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Cambodia: The Eastern Zone Massacres

**A Report on Social Conditions and
Human Rights Violations in the
Eastern Zone of Democratic Kampuchea
Under the Rule of Pol Pot's (Khmer Rouge)
Communist Party of Kampuchea**

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CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF

**HUMAN
RIGHTS**

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

1986

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A REPORT ON SOCIAL CONDITIONS AND HUMAN RIGHTS
VIOLATIONS IN THE EASTERN ZONE OF DEMOCRATIC
KAMPUCHEA UNDER THE RULE OF POL POT'S (KHMER ROUGE)
COMMUNIST PARTY OF KAMPUCHEA

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PREFACE

Most of the information submitted to the United Nations on the terrible human rights violations in Cambodia (Democratic Kampuchea) under Khmer Rouge rule was based on the accounts of refugees fleeing into Thailand from the Northwestern provinces of Cambodia from late 1975 through early 1977. These early refugee accounts depicted a consistent pattern of gross violations of internationally recognized human rights and a staggering amount of arbitrary and summary executions.

Yet, it is now known that the "worst" massacre or single series of massacres occurred in mid to late 1978 in Cambodia's "Eastern Zone," those provinces bordering on Vietnam, from where relatively few refugees reached Thailand to make contact with Western journalists and researchers.

The account which follows chronicles the 1978 massacres and the deteriorating social conditions that preceded and accompanied the massacres in Svay Rieng, Prey Veng, and eastern Kompong Cham provinces. Conservatively estimated, one hundred thousand deaths occurred there in six months in this small portion of Cambodia.

This documentation is based on extensive on-site interviews conducted in the Khmer language in Cambodia in 1980 and 1981 with a variety of Eastern Zone survivors of various social, political and ethnic backgrounds. A small number of the testimonies were taken from Cambodian refugees now living in France who were eyewitnesses to the murders of Eastern Zone villagers evacuated to other provinces for execution.

Mr. Kiernan's extensive interviews allow a district-by-district, region-by-region survey of death and destruction in one of the seven "zones" of Cambodia into which the country was organized by the Communist Party of Kampuchea after 1975. Kiernan's report also allows Cambodian survivors from these provinces to tell their own stories -- what happened to their families and to their villages -- personal histories heretofore largely unavailable in the West.

In human rights terms, what is portrayed in Kiernan's analysis constitutes "a consistent pattern of gross violations of internationally recognized human rights", that is, wholesale and severe violations of the norms and standards established in the articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: rights pertaining to the integrity of the person, the rights of opinion, expression, belief, assembly and movement, workplace rights, family rights, the right to the most elementary forms of property, and so on. It was not that the Khmer Rouge had no knowledge or understanding of "human rights". As Kiernan points out, the Khmer Rouge divided the population into three categories vis-a-vis eligibility for rights. And it was their policy to grant "full rights" status to only one third of the population. In practice terrible violations were perpetrated against all categories of the population.

There are in this account innumerable indications of repressive phenomena now described as "disappearances" (when state authorities abduct persons who are held incommunicado or executed) and "extra-judicial executions" (murder by government outside of any legal process). What is plainly evident in the story of the Eastern Zone massacres is that the Central Khmer Rouge leadership is murderously

striking out against real, suspected or imagined regionally based political groups within the Khmer Rouge movement.

What is also evident is that the massacres in the Eastern Zone went way beyond being directed only at perceived political groups or opponents in that region. The massacres -- what Khmer Rouge internal memoranda and external propaganda identified as the purification of the people -- were also directed against a substantial portion of the general population as well. The overwhelming majority of those persons executed were simple peasants or urban evacuees without any particular political affiliation, people who were deemed irremediably tainted simply by virtue of having resided under the jurisdiction of allegedly dissident Khmer Rouge elements.

The names of those who died in these massacres are irretrievably lost to history. Their remains are scattered among the "killing fields" that now scar the Cambodian landscape. It is possible to comprehend and react to the murder by government of a prominent Polish priest, or four religious workers in El Salvador. It is much more difficult to comprehend or respond to the deliberate murder of over one hundred thousand persons, particularly when those deaths are but a portion of an estimated one to two million people who died at the hands of their government and their government's policy in less than four years of Khmer Rouge rule.

Perhaps both the human imagination and the international institutions established after World War II for the promotion and protection of human rights are numbed, overwhelmed, and immobilized by the

magnitude of such numbers. Nonetheless, the former Director of the United Nations Human Rights Center noted, in a 1985 Amnesty International Report on Political Killings by Governments:

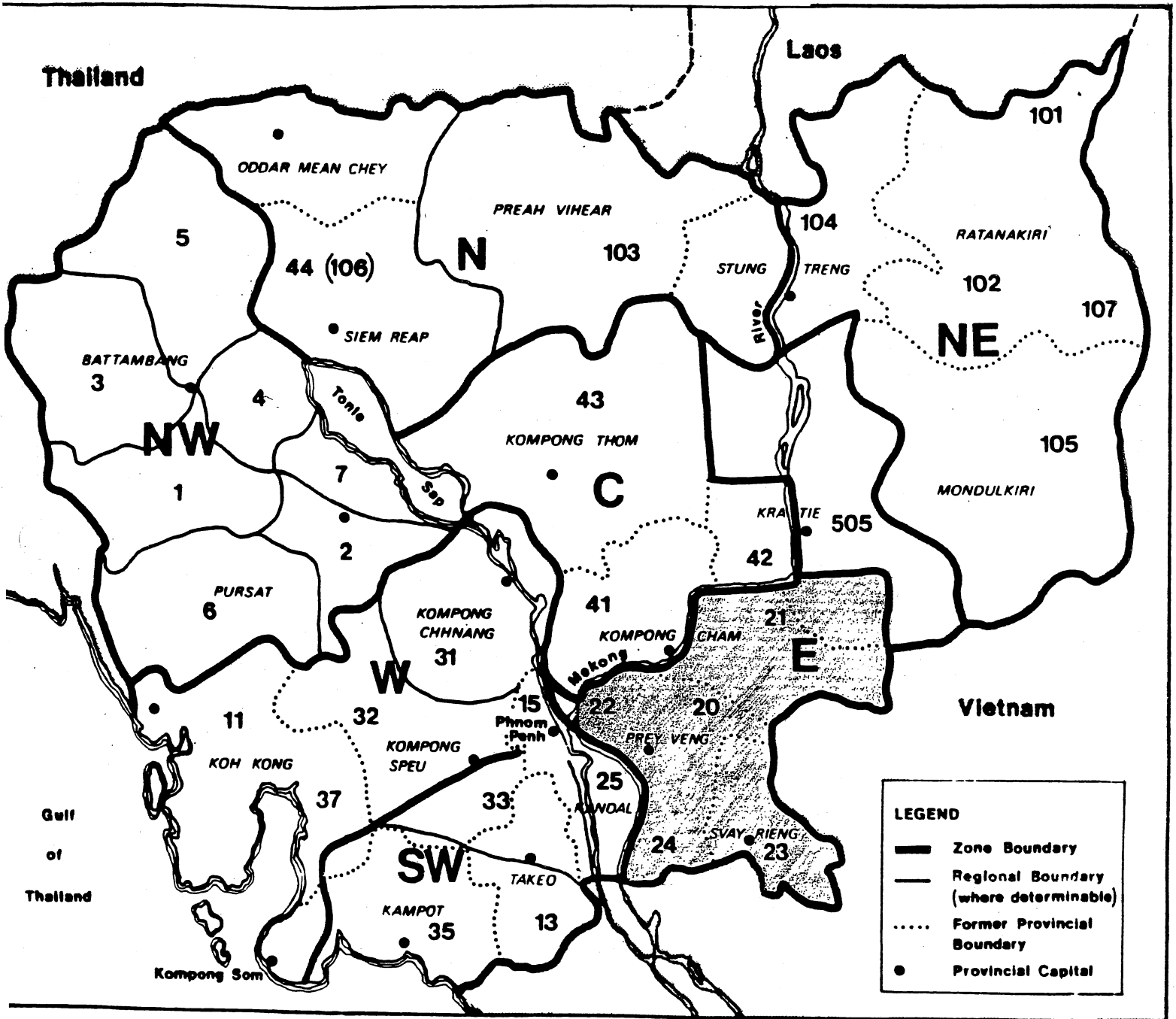
In matters of gross and persistent violations of human rights, in situations of extreme human suffering and wherever and whenever survival is at stake, we also have to raise questions of accountability. Who are the perpetrators of these gross violations of human rights, what political authorities carry direct and indirect responsibility and who are their accomplices? Those who hold power must be held accountable for the consequences of its exercise.

Those responsible for the extreme suffering and terrible human rights violations described in Kiernan's research have yet to be held accountable.

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DEMOCRATIC KAMPUCHEA (CAMBODIA)



EASTERN ZONE (shaded area)

Introduction

This research report is based on interviews with 87 people who lived in all five Regions of the Eastern Zone of Democratic Kampuchea between 1975 and 1979. They include forty "base people" (mostly peasants who had lived in communist-held areas during the 1970-75 war), twenty-seven "new people" (those evacuated in April 1975 from the towns held until then by the Lon Nol government) and twenty revolutionary cadres. Thirty-three of the 'base people' interviewed were peasants; twenty-three of the total of eighty-seven were women. Their ages ranged from fifteen to sixty-seven; all were ethnic Khmer apart from three Cham and three Chinese. Nine of the interviewees were refugees in Australia or France. The rest were interviewed in or near their homes or workplaces in Kampuchea itself. None of the interviews were conducted in refugee camps.

In addition, a further five accounts, obtained from refugees soon after their arrival in France in 1979, are presented towards the end of this report. These are eyewitness accounts by residents of other Zones (the Northwest and North) of the massacres of easterners forcibly evacuated there in 1978. They were the first reports of these events to be published in the West. (*)

Democratic Kampuchea was organised into six major territorial Zones (the East, Southwest, West, Northwest, North and Northeast, plus several smaller regions under more direct central control). Each of these Zones (phumipeak) was divided into Regions (damban), which were numbered; the Eastern Regions were nos.20-24. Each Region was divided, like provinces before the communist victory, into as many

(*) Ben Kiernan, "Genocide in de Oostelijke Zone", Vietnam Bulletin, no. 16, 25 June 1980, pp. 20-22. (Amsterdam).

as ten districts (srok), each district into subdistricts (khum), and each subdistrict into villages (phum). Communist Party of Kampuchea (CPK) local committees, usually of three members each, controlled these administrative institutions at every level.

The Eastern Zone comprised the former provinces of Svay Rieng, Prey Veng and eastern Kompong Cham, plus Chhlong district of Kratie province. The Zone bordered on Vietnam in the east and the Mekong River in the west. The major townships were Svay Rieng, Prey Veng, Neak Luong (accidentally bombed by US aircraft in 1973) and the rubber plantation centres of Chup and Krek. Like Phnom Penh, all these urban areas were evacuated in 1975 (or before, in the cases of Chup and Krek). The large rubber plantations continued to function in the Democratic Kampuchea period, but most of the Zone has always been riceland, watered by the Mekong and Tauch rivers. Prey Veng was the second largest rice-growing province in Kampuchea in the 1960's, and probably retained this position in Democratic Kampuchea. There are some extensive forested areas in the north of the Zone near Kratie, but the East is otherwise well-populated. According to the statistics accompanying the government's Four Year (1977-80) Economic Plan, the population of the Zone in mid-1976 was 1.7 million. This figure included probably 300,000 or more "new people" (or "depositees", neak phnoe) evacuated there from urban areas, mainly Phnom Penh, in 1975, but not another 100,000 or so who were again evacuated (to the Northern Zone) late in the same year. The neak moultanh, peasant "base people" in the Zone probably numbered about 1.4 million.

The Eastern Zone is in some ways the heartland of Khmer communism. In the First Indochina War (1946-1954), the communist-

run Unified Issarak Front maintained an extensive military and civilian network there, and benefitted from the aid of communist Viet Minh troops from across the border. During the latter years of the Sihanouk regime (1954-1970), although local communist rebels kept a low profile, Vietnamese communist sanctuaries were established along the eastern border of the country. These sanctuaries and nearby Khmer villages were extensively bombed by U.S. B-52's in 1969, and the spread of the Vietnam War to Kampuchea in March-April 1970 affected the Eastern Zone first of all (particularly the areas Richard M. Nixon called the 'Parrot's Beak' and 'Fish-hook'-- in Regions 23 and 21). Probably well over 100,000 tonnes of U.S. bombs fell on the Zone in 1972-73 alone, and took a massive toll in civilian lives. Communist Khmer-Vietnamese cooperation was strongest in the East; the tradition of solidarity between the two communist parties, inherited from both the First and Second Indochina Wars, died hardest there after 1975. There is, however, no basis for describing the Khmer communists of the Eastern Zone as Vietnamese "agents", although this came to be the view of the Democratic Kampuchea government.

The first accounts of conditions in the Eastern Zone⁽¹⁾ were probably those contained in a 61-page report declassified by the U.S. government in 1978. The references to the East consisted of two brief statements of refugees interviewed by U.S. personnel in Thailand in late 1976. Their report noted:

One person who came from eastern Cambodia claimed that executions are much fewer because the more sympathetic Khmer Rumdos (Khmer Liberation) are in control there. He noted that they have generally required only that former officers (of the defeated Lon Nol regime) from the rank of second lieutenant upward shave their heads and do forced labour.

The report went on to add that according to a second account from

the East, the Khmer communists there

continue to allow Buddhism to flourish, execute people rarely, make people work only a normal working day, and let them eat and dress better (than in other Zones.) (2)

The next substantial body of information came from six refugees interviewed in France in 1979. Five of them, referred to earlier, said they had witnessed mass executions of Eastern Zone residents in 1978, in other Zones. The sixth was a former Eastern Zone resident, whose village cadre, she said, had told her in late 1978 "that we would all be killed...but the Vietnamese arrived first, so the Khmer Rouge were unable to kill us." (3) The information provided by these six refugees was corroborated by many accounts obtained from Eastern Zone residents inside Kampuchea in 1980, accounts which form the basis of this report.

The picture of relative tranquillity in the East in 1975 and 1976 at least, followed by mass murder in 1978, is also supported by all other known sustained research on the subject.

On the basis of eleven refugee accounts from the East, collected in Thailand in 1980, Michael Vickery concluded that before 1978,

the entire East had been a relatively good zone, both for base peasants and new people. It had many good agricultural districts, and the administration there was in the hands of disciplined communists with long revolutionary experience. The zonal authorities did not deprive the population by sending excess rice to Phnom Penh, and urban intellectuals, as such, were not usually mistreated. (4)

Similarly, Stephen Heder wrote in 1980, on the basis of his own interviews with 250 refugees in Thailand, that compared to other Zones such as the Northwest, "conditions for evacuated deposites in the East had sometimes been marginally better or, even considerably better." (5) Timothy Carney, too, has concluded that before

1978, "life in general" in the Eastern Zone was "better than many other areas", although he stresses the relative nature of this judgment. (6).

Some revealing statistics on the 1978 massacres were compiled by Katuiti Honda, who conducted surveys in 1980 on deaths among about 350 people in four small communities of eastern Kampuchea. He found that there had been "few victims till early 1978"; nearly all of the 118 deaths had occurred in that year. His data are set out in the accompanying Table.

VICTIMS OF EXECUTIONS IN FOUR COMMUNITIES OF
THE EASTERN ZONE OF DEMOCRATIC KAMPUCHEA,

GROUP	<u>1975-1978</u>				Total Executions
	1975	1976	1977	1978	
1. 120 people (Svay Rieng)	1			53(1)	54(1)
2. 62 people (Svay Rieng)			1(2)	16	17(2)
3. 11 families (Kompong Cham)		1	7(2)	17	25(2)
4. 15 families (Kompong Cham)			6(2)	9	15(2)
<hr/>					
Total executions	1	1	14(6)	95(1)	118(7)

N.B. Figures in brackets represent additional deaths, caused by starvation or disease.

Source: Katuiti Honda, Journey to Cambodia, Tokyo, 1981, chs. 3 and 5.

Stephen Heder describes the Eastern Zone 1978 massacres as "massive and indiscriminate purges of party, army and people alike". (7) Michael Vickery calls them "by far the most violent event of the entire DK period". (8) Timothy Carney agrees that in 1978 the Eastern Zone "probably lost the largest number of people executed in direct

response to Central Party orders... a heavy toll among villagers".⁽⁹⁾

The following report, outlining the experiences of a limited group of 87 people, includes statistics on executions in 1978 in a number of individual villages. The death tolls were, according to the various informants: 100, 240, 50, 100, 600, 80, 70, 100, 23, 200, and 100 people. Also included are accounts of 705 executions in 1978 among the people from one subdistrict, 1,950 from another, 400 from another. When combined with the five eyewitness accounts of massacres with which this report ends, and with Honda's findings of 95 executions in 1978 out of a total of 350 people alive in 1975, these figures and the accompanying report suggest that a total death toll of 100,000 among easterners in 1978 (over one-seventeenth of the population), can safely be regarded as a reasonable conservative estimate.

At the time of the communist victory in April 1975 most of the population of the East and other Communist-held areas was organised into "mutual aid teams" (krom provas dai), small farming groups of 10-15 families. In the words of one peasant quoted below, this form of social organisation brought "real prosperity", as effective control of land, stock and equipment remained in peasant hands, usury and rental payments were abolished, and taxation was relatively light. However in 1975 most krom were merged into larger, "low-level cooperatives" (sahakor kumrit teap) which grouped together several hundred people or a village, rather like a small version of Chinese communes. These sahakor were less popular, as state taxation and regimentation of working life increased, but private family life, and even religious life in many villages, continued as before.

Then, in late 1976 or 1977 in most cases, came the formation of "high-level cooperatives" (sahakor kumrit khpuos). These often grouped an entire subdistrict of, say, 1000 families. From this point meals could only be eaten in communal mess halls, so family life came under severe strain. Wedding ceremonies became communal affairs involving large numbers of couples, many of whom had never met but had been designated to marry by local officials. The practice of Buddhism (and Islam, the religion of the Cham minority) was completely banned. Food rations were lower than before. This was largely because the 1977-80 Four-Year Economic Plan drawn up by the central government presupposed an increase in rice yields from three tonnes per hectare to six or seven tonnes in 1977, an impossible target for even the lower figure of three tonnes had rarely been achieved in 1976. Yet the central government's perquisitions were based on the higher figure, and thus the taxation of village produce was too high to allow for adequate rations for the producers. Huge quantities of rice were removed from the villages, and stored in army warehouses or exported in exchange for weapons and ammunition purchased in China.

The deaths from starvation and related diseases that now occurred as a direct result of this priority given to warfare must therefore be included in the human toll for which the Pol Pot government of Democratic Kampuchea is held responsible. As harvests after 1975 were almost universally adequate, the starvation was a government-induced phenomenon. It was accompanied by massive disillusionment among heretofore peasant supporters of the revolution; another by-product was probably reduced labour and land productivity, although in most villages working hours were lengthened as part of

the 1977 policy changes.

Around the same time the population was classified into three groups. Most of the urban evacuees or "new people" remained on the lowest social rung as "depositees" (neak phñoe), but some as well as a greater number of the local peasant "base people" were now classified as "candidates" (neak tream). The rest, the most loyal peasants as well as the families of officials, were accorded the highest rank as "people with full rights" (neak penh sith). The proportions in each category varied widely from village to village, but overall the three seem to have included roughly equal sections of the eastern population, although the depositees were probably the least numerous. The categories and their titles reflected the central government's inclination to demand of every citizen what was demanded of Communist Party members; only after passing a rigorous screening test would citizens be fully admitted to membership of the national community.

Some elements of the population were obviously considered to be too dangerous to be so admitted, and they were now executed in large numbers. Thus, 1977 saw a resumption of widespread killings of officials and officers of the old regime, and Vietnamese, Cham and some Chinese residents were now targets of extermination, in many cases with their whole families.

Meanwhile a nationwide Party purge was gaining momentum. During 1976 a small number of Eastern Zone cadre were arrested by the shadowy Security Service (Santebal) and sent to their deaths in the infamous political prison at Tuol Sleng in Phnom Penh, known as "S-21". The most important was probably the Secretary of the Communist Party of Kampuchea Region 24 branch, and former member of the Eastern Zone Party Executive Committee, Chhouk (arrested in

August 1976); another was the former Eastern Zone military commander, Chan Chakrey, who had risen to Deputy Chief of the General Staff of the Revolutionary Army of Kampuchea when the armed forces structure was centralised in July 1975. These two and others were forced to reveal the names of their closest comrades, who were then arrested in turn, and the spiralling purge eventually led to the Eastern Zone Party Secretary, So Phim, who committed suicide in May 1978.

In the meantime the number of victims throughout the country increased dramatically in 1977; cadres in nearly all villages were arrested and replaced, usually executed, in that year. In the East, Regions 23 and 24 were the most severely affected, coming under the aegis of the Southwest Zone Party Secretary, the warlord Mok, and his subordinates, in collaboration with the Party "Centre" (Pol Pot, Nuon Chea, Ieng Sary, Vorn Vet and probably Son Sen), a term that appears in Party documents in its Khmer form (mocchim) to justify most instructions that are transmitted to lower levels of the administration.

The same year, 1977, saw a number of brutal incursions into Vietnamese territory and the massacre of thousands of Vietnamese villagers across the border. These unprovoked attacks, which followed a year or more of calm along the border throughout 1976, were carried out by a combination of Eastern Zone regional units, Centre units, and Southwest and Northern Zone units sent into the Zone in 1976 and 1977 to stiffen the anti-Vietnamese posture of the Eastern forces and administration.

This pressure from the Centre proved largely unsuccessful, however, and it was soon decided in Phnom Penh that the Eastern

Zone military and Party organisations could not be trusted and had to be destroyed. Thus began, on 25 May 1978, the massive conventional suppression campaign, known in the East since then as "the coup" (rot praha). Eastern Zone resistance to this Centre imposition of control provoked the enormous massacres of the eastern population in the second half of 1978. The Centre described the entire population of the Zone as having "Khmer bodies with Vietnamese minds" (khluon khmaer kuo kbal yuon) and set about eliminating it either through mass evacuation or mass murder. The policy appears to have been far more ferocious than that adopted towards the evacuated urban population in 1975. This was partly because of the long history of social contact across the Khmer-Vietnamese border, and partly because of the less than hostile triangular relationship between eastern Khmer peasants, eastern Khmer communists, and Vietnamese communists. The isolation of the Pol Pot leadership from all three forces led to its decision to attempt the apparent annihilation of the first two, and even, if one is to believe Phnom Penh Radio at the time, of the Vietnamese race as well.* The manic nature of the massacres of eastern Khmers, however, is more than evident from the fact that they proceeded and were even increasing in scale in January 1979, as the Vietnamese army swept across the country and brought them to an abrupt end.

*"So far, we have attained our target: 30 Vietnamese killed for every fallen Kampuchean... So we could sacrifice two million Kampucheans in order to exterminate the 50 million Vietnamese -- and we shall still be 6 million..." Voice of Democratic Kampuchea, 10 May, 1978 (see note 20).

Evaluation, Analysis, and Summary of Data

A. 1975-76

Of the sixty-seven Eastern Zone residents interviewed who were not communist cadre, ten mentioned specific victims of killings by Eastern Zone cadre in the years 1975 and 1976, numbering over 190 victims in all. At least five of the ten were not eyewitnesses to the killings they mentioned, so there is no certainty about all of them. On the other hand, thirteen interviewees also reported people disappearing after being taken away "to study"; and from the testimony of five or six such people I interviewed, some of those apprehended in this way were executed. However, most were released, and large-scale deaths among those who remained in detention do not appear to have taken place before late 1976.

Of the 190 reported victims, thirty were reported from a single district (Chantrea, Svay Rieng, Region 23) which alone among the Zone's thirty-two districts--perhaps because of its strategic location, at the tip of the "Parrot's Beak" and surrounded on three sides by Vietnamese territory--appears to have been taken over by Southwest Zone cadre, who were more closely allied to the Party Centre, in the 1975-76 period. ⁽¹⁰⁾ Another eight to ten deaths occurred during an abortive uprising led by former Lon Nol regime figures, in Region 22 in November 1975.

About 130 of the reported executions in these first two years were dated at mid- to late 1976. For the sixteen months after April 1975, then, specific executions reported by the sixty-seven non-cadre interviewees outside of Chantrea district numbered about twenty, to which must be added seven victims of a self-confessed executioner who was also interviewed. There were, obviously, more

executions in the many Eastern villages not covered by this sample, and in 1975 and 1976 these probably numbered in the thousands, but well under ten thousand.

Six interviewees mentioned in general terms the types of people liable to execution in that period: "intellectuals and Lon Nol officers"; "most military, officials, and rich people"; "many Lon Nol officers"; "only well-educated people"; "one or two who refused orders or were lazy"; and "not many like in 1977", when there were fewer again than in 1978. However, twenty-nine of the non-cadre interviewees asserted that there were "no killings" of people from their villages in 1975-76; another ten mentioned none; ten described uncertain circumstances that may have led to executions; and two others mentioned executions limited to revolutionary cadre.

Starvation took a heavy toll in two of the interviewees' villages in the year 1975 - twenty deaths were reported in one Chantrea village, fifty in a village in Memut district (Region 21). Apart from these cases, however, all accounts agree that rations distributed and food available were adequate for basic nutrition in 1975 and 1976.

Large numbers of people were imprisoned in 1975, but the information available - covering three of the five Eastern Regions - suggests that the vast majority were released after short periods of detention. Since this does not conform with the general impression obtained from reports concerning other Zones of Democratic Kampuchea, it is important to establish the point in some detail.

In Region 22, 1,000 new people were arrested in May 1975 in Koh Sautin district. Twenty "civil servants and merchants" were released almost immediately; four hundred more, former Lon Nol regime officials, were "given permission to rejoin their families" in July; and of the other 580 who were Lon Nol military personnel, "junior officers and

soldiers return in great numbers" to the villages in September 1975. The officers, however, had not returned by December 1975. One of those released later reported that the prison regime had been harsh but "nobody had any intention of escaping" at that stage. (11)

Another "new person", Thun, 22, who lived in Srey Santhor district from April 1975 to December 1976, reported that the revolutionaries there "did not persecute the people, and there were no killings". She added: "They genuinely re-educated a lot of new people. There were schools, and the teachers were well-qualified" to undertake the task. (12) Michael Vickery has published an account of another Region 22 prison camp in Mid-1975, in O Reang Au district.

There some executions of Republican officers occurred, but food was adequate, and prisoners, all urban new people, were gradually trained to do hard work. At first they were allowed to set their own pace to get used to the work and eventually brought to the condition of real peasants. They then had one month of political education, and in July 1975, 67 of them were sent to the base village of Toul Sralau, where they were mixed directly in with the old peasants...and when they had been there for three months they were considered equal to the base people, although not yet quite in the Candidate or middle category. (13)

In Region 23, over 600 people, including 300 teachers, were imprisoned in Svay Rieng district in 1975 and then released, apparently in 1976. (14) In Svay Teap district, 193 prisoners were sent back to their villages in March 1976. (Towards the end of the year, however, presumably in connection with the purge of local cadre at that time, the prisoners began to be recalled and most were subsequently executed.) (15)

In Region 24, Song Van, 52, a "base" peasant from Peam Ro district imprisoned during the war in 1973, was released in April 1975 along with 170 others. He estimates that seventy percent of all prisoners in the seven communist jails in the Region were released at that time. Sokhun, a former chauffeur for the French embassy in Phnom Penh, was imprisoned for three months' "re-education" along with 100 other new people who

arrived in Kompong Trabek district in mid-1975. Then they were released and given "normal" work in the fields. (16)

As far as social conditions were concerned, most of the interviewees who reported executions or starvation in their villages in 1975-76 described the revolution and their conditions of life at that time as "no good". Of the other fifty-five non-cadre interviewees, eleven expressed no opinions on the subject. Among the remaining forty-four, a range of views was expressed, usually quite complex and nuanced. Seven described the revolution and conditions of life in that period as "no good" primarily because of hard work and low rations, but reported no executions or starvation. Another seven described them as something between (or, in different ways, both) "no good" and "tolerable" (kuo som) or "all right" (kron bao). Twenty-one described them in terms such as "tolerable" or "all right", and nine in terms such as "good" (la'o) or "not a problem" (ot ey te). Further, ten of the new people who did not hold such a view themselves, expressed the conviction that in 1975-76 the base people in their villages were supporters of the revolution. (17)

B. 1977-78

Beyond several favourable descriptions of the year 1977 and the early part of 1978, none of the interviewees expressed the opinion that the revolution and the conditions they lived under for the second two-year period were "good" or even "tolerable". All mentioned large-scale executions in 1977-78, as well as continued (or usually, increased) heavy work demands and continued low (or usually, reduced) food consumption. Around the end of 1976, most reported that rations were reduced in a number of places, private foraging for food--even outside of the long working hours -- was prohibited. As a result there was

serious starvation in some villages and widespread malnutrition. There was a detectable deterioration in conditions from 1976 to 1977⁽¹⁸⁾ when the war with Vietnam was launched, and a very sharp, dramatic and brutal deterioration after May 1978.

This phenomenon, which as noted must have cost a minimum of 100,000 lives, occurred despite the fact that recriminations and economic hardship might have been expected to occur in the aftermath of such a devastating civil war as that from 1970 to 1975, but to cease or decrease (as they did, temporarily, in 1976) as the new regime consolidated itself. But other forces were at work, and the time lag before the largest massacres gives them a decidedly more deliberate and premeditated character.

One theme which emerges from the interviews is that very few people approved of communal eating, introduced with high-level cooperativisation in the latter half of 1976 in some areas and in early 1977 elsewhere. The generalised resentment stemmed not just from the concomitant reduction in food rations. It was certainly a method of social control and of state economising; but it was also an ideological attack on what was called "privateness" (aekachun) and as such it was repugnant to many peasants who had previously approved of the revolution -- especially when it was combined with prohibitions on family (or personal) gardening and foraging.

As noted earlier, even if in 1975-76 the Eastern Zone Communists attempted "re-education" in most cases, they were not averse to executing elite new people (including some religious leaders) on the basis of their class origins, or others whom they considered "enemies". They were also prepared to implement directives from above urging them to prohibit religious practice, abolish conventional education and limit freedom of movement. In no way can these actions be described as enlightened or benign. But leading Eastern Zone cadre seem to have

sensed that to lower the living standards or threaten the basic lifestyle of their peasant constituents would deprive the revolution of the moral force they believed it could command. They were in fact much closer to the village people than the remote Pol Pot group (the Party 'Centre') or the far more militaristic warlord leaders of the Southwest and Northern Zones. The distinction was appreciated by one refugee interviewed by Michael Vickery. Kong, a former member of a Centre communications unit stationed in the East from January 1977 reported in 1980 that the Eastern Zone Communist Party Secretary,

So Phim was known to have said that the purpose of the revolution was to improve the standard of living, not to regress from rich to poor or to force people into misery just to learn how it was to be poor (Pol Pot's policy, according to Kong). (19)

On 10 May 1978, two weeks before the Centre-sponsored suppression of the Eastern Zone with the aid of forces from the Southwest and North, Phnom Penh Radio announced:

We must purify our armed forces, our Party and the masses of the People... (20)

Notes

1. I refer here to accounts published in the West. Michael Vickery has noted that an earlier account from the East, reporting that in Region 20 "the Khmer Rouge are less brutal than elsewhere", according to a refugee, was published in Malaysia. Straits Echo (Penang) 5 June 1976. For further details see Michael Vickery, Cambodia 1975-1982, Boston, 1984, p. 134.
2. "Cambodia Today: Life Inside Cambodia", U.S. Embassy report from Thailand, 21 September 1976, 13 pp., at pp. 4, 13.
3. Author's interview with Nhek Davy, Melun, 20 November 1979.
4. Vickery, op. cit., p. 136.
5. Stephen R. Heder, Kampuchean Occupation and Resistance, Institute of Asian Studies, Chulalongkorn University, Monograph No. 27, January 1980, p.7.
6. Timothy Carney, "The Organisation of Power in Democratic Kampuchea", forthcoming in a volume edited by Karl Jackson.
7. Stephen R. Heder, "From Pol Pot to Pen Sovan to the Villages", Institute of Asian Studies, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, May 1980, p.16.
8. Vickery, op. cit., p. 137.
9. Carney, op. cit.
10. For details, see David P. Chandler and Ben Kiernan, eds., Revolution and Its Aftermath in Kampuchea: Eight Essays, Yale University, Southeast Asia Studies Monograph No. 25, 1983, page 201, note 6. This is part of Ben Kiernan, "Wild Chickens, Farm Chickens and Cormorants: Kampuchea's Eastern Zone Under Pol Pot" (pp. 136-211), where much of the information that follows first appeared in print.
11. Kong Samrach, testimony at the "Cambodia Hearing", Oslo, April 1978. Typescript, 8 pp. In December 1975 Samrach was sent to the Northern Zone.
12. Interview with author, Kompong Thom, 16 October 1980. See also pp. 55, 57, below.
13. Vickery, op. cit., p. 134.
14. Interview with author, khum Svay Thom, 29 August 1981. The interviewee was one of those imprisoned and then released.
15. Katuiti Honda, Journey to Cambodia, Tokyo 1981, p. 90.
16. Interviews with author, Peam Ro, 7 October 1980, and Phnom Penh, 11 September 1981.
17. For an attempted explanation of this phenomenon, see Revolution

and Its Aftermath in Kampuchea, op. cit., p. 141.

18. See Ibid., page 201, note 7. Also "New Light on the Origins of the Vietnam-Kampuchea Conflict", by Ben Kiernan, Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars, 12, 4, 1980, pp. 61-65.

19. Vickery, op. cit., p. 137.

20. BBC Summary of World Broadcasts, 15 May 1978, FE/5813/A3/4.

REGION 20

Region 20, the first of the eastern Regions, comprised roughly the northern part of Prey Veng province--the districts of Ponhea Krek, Prey Veng, Kanchriech, Mesan, and Komchay Meas. It was a strong revolutionary base area and the site of So Phim's Zone headquarters. Although discipline seems to have been strongly enforced, orders from the Party Centre, which forced the substitution of gruel for rice rations were not popular with either the population or the local cadres. One cadre, a former monk of 29 years who was forced to disrobe at the end of 1975 and then became the chief of the 300 workers at a Zone agricultural collective (sahakar) in Dauntey subdistrict, recalled the conditions as follows:

In these collectives the workers ate rice and vegetables, not gruel. When I first arrived there, orders came from the Centre for the workers at state worksites to be given (only) gruel. But in early 1976 the workers complained of lack of strength, and asked (So Phim) to alter the rule. Two weeks later he allowed them to eat rice normally again. (So) life was all right in the (agricultural and other Zone) services; we ate rice through to 1978, but things were beginning to get tough elsewhere...

When Khoem, the chief of Region 20, told So Phim about these orders which had arrived directly from the Centre, Phim replied that he should not be so tough, since conditions were very harsh at that time. Digging canals and dams requires strength, and the workers needed more than gruel. But the order was from the Centre so little could be done. In the villages So Phim visited regularly the people ate rice, but elsewhere they ate only gruel.

Kim Y, a cooperative specialist in Ponhea Krek district, said that on at least one occasion he heard So Phim express dissatisfaction with the rations workers were being required to subsist on in cooperatives.

That is what he said. (But) people ate gruel continuously from 1976 on.

However, despite the apparently unwilling compliance in Region 20 with this policy directive from the Centre, the accounts of fourteen people who lived in all five districts of Region 20 indicate that the years 1975-76 were very harsh for the new people but violence was much more selective, and living conditions higher than in 1977-78 when the Centre assumed close and finally direct control.

Son, 61, became a candidate party member as early as 1951, but in 1973 he ceased political activity due to illness, and became an ordinary member of a cooperative in Kandol Chrum sub-district of Ponhea Krek. He summed up the revolution in this way:

The Pol Pot party first made the people suffer, to a small extent, after liberation in 1975, and then a great deal from 1977. In 1975-76 they used the people to work, sometimes night and day. There were no killings in 1975. The hardest work began in early 1976, when communal eating started, and the security forces took away a few people "to study". Harvest confiscations also began, but rations were still all right (kron bao) and living conditions were not too bad (kuo som). The people weren't happy with the revolution any more because of the hard work and rations of gruel, but they still had strength.

But then from 1977 it was simply killing--of men, women, children, babies. And there was very little to eat. At the end of 1976 deaths really escalated in number--when I went to one village in 1977 seven people died the day I was there, five or six on other days. In April 1977 the fighting began between Kampuchea and Vietnam: I talked to some troops heading off to attack Vietnam. Southwest Zone cadres came and said that Kampuchea Krom (the Mekong Delta of Vietnam) was our land.

Then in early 1978 a new cadre named Luon began to say clearly and often, in meetings: "The Chinese will attack from the other side, we attack from this side. Have no fear, we will retake the territory of Prey Nokor (Ho Chi Minh City).

1978 was also the worst period for killing--of cadres, soldiers, everyone. People were taken away in truckloads, fifty at a time. After the May 1978 coup, some people were killed on the spot: one hundred in my village, including all the teenagers in the work brigades and the Youth Association, and many party members. Four of my six children

were executed.

Then from July 1978 came the evacuations of the ordinary people to the west, to be killed there. Of 1,330 in the village, about 600 were evacuated, in November. Only half of the 600 returned. They were preparing to evacuate the rest of us, but they ran out of time.

Ek, 58, a base peasant classified as a "candidate" in early 1976 said that in his village in Kandol Chrum there was no starvation and "no killings from 1975-77". On further questioning, however, he revealed that in this period three people, including two former teachers, were taken away for "re-education" by district security forces, and never returned.

I saw them taken away but we were not that interested because the Khmer Rouge were only looking for their enemies. I did not know who these enemies were, I never had any rank. But the Khmer Rouge did not kill ordinary people in those years. In 1978, on the other hand, everyone was an enemy, whoever you were.

Ek went on:

In the period when So Phim was still alive, from 1975 right up to 25 May 1978, there were no problems. The cadres and people were on good terms, and would invite each other to meals in their homes. This friendship continued through 1976 and 1977. Conditions in the village were good, the leadership was good and close to the people (snit snal). We worked enthusiastically (sosrak sosram); people were happy and chatted casually, visiting one another from house to house in the evenings. We could travel to nearby villages or go fishing; so long as we just asked permission first they would let us go. But then in the Pol Pot period, in 1978 (sic), we were too afraid to move around like that, it was prohibited. You need a letter from the district office. The great fear began in 1978, when the killings started.

Before that the people had no say in what work they did, and so production was relatively low, and they feared the cadres to a small extent, (but) they believed them. From 1974 to 1977 there were meetings in which they explained politics to us, educated us, led us. They told us to love one another, not to quarrel, and to work together to increase production.

From May 1978 when the Southwest Zone forces arrived, there were no more political meetings, and we had less food to eat than before. Then in November the evacuations started. They took over 40 people from my village--not

everyone, just individual families, people they were not happy with. I just kept quiet and never said anything, so they did not evacuate me. I never saw any killings myself, I was too afraid to watch. If they killed people, they did it far away.

Yel, 44, joined the revolution in 1967 when her husband, father and younger brother, all former Issarak, were killed by Sihanouk government forces. In 1975 she became a member of the Ponhea Krek district office. She said that "the killing began in 1975, of new people, not base people. They started killing base people in 1977, but not many--in 1978 they killed many. After So Phim's death, trucks came and took people away for execution, husbands first, then wives and children a few days later. I stopped serving Pol Pot in May 1978, and ran into the jungle on June 18".

Kanya, a 24 year-old student, was evacuated from Prey Veng city to Angkor Tret subdistrict of Prey Veng district, in April 1975. On arrival in a village there, her father, a Lon Nol policeman, as well as her husband and elder brother, were all taken away and executed. The ten families of new people who joined the 35 families of base people "were persecuted a great deal" from the beginning. The work was hard, but for the first four or five months there was "plenty of rice" to eat, and even at that point when communal eating began and rations were reduced to gruel, there was still no starvation in the village over ensuing years, because "it was thick gruel".

In the 1976-77 period, there were killings "of intellectuals, and Lon Nol soldiers, but not many", at least compared to 1978, at the end of which year only two of the ten "new" families survived. According to Kanya, the base peasants "liked the revolution at first, when the Khmer Rouge were doing good things, in the

first four or five months. But after that, when they saw us new people getting killed in late 1975, they lost enthusiasm for the Khmer Rouge. They didn't like communal dining either." Further, the village Buddhist abbot had refused orders to defrock, and had been taken for re-education. After the monastery was destroyed, he died in prison. Still, Kanya said Khmer Rouge "persecution" of the base people began only in late 1976, and that there were no executions of base people before 1978. "In late 1978 a lot of base people fled to Vietnam to struggle,* and the ones who stayed behind were executed." 1978 was the first year of purges among local cadres, and two village officials, both base people, were executed.

Also in late 1978, about 25 families from the village were evacuated to the northwest. "People from all over the place were moved to Pursat in countless numbers. One village would be evacuated one day, another the next." Kanya and her surviving extended family arrived in Bakan Leu district and were put to work "night and day--we dared not chat to one another". After six weeks, they were told to rest for a day, but were soon called out of their houses and bound hand and foot. Ten of the fourteen family members, all but the young unmarried women, were then taken away and executed. Kanya cried as she told of seeing their terribly mutilated bodies afterwards. Before long she managed to escape to the Tonle Sap lake, and made her way back to Prey Veng after the Vietnamese invasion of early 1979.

A peasant from Popoeus subdistrict reported that in his village the urban evacuees, again a minority, were "re-educated

* This refers to the movement of rebellion against the Pol Pot regime.

but not killed" and that there were no executions in 1975-76; during this period he asserted that "the new people were happy" in the village, and that the ones who survived later violence "still remain with us". Although "in early 1976 the Khmer Rouge started to persecute us, bit by bit, there were not very many problems before 1977." One subdistrict official, Te Vin, had been "normal, correct--he didn't persecute the people: people were afraid of him but they also liked him. He wasn't tough and didn't implement the Pol Pot line." Another pre-1977 official, Pheang, had "implemented orders about work in the fields very tightly", and "people were unhappy with the communal eating and communal labour "instituted in 1974, but Pheang "did not persecute or kill people". Although "starvation began in 1976, "in 1977 it was really harsh, there were even killings and deaths." New cadres had arrived, mostly from the Southwest Zone, and in early 1977 "all the sub-district, village and team committees were called to secret meetings and disappeared." Vin was executed, and Pheang disappeared.

"Killings began in 1977, of both old and new people"; by September 1978, 240 people from the village had disappeared or been arrested and executed. Then 500 families of new and base people were evacuated to Pursat and Battambang, and when Pol Pot was overthrown the next year, 30 people failed to return. Striking a common theme concerning Eastern Zone cadre after the May 1978 coup, this peasant explained how he had avoided the evacuation: "The village chief was an inside agent, not faithful to the Pol Pot line, and he sent me off to grow dry season rice."

Sem, a peasant woman from Chrey subdistrict, said that

"in 1976 and 1977 there was enough to eat", and the cadres "didn't kill people--they did good things: the work we did was normal". However in 1978 Southwestern cadres arrived and killed the local officials, and began working the people much harder on rations of "just gruel". Finally they set about killing the entire village population, "new and old"; her husband and five children all perished. This woman knew the name of the Eastern Zone leader So Phim, and commented that "he was a good man, but Pol Pot killed him". She managed to escape death somehow and now has a small stall in a market town on the other side of the Mekong; as she told her story a crowd of people gathered around listening in what seemed to me silent incomprehension, which she explained to me by the fact that those listening had never lived under Eastern Zone cadres but were from the Southwest.

Chantha, a Phnom Penh woman, was evacuated to Kanchrieuch district in 1975, and said that there was no starvation there in the first two years. Some Phnom Penh people, teachers, and also some revolutionary cadres, were taken away and disappeared in 1975-76, and her own husband was put in confinement. She said that there were "no problems except that we had to work like the local people here", but added that, in fact, "we had to do more", and "whatever we did they tended to tell us it was wrong. We were criticised constantly", for instance, if new people failed to work effectively. "We were not allowed to stay at home or be sick very often." Rations to sustain this "non-stop work" comprised only gruel and salt, for which Chantha blamed the village chief.

The 600 base people, however, "were all happy that the Khmer

Rouge had won the war and had liberated us from Phnom Penh and brought us here to live". They were "discouraged" from talking to the three families of new people, who were described as "enemies".

Freedom of movement was restricted, at least for the new people. "I was only allowed to visit people within the village, not outside."

"In 1977 they began killing people." The village chief was executed and replaced. Then in mid-December 1978, Chantha and "tens of thousands" of others were evacuated to Taing Kauk in Kompong Thom province. The exodus was organised by Central and Southwest Zone forces, who were "crueller than the cadres from here--we couldn't look them in the eye." On the trek through the forest, "they shot people who didn't move along, and they executed some elderly women in our group." On arrival at their destination in early January 1979, mass executions began, as large groups of people were called to "meetings" and then massacred. "They hadn't yet started killing our group, but they had killed 700 of the previous group of 2,000 people. Big pits had been dug, 50 m. by 50 m. by 2 m. deep, and 2,000 bodies were to be buried in each one. They had drawn up lists of those to be killed, and we had been told to attend a meeting the next day. But that night our fraternal friends liberated us, and I ran back home."*

A peasant woman from the same village in Kanchrieuch recalled that during the 1970-75 war, US planes had dropped bombs "every day, on every little bit of land"; killing a number of people from the village, a fact which may help explain why Chantha said

* This refers to the Vietnamese invasion which put an end to the massacres in early 1979.

that the base people "were all happy that the Khmer Rouge had won the war".

Nevertheless, this peasant woman said that the years 1975-76 were "very tough". Production was high, but rations consisted merely of gruel since the produce was taken away, "to build socialism and provide electricity for every house" in the words of the local cadres at the time. The district chief was "no good, he made the people suffer." Further, she was sent to "study" in a prison because she owned a power saw, which apparently classified her as wealthy. "In 1975-76 they took revolutionary cadres and big people away to study. They didn't take the base people." After seventeen months she was released, but cadres were constantly being replaced, and "in 1977 they started to kill people"; communal eating and communal weddings had begun the previous year. Victims of executions by newly-arrived Southwest Zone cadres included the district and subdistrict chiefs, and in 1978, 50 people from the village, including one of her children. She was evacuated to Kompong Thom with many others; another child and several of her grandchildren disappeared there. "Fifteen more minutes and I would have been dead," she concluded.

Van, 27, a peasant from Mesan district, joined the Communist Youth Association of Kampuchea in 1973, and in 1974 was a member of a mobile youth brigade working on irrigation projects. Then in June 1975 he was dismissed from the Youth Association, accused of being part of an alleged "Indochina Federation Party network", and from that time on he said he enjoyed "no rights, and bad living conditions". At the same time, the local Youth Association and the revolutionary Peasants' Association were disbanded.

Van said the people in his village in Chres subdistrict had been incensed by a 1973 bombing raid which killed five peasants, and that they had participated enthusiastically in the mutual aid teams of fifteen families established by the Khmer Rouge during the war. But in 1975 larger cooperatives were formed, although the food situation remained "normal" until March 1976 when new cadres arrived from the Southwest and "began collecting everyone's belongings and making them communal property--motorcycles, trucks, bicycles, cattle, buffaloes, and so on." There was much popular resistance to this, and it was led by the revolutionary district committee, local men with Issarak backgrounds; the district chief, Chirong, had in fact studied in Vietnam for some time after 1954, returning to Kampuchea in 1970. Van named five villages in the subdistricts of Chres, Chipoch and Prey Totoeng, whose "entire populations...gathered to resist the cadres ordering them to work in the ricefields and planning to take away the crop." In response the Southwestern officials arrested and executed over 50 people, mostly cadres at the cooperative, subdistrict and district levels, "who didn't implement orders". Chirong was among those killed, apparently in late 1976. In Van's view Chirong was not coercive and had done "good things for the people--he was good as far as rations, work and production were concerned". In fact Van linked Chirong with Chhouk, the chief of Region 24 which borders Mesan district, in a united "struggle against the cooperatives".

Apart from the fact that living conditions worsened with cooperativisation, Van made no mention of events in 1977 except that early in the year Chan, the Eastern Zone Deputy Party Secre-

tary, visited the area and talked of the need to struggle to "regain Kampuchea Krom" (the Mekong Kelta) and even "Prey Nokor" (Saigon-Ho Chi Minh City). "In mid-1977 the fighting began. I saw truckloads of troops being transported to the border."

Mesan district, an area remote from any major road, does not seem to have been evacuated in 1978.

The last and perhaps the most important district of Region 20 is Komchay Meas, a former Issarak stronghold on the Vietnamese border, and the home of Tui, the Region Deputy Party Secretary. Because of this and more importantly, because of the proximity of the frontier, the tens of thousands of people who fled to Vietnam in late 1978 were mostly from Komchay Meas and from the neighbouring border district of Ponhea Krek. (in 1980, People's Republic of Kampuchea province chiefs of Kompong Cham, Prey Veng and Kompong Chhnang, as well as many national and district level PRK cadre, were natives of Komchay Meas.)

"Before 1978, things were a little soft", according to Suvan, a peasant cadre who had been an Issarak guerrilla and had joined the local CPK in 1966. "There was mutual aid, and the rations were not so low. If there was only gruel, it was gruel for everyone." After "heavy bombing in 1972-73", Suvan said there was some starvation in 1973-74, but none in 1975-77 despite the fact that, beginning in 1976, two-thirds of the annual harvest was confiscated by the state. In his view, rainfall was suitable and production adequate to satisfy these requisitions.

However in early 1977 one or two new cadres arrived from the Southwest or from Phnom Penh, "to represent the party". They were soon followed by armed forces from the Central and Southwest

Zones.

Many former members of the Peasants' Association, which as in Mesan district had been disbanded in 1975, were executed in 1977, and so were the leader and members of the local Youth Association, which along with the Women's Association was then disbanded. One reason for such purges may have been because "in 1976 So Phim began to ignore orders from Pol Pot to kill people, and in 1978 he favoured negotiation with Vietnam". Suvan said he was told this by Tui, Khoem and Chem, the Regional leaders, although the three of them nevertheless passed on to him orders from above in 1977 to send troops to attack across the Vietnamese border, "whether we wanted to or not". Tui, Khoem and Chem were executed in May 1978 for alleged participation in So Phim's "traitorous network"; presumably because of their local links, Suvan's cooperative was then classified as a "traitorous cooperative", and ten of its 260 people were soon executed, including "some ordinary people, some cadres, and two district military personnel who had not wanted to attack Vietnam and had escaped back home."

Chin, 42, was a member of the Krabau subdistrict committee until 1977. His father had become Issarak chief of Krabau in 1946, and Chin had first lived in the forest with him and then joined the guerrilla army in 1950 at the age of 13. After three years as a monk in the late 1950's, he then settled down growing rice until 1970, when he joined the CPK. He said that "until 1975 the revolution's political stand was good--it served the people correctly." But there was a change in that year: Chin heard Vietnam described as the "hereditary enemy", and saw a party history which changed the date of the party's foundation "from

1951 to 1961" so as to omit altogether the period of Issarak cooperation with the Vietnamese, a period which the leadership of Democratic Kampuchea preferred to forget.

As the official responsible for "culture" in Krabau, Chin attended twice-yearly political sessions organised by the party in the district and regional headquarters. Speakers included the Region 20 leaders Khoem and Tui: "Tui told us that Vietnam was the 'hereditary enemy' because he had to obey the orders contained in circulars passed down from above. I could see that he was uneasy about it, but he was afraid to disagree even though he had worked alongside the Vietnamese since a long time ago and had never had any conflict with them. To disagree with the line passed down from the Centre was treachery and meant danger, death. We were all afraid; none of us had ever considered Vietnam as an enemy. But whatever one's real feelings you had to do and say what the party ordered."

Communal dining began in Krabau in late 1975, a year before other parts of Komchay Meas, but "there was still rice to eat for a long time"; gruel became the norm only in 1977. There was no starvation, but a great deal of disease, beginning in 1976. Six families of Phnom Penh people, "ordinary people, not former government officials who were all kept at higher levels", had arrived in 1975, joining over 3,200 base people. Chin asserts that there were no killings in Krabau in 1975-76, and that "new and old people enjoyed the same difficult living conditions; they all ate together and had to work equally hard."

In early 1977, Chin was gaoled, and only escaped seventeen

months later, at the end of May 1978, when he profited from disruption caused by the "coup". He discovered that all four other members of his subdistrict committee had been executed by central government forces. Chin fought the latter in the jungle until August, when "over 30,000 people" from Komchay Meas and Ponhea Krek districts gathered in Krabau forest; in October they all crossed the border into Vietnam.

Huor, 30, a former Arts student in Phnom Penh, was evacuated with his parents to Komchay Meas in 1975, and spent the next eighteen months in prison. "For the first two months it was not very hard, because we prisoners occupied a village house and grew rice with the people." Then Huor was sent to break rocks with a group of 40 prisoners near Chup in Region 21, where life was "very tough, because food began to run out and there were no local villagers who could have helped feed us." Two of the prisoners were accused of being rebels and were executed. After three months there, Huor was sent back to Komchay Meas, "where things improved for us because we lived with the people, who would secretly give us supplies" despite the fact that if they were caught the villagers would be summoned and reprimanded by the authorities. Finally, around April 1976 Huor was transferred to an official gaol where "all the prisoners from all over Komchay Meas district", including a Phnom Penh doctor who was Tui's son-in-law, 120 people in all, were sent. There they worked a thirteen-hour day with "very little food". "We became nothing but skin and bones", and rations seem to have fallen drastically in the final months before the harvest: in October 1976, 80 of the 120 prisoners died of exhaustion or starvation--"three or four every night". The next month the 40

survivors, including Huor and Tui's son-in-law, were released.

Huor rejoined his family in their native village in Cheach subdistrict. His eighty-year-old grandmother had died, but the others "were healthy but having a tough time because new people were accused of being "leeches" and the base people, even our relatives, dared not be friendly to us." Huor's family of seven were the only new people among the 500 villagers. "When I first arrived I could see that the base people really believed in and liked the revolution because it had just been victorious. They had defeated the United States. And also in 1976 the food situation was still all right, and meals were eaten at home. In 1975-76 the cadres did not make the people suffer greatly--the cadres were not pro-Pol Pot. They gave people three tins of rice per day instead of one." Huor seems to have meant by this that the Region 20 cadres secretly disagreed with their Party's national leadership.

At the district level, Huor said that the pre-1978 acting party secretary was "a kind man", and he also approved of one other member of the Komchay Meas district committee, to whom he was related by marriage. Tui, in his view, was "not a killer"; although there were executions of Phnom Penh people in 1975-76, these were "not many", and none in the case of the base people.

However, at the end of 1976, new cadres arrived and executed many of the old ones during the next year, including "all the educated ones" like Huor's relative on the district committee. Cooperatives were formed, and communal eating instituted, around March 1977, which was regarded by people as an infringement of

their right to "eat when they liked". Rations were reduced to the level of inadequacy. "These difficulties following a period of ease meant that the people became unhappy with the revolution. They changed their minds about it because life was so tough in 1977-78-79." This was despite the fact that "production was really high" in 1977-78: Huor gave a figure of "over 300 tonnes in every village" in the area, compared with previous harvest of 230 tonnes. "But they took it all away; we were not allowed to eat it. They left only ten kgs. per person per month."

Fortunately for the locals, the chief of Huor's village continued the practice of hiding away part of the crop for popular consumption, until early 1978 when he was arrested and disappeared.

Communal marriages also began in early 1977, involving 20 couples in a single ceremony. The many large wooden houses in the village were demolished and the materials used to build both a communal dining hall and a number of very small "cooperative houses, just big enough to put a bed in". In 1978, 35 forced marriages took place in the village, some in an atmosphere of great sadness. As a result of all these changes, "both new and old people hated the Khmer Rouge in 1977-78."

Huor reported no fighting between Kampuchea and Vietnam in 1976, but during 1977, a number of high-ranking cadres from Phnom Penh, wearing pistols, began recruiting among the base people for the military, claiming that the army was going to retake Kampuchea Krom, the Mekong Kelta.

Finally, in May 1978 the Southwest Zone cadres rounded up all the local officials from village chiefs upwards, and took them to

the rubber plantations where they were executed. About one month later, when the Eastern Zone rebellion was in full swing, evacuations began. "At first the Southwest cadres told people to evacuate the village so they 'could catch the forest people' (meaning the rebels). Whoever stayed behind or was seen in the village afterwards must be a traitor. It was exactly the way they evacuated Phnom Penh. But in fact they were sending people not to live normally somewhere else but to their death, mostly in Kompong Thom province. On arrival at their destination, the Eastern Zone people were told that they were all traitors and not to be spared, and big pits were dug for our bodies."

"In our village, 150 base people, including all the men, demonstrated in November 1978 against evacuation, with knives, etc. Then the Southwest forces fired two shells at the crowd, killing about seven people, some of whom were women. I saw this, and my brothers and I immediately ran to get our things ready for the evacuation. Several old men who asked to stay behind because they couldn't make the journey were found shot dead in their houses after we left. We were at Chup when the Vietnamese and Khmer forces arrived on time" (to prevent the evacuation and mass executions).

REGION 21

Tbaung Khmum district

Probably the most important district of Region 21, itself the most important Region of the Eastern Zone, is Tbaung Khmum, which includes the extensive rubber plantations of Chup.

Map, 35, a rubber plantation worker who had joined the Khmer Rouge army in 1970 and the Party Youth Association in August 1972, was foreman of a 100-person mobile work team in the 1975-78 period. He said that "persecution began in 1975, when they killed my younger brother, a Lon Nol soldier, and former government officials and some intellectuals". However, during 1975-76 "working hours were regular and we could see our families at night". "Real persecution began in late 1977," when a search for suspects put Map under temporary arrest. "But there were not yet general killings until the May 1978 coup, when they killed cadres from the district level down to the ordinary population." All four members of the Mong Riev subdistrict committee perished at that time, as did five local village chiefs and their families as well as village committee members and villagers. Moreover, "after the May 1978 coup the workers had to eat gruel, and there were no regular working hours--they just used us and steeled us."*

Nal, 43, a former rubber plantation worker who took to rice farming in 1970, concurred: "From 1975 the Khmer Rouge did not yet do many bad things; they just arrested and gaoled some people, and took away the harvests; in 1976-77 they killed intellectuals evacuated from Phnom Penh, and there were also some deaths from starvation. Everyone, base people and new people, ate only gruel and salt"; and Nal, who was classified by the Khmer Rouge as "full rights" in 1975, does not appear to have enjoyed privileges over the new people. His mother died of starvation" in 1977" and in the same year his brother and sister, along with over 30 relatives, also perished.

* This expression (lot dam) was commonly used by cadres of Democratic Kampuchea to refer to the process of tempering or steeling people by having them undergo considerable hardship, allegedly to increase their capacity for sacrifice or work.

Nal nevertheless asserted that "the killing of the people began" when the Eastern Zone was invaded by Central Zone troops in May 1978. "They killed all the Eastern Zone cadres, and ordinary people who committed the most minor offences, such as talking about one's family problems at night. Every day they would take away three to five families for execution...We heard them screaming for help...".

When the Central Zone troops first seized power, they had attempted to legitimise their presence by highlighting the hardship for which they claimed So Phim's regime was responsible. "Who was it that made you eat gruel?", they asked, and then they gave us rice for two days. From then on it was back to gruel, and the killing of truckloads of people began."

While hardship under So Phim and his Eastern Zone cadres was in many cases severe, and a number of arbitrary executions took place, the sharp contrast between the situation in the East before May 1978 and that after So Phim's overthrow, was illustrated by the statements of Saly, 15, a peasant boy from Chup.

It was tough from 1975 on. People came from Phnom Penh to live with us. Sometimes there was rice to eat, sometimes gruel, sometimes nothing. People nearly starved to death.

Interestingly, however, Saly's response to my first questions in 1980 distinguished Pol Pot's forces from those who controlled the area before 1978:

BK: When did you first meet the Pol Pot forces?

Saly" A long time ago.

BK: What did they do when they first arrived?

Saly: As soon as they arrived they said: "Who was it that made you eat gruel?" Then they gave us rice to eat for two

or three days, and then gruel right through to the end, for six - eight months.

Although he had lived in the revolutionary zones since 1970, and although he volunteered no accounts of executions before or after May 1978, Saly regarded the events of that month as a turning point, his first contact with the "Pol Pot forces".

Ibrahim, 42, a Cham who had studied the Koran for four years in Egypt, also lived under Khmer Rouge administration from 1970-79. "Life was normal from 1970 to 1975, there was no persecution yet. People believed in the Khmer Rouge at that time." But around October 1975, religion was prohibited and communal eating introduced. However, "there were no killings yet--they began in mid-1976", and in fact perhaps the most revealing pointer to the future at this stage was the simultaneous evacuation of Ibrahim's village in Kor subdistrict and the dispersal of its Cham inhabitants. "Pol Pot wanted to wipe out the Cham race." Whatever particular methods were envisaged or used at this point, well before Ibrahim said killings began, the policy was clearly one of assimilation of the Chams, who were no longer to be recognised or tolerated as a distinct national minority. This was a relatively early manifestation of the racialist ideology which was to lead to such tremendous violence, for instance in 1978 when it was directed at the entire Eastern Zone population accused of having "Khmer bodies but Vietnamese minds".

However, although such national policies were carried out in Tbaung Khmum, their implementation appears to have been accompanied by much less violence, at least before May 1978, than in

the neighbouring Central Zone*. Many of the Chams from Ibrahim's subdistrict were evacuated to the Central Zone in late 1975, while the rest were sent to neighbouring villages of Tbaung Khmum in groups of five families. Ibrahim pointed out that of 11 haji (Mecca pilgrims) from his village, nine went to the Central Zone where they were all executed, whereas the two who remained in Tbaung Khmum both survived.

During 1976, Chams who had joined the Khmer Rouge and had become village chiefs, village committee members, or work team chiefs were removed from their posts. Ibrahim did not say they were executed, and at least one in his village survived in 1980. But at the end of 1976 Ibrahim's brother was taken away from his new village, and the violence soon assumed enormous proportions. "In late 1976 people were taken away in horse-carts; in late 1977 they were taking people away by the truckload. 1977 was the most fearful year. No particular group of people were singled out for execution--the victims were teachers, Lon Nol soldiers, people who committed infractions, both Chams and Khmer. The killings were simply general."

Mat Ly, a member of the district committee, was himself a Cham, but according to a member of the Region 21 Party Committee, "from what we could see he was like a phantom--he had no freedom". Mat Ly's adopted father, Sos Man, was a veteran revolutionary who had been Minister of Religious Affairs in the insurgent Issarak government before 1954. After spending the years 1954-70 in

* The Central Zone included western Kompong Cham province, Kompong Thom and the southern part of western Kratie. Its Party Secretary was Ke Pauk from 1976.

north Vietnam, Sos Man returned to Kampuchea and became "president of the Eastern Zone Islamic movement", a Khmer-Rouge-sponsored organisation, from 1971 to 1974. According to Tea Sabun, "when Sos Man first came back So Phim trusted him; later Phim obeyed Pol Pot and withdrew his confidence, but built a house in which Sos Man would live quietly". Man was told he was "too old" and was confined to a village on Highway 7, Mat Ly said. However in September 1975 two strangers arrived on a motorcycle and offered Man "medicine". He took it and died that night.

There is coincidence in time between this incident, clearly the work of people beyond the control of the district committee, the October 1975 dispersal of Ibrahim's village, and the widely reported massacres in two rebellious Cham villages in Krauchmar district to the north, "a few months after April 1975". A Cham rebellion is reported as having taken place in another Krauchmar village in late 1974, and it is probable that the Cham community in the East (having been led by the Hanoi-trained cadre, Sos Man, in the preceding years) was regarded by the Pol Pot group as politically suspect. In other Zones such as the Central Zone and the Southwest, in the absence both of this political background and of local cadres less inclined to implement national policies "at all costs", the fate of the Chams was determined simply by their race.

But on the whole the emerging racialist policy does not appear to have begun to affect the majority Khmer population of Tbaung Khmum in any dramatic way for another full year. When it did, from the second half of 1976, the role of the district committee in what happened remains unclear. Tea Sabun, who re-

mained district secretary until 1978, claimed there had been "not many killings in 1975-76...only of people accused of treason", and that there was no starvation in that period. Rather "people ate their fill". "Life was normal, there were not many problems. Travel and barter was permitted." However in 1976, "when we had big harvests" (both dry and wet season harvests), orders allegedly came down to turn over a large proportion of the crop to the state. As a result, Sabun says "in early 1977 rations fell considerably, and people began eating very thin gruel."

Memut/Toek Chrou districts

Yin, 25, and Sophal, 23, who were students in Phnom Penh, were evacuated from the capital and in June 1975 they arrived in an area of Memut then part of the new district of Toek Chrou. Their accounts of life in two subdistricts there for the rest of that year indicate severe food shortages that do not seem to have resulted from political factors such as state confiscation of the harvest. Further, although large numbers of former Lon Nol officials and military were gaoled, there does not appear to have been much discrimination against the "new people" as a whole, at least in 1975.

Yin went to a village "deep in the forest, where the people had never seen a brick house or a car". Of 450 people living there, 350 were urban evacuees, of whom fifteen, former officials, soldiers and students, were taken away to "study" during the four months Yin was there.

Starvation was a much worse problem. On the way from Phnom Penh, the evacuees had been welcomed into the Eastern Zone with

two meals cooked for them at Tonle Bet, and on arrival in the village "we rested in people's houses for a day or two while the Khmer Rouge built bamboo houses for us. Then we began work in the fields" But "we got enough rations for the first two or three weeks (only); after that we had to fend for ourselves. So, after two or three months my group were all skin and bones."

("Those who had brought gold with them from Phnom Penh", which they could exchange for food with the locals, managed to remain fairly healthy, however.) By October, over fifty people had died of disease, particularly fever, or starvation. The other 300 new people were then asked if they wanted to move to Battambang, although in fact those who decided to go were kept in the Central Zone once they had crossed the Mekong River.

Sophal, who in April 1975 went to a village in a neighbouring subdistrict, found a different situation. For the first month the 400 new people, about half the village population, received 30 kilograms of unmilled rice per person--probably the highest ration in the country at the time. "But rations gradually fell, until December when there was nothing left." The base people had "adequate" annual rations, but, "we were told to look after ourselves, to dig potatoes, etc." Still, it was only in December 1975, the last of the six months Sophal spent there before he was moved to the Central Zone, that two or three deaths occurred from starvation, and six or seven children died of disease.

The two youths, interviewed together, explained the difference in rations in terms of geography. Sophal's village, they said, was close to a major road and food could be transported there much more easily than to Yin's village in the forest, to which vehicles

could go no closer than "three or four kilometres". Of course, transportation of grain away from the villages would have been similarly easy or hard in each case, but the explanation given by Yin and Sophal seems to rule that out in its emphasis on the degree to which Khmer Rouge attempts to deliver food to different villages were hampered.

Sophal's village also differed from Yin's in that, perhaps partly because of the same ease of access, there were more arrests: he estimated that 120 new people, "former soldiers and officials, and one law student", were taken away "to study"* in 1975. Sophal said there was a prison in Toek Chrou district headquarters, but did not know whether those arrested were taken there. However, like those arrested in Yin's village, these people had not returned by the time he departed.

Sophal noted that among the 400 "base people" he lived with, "the former rich and educated people were no longer favourable to the Khmer Rouge, but the poor people from the forest who had never been to school liked them." Little is known about developments in Toek Chrou after 1975, apart from the fact that Lak, a former Phnom Penh student who had become the district Party Secretary, was arrested in 1977..

In neighbouring Memut district the purges struck in the same year. In Samoeun, the deputy Party Secretary, and Kuong Chhum, a member of the district Party Committee, were both killed in 1977. Two other senior local figures, Sor Kan and Hou Boi Hen, a former schoolteacher who had been a member of the Khmer Rouge embassy in Pyongyang and had returned to Kampuchea after April 1975,

* This is a euphemism which could mean re-education, imprisonment or execution.

were arrested and executed in the same year.

Mau Met, a former carpenter who joined the revolution in 1970 and was responsible for agriculture in Memut district after 1975, recalled the rather confused situation prior to the 1977 purges. He claimed that even though communal eating had been introduced in 1974, the base people "still believed in the Khmer Rouge and were still eating rice... From April 1975 new people were (kept) separate from the base people and the two groups received unequal rations... But by late 1975 everyone was unhappy as they were eating only gruel. The harvest at the end of 1975 was good, but it was collected and taken away, we weren't told where to... Then in mid-1976 a directive arrived from the Centre ordering us to abolish the distinction between new people and base people and ensure equality of rationing."

Met says that he was sent to raise agricultural production in Subdistricts where it was low. In mid-1976 the Chhlong River flooded and destroyed the wet season crop in Rumchek, a base sub-district where, as early as 1968, "everyone believed in the Khmer Rouge". Met went to live with the base people there and claimed he "ate only bamboo for three months".

On the evidence cited so far it seems that in fact the 20,000 "base people" of Memut were not very greatly favoured over the 2,000-3,000 "new people" in 1975-76, and that what Met called an "unequal" situation was really much more equitable than that to be found almost anywhere in the country, except in other parts of the Eastern Zone. Much of the crop previously produced by the base people in Memut undoubtedly went to help feed the new arrivals like Yin and Sophal. When the food ran out, or in remote

areas (Memut district headquarters possessed a single truck, according to Pichey) or places struck by natural calamities, everyone suffered together. As starvation began to take its toll on the new people in the villages where Yin and Sophal lived, the new people were asked if they wanted to settle somewhere else.

Met said that executions took the lives of former Lon Nol officials in 1975, revolutionary cadres in 1977, and base people (including the former Peasant Association leader Sam En) in 1978. As a brief statement this might in fact hold for the Eastern Zone in general. But in Memut, 1977 was in Met's view "a really terrible year" for reasons that go beyond the execution of so many of his Khmer Rouge comrades. His part-Vietnamese wife was killed, along with over 200 Vietnamese women married to Khmers in the district. Met was not killed or gaoled, although the husbands of the other women were. He said this was because of his success as district agricultural supervisor, apparently in ensuring a good harvest at the end of 1976. But the fact that his wife was executed for her race while he still held such a post suggests that in Memut, as in Tbaung Khmum, little power lay in the hands of district-level administrative cadre. Met in fact made this point in reference to the district Party Secretary Kuong Kea, whom he described as "a good man but he could not ignore his instructions from the Centre". 1976 production levels had to be raised to three tonnes of paddy per hectare, and 1977 levels to six-seven tonnes -- impossible targets but ones on which the Centre nevertheless based its requisitions from the district.

In May 1978 Kuong Kea took up the rebel cause in the jungle, and after victory over Pol Pot in 1979 he became Director of Kompong

Som seaport. He was joined in rebellion by Ba Men, head of the district office, and a number of other Memut cadres including Preap Pichey and Mau Met, who in 1980 were respectively province chief and head of the provincial office of Kompong Cham.

Chhlong district

Dara, 26, a law student, was evacuated from Phnom Penh to Region 21, and arrived in Chhlong district with his brother and a friend in June 1975. He was sent to a village in Hanchey sub-district where 300 of the 2,000 villagers were new people. Within a month, however, over 100 former Lon Nol soldiers and a number of teachers were "taken away for re-education, and disappeared". The newcomers were "very afraid of the base people and never dared ask them about politics--we were told to keep quiet if we wanted to survive, and I went along with this." Nevertheless, "at first there were no problems". There was "plenty of food", one and a half tins of rice per person per day, and "privateness had not yet been completely abolished", so meals were eaten at home. Ten Buddhist monks in the village monastery continued to beg for food from the population in the traditional way until mid-1976; there was a "lavish" Khmer New Year festival as late as April 1976.

In August 1975, Dara joined the chalat, a mobile work brigade of 500 village youths, most of whom were base people, "supporters of the revolution". The leader of Dara's 36-person work team was "very kind, a good man". Rations for the workers consisted of "all rice" throughout 1976, despite the introduction of communal eating and the (ineffective) prohibition of "private" foraging in mid-year. (At the same time, the Buddhist monks were defrocked

and the younger ones sent to work in the chalat.)

Attitudes to the system were mixed. The new people "mostly knew what was happening and did not like it". But "at first the base people supported the revolution, but as it got harsher and harsher...In 1977 they all became disillusioned when gruel was introduced in the communal eating halls--one meal per day of gruel, and one of rice. In 1976 they had been told that the Organisation was leading them towards three meals of rice per day, and sweets, for 1977. But when rations were reduced to gruel instead, they thought the Organisation had been lying, although they dared not say so. Production was high, and the base people had never gone without rice. They still had rice in their houses, but they lost confidence in the system."

Around the end of 1976, "four base people in my village committed suicide. Other base people told me that those four knew the committee members, and knew what was happening inside (the Organisation). They killed themselves because of the hatred and backstabbing that was going on."

In 1977, two members of the district committee, who had been "good to me when I met them", were executed. In September, Chhum Savath, the Chhlong district Party Secretary and member of the Region 21 Party Committee, was arrested and later killed.

So 1977 was, as elsewhere, a turning point in Chhlong: "The killings began in 1977, when they killed cadres. There had been one or two killings in 1976, of people who refused orders or were lazy." Also in 1977, children over the age of seven were taken from their homes to live in separate groups, and late in the year the new people and base people were reclassified into three

categories--'full rights', candidates', and 'depositees'. It was also in 1977, during a three-month stay at Suong in Tbaung Khmum district for the mid-year planting season, when for the first time Dara heard cadres mention an apparently foreign 'enemy'. "We started to do guard duty at nights". (Prior to that, Dara had heard district Party Secretary Chhum Savath "address us at a big meeting about the party line", but Savath had not mentioned Vietnam, implicitly or explicitly.)

In 1978 rations were reduced again. Now, "there was only gruel, and for some meals we got nothing at all. We ate lizards and insects." In mid-1978, dara was sent with ten families to another village "to die--they hated us". Several people were executed by the committee of Dara's new subdistrict in ensuing months, including both Dara's brother and his friend. Soon after, however, the village committee and most of the village base people "all ran into the jungle in opposition to the Organisation. The Centre troops came searching everywhere for them and executed the subdistrict committee. The Centre troops were not violent to us, but they supervised us at our work with guns, which had not happened before."

Six days before Pol Pot's defeat, everyone in Dara's village was evacuated north across the Mekong River. "All the villages along the way were empty, and the smell of decaying bodies rose through the forest."

Sieu, an ethnic Chinese restaurant owner from Phnom Penh, who was evacuated to Chhlong in 1975, confirms the 1977 turning point in the district. He said that in his village the base people, who had long "lived off the forest as woodcutters, bamboo sellers, etc...