Kampuchea — Socialism Without a Model

"We are building socialism without a model", smiled the head of the Communist Party and Premier of Democratic Kampuchea, Pol Pot. "We do not wish to copy anyone; we shall use the experience gained in the course of the liberation struggle. There are no schools, faculties or universities in the traditional sense, although they did exist in our country prior to liberation, because we wish to do away with all the vestiges of the past. There is no money and no commerce, as the state takes care of provisioning all its citizens. We did not have money or commerce in the liberated territory either. The cities have been resettled, because this is the way things had to be. Some three million town dwellers and peasants were trying to find refuge in the cities from the depredations of war. We could not provide enough food for them, and we had also learned that there were imperialist plans to organize guerrilla movements and a counter-revolution in the populated cities."

Pol Pot continued his first public press conference with foreign, in this case Yugoslav, journalists: "We evacuated the cities; we resettled the inhabitants in the rural areas, where the basic living conditions could be provided for this segment of the population of new Kampuchea. The countryside should be the focus of attention for our revolution, and the people will decide on the fate of the cities."

Thus spoke the first man of the Kampuchean revolution, a man who since 1962 had been in hiding in the villages of the liberated territory. He told us that there was not a single
village which he had not visited on foot in the course of those thirteen years. It was the villages, in his opinion, that won the victory in the liberation war, and the revolution owes a great deal to them. About 95 per cent of the members of the liberation army of the Khmer Rouge were poor or medium-size farmers. Today they are in the forefront of the Communist Party of Kampuchea, which last year emerged from underground to world prominence. Both Pol Pot and the others with whom we talked spoke about peace and war in the same breath. They spoke about the revolution, which was being threatened by “aggression from across the borders” and about the rebuilding of the country, which was being carried on between clashes in the frontier areas bordering Vietnam.

They cite this war and revolution as explanation for the “state of war” in their own country, the vacant cities and the herculean efforts of the entire population to master nature. The whole country has been transformed into one enormous building site. Work goes on from dawn till dusk on the construction of large earth dams and extensive irrigation systems. Everything has been subordinated to increasing the rice harvest. As Pol Pot put it, rice is obtained by means of water and independence is defended by means of rice. Our hosts pointed with pride to the vanishing of famine and malaria and to the fact that all the school-age population was now literate; the next priority, we were told, was the building of suitable accommodation for the worker-peasants.

Instead of housing the population in the town houses which are still standing, the authorities are building still dwellings or barracks. Our hosts did not say that these structures were being raised often just a stone’s throw from the empty towns, and they were also reticent about describing the evacuation of the cities which began the day after they were liberated.

All the cities in Kampuchea were liberated on the same day and at the same hour, on 17 April 1975. Until that time they had all been blockaded. The evacuation began the very next day. Although we heard no eye-witness accounts, except for the statements of some Cambodian refugees whom we met later in Vietnam, it appears that this was a large-scale military operation. Townspeople were simply ordered to leave their homes, and they were never to return to their city dwellings. They set out in long columns on a journey into the countryside, to a destination often as far away as several hundred kilometres. All they had with them was what they were wearing or carrying when they received the order to leave their homes. They went on foot, leading their children by the hand. Everything they owned stayed behind in the town; they began their new life as farmers out in the fields of the cooperatives of which they became members.

We found the former inhabitants of Phnom Penh, Takeo, Siem Reap, Kompong Thom, Kompong Cham, Batambang and other towns in the rice paddies. By all appearances, three years has been too short a time for these men, women and children to become accustomed to their new life. Because as many as three million people were living in the cities before liberation, it was impossible to provide suitable housing for them right away.

Now they are for the most part members of mobile brigades, which move from work site to work site to build new earth dams, forming artificial lakes, some of which have the enormous capacity of over two million cubic metres of water. Or else they are members of cooperatives and share the fate of all the rest; they receive 900 grams or a kilogram of rice a day, take their meals in common dining halls, where at times as many as one thousand or more families eat, and receive one suit of clothing a month. They have the same rights as the other members of these cooperatives and can give suggestions and make proposals to the committees which run these basic cells of the new Kampuchean regime. It is difficult to establish contact with them, because they usually say that they have forgotten the languages which they used to speak when they lived in town.

Because the revolution is still going on there is little time for rest or relaxation. The working day is nine hours long, with only every tenth day in the month off, this leisure time being devoted to political education and discussion of work plans. The people do not go hungry, but they are not very happy either. There was no singing to be heard, nor did we see any folk dancing, except for a show put on by a state ensemble.

However, in their place we did see kilometre-long irrigation ditches, seventeen enormous earth dams and rice paddies that are green in the middle of the dry season and in some places are already producing up to three harvests a year. We had the opportunity to see for ourselves that truly there is no more hunger in Kampuchea; sometimes the silos are too small to accommodate all the rice harvest, so that mountains of rice have to be stacked outside. No doubt the rice surpluses would be transported swiftly to the state warehouses in Phnom Penh or other towns if the means of transportation destroyed during the war had been replaced. However, so far there is virtually no public or freight transportation, and convoys carrying goods are only organized occasionally. As there are no shops, restaurants, post offices
or even any government administration, except for that set up in the cooperatives, the state is the main buyer and distributor, not just of rice but of other foodstuffs and commodities. It is the amount of a commodity in the state warehouses that determines how much a given cooperative will obtain.

Money is not used as a means of exchange or remuneration for work, for this traditional form of exchange has been replaced by old-fashioned barter. Rice is traded for salt between cooperatives, or rice is exchanged for clothing from the state. Each citizen takes his meals in one of the dining halls of the cooperatives; he has to work, and whatever else he gets depends on the plan of distribution. The television broadcasting network, which was highly developed in this country before the war, has still not resumed broadcasts. There are no daily newspapers, but there is a single periodical that appears every ten days. The main source of information is the Phnom Penh radio station, which awakens the village every morning at five a.m., counts out the rhythm for physical fitness exercises and then broadcasts the news and directives for the day. The day starts at five o’clock for everyone, old and young alike, schoolchildren or women, all of whom are taking part in the building of new Kampuchea.

Phnom Penh Remains the Capital

All visitors arrive in Democratic Kampuchea at the Phnom Penh airport. The battles for this airport have become legendary in the liberation struggle of the numerically small but brave Kampuchean people, who for months before the capital was liberated mounted attacks on it. Even today the reminders of this bloody war remain intact, and one’s first steps on Kampuchean soil lead past the twisted skeletons of burnt-out tanks and airplanes, past mortar shells or trenches that have not yet been filled in. Only the airport has been restored to use, and prior to April 1st the Chinese airplanes which flew in every fortnight provided new Kampuchea’s sole link with the outside world. Now these planes between Phnom Penh and Bangkok.

After three kilometres on the road into Phnom Penh the traces of past battles are no longer evident. The avenues traversed by the occasional foreign visitor have had shell holes filled in; the sidewalks have been repaired, and the city parks are well manicured and watered. Some new rows of coconut trees lining the streets have taken root, planted,
urban population to the countryside resembled a forced evacuation more than a resettlement project. Household effects and clothing were all left at home, and the inhabitants in their haste only took what they happened to be wearing on their backs.

In recent months, in the absence of imports, some of the household appliances, refrigerators, hot water heaters and air conditioners have been taken from these homes to be put to use elsewhere. During our stay in Phnom Penh, no doubt as more and more wounded arrived from the border regions near Vietnam, a drive was begun to remove the beds from some town dwellings for the hospitals. Although we asked to visit the hospitals, our hosts did not make this possible.

On several occasions we were inside buildings which bore the names of the ministries of the new Democratic Kampuchea. However, in these enormous edifices we only came across a few office workers, and all the offices were empty. Our guides explained that the people working here were not civil servants in the traditional sense; among other things, they must become educated through physical labor and they were away working on the vegetable gardens whose produce we consumed while we were in Phnom Penh.

In Phnom Penh itself we only visited one pharmaceutical factory and saw one elementary school, attended, we were told, by the children of the workers. All universities and other schools have been closed. The former building of the medical school now houses a battalion of women who most probably work in the hospital. The main post office of Phnom Penh has been shut behind iron doors, and its only occupants now are the swallows which have built their nests under its eaves. The telephones are not operating, and the street wardens are all equipped with walkie talkies. It appears that only a few major avenues and embassy row, where there are eight foreign embassies, have electricity and water.

Indeed, the only life in this former metropolis is to be found on the street where the embassies are located, which the diplomatic representatives are not allowed to leave without permission, in a hotel for visitors, in the sole cinema, bearing the name “Friendship”, and in an ultra-modern auditorium which only opens its doors when Phnom Penh receives some foreign visitors.

During our meeting with him, we asked Pol Pot when Democratic Kampuchea would start opening its doors to more foreigners. He replied that the country was already open to all sincere friends of the Kampuchean people and revolution and that in the future it would open up even further, but that for this the necessary conditions must be created in Phnom Penh so that these “dear friends” might be received in a cordial manner, according to the traditional hospitality of Kampuchea.

The Buddha Is Dead — Long Live the Revolution

Diplomats in Phnom Penh have no complaints about their contacts with their hosts. Of course as there is no telephone service all messages are carried by the couriers put at their disposal. When anyone seeks an audience at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or when a doctor or dentist are needed, a diplomatic note is written. If the note is sent in the morning, a doctor will arrive by the afternoon, and in emergencies help will come within a few hours after the request is received. The same procedure must be followed when a telegram is sent abroad, because the only telex service is with Peking, and permission from the ministry is needed for sending urgent messages.

We journalists were shown a documentary film portraying the achievements of Kampuchean progress. We saw sophisticated medical equipment photographed at Phnom Penh hospitals, and foreign diplomats told us that no criticism could be made on this score. It seems that the hospitals are in the hands of old renowned Phnom Penh doctors, with whom one can only communicate as a patient. And even then, notwithstanding the fact that these physicians often speak several languages, the examination must be carried out in the presence of an interpreter.

However, of late the diplomats have been insisting that they only want doctors present during medical consultations, and more and more frequently the interpreters are remaining outside the closed doors of the examining room.

In addition the diplomats have a diplomatic commissary which provides them with the basic foodstuffs. Besides bread, rice, fruit, meat and fish, the commissary also sells whiskey, French cognacs, wines, beer and some consumer items at “diplomatic” prices, which are calculated in the national currency for book-keeping purposes only as it is not in circulation, and are then converted into dollars. The rare foreign visitor receives the same treatment and for all services, accommodation, food and transport is charged from 38 to 40 dollars a day.

One of the major triumphs proudly pointed out to us by our hosts has been a 95 per cent eradication of malaria
and the teaching of 95 per cent of the population of new Kampuchea to read and write. We were told about the latter achievement in greater detail by Pol Pot and by the minister of Vice Premier Teng Sary. She told us that “Buddhism is there were no more problems, because it had been an instrument for culture, information and propaganda. Yun Yat, the wife has been cleared for striking the foundations of a new revolution in both cultural life and in education, propaganda and health care. “We are beginning from the beginning, from the elementary schools in the cooperatives”, we were told by the minister in explanation of the closing down of all schools of higher education in Phnom Penh and other towns. There are no professors or school teachers in the generally accepted sense; in their place are cadres who have been school-educated in the revolution. They are the new teachers in the present and future schools of new Kampuchea.

Yun Yat was right. In the school for skilled electricians, which we visited in a suburb of Phnom Penh, the lecturers were former workers who had been graduated from the “school of revolution”. In an elementary school near Takeo, a school teacher also only had the “diploma of a revolutionary”. However, the lecturers at an agricultural school near Kompong Thom had previously been employed in some other school no doubt, for they were expertly applying science in the production of seeds for new rice hybrids.

The officer from the General Staff who showed us around Lon Nol’s headquarters told us that former pilots of the Cambodian dictator are instructing future pilots of the new Kampuchean army.

It is difficult to draw any conclusions as far as Buddhism is concerned, for we truly had no occasion to see ordinary citizens in the Buddhist pagodas. In fact, with the exception of some ancient Buddhist monuments which are carefully preserved, the majority of pagodas have been transformed into storehouses for rice or have been abandoned to the elements. The ruins of the ancient city of Angkor Wat, the symbol of the beginning of Buddhism in Cambodia, are being jealously preserved and kept under strong guard. In this place, which is also a Buddhist shrine, some of our guides rushed to touch the Buddha’s stone countenance as a sign of respect, notwithstanding the directive that the Buddha is dead. Some high-ranking members of the Party greeted us in the Buddhist manner when we met them, and one Buddhist priest who had exchanged his saffron robes for a revolutionary uniform differed from Minister Yun Yat’s opinion.

He told us that both Buddhism and communism had humane aims and that there was no great contradiction between them.

Yun Yat described the school system to us in detail. Every child, regardless of age, must be educated through work in addition to receiving instruction in improvised classrooms. Classes are held until noon, and then in the afternoon the children work in the rice paddies. During our stay there was a drive on to collect manure and produce fertilizer, and the children also had their assignment to carry out in it. Work in the fields in addition to classes is also obligatory at the other improvised school centres. In the school for future electricians, we were shown the plot of land on which the pupils must grow their own fruit and vegetables. In one large workshop, which will one day no doubt become a water pump factory, we saw children of ten to fifteen who most often had to climb onto some kind of platform to reach the machines they were working on; after ten hours a day in the workshop these children have an hour or so of recreation in the fields. In the evenings they study, and every tenth day in the month, a non-working day, they can rest. As there is no postal service, they correspond with their parents by courier, so we were told by our guides. Their accommodation is, however, “urban”, for in their case and in a few other instances an exception has been made and they have been allowed to stay in one of the well-preserved homes in the suburbs of Phnom Penh.

There is enough food, especially rice, fruit and fish. Meat is eaten more seldom, and milk is only available in some children’s institutions once or twice a month. There is so much work to do that there is no time for entertainment. The travelling cinemas are few and far between, and at some of the large work sites, where up to 20,000 people are at work, the sole entertainment is Radio Phnom Penh, which broadcasts three times a day. Songs on the radio were the only ones we heard during our stay in Kampuchea, and a single recital of songs and a ballet was organized for us by a state ensemble. When we asked why song and dance did not accompany the work and building effort, we were told that the dynamics of the revolution were such that there was no time at the present for entertainment of that kind.

Self-Reliance

For five years tiny Cambodia, with its seven million inhabitants, waged war, and it won a victory over the most
powerful country in the world. The price of freedom has been too high. The test to which the Kampuchean people have been put is too severe and rigorous. During the war the whole of Cambodia was a free zone for American bombing. A total of 250,000 tons of explosives, including napalm bombs, was dropped on it. The United States spent seven billion dollars on its adventure in Cambodia. About half a million Cambodians were killed, and as many wounded or maimed for life. The US Senate sub-committee estimated that 3,389,000 Cambodians, about half the total population of Cambodia, had become refugees.

A decade will probably be needed to rebuild Kampuchea and build housing to accommodate the refugees and former town dwellers. However, we gained the impression after the fortnight spent in this country that the destruction of war would not be removed right away. The new authorities have set as their top priority the development of agriculture, the increased production of rice and thereby the raising of the living standard of the inhabitants of this country, almost all of whom now live in the rural areas. "We have the Mekong and numerous other rivers and streams, and when we make use of them we shall become the sovereign masters of the country and nature in general," were words we often heard from our hosts as they showed us the earth dams and farmlong networks of long and deep irrigation ditches. In the last three years fifteen large and small earth dams have been built for irrigation systems, so that two or even three rice harvests a year are possible. Work goes on without respite from morning till night in the cooperatives and mobile brigades, which move from work site to work site. Thanks to the general mobilization, not only has the internal topography of the country been changed, but the problem of feeding a starving population has been solved. Every citizen is assured a kilogram of rice a day, and in this country with its plentiful watercourses there is enough fish not just to feed the population but even to export if it could be processed.

However, at this stage of the Kampuchean revolution everything other than rice is of secondary importance. One of the responsible regional officials of the Batambang province told us: "When we achieve the goal of keeping the fields green in the dry season as well as in the wet season, we shall have enough rice to buy steel, factories, tractors and other machinery in order to ensure the complete harmony and stable independence and sovereignty of the country". No one mentions any outside help, nor is it sought. All the work is done virtually with hand-wielded hoes and spades, and the irrigation pumps must also be operated manually. Kilometre-long dikes are built up from earth which is carried in baskets. The only mechanization we saw on all these work sites was a dump truck or two and power shovels left over from the previous regime and a few dozen tractors and lorries which the new government bought from Yugoslavia.

The principal slogan of the Communist Party is "Building and development by our own forces", and we heard it repeated in every region in the interior of the country where we toured the large building sites. However, even without being told this we could come to the same conclusion. In Kompong Som, in the only port equipped to receive ships, just two fishing trawlers were in working order, one of which was of Chinese origin, but two new ships could be seen under construction on the slipways. New warehouses are going up in the port, and a new quay is being built. One large freighter, which our hosts have still not been able to equip for navigation, has been anchored here since 1975.

The "crews" are mere children, war orphans, and for the most part they saw the sea for the first time in their lives just three years ago. The radio and telegraph operator on the Chinese trawler is only thirteen years old, but he has already mastered the Morse code. The crew on the ship is totally Kampuchean.

Our hosts were, however, reluctant to talk about all these problems. They claim that they are strong enough to cope with them, and even if the present progress in the absence of machinery is slow, nevertheless that they will achieve their goal. Outside assistance, even the purchase of the indispensable equipment on credit, is presently resorted to only in exceptional cases, when the reconstruction and building of the country is at stake. We were never to learn if this slogan about self-reliance also applied to the arming of the army, because our hosts were never able to fit in a visit to a unit of the regular army.

Everything else that we saw was an embodiment in practice of this slogan on self-reliance. To be sure, there is quite a bit of irrational radicalism and a strange kind of "puritanicalism" in the Kampuchean revolution. In the midst of a shortage of essential consumer goods and raw materials, "frozen" capital lies unused and left to decay. This capital includes not just the empty cities but also other property which could be producing revenue. Unopened iron safes still lie in the ruins of the former National Bank in Phnom Penh, allegedly blown up three days after the liberation of the capital as an act of sabotage by counter-revolutionary groups.
Our hosts assured us that so far no one had even attempted to check on their contents, because the watchword is for the new society to be built by means of newly earned resources.

It seems hard to believe, but our guides told us that this was the truth. Even when we pointed out to them the shortage of medicines or powdered milk for the children and the impossibility of resuming television broadcasts, which before liberation were received by two thirds of the country, they defended this party directive as being "very far-sighted". They even became a bit angry because we as newsman had brought up the subject of a lack of the most indispensable articles. They told us that they did not wish to "bombard" foreign guests and visitors with their problems and that it was their own affair, which they would gradually deal with.

Their answer was the same when we mentioned the problems of juvenile delinquency and prostitution, which, until 1975 had been a flourishing business in the large cities. Daughters "working" in town were of vital importance for several tens of thousands of Cambodian families, their earnings often being their sole source of income. The new authorities decided to eliminate this social ill and have had considerable difficulty in doing so, even to this day, but their pride does not permit them to talk about it. Nor do they mention the orphans or abandoned children who are the other side of the coin of this problem, because they have their "own recipe for removing all traces of the past and healing the wounds inflicted by the war".

**Hot Borders with Vietnam**

Not only are the ravages of war still to be seen in Kampuchea, but this country is now more than ever in the grip of a war psychosis. Only occasional lorries can be seen moving slowly along roads furrowed by American bombs. Bridges and the railway line from Phnom Penh to the port of Kompong Som have been provisionally restored to use, but there is no organized transport or any fixed train schedule. Transport is only arranged when absolutely necessary, when for instance the mobile brigades have to be moved to another work site or to another rice paddy. In the absence of cars, lorries, buses and railway carriages, people most often do their travelling on foot. There is not enough oil or petrol, nor is there enough electricity, for not all the power plants have yet been repaired. As there are no batteries available for transistor radios, a bicycle-powered dynamo is sometimes used to produce power in order to hear the news on Radio Phnom Penh.

The state of transport is perhaps best illustrated by the example of Kampot, where we saw brigades of women working on the salt flats. About 5,000 young girls and women, none over the age of thirty, live in make-shift barracks on the edge of the salt flats, even though only a kilometre or so away, in Kampot, there are hundreds of well-preserved houses standing empty. Mountains of salt lie under the open sky, for there is no way of transporting it to the covered sheds in the nearby town.

Our hosts often explained the many difficulties they were having to cope with in terms of the clashes on the "hot" borders with Vietnam. In mid-March our small group of Yugoslav journalists had an opportunity to witness the drama of two nations, which, after a protracted war against a common enemy, just as a lasting peace seemed to be within their grasp, again took up arms against one another. It seems that the months of sniper fire exchanged along the length of the Vietnam-Kampuchean border have grown into a full-fledged military conflict that was a topic of discussion during the first days of our stay in Phnom Penh. We were told about a large-scale offensive mounted by Vietnamese divisions which were allegedly supported by tanks and artillery, and in a few places incursions were made into Kampuchea. Newly built dams and other projects bear the name of the date of this clash between the two nations.

Our hosts were at pains to convince us that an act of aggression had indeed taken place, and on March 6th they took us to the slopes of Kirivong mountain, which lies on the border between Kampuchea and Vietnam. Our guides told us that here, sixteen kilometres within Kampuchean territory, two Vietnamese divisions of 400 tanks were on the road leading to Takeo up until January 2nd. One of the frontier commanders called to our attention the tracks of a tank in a rice paddy that had not yet been obliterated by the luxuriant vegetation. As we drew closer to the Vietnamese border, an occasional dead water buffalo was pointed out to us as having been killed by the Vietnamese. We saw three or four trenches, several bombed-out houses, the shattered trunk of a coconut tree and a mortar bomb of undeterminable age.

We were informed that sixteen Vietnamese tanks had not returned, but we saw no traces of them, and our hosts explained that because of the metal shortage the peasants had used every scrap of them to make ploughshares, hoes and shovels, and even cooking utensils. Interestingly enough, in some other regions we came across the wrecks of American tanks which had been standing by the roadside for three years already.
On the road leading to the border we saw peasants at work in the rice paddies, even though our hosts told us that in that very place, six kilometres from the Vietnamese border, a clash with the “enemy” had ended just a quarter of an hour before our arrival.

We discussed the conflict with Vietnam on many occasions with competent officials of new Kampuchea, and they explained it more in ideological terms than as a result of unresolved border issues. They recognize the present border and have no claims on Vietnamese territory, so that they interpret the misunderstanding which has arisen between them and their neighbour as an attempt by Hanoi to force them to become members of a “great Indo-Chinese federation”. Within a decade, Pol Pot told us, “the Kampuchean people would become a national minority in such a federation”. In an interview granted to us at the end of our visit to Kampuchea, Pol Pot stated: “Let Vietnam renounce such ambitions and let it respect our independence and territorial integrity, and our dispute will be resolved right away.”

Throughout our stay we constantly heard about these border clashes, which we never had an opportunity to witness on the spot, in broadcasts from Radio Phnom Penh. News reports were full of descriptions of “fresh attacks on Kampuchean territory by Vietnamese units”. Incursions into Dak Dam, the province of Mondulkiri, and at Ratankiri and some other places were mentioned, and there must indeed have been fighting there, because Radio Hanoi also reported these incidents, although giving different information.

Just why our hosts did not wish to take us to the “hot spots” along the frontier with Vietnam, which runs over a thousand kilometres in the region known as the Parrot’s Beak, will perhaps remain a secret which can only be explained by the pride of the Khmer Rouge, who did not wish to cast doubt in any way on their assertion that in these regions their army had the situation “under control”. Or perhaps the reason was the impossibility of ensuring the complete safety of the lives of the Yugoslav special correspondents.

Everything else that could be seen by the casual observer indicated that clashes were frequent but that in this period they were not on a very large scale and went no further than exchanges of fire in the border areas. Reports about these frays, for instance, never mentioned Kampuchean losses, but only Vietnamese losses. In Phnom Penh we did see a rather large-scale drive to collect beds from the abandoned houses for the hospital, which during our stay was full of wounded.

Nor could the mobilization of the entire army for war be concealed. In Phnom Penh the security guards and watchmen at some cultural and administrative centres were for the most part young boys and girls between the ages of fifteen and eighteen, because presumably the army was deployed in the frontier regions. Military patrols and roadblocks in the provinces adjacent to Vietnam are frequent and very strong at night, and even our guides avoided travelling with us at night whenever possible. If we did have to travel by night for any reason, the were not able to conceal their nervousness, notwithstanding our very strong military guard.

However, any analysis of this conflict is made difficult by unreliable and contradictory information, both about the situation on the front and about the intentions of the direct and indirect participants in it.

A Smile for the Future

We asked Premier and Communist Party Secretary Pol Pot what direction the Kampuchean revolution was taking. He answered with a complacent smile: “We have no models; the people will decide at each stage of our revolution.” He then talked to us about things that had already been decided upon, and about the independence and non-alignment of his country.

The political programme of the Party has still not been made public. As background material we were only given copies of two public addresses by Pol Pot and the Constitution, which was promulgated on 14 December 1975 at the third national congress, when the Communist Party was still operating in illegality. This constitution is some 800 words long and was obviously framed in a hurry, but nevertheless the main lines of development of the new state are contained in it.

The first chapter of the new constitution states, for instance, that “the state of Kampuchea is an independent, united, neutral, non-aligned, sovereign and democratic state of workers and peasants and other workers.” All the major means of production are collectively owned by the “people’s state and nation” except for those “which serve to satisfy personal needs”. Agricultural estates were to be run collectively.

Justice lies in the hands of “people’s courts, which protect the democratic freedoms and punish every act against the state and its laws”. The Constitution specifies that
“hostile activities which endanger the people’s state should be punished by the most severe penalty, while other violations or rather their perpetrators should be reeducated.” We were told that there had been such activities aimed against the people and state in the recent past. In his speech made when the Communist Party emerged from underground, Pol Pot presented an analysis according to which only 2 per cent of the population were hostile to the new state and under cover or openly were endeavouring to undermine the revolution and its institutions. In his opinion this was a “handful of traitors, who are implacable enemies and therefore incorrigible”. According to the same calculation, three per cent of the population was still hesitant but was gradually being won over to the revolution, while between 90 and 95 per cent supported the revolution. It is not known how many members the Party has, or what its structure is like, but it is said to be composed of “small, poor peasants and workers and other workers”. The progressive intelligentsia is not mentioned and officially does not even exist.

According to the Constitution, every citizen must be provided with the material prerequisites for life, and there can be no unemployment, because every worker is the owner of his factory and every peasant is the owner of the rice paddies. Women now have the same rights as men, and, judging from what we could see, equality between the sexes has been achieved. Women are in the troops of the regular army; they are managers of large economic projects, and they sit on the seven-member committees which decide on all current matters, even on marriage, as polygamy and bigamy have been outlawed.

Every citizen has the right to practice a religion, as a constitutionally guaranteed right, provided “that religion is not a threat to the state or people”. The citizen also has the right every five years to vote directly and by secret ballot to elect his representative to the national assembly, which has 250 members. The assembly which promulgated the first constitution of Democratic Kampuchea comprised 150 peasant deputies from the workers and “other workers”, and 50 members of the “revolutionary army”. This first assembly approved an item on the retirement from public life of the former head of state Norodom Sihanouk, with due honours and recognition for his work, and it awarded him an annual allowance of 8,000 dollars.

This session of the assembly, the only one which is officially mentioned, decided to spell out the main lines of the foreign policy of Democratic Kampuchea in the 16th, concluding chapter. The text states that the new state “shall resolutely endeavour to maintain close and friendly relations both with all neighbouring countries and with other nearby and far away countries of the world on the basis of strict mutual respect of sovereignty and territorial integrity.”

This chapter goes on to state that “Democratic Kampuchea shall adhere to the policy of peace, neutrality and nonalignment”, and that under no circumstances will it permit “the installation of military bases on its territory”, that it will not allow any outside interference in its domestic policy and on its part it will never “attempt to interfere in the internal affairs of other countries”. In its final paragraphs the Constitution reiterates the day-to-day and long-term policy orientation of Kampuchea to belong “decisively to the great family of nonaligned countries” and it states that Kampuchea will make every effort to foster solidarity with all nations of the third world in Asia, Africa, and Latin America and with other countries which desire peace and justice in the world and which support the struggle to eliminate colonialism and neocolonialism and to achieve independence, friendship, democracy and genuine progress.

There are no ranks or hierarchy in the army, just “party cadres”. This fact was confirmed for us by a high-placed army “cadre”, who, very much concerned with the need for secrecy, refused even to tell us his name. Everyone is dressed alike. The only difference that we could tell was that the higher officials wore wristwatches.

The cooperative is the basis of all of society. Pol Pot claims that about 85 per cent of the population are members of cooperatives, and perhaps this figure should not be doubted. However, there are notably large differences between cooperatives. In the fertile province of Batambang and everywhere that villages existed before, the individual plots allowed for cultivation are much larger: the peasants even have “their own” cows and pigs or poultry, and there are not so many of those huge prefabricated barracks serving as communal dining halls in which all the members of the cooperative and their families have to take their meals. The most undeveloped cooperatives are in the recently established economic zones where the former townspeople who began their rural lives without anything and where even today hundreds of thousands of families are still living in still dwellings or make-shift barracks. It is probably for this reason that the plan now gives top priority to providing a suitable dwelling for each family by the end of 1979, and equipment has been ordered from abroad for new sawmills to produce the building material for this “housing” construction.

This target as set by the plan perhaps indicates that the authorities still have no intention of returning the popula-
tion to the cities. Nevertheless, a new "siege" of the urban settlements has begun, particularly in Phnom Penh. Our hosts told us that there are now some 220,000 inhabitants in the suburbs of the capital, and we saw some industrial facilities being built in the vicinity of some towns. For instance, the shipyards building river boats located in a suburb of Phnom Penh has accommodated its workers in town houses. When the time comes to repopulate the towns, the greatest problem for the new authorities will be deciding whom to settle in these now empty town houses. Should those three million inhabitants who were born and had lived all their lives in the cities return to their own homes, or should some others be installed in them? This is a highly sensitive political question, and it seems that the new regime is aware of all its ramifications.

In the absence of other mass membership political organizations and given the small size of the Communist Party, whose members, judging from what we could see, have been recruited mainly from the ranks of the army, the decision on resettling the towns could well have serious political repercussions if consideration is not given to their former inhabitants now living in the villages. Pol Pot did not want to commit himself on when the new resettlement would take place, no doubt because of the border conflicts with Vietnam, for it appears that the policy of empty towns is part of the country's defence strategy.

The main preoccupations of the new authorities in Phnom Penh are still the construction and rebuilding of the villages, the raising of the living standard of the peasants and a growth in the population (the plan envisages a doubling of the population of new Kampuchea in the next few years). There will be enough rice for these future citizens, thanks to the rice paddies established in the new economic zones, but many years will have to pass before the other conditions for their lives will be provided. The Kampuchean revolution, notwithstanding its high ambitions, has spurned mechanization in its zeal for "purity" and in accordance with its policy of doing everything with its own efforts, but human labour is not enough to rebuild the country as fast as necessary. Things are made even harder by the fact that the revolution has radically decided to sweep away all remnants of the past, to create new, exclusively revolutionary cadres, whose training for the ambitious and demanding tasks that face this war-torn and exhausted country is not something that can be carried out overnight.

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(Translation: Boško and Margot Milosavljević)