

## 6. The Pattern and Scope of Violence

by Kenneth M. Quinn

The communist military victory in April 1975 brought with it the hope that peace would return to Cambodia and that there would be an end to the dying. There was instead an almost immediate escalation of the level of violence, as Pol Pot moved to impose on all Khmer the radical economic and social system he had introduced in areas he controlled since June 1973.

A review of the pattern of violence in other totalitarian regimes would suggest that this increase in the use of force and terror in Cambodia should not have been unexpected and is indeed characteristic of both communist and fascist revolutionary regimes. Prior to total victory, violence against the population is usually held to a minimum to maintain popular support for the revolution's military effort. Once victory is achieved, however, totalitarian rulers in general resort to fear and terror to achieve unanimous acquiescence in their political program and to destroy any potential challenges to their rule. Communist China, the Soviet Union, and Nazi Germany experienced the greatest degree of terror after Mao, Stalin, and Hitler had achieved power.

Hannah Arendt, in her classic study on the Nazi and Soviet regimes, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, noted that in the initial period after the seizure of power the major force is directed at obvious enemies—the remnants of the former government and armed forces that might continue to resist. After the remaining elements have been destroyed, the new regime turns on the masses using even greater amounts of terror,

... the end of the first stage comes with the liquidation of open and secret resistance in an organized form. It can be set at about 1935 in Germany and approximately 1930 in Soviet Russia. *Only after the extermination of the real enemies does terror become the actual content of totalitarian regimes.* (Arendt 1958:400; emphasis added)

Pol Pot's rule was to follow this pattern, although it took him only about one year to effectively deal with residual internal threats to his rule.

Carl Friedrich and Zbigniew Brzezinski in their work on totalitarianism touch upon another aspect of terror that has relevance to Pol Pot's Kampuchea:

It is a curious and frightening fact that totalitarian terror increases in scope and violence as the totalitarian system becomes stable and firm—terror embraces the entire society reaching everywhere for actual or potential deviants . . . (Friedrich and Brzezinski 1956:137)

Totalitarian terror grows by leaps and bounds. It not only . . . [is] . . . aimed at anticipating political resistance—it becomes the fundamental method of achieving the revolution without which the regime would lose its total character and probably also its power. Totalitarian terror is therefore the vital nerve of the totalitarian system . . . Because of the belief of the ideological infallibility of its dogma, the regime is propelled toward an increase in terror by a violent passion for unanimity. Since history tells the totalitarian he is right, he expects others to agree with him. This passion for unanimity makes the totalitarian insist on the complete agreement of the entire population. (Friedrich and Brzezinski 1956:131–32)

On April 18, 1975, Pol Pot had every reason to believe he was indeed on the historically correct path. Just five years earlier he and a handful of loyal cadres had appeared on the verge of oblivion. By following an assiduously cultivated plan for revolution, the Communist Party of Kampuchea had: gained control of the revolution by thwarting the influence of Prince Sihanouk; driven the Vietnamese from much of Cambodian territory; established a nascent collectivized agricultural system; forced the American diplomatic and military personnel to flee by helicopter; defeated the better-equipped Khmer Republican Army; and finally captured Phnom Penh a full two weeks before the North Vietnamese entered Saigon, thereby accomplishing in five years what it took Hanoi thirty years to do.

Flushed with victory and imbued with a sense of righteousness, Pol Pot then set out to implement his plan to radically restructure Cambodian society. In seeking to establish this new social system, Pol Pot employed terror, violence, and purges in a systematic way to accomplish these specific goals:

1. *Breaking the System*—using violence and terror to destroy the old society and its social, political, economic, and cultural infrastructure
2. *Socioeconomic Transformation*—applying violence and terror to force the entire society into new socioeconomic patterns (collectivization, work battalions, abolishing private property and religion, and instituting a new value system)
3. *Political Prophylaxis*—using purges and selected executions to counter revisionism and coups d'état from within
4. *Defending against External Threat*—seeking to eliminate threats posed by Vietnam and perceived collaborators of the Vietnamese

In each case the target of the violence would be different.

### Breaking the System

From April 1975 until April 1976, Pol Pot and his followers concentrated on the steps necessary to "break" the old system: that is, to destroy the patterns of political authority, economic activity, and cultural tradition that

had characterized it. To accomplish this goal they sought to: (1) empty all cities and towns and resettle the population on agricultural communes; (2) identify, arrest, or execute officials and military personnel from the Lon Nol government; and (3) neutralize those elements in society perceived as potentially threatening to their rule and desirous of a return to traditional Khmer society. In all three efforts, the party utilized significant amounts of violence and terror to accomplish its objectives.

### THE EXODUS FROM THE CITIES

Pol Pot's first move was to empty all of the cities and towns and force the entire urban population to walk to new collective agricultural sites in order to begin new lives as farm workers. Several reasons were put forward by the Khmer Rouge for this radical development: the threat of American bombing; the inability to supply sufficient food to the cities; and the fear of counterrevolution. In an interview in 1978, Pol Pot told journalists that: ". . . the cities were not evacuated through a pre-established plan but were in conformity with the situation at the time, . . . the shortage of foodstuffs, the necessity to solve this problem for the population and the U.S. imperialists and their lackey's plan aiming at destroying our revolution and taking back power" (FBIS IV, March 1978:10).

These reasons were indeed ones that Khmer Rouge cadres used in ordering people to leave the cities. Other statements made by communist cadres, the inclusion of sick and handicapped persons in the evacuation, and the well-established checkpoints in operation along the routes suggest, however, that the evacuation was planned in advance and implemented to achieve fundamental policy objectives rather than for spur-of-the-moment security reasons. In 1977, Pol Pot himself admitted openly that the evacuation of the cities was a carefully planned, premeditated action. "One of the important factors is the evacuation of city residents to the countryside. *This was decided before victory was won, that is, in February 1975 . . .*" (FBIS I, October 3, 1977:A23; emphasis added).

Moreover, it appears clear in retrospect that the evacuation of the cities was not a new concept but a repeat of the policy implemented in June, 1973, when the Khmer Rouge systematically burned rural villages and hamlets under their control in order to force peasants into the new communal agricultural system. The goal of the new Cambodian rulers was fundamentally and drastically to change the nature of Khmer society. Cities were viewed as creations of Western influence, centers of decadence and conspicuous consumption, and impediments to change. Like villages and hamlets, they were a fundamental part of the old order. By literally tearing the great bulk of the country's population from its roots and familiar patterns of work and life, the Khmer Rouge leadership intended irrevocably and irretrievably to move toward a new egalitarian agricultural society.

One communist cadre put it this way in explaining the emptying of the capital: "From now on if the people want to eat, they should go out and work in the rice paddies. They should learn that their lives depend on a grain of rice. Plowing the soil, planting and harvesting rice will teach them the real value of things. Cities are evil. There are money and trade in cities and both have a corrupting influence. People are good, but cities are evil. This is why we shall do away with cities" (Barron and Paul 1977:16-17). Another Khmer Rouge cadre echoed this notion: "The city is bad for there is money in the city. People can be reformed, but not cities. By sweating to clear land, sowing and harvesting crops, men will learn the real value of things. Man has to know that he is born again from a grain of rice" (Ponchaud 1978:21).

Other evidence indicated that the Khmer Rouge also disdained the influences of city life—like long hair on students—and the class distinctions that were maintained by such things as large houses, opulent furniture, automobiles, and fancy clothing.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, cities were centers of commerce where large sums of money changed hands and "greedy" merchants made "unseemly profits" by exploiting the rural poor. Pol Pot may also have been influenced by the Chinese experience that cities are not conducive to communism and were in fact the locus of much political opposition to the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution. Furthermore, the Khmer Rouge viewed the cities as unproductive economic drains on the countryside, and the revolutionary movement did not have enough cadres to control all the cities. By destroying urban life, Pol Pot sought to wipe out all of these negative features.

The forced march of approximately three million out of Phnom Penh and hundreds of thousands of others out of Cambodia's provincial towns caused a significant number of deaths, particularly among the aged and infirm. This process began when "... roughly twenty four hours after the advent of peace, the Communists began routing out the people much more methodically and vigorously. In the name of *Angkar*, parties of four to six soldiers systematically went from door to door, ... and by mid-morning the streets teemed with hundreds of thousands of people" (Barron and Paul 1977:25-26). One French journalist reported that refugees in Saigon recounted the story of a "Khmer Rouge cadre entering a hospital crying, 'The American imperialists will bomb the hospital—you must evacuate immediately'. Everyone had to leave. Those who could walk helped the crippled, amputees and others, some hobbling, others on their hands and knees" (*Le Figaro* 1976).

François Ponchaud, whose analysis of the social context of these events

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter 5 by François Ponchaud for additional interpretation of the anti-urban bias of the Khmer Rouge.—ED.

precedes this chapter, provided an eyewitness account of this exodus of the walking wounded, "A few moments later a hallucinatory spectacle began. Thousands of the sick and wounded were abandoning the city. The strongest dragged pitifully along, others were carried by friends, and some were lying on beds pushed by their families with their plasma and I.V. bumping alongside" (Ponchaud 1977:6-7).

The largest numbers of deaths along the evacuation route resulted from the heat, lack of food and water, and absence of medical assistance. As one refugee noted:

From noon onwards, the masses in the streets multiplied as Communist troops uprooted more and more families ... there was a huge crowd of every age and condition, young, old and sick ... virtually everybody saw ... corpses rapidly bloating and rotting in the sun. Then the water supply ceased throughout the city ... No stores of drinking water, no stocks of food, no shelter had been prepared for the millions of outcasts. Consequently acute dysentery racked and sapped life from bodies ... already weakened by hunger and fatigue ... we must have passed the body of a child every 200 yards. (Levin 1977a).

The sheer rigor of the march and the lack of sanitation and health care added to the death toll. Unburied bodies accumulated rapidly, aggravating health problems; "an estimated 100,000 people died in a single cholera epidemic that broke out southwest of Phnom-Penh 15 days after the exodus" (*Time* 1976:9).

By interviewing refugees that reached Saigon a month later, one reporter concluded that "hundreds, and possibly thousands, of city dwellers had died on the roads ... mostly old people and children" (Dawson 1975:17). This estimate concerned only one part of the evacuation. Others estimated that as many as four hundred thousand people succumbed during the entire process of emptying the cities (Barron and Paul 1977:203). Although it will probably never be possible to achieve a precise accounting of the actual number that perished, the evidence strongly points to a significant loss of life during this evacuation.

The Khmer Rouge, in their application of these harsh measures, had extracted a high price from the population, but they had achieved several of their objectives. Through the forced abandonment of the towns and cities:

they had totally cut off virtually the entire population from whatever material connection it had with the old order  
all homes, money, cars, bank accounts, and consumer goods were left behind

potential adversaries and opponents were disorganized and separated from places that might serve as centers of resistance, thus maximizing the communist political control

familiar social, religious, familial, and economic patterns were shattered, and all evacuees were thrown into a basic struggle for physical survival

Thus, in the first few days of implementing their revolution, Pol Pot and his followers eschewed all gradualism and instead abruptly terminated a thousand years of Khmer socioeconomic history and began the establishment of a radically new order.

SETTLING THE SCORE: IDENTIFYING AND ELIMINATING  
THE FORMER ENEMY

Concomitant with their destruction of the patterns of urban life, the Khmer Rouge began an effort to identify—and in many instances execute—political leaders, military officers, and civil servants from the republican government. Some were killed at their offices; others were identified at check points along the march routes outside of Phnom Penh; still others surrendered and were taken out in large groups to be killed. In some instances the spouses and children of the officials were killed alongside their husbands and fathers.<sup>2</sup>

The persons most sought after by the victorious communist forces were the top leaders of the former government. Although some escaped before the Khmer Rouge entered Phnom Penh, others remained behind and were subsequently arrested and executed. In November 1975, Ieng Sary confirmed that Sirik Matak, former Prime Minister Long Boret, and Lon Non (Lon Nol's younger brother) were all executed. An aide to Prince Sihanouk in Beijing at the time confirmed the deaths, saying that Lon Non had been lynched by a mob and the other two shot by a firing squad (*Washington Post* 1975).

Other officials were included in this roundup of former government functionaries. For example, here is the story of one female refugee who managed to flee to Vietnam: "Married to a police officer, she lived in Phnom Penh with her four children. On April 18, the Khmer Rouge entered their house and without so much as a word of explanation killed her husband with a stick (right in front of the family). They did the same to the 10-year-old son. The woman immediately fled with her other children. She walked for a month across Cambodia. Her younger two children died along the way of starvation and sickness" (*Le Figaro* 1976).

Most of the killings took place after the officers had been rounded up, often on the pretext that they were going to meet with Prince Sihanouk or to participate in the "reconstruction of the country." Here is a report of

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter 5 by François Ponchaud for an explanation of the tendency to kill whole families. See Chapter 7 by David Hawk for evidence that this same pattern was carried out against communist cadres judged to be enemies of the state.—Ed.

what a refugee from Battambang Province saw when he was forced to serve on burial detail:

He [Soun Heap] and other men were taken to a place called Arak Bak Kor near Sisophon. There the villagers found a killing ground scattered with the corpses of soldiers who had been beaten to death. As they began to bury them, which they were ordered to do, trucks began to arrive packed with more Lon Nol soldiers, each man individually bound at the ankles and by a rope pinioning his arms at the biceps. The first batch of soldiers were taken from the trucks by the Khmer Rouge Guards and then tied together with a long rope to form an enormous human chain. The Khmer Rouge then beat them to death with pieces of timber in full view of the other victims awaiting the same fate in the trucks. "The men in the trucks began to scream and wail and many fell down unconscious," Soun Heap said . . . (Woollacott 1976)

Ith Thaim, another refugee who had been drafted to drive a Khmer Rouge truck provided this eyewitness account of the execution of some civilian officials and their families:

At Mongkol Borie, the local Khmer Rouge commander . . . ordered . . . a squad of young Communist soldiers to punish . . . a group of civilian officials of the fallen government . . . The 15 Khmer Rouge rounded up ten former civil servants and their wives and children—about 60 people—tied their hands behind their backs . . . and drove them . . . to a banana plantation . . . Scattered about the place were the bodies of people killed one or two days earlier . . . The Khmer Rouge thrust each official forward one at a time and forced him to kneel between two soldiers armed with bayonet-tipped AK-47 assault rifles. The soldiers then stabbed the victim simultaneously through the chest and back . . . As each man lay dying, his anguished, horror-struck wife and children were herded up to the body. The women, forced to kneel, also received the simultaneous bayonet thrusts. The children, last to die, were stabbed where they stood. Of the 60 or so executed, only about six were spared the bayonet. These were very small children, too young to fully appreciate what was happening. In a killing frenzy now, the two executioners each grabbed a limb—one an arm, the other a leg—and tore the infants apart. (*Time* 1976)

François Ponchaud cites the slogans he frequently heard on Khmer Rouge radio broadcasts as evidence that this drive to destroy all these links and kill all the officers and their families was indeed premeditated:

. . . this total purge was, above all, the translation into action of a particular vision of man: a person who has been spoiled by a corrupt regime cannot be reformed, he must be physically eliminated from the brotherhood of the pure. "The regime must be destroyed"; "the enemy must be utterly crushed"; "What is infected must be cut out"; "What is rotten must be removed"; "What is too long must be shortened and be made the right length"; "It isn't enough to cut down a bad plant, it must be uprooted"; those are among the slogans used both on the radio and at meetings, to justify the purge. The authorities of the former regime were enemies and as such had no place in the national community. Several accounts state that in many places the officers' wives and children were killed too: the theme that the family line must

be annihilated down to the last survivor is recurrent in such reports. (Ponchaud 1978:50-51)

Executions were usually carried out in locations far removed from the population—sometimes, if villagers were nearby, Khmer Rouge cadre took measures to eliminate the noise associated with mass executions. A former member of the army described the scene as he and his entire family were being taken to be executed:

One evening the Khmer Rouge assembled us. We were to be interrogated. At 2030 hours we were ordered to leave the pagoda where we were waiting. The Khmer Rouge took us to the edge of a forest. My wife held the youngest of our sons in her arms. I held the hands of the other two. Our elbows were then tied. I stretched them as far as possible so that my bonds might be looser. We were blindfolded and I knew we were about to be executed. I was able to untie myself and lift my blindfold. I witnessed a scene of horror. The Khmer Rouge were stuffing the mouths of those they were leading with rags and grass to prevent them from screaming and were cutting their throats like animals—the throats of men, women, old folk and children alike. I managed to escape. (Porlier 1976)

Another report of a large-scale execution came from refugee Chea Sambath, who stated that on April 24 he arrived at Thmar Kaul, where "there were hundreds of bodies lying by the roadside with their hands tied behind their backs. I learned later that they were the non-commissioned officers from Battambang who were supposedly going for retraining" (Ponchaud 1978:44).

Chan Dura, a court clerk in Pailin, recounted how all the municipal officials—eighty people in all—were executed together (Ponchaud 1978:44).

Yon Kim Lanh, a young electrical technician who stayed in Phnom Penh to help run the city's power plant, witnessed the continual disappearance of military officers and had a chance to ask a senior Khmer communist official about it. He was working at a communist headquarters at the Monorom Hotel where he observed:

I saw more than two hundred Lon Nol officers brought in. They were taken away the same night, for an unknown destination. Everyday the Khmer Rouge brought in another hundred or more people, mostly officers . . . [but also including the editor-in-chief of the newspaper *Depeche du Cambodge*.] One after another they all disappeared, and always at night. I knew a few of the Khmer Rouge—and asked them what had happened to the people who disappeared from the hotel. The answer was: "We kill them all because they're traitors and deserve to be shot." (Ponchaud 1978:28)

Regardless of the source of information, the pattern seems to have been relatively uniform throughout the country during the opening days of liberation: army officers and bureaucratic functionaries (often with their families) were systematically sought out and executed as "traitors." This pro-

gram, of course, directly contradicted the promises of the revolution before it came to power, when it sought to reassure the population that only the most important traitors would be executed.<sup>3</sup> It, however, represented another clear indication that the success of the Khmer Rouge revolution was premised on the early elimination of all political impediments. The mass of the population was cut off from their cultural and economic roots, and former enemies and (as will be seen) political dissidents within the revolutionary movement were physically eliminated.

#### SUPPRESSION OF TEACHERS AND STUDENTS

The Khmer communists apparently saw the intellectual community as one of the major threats to their continued rule and to the smooth transition to the new society they were imposing. Thus, while military officers and former civilian officials were the primary target for elimination, the new Cambodian authorities also initiated a campaign to identify teachers, professional people, students, and intellectuals—anyone with an education. In some instances this process led to immediate execution. In others it was the beginning of a process that would culminate with the violent effort a year later to do away with virtually every educated or technically trained person in Cambodia.

During the forced march out of Phnom Penh, Khmer Rouge cadres put up signs requiring all professional people to register along with military personnel. One former army captain, Mam Sarun, told of such a sign at the Kieng Svay Pagoda which read: "All officers the rank of second lieutenant up must register here, in order to return to Phnom Penh. *Professors, students and school teachers must also give their names, but will leave later*" (Ponchaud 1978:27; emphasis added).

Another refugee recounted that in September of 1975 the Khmer Rouge were still rounding up educated persons for review, and then for re-education or elimination. He had been forcibly moved to Sisophon by train and recalled that as he disembarked, a loudspeaker asked "all specialists to step forward: doctors, architects, school teachers, students, technicians and skilled workers of all kinds" (Ponchaud 1978:69).

This refugee went on to describe how he was held in forced detention for months while Khmer Rouge cadres evaluated whether he and the other "397 specialists" who voluntarily identified themselves would be "trouble makers." He described a Khmer Rouge "trick," which they often repeated in other parts of the country. In an effort to make people relax and not feel threatened, they would provide plenty of food and even have a banquet of sorts. After that, people were asked about their ideas on how to make the new society better. Those teachers and students criticizing Angkar (the

<sup>3</sup> For confirmation of this point, see Chapter 2, p. 50, by Karl Jackson.—Ed.

At first, the largest numbers of deaths in the new communes were attributed to the lack of nutrition and vitamins, the long hours and the absence of the most elemental medical care. Yean Sok, a refugee who lived on a new collective farm, wrote: "Everyday 3 or 4 people died at the village in a population of 440 families. There were families that were totally exterminated. For example, the family of Mr. Ben Huot who lived next to me and used to be the judge of Phnom Penh: a family of 18 members from November 29, 1975, till July 3, 1977, were deceased and only six people remained. All of these deaths were caused by dysentery plaudisime, wounds which are untreated, or lack of vitamins. These people died miserably without medicine. The sanitary personnel is very young and have no medical training. Almost every family lost at least 2 or 3 members." Yean Sok added that one "section" of his commune disappeared entirely and that he later learned from one of the local communist cadres that in the year and a half after Pol Pot took over "more than 4,000 people died" in their village (Yean Sok 1978).

Deaths from the physical hardships of the new order were supplemented by efforts to do away with politically undesirable individuals. Toward the end of 1975, a campaign was initiated in the communes that aimed at identifying and eliminating individuals with any attachment to the former regime, including government employees, anyone who had served in the Lon Nol military down to the rank of private, and all students and teachers and all their families. "In October 1975, monitors abroad listened as the Communist commander in Sisophon received radio orders to prepare for the extermination after the harvest of all former government soldiers and civil servants, regardless of rank, and their families. The killing began during . . . 1976. Before the organized slaughter had been largely confined to officers and senior civil servants. Now the lowliest private, the most humble civil servant, the most innocent teacher, even foresters and public health officials, became prey" (Levin 1977).

This type of "Purification Campaign" would be repeated again in 1977 and in 1978, each time seeking out people at the lower levels of society with any connection to the old regime. These purges and harsh treatment of the population on the collective farms was intended to force acceptance of the new economic, social, and cultural regimen, as well as to establish new patterns of work. Moreover, since most of the city dwellers from the "old society" were viewed as tainted by their association with the corrupt former social order, those that might expire would not be considered a loss. In addition, a weakened, dispirited population would be less able to resist the other changes that Pol Pot envisaged for the new Cambodia—the elimination of the most basic features of the Khmer culture and society.

In order to create the "new socialist man" to inhabit his new society, Pol Pot sought to strip away the cultural, religious, and social infrastructures upon which traditional Khmer society was based and to replace them with a

new socialist order based on total acquiescence to the "organization" (Angkar) and subjugation of the individual self to the collective good. The new collective farms served as the main instrument for achieving this goal. They represented a tabula rasa upon which the new Khmer culture was to be imprinted. To create a new system, a plan was implemented to eradicate old practices, beliefs, and social patterns. Similar to the Chinese Cultural Revolution's campaign to destroy the "Four Olds" (old thoughts, old culture, old customs, and old habits—Baum 1964:101), this process had several distinct elements, all aimed at destroying the institutions and organizations of the ancien régime.

First came the attack on organized religion. Buddhist pagodas were closed, statues and icons destroyed and monks forced to take up secular work or join the army. The new collective farms had no religious edifices of any type, no monks were allowed, and the practice of religion was proscribed. A Yugoslav journalist quoted Yun Yat, the minister of education and propaganda and the spouse of party leader Son Sen, as she outlined the underlying philosophy for this action: "Under the old regime peasants believed in Buddhism, which the ruling class utilized as a propaganda instrument. With the development of revolutionary consciousness, the people stopped believing and *bonzes* (priests) left the temples. The problem gradually becomes extinguished. Hence there is no problem" (*Des Moines Register* 1978).

Dragoslav Rancic, the journalist to whom Yun Yat made these statements, wrote that based on his two-week tour of Cambodia, "priests were considered social parasites . . . [and] their fate was not known." Rancic added that "we saw pagodas turned into storage houses for rice or into barns for storing farm equipment" (*Des Moines Register* 1978). He stressed, however, that while religious shrines had been attacked, the Khmer Rouge were careful to guard and preserve the Angkor Wat complex as a national shrine, apparently seeing it as a relic of an earlier primitive Cambodia that they respected.

The second institution that came under attack as part of Pol Pot's revolution was the family. Many young teenagers were separated from their families and sent away for rigorous ideological training. Upon returning to their homes these young people were described by refugees as fierce in their condemnation of the "old ways," contemptuous of traditional customs, and ardently opposed to religious and parental authority (Quinn 1976).

In other instances, families in the new communes were segregated by sex and compelled to live in dormitories with large numbers of other persons. The end result was a severe lessening of parental control, which along with monastic authority had formed two of the strongest pillars in the cultural foundation of the Cambodian village.

The burning of old, long-established villages and the emptying of cities

and towns was yet another part of this destructive process, as was the abolition of a money economy and the prohibition of most individual possessions. By these steps, individuals were totally cut off from their previous ways of life and any wealth they had accumulated. In one stroke, every member of Khmer society was to be ineluctably reduced to the same economic and social level. The "contradictions" between rich and poor, educated and illiterate—and rural and urban—built up over the years, were to be wiped out.

Next, and perhaps the most basic change of all, the pattern of land holdings and agricultural cultivation was completely transformed. Individual plots of land and reliance on kinship ties for assistance in planting and harvesting gave way to production brigades and large communal farms. The peasant farmer's direct personal relationship with the land, which had developed and endured for generations as a hallmark of Cambodian society, ceased to exist in a matter of a few days.

The final institution that the Khmer communists sought to eliminate was the monarchy. Prince Sihanouk had his critics and detractors in Phnom Penh, but royalty still retained esteem in the countryside. It is one of the ironies of this entire period that without Sihanouk on their side, the Khmer Rouge might never have attracted peasants to their cause. But, just as the Chinese and the Vietnamese communists were able to espouse popular nationalist themes to attract individuals to join their cause, so too were Pol Pot and his followers able to use the restoration of the prince as a rallying cry during the first years of the united front against Lon Nol (*Asia Week* 1977). When it was clear that Pol Pot was finally in charge, however, Sihanouk was eliminated from any role in the government or society (Quinn 1976). In 1976, with the adoption of the new constitution and the death of Zhou Enlai—Sihanouk's chief supporter in China—the monarchy was abolished.

Thus, in a relatively short time following their April 1975 victory, the Khmer communists dramatically changed the nature of many of Cambodia's oldest and most enduring institutions: religion, the family, cities, natural villages, private property, land tenure, money, and the monarchy. It was upon these structures that Cambodian society had been built. Yet through the application of terror and the establishment of the new communes, all these institutions were extensively changed in a short time.

*New York Times* journalist Sydney Schanberg described Pol Pot's new Cambodia this way:

The Draconian rules of life turned Cambodia into a nationwide gulag, as the Khmer Rouge imposed a revolution more radical and brutal than any other in modern history . . . attachment to home village and love of Buddha, Cambodian verities, were replaced by psychological reorientation, mass relocation and rigid collectivization.

Families were separated, with husbands, wives and children all working on separate agricultural and construction projects. They were often many miles apart and did not see each other for seasons at a time. Sometimes children were separated completely from their parents, never to meet again.

The practice of religion had been forbidden by the Khmer Rouge; all statues of Buddha had been destroyed; monks had been either killed or made to work in the fields as common laborers. (Schanberg 1980)

But the Khmer communists were not concerned only with the organizational structure of Cambodian society. Their second point of attack was the minds of the Khmer people themselves. Pol Pot's policies aimed at creating a new socialist man whose actions would no longer be based on individual profit, but rather on selfless dedication to the collective well-being. To do this the Khmer Rouge sought to remove all incentives for individual accomplishment: thus the elimination of money, individual plots of land, and any differentiation in housing, clothing, and personal property. But beyond that, they strove to teach each person that any deviation from the general party line—any selfish act—would result in the most severe punishment and probable death. It appears that on the new collective farms they sought a society of automatons carrying out repetitive functions in a mechanistic fashion. Cambodian society was to become a giant agricultural factory with each person filling a distinct, specific function, like a small part of a machine. To accomplish this, Pol Pot created within the new communes an atmosphere of terror in which people were in some cases afraid to even talk with each other and in which families feared to speak even in their own homes or in front of their children for fear of being taken away and never being heard of again. "Fear and suspicion became the essence of existence. To trust anyone was to risk one's life. People stopped having meaningful conversations, even inside their own family" (Schanberg 1980).

What Pol Pot sought to achieve was the obliteration of individualism, for just like Mao, he believed that for communism to succeed it must eliminate individualism (see Pol Pot 1977:H30 and Schurmann 1966:92). Pol Pot saw that to achieve the full socialist transformation he had to strip the concept of individualism from the collective Cambodian psyche. It appears he believed that only by destroying every root, every vestige of individualist thought could a new society emerge consisting of persons totally dedicated to, and knowing only, a collectivist regimen.

After learning about the multitude of executions in Cambodia, many observers concluded that these could only have resulted from irrational, purposeless madness. In fact, the killing had a clear, distinct purpose—the systematic eradication of those persons who embodied or perpetuated the notion of individualism. To Pol Pot it was necessary to kill the professional or well-educated persons, the wives of military officers and government officials, and their children. All of them possessed the ethical and philosophi-

cal heritage by which the individualist system operated; Pol Pot evidently feared that, if allowed to live, they would always seek to return to it.

This rationale would also seem to explain the Khmer Rouge emphasis on allowing "poor peasants" to hold positions of responsibility even when technical expertise was required. Among all persons in society, they alone were believed to least embody the most exaggerated aspects of individualism—ambition, achievement, wealth, and avarice. All others in society were deemed untrustworthy. The evidence strongly suggests that from 1975 to 1978 Pol Pot followed a course of progressively executing many people from all but the "bottom level" of the old society. First, right after the fall of Phnom Penh, the senior officials and military officers of the Lon Nol government (as well as in many cases their families) were executed in large numbers. They were followed a few months later by teachers, highly educated persons, and professionals such as doctors and engineers. At about the same time, the lower military personnel were singled out for elimination, and then later (1977), persons who had served in the republican military, even if it was only as a private in the village militia. Finally, the campaign was initiated to identify and eliminate the "new people"—that is, those who had lived in the noncommunist zones at the end of the war.

Apparently, all of the above classes were tainted in the eyes of the Khmer Rouge leadership. To them, the new collectivist, socialist society could only be achieved when a new generation emerged—imbued only with the philosophy that a human being's sole function in society is as an interchangeable part of a large collective entity. Once that occurred, the new socialist man and woman would pass this new value system on their children and the new society would be institutionalized. To insure that this plan would not fail, the Khmer Rouge appeared to have planned to eliminate systematically all those judged as incapable of fitting into the new, or possessing an attachment to the old.

### Political Prophylaxis

In addition to being aimed at achieving radical social transformation, Pol Pot's violent policies served to stamp out any remaining remnants of opposition from the old society, while simultaneously insulating him from challenges from inside his own party. Nonetheless, Pol Pot's draconian policies inspired attempts to overthrow his rule. These in turn led the Khmer Rouge leaders to initiate violent, far-reaching purges of the party.

The available evidence indicates that there were two attempted coups against Pol Pot: the first in 1976, from within the center of the Communist Party of Kampuchea itself, and the second in 1978, which was encouraged by Vietnam and led to the defection of Heng Samrin and Pen Sovan and the ultimately successful move to topple Pol Pot through the use of Vietnamese

military power. The first coup attempt occurred in September of 1976, and was organized and carried out by military leaders and senior party officials who were dismayed by the continuing level of violence in the country and the stark nature of the new society. These feelings had apparently been building for some time. Hou Yuon, the minister of the interior and cooperatives and one of the most prominent Khmer Rouge leaders during the war, had reportedly resigned in late 1975 in protest over the brutal nature of the forced and rapid communization of the entire country. Evidence of Hou Yuon's departure first came in April 1976, when a new government was announced and his name was conspicuously absent. It later became apparent that he had been executed (Quinn 1977).

Dissatisfaction appears to have spread to a number of other senior leaders who then conspired among themselves to kill Pol Pot and impose a new leadership on the party. According to Khmer Rouge defector Chek Win, planning for the attempted coup began on February 24, 1976, when Mit Soth, the regional commander in Damban (region) 106 (Oddar Meanchey, Siem Reap, and Kampong Thom provinces), called a clandestine meeting in Siem Reap City. Chek Win claims that at this time plans were drawn for an uprising because "all the soldiers wanted to create a rebellion that would allow people to go back and work as they did before the capture of Phnom Penh" (*Asia Week* 1977). April 17, 1977, was set as the date for the liberation, according to Chek Win, who added that he was told about a week before it was to take place that the plot had been uncovered and foiled. Other evidence provides a different chronology, indicating that the attempt to overthrow Pol Pot took place in mid-1976, although word of it did not get out until the spring of 1977.

Little is known with certainty about the actual attempt to kill Pol Pot. According to one account provided by a former Khmer Rouge member who later fled to Thailand, the commander of troops in Phnom Penh, Mit Cha Krey, joined by the military commanders of the Northern and Northeastern regions and of the Battambang and Oddar Meanchey special zones, attempted to poison Pol Pot during one of his regular meals. The poison was added to his food by his cook who was a relative of one of the conspirators. The plot was foiled when one of the guards at Pol Pot's headquarters inadvertently sampled the food in the kitchen and died immediately. Cha Krey and the others were motivated, according to this report, by the "hardships" the people were being made to endure.<sup>4</sup>

In September 1978, Democratic Kampuchea openly confirmed in its own *Black Paper* that Cha Krey had been asked to assassinate the Khmer Rouge leadership in mid-1976—but that "nothing came of it" (Democratic Kam-

<sup>4</sup> This account was provided to U.S. Government officials in Thailand in 1977.

puchea 1978a:45, 62).<sup>5</sup> This same document also acknowledged the attempt to poison Pol Pot, but caused some confusion by attributing it to the Vietnamese and putting the date for its occurrence in 1970. The details of the 1970 poisoning attempt contained in the Cambodian *Black Paper*, however, were remarkably similar to those provided for the 1976 incident by the Khmer Rouge defectors. More confusion was added by the *Black Paper* statement that the 1970 plot was not discovered until 1976:

... On the occasion of the negotiation of November 1970, the Vietnamese tried to poison Comrade Pol Pot and Comrade Second Secretary Nuon Chea through their agents infiltrated into the very breast of the KCP ...

The negotiation took place in the Northern Zone, called Zone 304. The Secretary of the Zone, Koy Thoun, organized these negotiations, and it was his wife who prepared the food for the occasion.

Arrested in 1976, Koy Thoun revealed the plot ... As the KCP took strict surveillance measures one had loyal Party members in the kitchen, this heinous criminal act was unsuccessful (Democratic Kampuchea 1978a:45, 62).

There are several reasons to believe that the poisoning attempt described in the *Black Paper* occurred in 1976 rather than 1970. First, the *Black Paper* account implies that the incident was not discovered by party officials until 1976, leaving one to wonder why the "Party members in the kitchen" who thwarted the attempted assassination would not have told someone about it before then. Second, the relationship between the Khmer Rouge and the Vietnamese communists in November of 1970 was hardly at the point where an assassination would seem called for. Rather, 1970 represents one of the high points of cooperation between the two parties as they fought against Lon Nol.

There is additional evidence lending support to the argument that the poisoning occurred in 1976. On September 26, 1976, Radio Phnom Penh announced that Pol Pot had taken "temporary leave" from his post as prime minister "to take care of his health, which has been bad for several months" (Quinn 1977:46). At the time, this development caused much speculation about whether Pol Pot had been removed from office. In retrospect it seems

<sup>5</sup> The *Black Paper* issued by Pol Pot's ministry of foreign affairs detailed two other abortive assassination attempts that the Cambodians attributed to the Vietnamese, but that could reasonably have sprung from the ranks of the Communist Party of Kampuchea itself.

The first occurred in July 1975, at a ceremony in which all military commanders pledged their Kampuchean Revolutionary Army forces to the party central committee. At that time "the enemy ... was able to implant a soldier, from a unit in the Northern Zone, among the group of security guards responsible for the conference area or room to fire on the leaders of the KCP [Communist Party of Kampuchea] ... But the plan failed because all weapons were emptied of cartridges prior to entry into the ceremonial room. The enemy plan was only revealed a year later in 1976."

The second attempt came in September 1975, when "a three or four man team from a unit in the Eastern Zone" was organized "to assassinate the leaders of the KCP." This plot also failed because "the three soldiers could not recognize the leaders and consequently did not know whom to fire at (Democratic Kampuchea 1978a:45-62)."

probable that the relinquishing of his governmental duties was directly linked to the assassination attempt. It is possible that Pol Pot actually did become ill as a result of eating some of the poisoned food. What seems more likely is that Pol Pot retreated to a secret, well-protected area where he would be safe from further attacks and from which he could direct the effort to rout out and eliminate all of those involved in the plot to kill him.

Still other evidence confirms that a coup attempt did take place in this general time frame. In mid-1977, Thai intelligence officials revealed information about an abortive overthrow of Pol Pot (*Bangkok Post* 1977; see also Kramer 1977). Another indication came in September 1977, when North Korean radio broadcast Kim Il-Song's message to Pol Pot on the seventeenth anniversary of the founding of the Cambodian communist party, which contained the following paragraph: "the heroic Cambodian people have wiped out some time ago the counter revolutionary group of spies who had committed subversive activities and sabotages, worming themselves into the revolutionary ranks for a long time at the instigation of the foreign imperialists" (FBIS IV, September 30, 1977).

At the time (September 1977), this was a subject of great sensitivity for Pol Pot, since he had just finished announcing openly the existence of the Cambodian communist party and had recounted all of its "positive" achievements.

An indication of the sensitivity of this issue is provided by the fact that references to the internal plot were expurgated from the version of Kim Il-Song's message when it was broadcast over Radio Phnom Penh (Jackson 1978a:81).

Four months later, Cambodian officials were less circumspect. Engaged in an increasingly heated confrontation with the Vietnamese and anxious to exorcise all sympathy for Hanoi from their ranks, Khieu Samphan admitted that in 1975 and 1976 "... a small group of traitors at the service of the Vietnamese and the expansionists attempted to overthrow the Phnom Penh government" (*Asia Week* 1978:17).

From all this evidence, it seems relatively certain that an attempt to poison Pol Pot occurred in 1976. The Cambodian communists probably changed the date in their *Black Paper* because they wanted to shift the blame to the Vietnamese and hide the fact that the assassination attempt had come from within their own ranks.

#### THE PURGE

While there may not be precise information on all the details of the 1976 coup attempt, a great deal is known about what followed in January 1977—a large-scale effort to identify and eliminate all party leaders, governmental officials, and military officers associated with the plot. This purge then expanded to all those whose loyalty might be suspect for other reasons, including any who might be pro-Vietnamese.

This purge took place in several phases. In late 1976 some of the most senior of the suspected conspirators were taken to the Tuol Sleng school in Phnom Penh that was Pol Pot's main "torture and execution center." It seems certain that Hu Nim—the former minister of information—was executed there, as well as Hu Yuon and probably most of the other plotters: "When Pol Pot's former Information Minister Hou [sic] Nim was executed in 1977, his torturers reported to Brother Duch [the Center's head] that they had 'lashed him four or five times to break his stand, before having him filled up with water'" (Newsweek 1980:42).

Public acknowledgment that Hou Yuon was also executed came from four former members of the Khmer communist administration who reportedly told a conference in France that "the former Minister of the Interior and the Minister for Co-operatives in Kampuchea had been accused of 'treason' and 'shot'." (FBIS IV, July 3, 1978:K13)

The executions of these senior officials were followed by many others, according to a prisoner who worked at Tuol Sleng. Documents found after the Vietnamese overran Phnom Penh indicated that thousands of Cambodians were systematically executed at Tuol Sleng. According to one report, the victims: "passed over iron beds on which they were beaten and tortured with electrical shocks, passed through tiny cells where they were left in chains without food to starve and rot, among them Khmer Rouge Ministers, Ambassadors and high functionaries who were accused of 'treason'" (Terzani 1980).

The report revealed that among the records at Tuol Sleng were "more than 16,000 dossiers on victims, dozens of boxes of photographs of people prior to and after execution, among them 1,200 pictures of children, some of them under 10 years of age" (Terzani 1980). Peter White, who visited the prison in Phnom Penh after the defeat of Pol Pot, indicated that "four out of five prisoners brought to Tuol Sleng were Khmer Rouge supporters . . . (White 1982:600)."

Still another report indicated that "Brother" Duch, the head of the "torture center," was a well-educated university graduate from Kompong Thom; he was also reported to be head of Nokorbal, the secret police system in Cambodia and as such "responsible for the deaths of as many as one million people" (Newsweek 1980:42). Duch had "200 like-minded interrogators and torturers" working under him. His right-hand man was Mam Nay, "a former teacher." Another was Peng, "who used a butcher's knife to kill prisoners." "A woman known as 'Yek' was in charge of killing women" (Newsweek 1980:42).

Thousands of prisoners were tortured into making preposterous confessions, often that they were agents for the CIA, the Soviet KGB and the Vietnamese—all at once. Then, ever the schoolmaster, Duch would carefully go through the confessions, "correcting" them with a red pen and suggesting improvements here and there,

which meant further torture. Finally the victims would be killed, often in gruesome fashion. (Newsweek 1980:42)

Ing Pech, the lone survivor of the Center, said that when Duch indicated someone had made an "error" and had to be re-educated, that meant they would be "crushed to bits after torture" (Newsweek 1980).

After disposing of the coup leaders at Tuol Sleng, and learning the names of other coconspirators in the provinces, Pol Pot initiated the next step in his purge, the removal and execution of party leaders who had been implicated in the provinces. Beginning in March 1977, in scenes reminiscent of the roundup of former Lon Nol army officers, "new" Khmer cadres descended upon selected areas and arrested large numbers of party officials, village and hamlet leaders, and, in some instances, even soldiers. For about four months, this purge continued with formerly trusted party cadres disappearing overnight. In some instances, the new leadership, which for the first time included women at some villages and districts, explained that the "old" officials had been removed because they were lax in not executing all the former officials of the Phnom Penh government. Others, near the Thai border, were accused of secret trading relationships with Siamese businessmen or allowing too many people to escape across the border. Still others were more straightforward in saying that the former officials had tried to revolt.

According to one former communist official, Hui Pan, who served as a village chief in Siem Reap Province, the purge in his area began in February 1977, when fifty or so Siem Reap officials were ordered to Phnom Penh. They were soon replaced by "new Khmer Rouge" leaders (Kramer 1977).

Many other changes took place during the time Khmer Rouge leaders were preparing to celebrate the second anniversary of their coming to power. Khem Chhomali, a refugee from Kaping Cham, said that: "Between the 6th and the 17th of April, all of the 'Old Khmer Rouge' were suddenly removed. We don't know what happened but they say the *srok* (district) chief had died and that the old Khmer Rouge had tried to make a new revolution. I heard that 500 village chiefs and 1,000 soldiers were taken away in Damban (region) 106" (Asia Week 1977). Chuk Han, a Khmer communist military leader who fled to Thailand, added that "In my province of Oddor Meanchey, many people simply disappeared. Five hundred military chiefs and ordinary soldiers linked to the Khmer Rouge had their hands tied up and were taken away for execution. The arrests continued throughout May, June and July" (Chinoy 1977). Khem Chhomali offered additional evidence that many of these "old cadre" were put to death, claiming that he saw a mass grave containing the bodies of about seventy former Khmer Rouge leaders (Kramer 1977).

Refugees Im Vin and Chhoeng Sokhom Theavey from northeastern Cambodia reported that the purge was carried out in that part of the country

as well during April and May of 1977. During this time a local party cadre admitted that the commanders of the Northern and Northeastern regions had been executed, along with some senior party officials "accused of revisionism and plotting to overthrow the government" (*Asia Week* 1977). Among them, according to Im Vin, was Koy Thoun. Im Vin went on to recount another experience in which he overheard Khmer Rouge soldiers at Stung Treng discussing the execution of twenty-five party cadres for participation in a conspiracy headed by some "ministers" (*Asia Week* 1977).<sup>6</sup>

One former Khmer Rouge veteran and the chief of a major cooperative in Thma Poek district of Battambang Province—Tuay Mien—provided additional information about the purge. According to him, on June 26, "outside units" of Khmer Rouge moved into his district and arrested the five members of the ruling committee and disarmed the one hundred members of the civil militia. From there, according to Tuay Mien, the new troops fanned out to the district's fifteen cooperatives, arresting the leaders of each. On July 5, Tuay Mien and his subordinates were taken prisoner. Also on that day, it was announced that "of the 70,000 citizens of the district, 40,000 were traitors who had collaborated with the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency and concealed the names of former Lon Nol agents . . ." (Nations 1978).

#### EXTENDED PURGE

In mid-1977, Pol Pot turned once again to purifying his new society by further efforts at eliminating the remainder of the population with connections to the "old society." To accomplish this, Pol Pot sent many new cadres into the villages to implement his revolutionary programs. Refugee Hui Pan described how the new Khmer Rouge cadres carried out this effort: "Under the old Khmer Rouge, only about 30% of the soldiers who had served in Lon Nol's army had been killed. But the new Khmer Rouge are worse, and under their rule all the Lon Nol soldiers are being hunted down. The new Khmer Rouge is killing all former policemen, soldiers, government officials, teachers, students, monks. If anyone is found to be an agent, he must be killed" (Chinoy 1977).

Refugee Chhoeno Sokhum Theavy, himself a former school teacher, echoed this philosophy. "The Communists would keep telling the people about the Maoist principle that if you want to tear out the weed, you must go for the roots (*Asia Week*, December 2, 1977). Khem Chhommali added that during meetings, the "new Khmer Rouge" repeatedly emphasized that the leadership in Phnom Penh was dedicated to destroying "the old rich

<sup>6</sup> These "ministers" may have been a reference to Hu Nim, who had not been mentioned publicly since January 1977, perhaps confirming that it was at that time that he was arrested, and, more certainly, to Koy Thoun, whom the Cambodian *Black Paper* identified as the assassination leader.

classes." As one cadre put it, "we must destroy these people in order to destroy the class" (*Asia Week* 1977).

Other evidence of this campaign came from Henry Kamm, who concluded after interviewing numerous refugees that

Detailed narratives of mass killings of enemies give rise to an impression that the regime has lost what inhibitions it may have had in its early stages and is conducting mass slayings without regard to the presence of witnesses. A number of refugees reported that officials were more and more openly speaking of a need to kill great numbers of Cambodians.

Mr. Sen Smean [from Battambang Province's Ampil district] said that Nan, the late district chief, had announced early last year [1977] that of the 15,000 people of the district, 10,000 would have to be killed as enemies and that 6,000 of them had already perished.

"We must burn the old grass and the new will grow," Nan said, according to Mr. Sen Smean. (Kamm 1978)

Kamm pointed out that "the principal targets for extermination continue to be intellectuals, soldiers in the Lon Nol army and former government officials." But Kamm added that

A devastating new element that emerges from the refugees' accounts of the last year [1977-78] is that the regime now appears to be methodically killing wives and children, many long after the husbands were killed.

Mr. San Daravong said that toward the end of last year he had witnessed the killing of 108 wives and children of former soldiers outside the village of Chba Leu, situated about 10 miles east of the town of Siem Reap in the midst of Angkor temple complex.

He said the victims had been led to a dike, their arms tied to their sides and pounded to death with big sticks in groups of 10 by a small group of soldiers. Some of the small children, he said, had been thrown into the air and impaled on bayonets; others were held by their feet and swung to the ground until dead. (Kamm 1978)

Other refugees indicated that even living in proximity to former government leaders could be sufficient cause for elimination. For example,

Mr. Okeum said that he came from the district of Siem Reap Province where former President Lon Nol was born. He said that to celebrate the second anniversary of their victory in April 1977, the communists had killed the entire population of the former leader's village . . . [Okeum] said that the district chief, who was later killed himself, announced that the villagers had been slain because all were relatives of Lon Nol. Throughout the district, Mr. Okeum said, about 350 families had been killed on that occasion, their family names recorded by authorities and displayed at the anniversary rally. (Kamm 1978)

Kamm's analysis pointed out that, in addition to deaths by execution, the constant hunger and disease caused considerable suffering and death in the

new, larger agricultural communes with their communal kitchens and poor rice crops. In Siem Reap,

Malaria, cholera, diarrhea, tuberculosis and enfeeblement from pervasive malnutrition took a catastrophic toll in the district of Banteai Srie . . . [A] former [medical] student said that children, particularly infants, suffered the most cruelly from illnesses and died in frightening numbers. He said that infant mortality was particularly high because mothers, as a result of malnutrition, had little milk and no substitutes were available. (Kamm 1978)

Tuay Mien, the commune head from Thma Poek, said that as early as April he was ordered to survey the 999 families in his cooperative to identify "suspicious elements." The list was to include "all individuals and their families—who were former regulars in the Lon Nol army, minor officials, school teachers, village headmen of 10-family units in areas under Lon Nol's control and anyone educated or trained in Thailand or Vietnam." After conducting a house to house census, relying on every third house to cross-check the others, Tuay Mien finished with 700 families on his list (Nations 1978).

Some of the most detailed testimony about this campaign was given by refugees interviewed by U.S. government officials who later submitted their accounts to the United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees. Excerpts from these unclassified State Department cables paint a picture of life in Cambodia during the 1977–1978 effort to eliminate people connected to the old society. One refugee from Oddor Meanchey said:

In 1978, the Khmer Rouge started executing former students, former members of village defense forces or former militiamen. They started with leaders and those who studied to higher grades. In January or February, about twenty students who had studied five years or more—and about 30 former militiamen were killed. I know of 13 young men, some of whom were my friends, who were killed. The Khmer Rouge tied their hands behind their backs and took them to the forests. The next day I saw 13 fresh mounds. No one knew any reason why they would have been killed except that they were former students. (U.S. Department of State 1978)

Another refugee indicated that people would often be killed for being late to work and confirmed that the Khmer Rouge policy was to kill the spouses and children of persons judged to be guilty of an offense.

In 1976–1977 the guilty would be executed alone. After late 1977 and in 1978, the guilty and his family also were executed, even for a minor offense. For example, if you were executed for being late for work, your family would be executed too. This may have been because of the leader. In 1975, the head of the northern sector in Siem Reap, Anmed Sot, was not too strict. Sot was found to be a traitor and was replaced in late 1977 by Se who was more strict. Se followed the policy of killing wives and children of former soldiers and teachers. *Se said that wives were vestiges*

*of the old society and are still corrupt.* (U.S. Department of State 1978; emphasis added)

A resident of Battambang, who said he was so afraid of the pervasive control of the Khmer Rouge that he did not even trust his own children, said: "All the 'New Cambodians' are being eliminated. Buddhists, intellectuals, anti-Communists as well as former soldiers, students and government officials. Everyone even remotely associated with the former regime. I fled because the Khmer Rouge suspected that I was a former official and would certainly have killed me sooner or later. *I did not dare speak to my children about my departure, because the Khmer Rouge spies are everywhere and greatly to be feared*" (U.S. Department of State 1978; emphasis added).

The underlying rationale for this campaign to eliminate the parts of the population that were suspect was contained in Pol Pot's major address on September 27, 1977, commemorating the seventeenth anniversary of the founding of the Communist Party of Kampuchea. In that 299-minute peroration, Pol Pot reminded his followers that certain "contradictions" continued to exist in new Democratic Kampuchea: ". . . we should ask whether there are any more social contradictions in this great new society of ours. We also should want to know more about these contradictions, if any, so that we can work out ways to solve them. We pose these questions in order to correctly assess and define our revolutionary duty for our new revolutionary phase" (Pol Pot 1977:H28).

Pol Pot answered his own question by saying, "Contradictions do exist within the ranks of our people. These contradictions stem from the differences in the nature of the remaining class vestiges. It is understandable that each person can not easily shed the vestiges of the class to which he belonged for generations and which he has just recently renounced for the proletarian nature of the revolution. These contradictions are regarded as contradictions within the people's ranks (Pol Pot 1977:H28). He added that, even more importantly, "These people must be constantly and profoundly instructed and educated in collective, socialist ownership and asked to gradually shed and finally eliminate the idea of private ownership" (Pol Pot 1977:H28).

Earlier in the speech, Pol Pot had given his assessment of how many Cambodians fell into each class in the new Cambodia: "We estimate that workers, peasants and other working people number more than 90 percent of the population, because we know the peasant class alone represents 85 percent of the people . . . among [the remaining] 10 percent are capitalists, landowners or members of other special strata" (Pol Pot 1977:H27).

In his public speech Pol Pot advocated dealing with these "contradictions" through "serious education, criticism, self-criticism and inspection of the

revolutionary life style"; however, the overwhelming preponderance of evidence suggests that violence and terror were the preferred means of eliminating the contradictions.

Pol Pot saw other contradictions as well: "The actual situation clearly shows that imperialisms and foreign reactionaries harbor the strategic and fundamental intention of threatening and attempting to grasp our Cambodia. This brings about contradictions, contradictions in which foreign enemies want to violate, want to encroach upon, threaten and annex our Cambodian territory" (Pol Pot 1977:H28).

While this reference appeared directed at the Vietnamese Communist Party, Pol Pot also saw threatening contradictions within his own party and inside Cambodia:

In our new Cambodian society there also exist such life and death contradictions as enemies in the form of various spy rings working for imperialism, and international reactionaries are still planted among us to carry out subversive activities against our revolution. There is also another handful of reactionary elements who continue to carry out activities against, and attempt to subvert, our revolution. These elements are not numerous, constituting only 1 or 2 percent of our population. Some of them operate covertly while others are openly conducting adverse activities. (Pol Pot 1977:H28)

Pol Pot's prescription for dealing with these internal dissidents was harsh and to the point:

These counter revolutionary elements which betray and try to sabotage the revolution are not to be regarded as being our people. They are to be regarded as enemies . . . We must thus deal with them the same way we would with any enemy, that is, by separating, educating and coopting elements that can be won over . . . , neutralizing any reluctant elements . . . , and isolating and eradicating only the smallest number . . . who determinedly oppose the revolution . . . and collaborate with foreign enemies to oppose their own nation. (Pol Pot 1977:H28)

#### DEFENDING AGAINST EXTERNAL ENEMIES

The Khmer Rouge had been consciously working to reduce and finally eliminate the Vietnamese communist presence and influence in Cambodia since the early 1970s. Many Khmer cadres trained in Hanoi who returned to Cambodia after Sihanouk's overthrow were quickly replaced, and in many cases killed. Radio Hanoi in a 1978 commentary confirmed this: ". . . at the wishes of the Cambodian Revolution, Vietnam sent back to Cambodia cadres that the Cambodian Revolutionary Organization had asked it to form, indoctrinate and train. But it was most heart-rending to learn that almost all these Cambodian cadres have been executed" (FBIS IV, February 15, 1978:K1).

Skirmishes and outright fighting between North Vietnamese units and

Khmer Rouge troops were not uncommon even before the war ended, as the Cambodians sought to eliminate any Vietnamese presence from Kampuchean soil. In 1972, in one area, Khmer Rouge military officials even entered into an informal agreement with South Vietnamese army officers in an effort to reduce the North Vietnamese presence in Cambodia.<sup>7</sup> These disputes, which subsided after 1975, when Vietnamese troops withdrew from many parts of Cambodia, erupted again in 1977 and escalated during that year until early January 1978, when Cambodian military forces took the unprecedented step of attacking into Vietnam and capturing the small Vietnamese coastal town of Ha Tien. Hanoi quickly countered with a large-scale military move into southern Cambodia.

#### SECOND COUP ATTEMPT

At the same time that Hanoi moved into Cambodia, reports suggest that the Vietnamese began efforts to recruit some Cambodian military and political officials to lead an uprising against Phnom Penh. A communique from the Kampuchean ministry of information issued June 25, 1978, charged that, in early 1978, six political operatives of the Politburo in Hanoi had, ". . . several times sneaked into Kampuchean territory in order to contact and hold meetings with the Vietnamese agents planted in the Eastern Region for subversive activities by Vietnam, concerning implementation of the coup plan and to directly supervise this coup" (FBIS IV, June 26, 1978:H1).

The communique pointed out that secret meetings were held in February, March, April, and May, 1978, in the eastern parts of Kampong Cham and Svay Rieng provinces. The aim of this activity, the communique charged, was to "topple Democratic Kampuchea" or, if that was not possible, to take over and separate the Eastern Region from Pol Pot's control (FBIS IV, June 26, 1978:H1).

Phnom Penh authorities claimed they were successful in thwarting this plan in May of 1978. Although not acknowledged by Cambodian officials, this coup attempt apparently led to a second purge that began in late 1977 or early 1978, and included military and party leaders suspected of sympathy for the Vietnamese.

Evidence for the existence of the purge came from Prince Sihanouk, who wrote in 1980 that Pol Pot, Ieng Sary, and Khieu Samphan all admitted over Radio Phnom Penh that "the CIA, the KGB and the Vietnamese agents made repeated attempts" to overthrow them. Sihanouk interpreted this to mean that "the split within the Khmer Rouge Party and army was widening." When Sihanouk asked Khieu Samphan what in fact was happening, all he

<sup>7</sup> The author learned this while residing in the border province of Chau Doc in South Vietnam.

would reply was that Le Duan and Pham Van Dong wanted to replace the Khmer Rouge leadership (Sihanouk 1980:75).

It is unclear whether there was any Vietnamese attempt to undermine Pol Pot in 1976 and 1977, or whether this was a charge Pol Pot used to mask extreme dissension within his own movement. What does seem clear is that Pol Pot did carry out another purge that again reached deep into the ranks of the Communist Party of Kampuchea and the military and civil structures of Democratic Kampuchea. What is further known is that by 1978, Vietnamese authorities were actively urging Khmer Rouge cadres to revolt against Pol Pot.

#### THE SECOND PURGE

According to Sihanouk, evidence of the second purge came from Phnom Penh radio, which in 1977 broadcast news of "the complete removal of Vietnamese, CIA and KGB agents from every cooperative, administrative department and army unit" (Sihanouk 1980:76). He added that in 1978 a Khmer language broadcast over Radio Peking mentioned "extensive and radical purges in Zone 203" (areas along the Vietnamese border). Curiously, the report indicated that the only survivors of the purge were Heng Samrin, Chea Sim, and Ros Samay, who later would side with the Vietnamese and head the new government that would replace Pol Pot (Sihanouk 1980:76).

There is other evidence that this second purge reached into the upper ranks of the party leadership. Sihanouk said that Von Vet, the vice-premier in charge of economic policy, was reportedly killed during 1978, and implied that other senior leaders were so suspect that by the middle of that year the country was being run by only four people: Pol Pot, Ieng Sary, and their wives, Khieu Ponnary and Khieu Thirith (Sihanouk 1980:79).

This purge also reached down into the party organization, military structure, and governmental organization, particularly in those areas thought to be under any Vietnamese influence. Refugees arriving in Thailand in 1978 reported that "growing numbers of local Communist officials have been killed in what appeared to be an ongoing wave of violent purges" (Kamm 1978).

These refugees noted that in one district in Battambang Province, district chiefs had been removed twice in one year and reportedly "killed as enemies." In addition, "the changes of district chiefs were always accompanied by the disappearance of village chiefs and frequently by the small teams of soldiers who supervise the villagers' work" (Kamm 1978). Similar reports were received from refugees in Siem Reap, Oddar Meachey, and Koh Kong provinces. These reports from western Cambodia were matched by others from the eastern part of the country.

One former Cambodian officer who fled to Vietnam indicated that at the

end of March "three truckloads" of cadres and officers were arrested and executed by Pol Pot loyalists. Among those reportedly killed were the political commissar of the 280th Division and members of his staff. By May, this same source stated that the purges were reaching down to the battalion level. In a radio broadcast from Hanoi, this officer called on all of his former comrades remaining inside Cambodia to "rise up and struggle to topple the Pol Pot-Ieng Sary clique of traitors who have betrayed their nation and people and who are henchmen of the reactionary People's Republic of China rulers" (FBIS IV, June 22, 1978:K7-9).

Ironically, it may have been Pol Pot's fear of the Vietnamese and the resulting purges that drove senior Cambodian officers to break with him and side with Vietnam. Sihanouk himself claims that Heng Samrin, Chea Sim, and Ros Samay, who led the rebellion in the Eastern Region (albeit heavily supported by Vietnamese military forces), had been true Pol Pot supporters and only defected after they feared they would be purged (Sihanouk 1980:23). Whatever their true motivation, the three did side with Hanoi and, backed by a Vietnamese offensive launched on December 25, 1978, Heng Samrin and his followers rode into Phnom Penh on January 7, 1979 (almost a year, to the day, after the attack on Ha Tien), and established the People's Republic of Kampuchea.

#### Conclusion

An analysis of Pol Pot's September 27, 1977, speech indicates that he identified four major contradictions, each of which he dealt with by means of violence.

1. The contradiction between the peasants and ruling strata of the old society that continued to exist even in the new agricultural communes. To eliminate this contradiction, Pol Pot embarked on a campaign to identify and eliminate former soldiers, government workers, intellectuals, and anyone with an education.
2. The contradiction between individualism and collectivism, that is, between private ownership of land and "socialist ownership." Here the targets of Pol Pot's efforts were the peasants, including the poor peasants who had to be forced to accept the new economic regimen and produce goods under it. Pol Pot used terror, executions, and the threat of death to force villagers and peasants to conform to his new collectivized society.
3. The contradiction within his own party, between those supporting him and those opposing his radical revolution. Pol Pot implemented violent purges deep into the party in an effort to resolve this contradiction.
4. The contradiction between Democratic Kampuchea and foreign "imperialists and reactionaries," which presumably included the Thai,

the Americans, the Soviets, and the Vietnamese. To deal with these potential problems, the Khmer Rouge sought self-sufficiency, practiced a constant vigilance to protect their borders, and meted out brutal treatment to those, including party members, suspected of allegiance to foreign powers—particularly Vietnam.

In analyzing the use of terror and violence in Cambodia, it is important to point out that it did take an *external* force to unseat Pol Pot. Heng Samrin could not have accomplished this without Vietnamese military forces. Pol Pot's political plan had largely achieved its goals inside Cambodia. He had destroyed virtually all of his potential and real opposition, although at one point he was only a spoonful of soup away from being deposed. Having weathered this challenge from within his own ranks in 1976, by 1977 he appeared to have the ability to continue to rule for the indefinite future. Without his conflict with the Vietnamese and their long involvement in Cambodia, it would be possible to argue that Pol Pot might still be in power.

With the end of Pol Pot's official reign, efforts were made to estimate the number of deaths and the extent of the suffering that Pol Pot caused, either directly by execution or indirectly through disease, malnutrition, and starvation resulting from his forced mass relocation, harsh working conditions, destruction of virtually all health and sanitary facilities, and the changes in the agricultural and economic distribution systems. It must be conceded that all attempts thus far are rough estimates at best, and range from several hundred thousand to about 3 million.