in the countryside.

By the end of 1975 and the beginning of 1976, the government of Kampuchea was also able to secure the food supply for every citizen and have a surplus of rice. In Feb.1976, the government offered 50,000 Tons of rice for export and sale. The highway and railway linking most of the provinces had been restored. As a result of the successful harvest in October, the confidence of both the former and the new peasants grew as did enthusiasm to raise production and hopes to increase the per hectare yield in excess of three tons in the next harvest.

Many citizens started to return home after the liberation. But life in new Kampuchea has changed from the roots, especially in the fields of social organization and administration. The government welcomes people who return to their country where they wish to live and work as other citizens. It is well aware that those who have committed crimes during the Lon Nol regime are against the social change and have fled away for fear of the revolution. There is a group of officers who were sent by Lon Nol for training in the United States. They now wish to return home. Their desire has been accorded with welcome. I noticed during my trip from Peking to Phnom Penh, that the majority of the passengers were Kampuchean returning from France. All of them were excited and crowded at the plane's windows to have a look on the MeKong River before landing.

The State of Democratic Kampuchea

The liberation marks the beginning of a glorious new stage in the history of the people of Kampuchea, and the new-borne revolutionary regime is called "Democratic Kampuchea". Prince Sihanouk commented on excluding the word "Republic" at the present stage, saying "Lon Nol tried to cheat the people of Kampuchea when he said that he was making a republican system for them by his coup, a coup planned by the Americans for their own interests. The people, therefore, hate to hear the word 'republic' because it is attached to the name of Lon Nol. The people cannot accept this word and their hatred may extend for a long time, maybe twenty years, in spite of the fact that our state system is in reality republican." As for the name of "Khmer" which appeared in Lon Nol's 'Khmer Republic', Sihanouk said, "The 'Khmers' refer to a nationality in Kampuchea like the 'Hans' in China. Since there are other nationalities forming the Kampuchea nation 'the Khmers' is no longer used in naming our country."

The Theory and the Ruling Party

Those who are interested in studying the affairs of Kampuchea have repeatedly asked its leaders about the identity of the new regime. Is it communist? Is it socialist? Is there a ruling party adhering to a certain theory? Before telling of my personal impression, I quote the words of some Kampuchea leaders who were answering these questions:

Ieng Sary said, "We did not act with the guidance of definite theories, but followed our feelings and carried out the struggle in a practical way. We passed through different forms of struggle under different circumstances. What is important is the determination and faith of the principled revolutionaries in their cause. We did not study in ideological schools, but practiced struggle in the light of the concrete situation of our country and people.

We saw that the people were very poor and miserable. We did not believe that misery and poverty come from heaven. Our people worked hard and were not lazy, but why were they poor? We found that the reason was the foreign exploitation. Facts in history have confirmed it. In 1940, France dispatched large numbers of troops to our country and perpetrated the most ruthless exploitation of our people. In 1945, came the Japanese invaders who deprived the country of its sovereignty for months. With these imperialist invasions, numerous foreign exploiters entered our country. Our understanding of the reasons for the misery of the Kampuchean people motivated us towards struggle.

Our aim has been to abolish all forms of the exploitation of man by man in Kampuchea. In the past, commerce was in the hands of foreigners. The peasants used to work and sweat the whole year round but remained poor, while another class enjoyed the fruits of their production. The capitalists corrupted the administrative officials with bribery and used another part of their capital to make projects and investments to favoring the foreigners. The result was that the entire burden fell upon the poor peasants. As to the middle class, their wavering character added to the sufferings of the peasants.

We deal with matters in the light of our country's conditions. We are not concerned about what we are called abroad. *The policy of Kampuchea remains in the framework of its Constitution of Democratic Kampuchea. We respect all friends, but we are not following any of them. We do not import foreign ways of thinking and working, nor do we imitate others.*"

Prince Norodon Sihanouk once said in the presence of other important Kampuchean leaders, "Some countries, the Europeans in particular, like to call our state communist. I do not know what communism they refer to, since there are many kinds of communist Parties and socialist parties such as those in France, Italy etc. We are Kampuchean and the leaders of Kampuchea did not participate in the communist conference (he refers to the Conference of the Soviet Communist Party)."

A high ranking cadre said, "We offered thousands of martyrs to liberate our country and build up our modern independence. We don't follow or imitate others, but try to build up the mastery of the poor peasants over the countryside in accordance with our reality."

With an over-all appreciation of these quotations, a review of the history of the Kampuchean people, and a careful observation of the reality of the present, we can see a vanguard organization of very high qualities that has obtained its rich experience through prolonged, determined revolutionary struggle. This organization possesses clear sight, firm stand and adequate ability to draw its policies guiding different revolution stages and take emergency steps as required by the development of the struggle. This organization is so conscious, vigilant and experienced that it was able to take initiative in face of the American-backed coup without the least hesitation of perplexity. It has been able to mobilize the masses and form the united national front with the revolutionary organization as the backbone to lead the entire nation towards unity and victory.

The Executive Authority

This is the cabinet, with prime minister and ministers elected by the Congress. All the cabinet members work together with the people in the countryside and production centres. The cabinet practices a revolutionary style of work. Ministers act with only that small amount of bureaucracy that cannot be avoided in any other country. The cabinet does not possess great files, nor does it issue orders or instructions through written documents. Routine, periodic meetings of the cabinet are unnecessary. When important matters need discussion, the cabinet meets for a short time and takes decisions in accordance with the principles of the general line. After the meeting, the cabinet members rush back to the fields of work to implement the decisions which guide their functions. Thus they are both markers and executors of government policies. This enables them to avoid misinterpretation of the policies or decisions among the basic administrative bodies and among the masses. The leading structure is therefore brought closer to the masses. They formulate policies on the basis of reality and possibility and have them executed on time and with good results.

I saw the ministers during my visit to the country, executing cabinet decisions while working together with the masses in production. Ieng Sary the Foreign Minister was left in the capital to deal with foreign affairs with the assistance of five other cadres. He also has to organize the workers in the city's factories. In addition, the work of urban security is placed on his shoulders.

The broadcasting service plays an extremely important role, in educating the masses in the essential meaning of the general political line which guides specific policies dealing with concrete problems in various fields of work, in particular in the field of production, thus bringing the potentialities of the masses into full play as production forces rebuilding the country.

The System of Co-operatives

The co-operatives came into being in the liberated rural areas during the liberation war, and at this time obtained their initial experience in solving problems in economy, social affairs and production. After liberation, the whole nation joined the co-operatives. The co-operatives are democratic administrative units which constitute the new Kampuchean society. They deal with social affairs popular propaganda, education, culture, politics as well as production. Its system is different from the popular committee in Democratic Korea, the administrative committee in the Chinese people's communes. The Kampuchean leaders pointed out that they do not imitate foreign countries and that the way of their new life is the result of their own experience in struggle and proper analysis of the subjective conditions of their country.

The co-operative, governing an area as big as three to four villages, is the basic-level unit of the country's administrative structure. Its functions are:

- 1) to organize agricultural and handicrafts production,
- 2) to arrange transportation,
- 3) to organize local commercial exchange with other co-operatives and with the state in accordance with the system of goods exchange (money is not used).
- 4) to take care of social welfare and cultural, political education,
- 5) to exercise administrative authority.

Other functions stress the role of the co-operative as a basic social unit -- almost a miniature of Democratic Kampuchea.

Commerce:

1) Internal exchange of commodities. To meet the need of co-operatives for commodities available in others, the "exchange system" among the co-operatives is applied. The other phase of domestic commerce is the exchange of commodities between the state and the co-operatives. For supplies which the co-operatives fail to obtain through exchange among themselves, the co-operatives exchange their surplus production with the government. In both cases no currency is involved.

Democratic Kampuchea sees that the safety of its economic and social plans requires the absence of local currency, at least for the present. Therefore, neither domestic nor foreign currency is used inside the country. This is indeed unique in the world of today, even among the socialist countries. It sounds incredible, but as far as I am concerned, I am satisfied when I compare it with the numerous diseases striking world society today as a result of running after banknotes. Though I was impressed by the no-money life that I enjoyed with the Kampuchea people during my visit, I felt that neither the Kampuchea leaders nor myself are certain of the possibility of doing without money for long.

2) External commerce. It is the state that shoulders full and direct responsibility for the foreign trade. Both the material income from state property and what it receives from the co-operatives through the above-mentioned exchange are the sources supplying Kampuchea's

foreign trade. From the total production under the government disposal, a percentage is reserved for emergency use such as in natural catastrophes. The rest is exported to exchange for badly needed commodities and to acquire/foreign hard currency

foreign hard currency which is also vital for the newly developing state. Kampuchea's most important export commodities are rice, rubber, wood, fish, wine and cigarettes. The needs of the country are technology and petroleum. While being anxious to improve the living conditions of its people, Kampuchea never relaxes its effort to eliminate the remnants of the old economic system. The state is doing its utmost to achieve self-sufficiency in various aspects of economy. Imports will be very limited and nothing will be allowed to interfere with the principle of self-reliance.

The Social Conditions

As I have said, the co-operative is a basic social unit which takes care of education, production, security, health and welfare. It contains all the classes left over by the old society and tries to melt the differences among them through undistinguished working and living conditions. They work together as a newly created human community. Signs of contradictions and class struggle seem to have vanished before the complete mass mobilization in the struggle against nature for food production and the intensive political education which are the over-all part of the new life.

Laws controlling marriage and birth are unnecessary. Instead, the government encourages the youth to get married in order to boost a population of only 7 million, while the capacity of the country can be 15 million according to economic estimates. Polygamy and polyandry, formerly common in the country, are now prohibited. The family is considered as a respected cell in the new Kampuchea society. The bourgeois habits of the old society that spoiled family relations and interrupted marriage are absolutely prohibited. Marriage is encouraged, but corrupt sexual relations are forbidden.

There is no unemployment in the country, backed by constitution which stresses that no civilian in Kampuchea should be unemployed. Even old people and disabled soldiers are engaged in suitable work, ~~for none~~ of them wish to depend on others and live an easy life. The Buddhist monks, who used to live in temples as a special community have given up their privileges and are now mingled with the working masses in the countryside. They enjoy themselves in manual productive labour and the new collective life of the co-operatives, thus turning themselves from a consuming strata into a productive social force.

The New Peasants

"New peasants", a term frequently mentioned in the talks of the cadres of Kampuchea refers to all former city inhabitants who have evacuated the cities and joined the peasants in the co-operatives. They were civil employees, merchants, religious men, intellectuals and poor urban inhabitants. All of them are now working in farming or handicrafts, living in wooden peasant houses just like the old peasants. Because of the same Kampuchea smile on their faces and the black shirts these "new peasants" wear, visitors are unable to distinguish them from regular villagers. It is natural that some of these new peasants may grumble, especially former businessmen, exploiters and other privileged personalities of the past. But the government is able to deal with it through ideological education and mass engagement in production to raise living levels rapidly.

I saw many large groups under red banners receiving education under trees. The owners of big ~~banners~~ buildings and grand villas in the cities are told that they can go back to where they were living in the past,

living in the past, but in this case they will not have any rice until they die of hunger.

The Repopulation of the Cities

The cities are nearly uninhabited while active steps are being taken to reconstruct destroyed factories and build new ones. All handicrafts attached to agriculture and other minor crafts will be settled permanently in the countryside. Medium and heavy industries will mostly be confined to the cities' suburbs in order to utilize the old factories and the transport facilities, especially river and sea transport. I noticed that all factories reconstructed in Phnom Penh's outskirts are very near the Mekong.

In the light of these facts we can conclude that the city population will be mainly workers concentrated in the suburbs around the factories, where living quarters are also available. It was said that the repopulation of the cities in the future will be controlled in accordance with the number of workers needed. Those chosen to be workers are required to have a high political consciousness and revolutionary moral.

Officials told me that the coming population for Phnom Penh will be confined to the following categories;

- 1) Workers engaged in production in factories on the outskirts of the city.
- 2) Persons engaged in civil and public services necessary for the residence of the government, workers and foreign diplomats.
- 3) Diplomatic missions, now being accepted to the country very slowly.

Other cities where some of the old houses still remain and where new houses will be built are to contain only the first two categories. This policy will wipe out the differences in living conditions among the people and will guarantee a prosperous life in the countryside. The desire to move from the countryside to the city is forced to be given up. Living facilities will be almost the same in both the countryside and the cities throughout Kampuchea.

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NOTICE

There has been a constantly increasing demand for News From Kampuchea. Our first issue was printed in 250 copies, the second 350, the third 450 and this fourth issue 550. However, as our circulation goes up so do our costs, and we are always close to financial disaster. Please send your subscriptions (\$5 p.a., \$10 overseas air mail) in promptly, and, of course, further donations are always welcome.

Vol.1 Nos. 3 and 4 of New From Kampuchea have been produced by the collective work of Doua Chanthou, Ung Dunhuor, Den Kiernan and Chring Sophal.

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