Although widely criticized and denounced for its collectivization policies, mass executions and violent purges, very little is known about Pol Pot’s Communist Party of Kampuchea (CPK). The large death toll, at least 700,000–800,000 people in three and a half years (1975–78), and the party’s apparently relentless pursuit of radical policies in the face of failures, nevertheless suggest perilous inadequacies in its organization and leadership. In an important appraisal, William Willmott has argued that the CPK’s analysis of agrarian problems was almost certainly erroneous. It resulted in a serious overestimation of revolutionary potential within the society and led to the rapid squandering of the nationalist support earned by the revolutionaries during the war against the US-backed Lon Nol military regime. Other close observers, including Vietnamese writers and officials, attribute CPK failures to the absence of a Marxist social analysis underlying party policies and practices. Violence in the post-war period, it is argued, stemmed from peasant warlordism coupled with the irrational ‘chauvinism’ of Pol Pot and other party leaders.

Research into these and other crucial issues, such as patterns of communication within the party and methods of determining policies, is seriously constrained by the paucity of primary documentation. In contrast to practices elsewhere in the communist world, the CPK kept few party archives and published very little either for internal consumption or for a wider public. Moreover, its Democratic Kampuchea state apparatus was skeletal. It relied heavily on radio and other forms of unrecorded oral communication with the thousands of rural co-operative administrations established after liberation. Some party and government records were destroyed in the wake of the Vietnamese invasion of 1978; others have been withhold by the Vietnamese or its allied successor administration. The papers that have been made available, notably the CPK security police files of ‘confessions’ written by purged CPK cadres, present fragmented and ideologically distorted glimpses of inner party life. These are very useful and informative when interpreted alongside data from other sources. But non-archival data are also rare. In particular, inter-
views with high-ranking CPK cadres in circumstances permitting frank discussion of party affairs were exceptional occurrences. Therein lies the value of the following unique document.

By 1978, realizing that a Vietnamese military invasion was likely and that Democratic Kampuchea's self-imposed isolation from the international arena would be disadvantageous in such a crisis, the CPK leadership agreed for the first time to receive visits from friendship associations, fraternal parties and selected journalists. Most of the visitors had meetings with Secretary Pol Pot. But the delegation of the Danish Communist Workers' Party (KAP), having arranged its visit hastily while on a tour of China, was told upon arrival that the Secretary was too busy to see them. Similarly, Ieng Sary, a member of the Standing Committee of the CPK Central Committee with responsibility for foreign affairs, was abroad on a diplomatic mission. Thus, and surprisingly in view of his background, Nuon Chea, First Deputy Secretary of the party, took charge of reception formalities and, in particular, the exchange of party reports required by protocol on these occasions.3

So far as is known, Nuon Chea had not travelled outside Indochina for 30 years at the time of this meeting. Nor had he ever attended European schools. Originally from Battambang province in the west, he attended a Thai language school in the early 1940s. Afterwards, along with several thousand other Kampuchean students from the occupied province, he was sent to a special secondary school for able 'provincial' students in Bangkok. By 1948 he was studying at Thammasat University and working part-time as a clerk in Thailand's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. While at university, he joined the Thai communist party, being recruited by members of the Indochinese Communist Party (ICP) in Battambang who had access to his intellectual circle. Predictably, when the ICP expanded its anti-French activities in Kampuchea towards the end of the decade, Nuon Chea abandoned his studies, returned to Kampuchea and transferred his party membership to the ICP. From 1949 to 1952, he worked with the Viet Minh to raise rural support for the pro-communist wing of the Khmer Issarak (Freedom) movement led by Son Ngoc Minh, and for the Khmer People's Revolutionary Party (KPRP), established in 1951 when the ICP was dissolved into national branches. In 1952, he was sent to north Vietnam to study. The exact nature or duration of this training is not known.

The KPRP was only modestly successful in its attempts to forge a Vietnamese-style nationalist-communist alliance in Kampuchea. In 1953, leadership of the nationalist movement was decisively usurped by King Sihanouk's royal crusade for independence. Thus, when independence was finally received from France in 1954, the future of the proto-communist people's party was highly uncertain. During the war, it had been unable to complete some of the preliminary organizational work of the party. The provisional statute was never in fact formally ratified by a national congress.4 Moreover, approximately one-third of the party membership, around 1,000 cadres, were taken to Vietnam for political studies in 1954. They were evacuated along with the Viet Minh armed forces that were obliged to leave Kampuchea under the terms of the Geneva armistice. Nuon Chea, however, returned from Vietnam in that year to take up party work in the capital city, Phnom Penh. By the end of 1954, Pol Pot had also been assigned to the capital, following technical studies in France (where he joined the PCF) and a year in the East Zone maquis under the tutelage of Tou Samouth, an ex-ICP member who was in charge of KPRP propaganda and united front work. The party fell on hard times in this period. Sihanouk's army sought out veterans of the resistance and took reprisals. Concurrently, the new Democratic Republic of Vietnam and the Workers' Party of Vietnam (WPVN) began urging Kampuchean 'progressives' to support Sihanouk's regime. His neutralist foreign policy obstructed US interference in the politics of at least one part of the former French colony. In addition, Sihanouk had normalized diplomatic relations with China and other socialist countries. Thus constrained from militancy while at the same time suffering steady losses of cadres through death and intimidation, the KPRP seemed destined to disappear. In 1960, the failing movement was reorganized and upgraded to a Marxist–Leninist organization. Tou Samouth, Pol Pot's mentor, was elected Secretary of the new party's central committee. Samouth resided in Kampuchea Krom, that is, in regions in southern Vietnam inhabited by Khmers. Because of this, it is believed that much routine secretarial work was delegated to Pol Pot who acted as his personal secretary. Nuon Chea was elected Deputy Secretary of the party. He states baldly to his Danish interlocutors that this congress was 'the beginning', thereby avoiding any direct reference to Vietnam's early sponsorship of the Kampuchean communist movement.

It remains to be noted that the two Danish visitors were experienced, knowledgeable observers of Third World communist politics, especially of Albanian politics. Alerted by reports of attempted coups against Pol Pot, they wanted to know if difficulties in post-war reconstruction had prompted debates and conflicts inside the party. If so, did the coup reports coming out of Phnom Penh mean that inner party conflicts were being suppressed, that is, dismissed as acts of interference on the part of 'enemies' of the party and the revolution? Put in other terms, were difficulties encountered in the transition to socialism being compounded by a failure to apply a democratic political line during the period of transition? Finally, the Danes were interested in finding out what positions Kampuchean comrades took on issues central to the Sino-Soviet dispute. Intriguingly, Kampuchean media rarely mentioned the USSR during 1975–78, and while Kampuchea maintained close diplomatic relations with China, there was little conspicuous support of China's ideological and foreign policy positions in communist world affairs.

On Party Building and Armed Struggle

Nuon Chea begins by stressing what appear to be orthodoxies. It is only
when his remarks are placed in the context of a decade of failures, especially the failure of the KPRP and its Viet Minh allies to organize in the cities during the first resistance, the failure of the party to make any progress in the elections held after independence and the failure to retain its following in the face of official repression, that his insistence upon the need for a militant working class party acquires specific urgency and cogency. According to Nuon Chea, the new party adopted united front tactics for the period of democratic revolution, identifying US imperialism and the feudal class in Kampuchea as the principal enemies of the revolution. In this, the party’s analysis reproduced that formulated by the ICP and WPVN for post-colonial Vietnam. But Nuon Chea then cites difficulties with the Vietnamese party, giving the impression that it objected to the creation of a Marxist–Leninist organization in Kampuchea or the desire of some in the party to resume armed struggle in 1960. The Vietnamese, he states, urged the Kampuchean party to respect policies adopted by the twentieth congress of the CPSU and, he adds, ‘they thought the revolution could be achieved through the parliament.’

Similarly, Ieng Sary, in talks with Norwegian visitors, claimed that the Vietnamese put pressure on Tou Samouth, Acting Secretary of the KPRP following the defection of the Secretary to Sihanouk, into delaying the convening of a congress scheduled for 1959. Later, after the Vietnamese party had been persuaded of the need for a congress, it attempted, according to Ieng Sary, to determine its outcome. Once again Tou Samouth was the intermediary between the two parties. He was apparently effective in this role, for the Kampuchean party continued its parliamentary struggle after the congress, as the WPVN and CPSU desired, and Tou Samouth was confirmed as Secretary. If the strategy agreed by the founding congress included provision for armed struggle, as Nuon Chea states, it was probably limited to the creation of a self-defence corps to protect cadres.5 By Ieng Sary’s admission, debates over the merits of armed struggle versus parliamentary struggle, especially over the feasibility of parliamentary struggle in Kampuchea, continued unresolved into the early 1960s. Tou Samouth was elected Secretary, Sary claimed, because everyone was confident that he would continue to put the ‘national and democratic’ case to the Vietnamese.6

Assuming these remarks to be accurate, Vietnamese party strategists apparently viewed developments in Kampuchea in much the same light as concurrent developments in southern Vietnam. When the CPSU adopted its policy of peaceful coexistence and called upon newly independent countries to assist the socialist camp in the creation of a ‘vast zone of peace’ (January 1956), WPVN leaders already knew that Ngo Dinh Diem had no intention of respecting the timetable negotiated in Geneva in 1954 for peaceful reunification of the two Vietnams. But being dependent upon Soviet aid and diplomatic support, the WPVN leadership had to respect Soviet desires and find some way of reconciling these with national realities and aspirations. Initially, the WPVN Central Committee took the view that CPSU strategic aims would be met and supported by an indefinite extension of a (peaceful) political struggle for reunification. Supported by a DRV diplomatic struggle, such a strategy was also deemed ‘realistic’ for southern comrades, for party leaders in Hanoi judged the southern apparatus ‘weak’. Gradually, however, Le Duan (then head of the southern region committee) persuaded the Central Committee of the need for a more active and positive approach to problems in the south, particularly in response to Diem’s violent repression of the communist movement. Because the southern apparatus was weak, Le Duan argued, it had to be made ‘ready’ to some extent for its future revolutionary leadership role. He feared that an indefinite prolongation of political struggle would serve to promote reformist tendencies already apparent in the southern apparatus. ‘Leftist deviationism’, the desire to resume armed struggle, was in comparison a less pronounced and less worrying tendency. Accordingly, the WPVN Central Committee agreed at the end of 1956 to commence self-defence activities in the south in order to protect the party apparatus and to encourage mass support for it. The CPSU and several Eastern European parties were meanwhile informed of Vietnam’s awareness of the ‘possibility’ of a peaceful reunification and transition to socialism, but at the same time fraternal parties were alerted to a second possibility, that of a non-peaceful transition forced upon revolutionary socialists by exploiting classes who used violence against the masses. Aid from the USSR increased in 1958. In early 1959, as party and popular struggles against Diem gained momentum, the fifteen plenum of the WPVN authorized a resumption of armed struggle in the south. A statement from the plenum identified southern society as ‘neo-colonial and semi-feudal’ and accused the Diem administration of being ‘a tool for aggression and enslavement’. From mid-1959, thousands of specially trained party cadres in the north were infiltrated into the south to assume leadership of the resumed armed struggle.7

From these developments, Kampuchean communists undoubtedly took hope. This was perhaps especially true of veterans of the first Indochina war, such as Tou Samouth and Nuon Chea. The Vietnamese request for a delay in the convening of the Kampuchean congress of 1959 probably reflected uncertainty about the situation in Kampuchea and the strategy to be pursued there at a moment when debates concerning southern Vietnam were still being resolved. Nevertheless, the third WPVN congress of September 1960, held three weeks in advance of the founding Kampuchean congress, almost certainly gave its formal approval to the formation of a Kampuchean party. But because Sihanouk was not thought to be a tool of US imperialism, as was the Diem administration or the Phoumi Nosavan coup regime in Laos, the ‘possibility’ of a peaceful transition was pressed— uniquely— upon the Kampucheaans. None of the Kampuchean cadres taken to northern Vietnam in 1954 were sent home. Nor is there any evidence that their return was requested. Thus, while CPK leaders would not admit it in 1978, it
appears they willingly complied with Soviet global strategy and Vietnam's regional strategy in 1960. Only later was this thought to be a mistake or yet another failure.

Nuon Chea's claim notwithstanding, there is no evidence that the party adopted a strategic line of 'independence, sovereignty [sometimes translated self-determination] and self-reliance' before late 1966. The abandonment of the old KPRP strategic line of solidarity with and strategic co-operation with the Indochinese movement was triggered by the loss of more cadres and a gradual appreciation of the existence of alternative strategies. By 1966, Sihanouk had imprisoned or exiled a large number of the party's 'legal' cadres. Tou Samouth and others had been assassinated and Marxist members of parliament as well as many liberals were under constant surveillance. The party's underground Standing Committee had been forced to flee for their lives to isolated mountainous redoubts. From these vantage points, the party observed the sharp lurch to the right in Kampuchea's 1966 parliamentary elections and appraised the collapse of the legal struggles of the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI). Between 1965 and 1970, Sihanouk proceeded to extend rights of sanctuary and transit to the Vietnamese revolutionary armed forces, partly as a means of further isolating the Kampuchean revolution from the Vietnamese revolution. And in support of the Vietnamese revolution, the USSR, China and most Eastern European countries granted economic and military aid to the near bankrupt Sihanouk administration. On these matters, Nuon Chea is extremely discreet:

... confronting ... acute contradictions, we had a Central Committee meeting. We decided we could no longer continue the legal struggle and that we had to start the uprising. This was in January 1968. ... In 1967–68 many people said we were ultra-leftist; in 1970 [following the coup against Sihanouk], everyone followed us. Socialist couriers ... supported us ... (emphasis added).

The adoption of a political line of independence and self-reliance was signalled by the taking of the name Communist Party of Kampuchea from about the beginning of 1967. The organization formed in 1960 had reportedly taken the name Workers' Party of Kampuchea.8

Secrecy, Class Struggles and 'Ideological' Party-Building

Most of Nuon Chea's statement describes party struggles in the 1960s. By his account, they were arduous and heroic. Enemies, difficulties and temptations were omnipresent, forcing the party to do most of its organizing in great secrecy. Secrecy, he claims, was necessary for the protection of cadres, especially its leading ones, and this was preserved even to the extent of isolating cell groups from one another. In fact, Nuon Chea's description of inner party life reveals that most party members would not have met or known many other party members until they had been inside the organization for some years. Paradoxically, in view of the implications for inner party democracy, the cloistering of people in closed cell communities in which they attempted to 'build up' and to deepen their awareness of proletarian standpoints, was viewed by the party leadership not simply as a tactical necessity but as a strategic source of strength. As one internal history describes it, the party apparatus had a 'unified nature from top to bottom, from the centre to the lower echelons ...'9 Collective corporatist power apparently accrued from the structural reproduction and accumulation of 'base' units and their monolithic, hierarchal integration. When, moreover, Nuon Chea speaks of martial prowess rather than class interests as the key to gaining the support of the peasantry, and of 'grasping' national forces or of the Vietnamese 'uniting' with the US in negotiations, it is clear that some of the dynamics in CPK struggles are lodged in pre-democratic traditions.

One possible approach to an understanding of these is suggested by the internal history already mentioned. Accounting for the defection of Secretary Sieu Heng and other problems encountered in the 1950s, it explains:

From the ideological and political point of view, Sieu Heng taught the people that there were no social classes in our Kampuchean society. This meant that there was no struggle between the social classes; and that the people, above all the farmers, did not wage revolution. They had to follow the ruling class with Sihanouk at the head, as Sieu Heng had followed it.10 From this it is evident that Sieu Heng might have accepted as valid the dominant view of the nature of social order. There is no mention of Vietnamese determination of his views on this subject. Traditional popular conceptions of society have been observed and described in part in a small but fine sociological literature.11 Unfortunately, the subject cannot be treated in detail or very adequately here.

In broad outline, however, the common view was based on the structure of the family and the village. From infancy, Khmers were taught their 'place' in the household, being obliged to address and to pay other forms of status-respect to their parents, siblings and neighbours in accordance with degrees of kinship, age, sex and social rank. Rank attached to membership in clerical, secular or other hierarchies – for example, to people such as Buddhist bhikkus, village headmen, teachers, achars and mediums. The village as a whole was conceived of as a wider, familial corporation. It was said to be a place settled by older and younger people living closely together in the manner of siblings and having a Buddhist wat as its centre or core. The external boundaries of the community varied with the movement over time of households that participated in wat activities. Understood social boundaries rarely corresponded to territorial boundaries on maps but it was clearly understood who belonged to the village and who were outsiders. Movement out of the village involved finding a 'place' in another corporate household or wat and the associated corporate neighbourhood. Movement involved attachment to
and reliance upon kin or others of higher rank who, in exchange for service, loyalty and status-respect, provided largess, 'place' and degrees of 'dignity' or meaning to life. One's industrial role or performance was quite secondary. The moving inwards and outwards of various corporate cells of the society was assured by an inter-village scaffolding of kinship relations, the state and Buddhist school systems and national administration (royal service). The vision of 'society' focused concretely on this scaffolding and on the 'proper' or highly disciplined handling of inter-personal relations between those of superior and subordinate status. The 'centre' and the 'top' of society were represented by and occupied by the King. Indeed, Sihanouk sought to preserve this peasant, courtly social order in the 1960s, a period of economic crises, with policies designed to ensure that people of high status retained control of national wealth (largess) so as to protect the well-being of their followers.12 But market mechanisms and capitalists were not easily controlled or constrained. There was a widespread sense of loss, of being unable 'to find' one's 'place' in the established status hierarchies, and a sense of erosion and pending collapse of those hierarchies and the codes of conduct associated with them. Referring to this period and phenomenon, Nuon Chea expresses a widely held view when he says, '...when people lived in a capitalist way, the society disintegrated'.

At first glance the class analysis of the CPK conveys an entirely different vision of Kampuchean society and of its problems. Pol Pot revealed crucial details of it in an important speech in 1977 when the existence of the CPK was made known to the world.13 Other details, notably the subdivisions of the classes and the criteria employed for identifying who belonged to the classes, have become known through documents captured during the 1970–75 war and defector accounts. Nuon Chea, following Pol Pot, explains that party struggles were based on the class contradictions between workers and capitalists and between peasants and 'feudalists', a subdivision usually excluding Sihanouk. The united front strategy sought to unite the basic classes in the revolution, the working class plus the poor and lower-middle peasant strata, with progressive and patriotic elements in the capitalist classes, for the purpose of defeating US imperialism and overturning the feudal class. (See Chart 1.)

Most historians of Kampuchea would argue that class formation had barely commenced by the 1950s, but to pass over this debate, there are several more immediately curious elements in the CPK analysis. First, the figures used by the party to indicate the size of the classes that are assumed to have been formed, especially the size of the middle peasantry, bear little relation to known empirical realities. Remarkably, the official party figures also contradict the best estimates of well-known Kampuchean political economists, some of whom were also party members. Khieu Samphan, for example, interpreting colonial era data on selected provinces, considered 60 per cent of all landowners to be middle peasants.14 While poor land registry records prevent definitive judgements, social scientists are generally of the opinion that self-sufficient smallholders – middle peasants – were the largest group in the countryside. It is also thought that landless peasant households made up no more than 20 per cent of the rural households. CPK figures for the size of the poor and middle peasant classes are therefore startling; they appear to be faulty projections to the national level of figures drawn from studies of a few selected localities. This means that radical collectivization policies that were designed to assist a mythically enormous poor peasant carried with them the risk of alienating a large, politically powerful and officially overlooked middle peasantry. In 1978, Nuon Chea concedes privately the existence of contradictions between those favouring collective and private ownership and also the possibility that these could become 'antagonistic' in the absence of party vigilance. But from other sources, the existence of 'antagonistic contradictions' was put to the Standing Committee as early as 1974 by none other than Hou Yuon, the wartime minister of co-operatives.15 Many purged cadres were obliged to confess to errors in the application of the party's class line. The errors often consisted of relying upon the wrong class elements in administering cooperatives. Alternatively, they were accused of proceeding too rapidly through stages of collectivization, thus deepening class contradictions.16 In some regions, a sufficiently large number of basic class elements may have been difficult to find and in areas where middle peasants made up a large majority, even preliminary stages of collectivization were presumably resisted.

Hou Yuon's form of criticism demonstrates that some people in the party were able to use class analysis not only to divine but also to evaluate class struggles. Some of Nuon Chea's remarks and some criteria employed in the official analysis suggest in contrast that not all cadres had this ability. Relations of domination and consumption, central to the functioning of the old class order, figure prominently in the official CPK view, and the existence of a 'Special Class' alongside those with Marxist nomenclature indicates the continuing salience of one village communal criterion for class-group belonging, that of geographical propinquity. 'Outsiders', if not always simply 'traitors', and with the exception of Buddhist monks, were simply not trustworthy.17

Although Nuon Chea's formal outline of party strategies and tactics is in many ways theoretically orthodox, his description of party activities conveys an impression of a slightly different view of class order. The society Nuon Chea worked in contained 'top' people and undesirables such as 'vagabonds' who were too easily enticed, it would seem, into Soviet Embassy plots against the party. United front work with 'high-ranking personalities' involved slipping party slogans and views into their speeches to make them campaign for communism without knowing it. Nuon Chea regards the words of the party with reverence as if they contained a spirit and meaning independent of the will of those who uttered or published them, as if the spirit somehow penetrated the consciousness of listeners. In this, he displays fetishism. Similarly, when explaining how the wartime National United Front of Kampuchea was...
## Chart 1

### Kampuchea’s Class Structure: The CPK View

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Sub-Division</th>
<th>Membership/Criteria</th>
<th>% Total Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Feudal</td>
<td>Aristocrats</td>
<td>Members of the royal family</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>‘Feudalists’</td>
<td>Former ministers, provincial governors, high-ranking Lon No1 military officers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capitalist</td>
<td>Compradore</td>
<td>Businessmen with foreign trading connections; defeated during the war</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Patriotic</td>
<td>Businessmen supplying NUFX during the war; eliminated by 1975 abolition of private trading</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Petty Capitalist</td>
<td>Upper level</td>
<td>High civil servants; individuals in possession of a licence, a bac or other forms of ‘intellectual’ capital</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Middle level</td>
<td>Teachers, hairdressers, tailors, craftsman or other self-employed small businessmen</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lower level</td>
<td>Low ranking civil servants, employees, clergymen (monks, priests, etc.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workers</td>
<td>Independent labourers</td>
<td>Builders, joiners, bicycle cab (cyclopusse) drivers, plumbers</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Industrial workers</td>
<td>Rubber plantation workers, dock workers, factory workers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Party workers</td>
<td>Workers in mobile youth brigades and cadres employed in the revolutionary government and army</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Peasantry       | Rich Peasants        | Landowners who employed hired labourers and modern equipment for all work           | 10%                |
|                | Middle Peasants      | Landowners who employed hired labourers to work 00% or more of their land          |                    |
|                | - Upper level        | Landowners who employed hired labourers to work 20-60% of their land               | 5%                 |
|                | - Middle level       | Smallholders working their own land and who had enough to eat throughout the year  |                    |
|                | - Lower level        | Peasants lacking one or more of the means of production, obliged to work the land of others or lacking in food to eat for various lengths of time each year. Material criteria varied from region to region | 70%                |
| Poor Peasants  | - Upper level        |                                                                                        |                    |
|                | - Middle level       |                                                                                        |                    |
|                | - Lower level        |                                                                                        |                    |
| Special Class  | Revolutionary intellectuals | Individuals outside of Kampuchea as of 17 April 1975, the date of liberation, and who returned to Kampuchea between 1975-78. | 45%                |
| (or 'Class Apart') | Reactionary intellectuals (overseas residents who did not support NUFX) |                                                                                        |                    |
|                | Militarymen, policemen and high ranking officials of the old regime |                                                                                        |                    |
|                | Buddhist monks (treated in practice as petty capitalists) |                                                                                        |                    |

formed with Sihanouk, stress is placed on the superior military force of the CPK. Although it is not mentioned here, the party also kept Sihanouk out of the country and the maquis as much as possible. Thus ‘King’ Sihanouk was subordinated to the party’s organizational power. Indeed, it is remarkable that for Nuon Chea, Sihanouk is ‘King’ in view of his abdication of the throne in 1955. From all this and in the absence of party efforts to raise the democratic consciousness of the Kampuchean masses, the Danish delegation concluded that the CPK did not understand how to form internal and external fronts.

The manner in which the party strove to build fronts and acted politically in the 1960s is none the less crucially important for working out the logic of its political reaction to problems arising after the war. When things went badly wrong inside the co-operatives, it was assumed that enemies ‘outside’ the revolutionary alliance, that is, class enemies, were guilty of systematic, secret sabotage. There were periodic round-ups of such enemy class elements, and by dozens and hundreds they were executed. Additionally, it was apparently suspected that cadres had knowingly distorted or simply misunderstood party directives, thereby undermining revolutionary order and progress. The security service delved into their class background-composition, that is, class origins plus experience of transformations in the course of revolutionary activities. Contact with counter-revolutionary forces was thought to have transformed revolutionary and proletarian consciousness. Thus, between 11,000 and 20,000 party and government cadres and their spouses were purged and executed including, at the end of 1978, Vorn Veth, the party’s Third Deputy Secretary. Some of the alleged contacts with the CIA are the most revealing of the running amok of the party’s organizational and corporatist logic. In 1976, a cadre who had been imprisoned in the 1960s was obliged to confess to recruitment into the CIA by an enterprising American journalist who managed in 1969 to obtain an interview with Sihanouk’s most famous political prisoner. Another cadre who had been responsible for urban united front work in Phnom Penh during the war ‘confessed’:

After my wife joined the CIA at the end of 1971, Nuon Kheou took me to meet an American woman named X [name withheld]. Before introducing me, Kheou told me she was an agent of the CIA. She was a student at Cornell University in New York. The CIA controls this university so as to select agents for carrying out its activities. X joined the CIA while at this university. She came to Kampuchea to look over the political situation which was evolving unfavourably for US imperialism and to find a way to improve this situation ... the three of us decided to agitate among the masses, stirring up anger against Lon Nol forcing him to resign. ... For some Kampuchceans, including cadres high in the party, individuals are always seen to be attached to groups and subject to the will and discipline of those groups. In commenting upon the CPK’s refusal to allow

the USSR to establish an embassy in Phnom Penh after liberation, Nuon Chea might have criticized the Soviet Union for refusing to recognize the resistance government during the anti-imperialist war or for maintaining diplomatic relations with the Lon Nol regime. Instead, he claims it was impossible to ‘receive’ 200 Russians.

It is perhaps important to note in conclusion that little evidence has been found in available internal CPK archives of dissent from the CPK’s foreign policy of ‘independence’ from the Vietnamese revolution. The evidence instead points to wide party support for the political line of independence, self-determination and self-reliance. The history of relations with the Vietnamese party had clearly left many grievances. Using Kampuchea as a strategic rear area, the Vietnamese had initially encouraged the communist movement in the 1940s only, it appeared, to abandon it in the late 1950s and until the 1970s. In 1975, Vietnamese development strategies and aspirations for Indochina conflicted sharply with and in some cases were completely opposed to the aspirations of the CPK, however unwise or ill-founded these might be judged. The international dilemmas of the CPK were therefore real and not entirely of its own making. While the CPK clearly attempted to suppress inner party conflicts arising from the failure of its post-war policies, by stressing the need for unity and solidarity in the international conflict with Vietnam, it seems equally clear that the external pressures placed upon the party by the Vietnamese served only to exacerbate very long-standing organizational and ideological weaknesses and failings.

NOTES

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3. The CPK had no leading body designated as the ‘political bureau’. The Standing or Permanent Committee of the Central Committee undertook duties that elsewhere are divided between a secretariat and a political bureau. In mid-1978, the Standing Committee had six full members: Pol Pot, Secretary; Nuon Chea, First Deputy Secretary; Chhit Chhoeurn (also known as Ta Mok), Second Deputy Secretary; Sok Thouk (also known as Vorn Veth), Third Deputy Secretary; Ieng Sary, Member; and Ep Phnom (also known as Phuong), Member.
4. The rules are composed in Vietnamese rather than in Khmer, the principal language in Kampuchea. Article 24 stated that the rules were provisional and required formal adoption by a national congress. See ‘Statuts Provisorios du Parti Revolutionnaire du Peuple du Cambodge’, an unpublished translation prepared by the French colonial security services (in my possession). A second captured ICP document stated that a national congress for ‘unifying’ the Khmer party should be convened once each srok (district) had at least three party cells. Recruitment during 1951–54 fell far short of this target.
5. Such a corps is mentioned by Nuon Chea and is known to have been established in 1961.
or soon thereafter.


17. Nearly everyone in this class, excluding those arrested and executed upon return or in purges, spent the entire DK period in ‘special’ camps. They were told they were unworthy of being integrated into revolutionary co-operative communities. Over one-third of the special camp people, who numbered perhaps 2–3,000, are believed to have died of exhaustion, malnutrition and associated illnesses.
