

Kommunistisches Programm - National Revolution and Downfall of Cambodia

Pre-Capitalist Cambodia up to the Sihanouk Reform Government

Everything that has been said about the prehistory of the bourgeois upheaval in Vietnam applies with even greater justification to Cambodia. This ancient cultural people had its golden age in the Angkor period from 802-1442, when it ruled over most of Southeast Asia. Saigon was then a small Khmer fishing village. Since then, Cambodia has shrunk to its current residual size due to the conquests of its strengthening neighbours Vietnam and Thailand. The final dissolution of Cambodia seems to have been delayed in the 19th century only by the problems of division between these two, and there is much to suggest that without France's colonial intervention in 1863, there would no longer be an independent Cambodian state. Although Cambodia thus became a French protectorate, its social and economic relations were initially only marginally affected. In this country, for example, imperialism never installed a central port city for transporting away wealth, because there was obviously hardly anything valuable to be gained in the Khmer agrarian country. Therefore, compared to the problems of other colonies, the economic situation could be described as relatively relaxed until the mid-1960s. Epidemic famines and a general pauperisation of the rural population, which made up more than 85% of the total population, were not to be registered. About two million hectares of land were cultivated, of which about 1.5 million hectares were rice land. Agriculture was divided into a pre-capitalist sector, in which these about 1.5 million hectares of rice land - three quarters of the cultivated land - were cultivated according to traditional patterns, and a capitalist rubber plantation sector, which was largely under the control of foreign, mainly French, companies. Within the framework of the traditional sector, around 40% of the rice land was in the hands of only 10% of the landowning population, mostly landowners who resided in the cities and had work done on a leasehold basis. The economic and political order in this area was characterised by a self-sufficient natural economy, i.e. the agricultural products were used by the peasants mainly for personal consumption and only secondarily for exchange. Given the unequal distribution of land, around 30% of peasants were forced to lease land and sometimes hand over up to half of their harvest in return. On top of that, additional taxes had to be paid and unpaid compulsory labour had to be performed. In view of these circumstances, the peasants were only formally free. In this respect, one of the great social contradictions in Cambodian society was the tension - merely superficially concealed - between landowners and leasehold peasants. Battambang province in particular, where the land ownership and leasehold structure was essentially concentrated, can be described as Cambodia's historical centre of unrest, not least for this reason. In the plantation sector, whose production was oriented towards the world market, the organisation of labour was based on capitalist criteria, and these rural wage labourers lived under increased social insecurity.

However, with regard to the subsistence economy, which was still practised for a long time despite imperialist intervention, similar particularities arose as in Vietnam. One should properly even distinguish "two Cambodias", namely the "heartland", where about 90% of the pre-decimation 7-8 million Cambodians lived on an area of only about one third of the country, and the "outlands" in the north, northeast and south, which were dotted with mountains, forests and barren strips of territory and were sparsely populated. The "heartland" is located in the vicinity of the Tonlé Sap Lake and the capital Phnom Penh and consists of a large plain. The "outlands" in the mountainous jungle regions are mainly inhabited by minorities collectively known as "Khmer Loeu", estimated to number between 40,000 and over 100,000. Despite their small numbers, these minorities populate around two thirds of the territory. Besides these "native" minorities, Cambodia has a second category of minorities. These

are Chinese and Vietnamese, who were mainly "imported" during the French colonial period. The total number of Chinese was around 400,000, that of Vietnamese at least 350,000, so both groups together only make up around 10% of the total population. Nevertheless, they have posed a greater problem than the Khmer Loeu in the past for various reasons.

First, the Vietnamese and Chinese were largely concentrated in the urban population. For example, at just under 30% each, the two groups together made up more than half of the capital's population - albeit before the time of the growing flows of refugees. Secondly, both minorities are generally unpopular with the Khmer because of their economic-colonial aid activities. While the Chinese had monopolised most of the rural-urban intermediary trade and thus ethnically raised the strong urban-rural divide into Khmer consciousness, the Vietnamese had been brought into the country primarily for colonial-political administrative tasks. In other words: Whenever a Khmer had to deal with the power of government, it was usually a Vietnamese face that he saw. The thousands of lower-level Vietnamese officials were clear evidence of Cambodia's subjugation to foreign rule. This fact, combined with Cambodians' knowledge of Vietnam's expansionist tendencies in the past - which resulted in the acquisition of Cochinchina - has contributed to the widespread hostility towards Vietnam and the Vietnamese.

Despite the imperialist intervention, industry remained extremely weak. In 1955, this sector, including construction and utilities (energy and water), represented only 9% of the gross domestic product, i.e. the sum of all goods and services produced and marketed according to bourgeois national accounting. Through Sihanouk's measures, however, industry experienced an acceleration in the 1960s: in 1969 - the last "year of peace" - the share had well doubled to 19%. Around this time, Cambodia had 18 larger and about 3300 medium-sized or smaller enterprises. Of the 18 larger ones, 13 were state-owned and the remaining 5 had state participation.

Over 2/3 of Cambodian industry was concentrated in and around Phnom Penh. Overall, almost exclusively agricultural and other raw materials (e.g. rubber) were processed into consumer goods for domestic use. The weakness of industrialisation is naturally also reflected in the low number of wage earners: according to the last census before the US invasion, the active population in 1962 was 2.5 million, of whom around 80% worked in agriculture. The figures for wage earners are largely based on estimates, whereby the demarcations between industry and crafts are certainly hardly exact, certainly also because these two sectors were still similar in many respects and therefore the transitions were rather fluid. Thus, in 1970, about 10,000 people were employed in "modern" industry, of which about 6,500 were employed in the 18 larger companies alone (1968). In addition, about 100,000 worked in crafts and manufactories. Industry, crafts plus trade together comprised about 235,000 people or about 10% of the active population in 1962.¹

Even in the capital, which had 600,000 inhabitants before the flow of refugees, the share of industrial workers was only significantly less than 10% of all employees and considerably less than 5% of the total population. The vast amount of the city thus lived from "non-productive" activities, commonly grouped under the term tertiary sector.

In view of the immobility and self-sufficiency of the rural economy and the low industrial production, in other words, in view of the small national market, the existence of such a bloated tertiary sector could not be explained by domestic economic necessities.

As already mentioned, the figures are estimates from the time before the outbreak of war. How weak industry really was after the bombing is illustrated by a report by Radio Phnom Penh in August 1975 -

¹ cf. "Area Handbook for the Khmer Republic (Cambodia)", Washington 1973, p.225, 275 ff.

i.e. after the "liberation": according to this report, the number of industrial units in the whole country amounted to only "70 small and medium-sized plants, 50 of which were clustered in Phnom Penh"².

This pre-capitalist society, like the entire region, was completely torn from its tranquil calm as a result of the Second World War and the wars that followed. As in Vietnam, the Japanese, shortly before their defeat, had persuaded Prince Norodom Sihanouk, who had been installed by the French in 1941, to declare Cambodia independent on 9 March 1945. When the Japanese surrendered in August 1945, a dispute arose between various political groups in Cambodia over the further conduct of affairs of state. King Sihanouk advocated loose relations with France, but these were to be gradually developed into political independence. In contrast, another group, led by the later influential Son Ngoc Thanh, argued for immediate independence and the introduction of a republic or at least a constitutional monarchy.

The disputes between the two groups eventually escalated to the point of street fighting in the capital - especially in the summer of 1945. When British troops entered Cambodia in October 1945 and the first Frenchmen reappeared in their wake, Son Ngoc Thanh fell into French hands - not without Sihanouk's help. Thanh was initially sentenced to death, but later released. He then started the Khmer Serei resistance against Sihanouk from Thailand. French authority in Cambodia was restored as early as 7 January 1946. On the basis of a treaty dated 8 November 1949, the Kingdom of Cambodia became an "independent" state within the French Union. France, of course, nevertheless retained control over almost all instances of power, which is why Sihanouk soon gained the reputation of a collaborator among his domestic political opponents.

This domestic problem was very soon joined by the foreign policy problem. There was an increasing danger that Cambodia could be drawn into the First Vietnamese War.

In this delicate situation, Sihanouk went on the offensive and took measures that would lay the foundation for the later "Sihanouk era". He dissolved the Council of Ministers, which was paralysed by intra-factional disputes, also dismissed the National Assembly (1952) and in January 1953 imposed martial law on the whole country, appointed an emergency government and set out on his now famous "Royal Crusade for Independence", which took him through numerous countries in Europe, America and Asia and had the dual purpose of, on the one hand, exposing the grip of the Việt Minh to all the world and, on the other hand, "liberating" Cambodia from France. After this ten-month round trip, he triumphantly proclaimed Cambodia's complete independence on 9 November 1953.

At the Geneva Conference the next year, with the help of massive American and Chinese pressure, he in fact managed to achieve formal independence without having to recognise the then allies of the Việt Minh - the Khmer Issarak. While the Pathet Lao could stay in its "liberated" areas of Laos, the Khmer Issarak had to leave Cambodia together with the Việt Minh. After Sihanouk believed to have secured his country on the foreign policy front for the time being, he initiated a radical cure on the domestic front, which made use of mainly three techniques: Abdication as king, establishment of the "Sangkum" and actualisation of "Khmer socialism". On 2 March 1955, Sihanouk abdicated in favour of his father. Thus he had all at once descended from his high pedestal as godlike king, not least in order to be able to intervene more actively in concrete day-to-day politics.

The "Sangkum Reastr Niyum" (Socialist People's Community) became his instrument of mass mobilisation. From then on, the Sangkum prevailed in all subsequent elections - in 1955, 1958 and 1962 - without much effort. Sihanouk's influence on "his" people became so overwhelming that the previous domestic political opponents had practically only two paths open to them, namely either to join the Sangkum or to disappear into illegality. Sihanouk, through his influence, but above all through the charisma of his God-Kingdom, which still remained despite his abdication, succeeded in becoming

² Radio Phnom Penh, 30.8.75, in Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS), 5.9.75, H. 2-3.

the strongest integrating force according to the well-conservative motto: Change as little as necessary to preserve as much as possible.

To get a grip on his concept of reviving old Angkor traditions (building hospitals, canals, roads and other welfare facilities "by the king for the people"), Sihanouk experimented with a series of populist institutions. In the actualisation of these projects, the ex-king naturally also acted in the name of socialism. The ideology underlying the Sangkum's politics was "Khmer socialism". It was based primarily on the following "trinity": monarchy, religion - Buddhism, of course - and the peasant traditions of mutual aid and cooperation. If he had not been king, his ideology would certainly have found much favour with the petty bourgeois in the West, for he heralded the following Good News: Already the Cambodian people were living in a state of socialism. One habitually worked in the community, gave each other help and support and lived in an atmosphere of equality in the villages. The Sangkum would give the individual citizen the possibility to participate immediately in important decisions. Under these circumstances, there would be no need for a revolution, just as violence as a means of politics was to be rejected in Cambodia.

According to Sihanouk, "Khmer socialism" also manifested itself in the cooperation between state and private enterprises, through voluntary cooperation in infrastructural measures, through the distribution of land to the peasants, through the expansion of educational institutions, through social laws and, last but not least, through the development of a planned economy (two-year plan from 1956-58, five-year plan from 1960-64).

Due to economic difficulties that arose in the early 1960s, this "socialisation" in the Khmer spirit was extended on 10 November 1963 by a major economic reform: from now on, the state was responsible for all foreign trade. Finally, since 1 July 1964, the banks and insurance companies were also nationalised. With this policy, Sihanouk wanted to ward off the economic problems. Above all, he thus tried to break up the Chinese-dominated intermediary trade with the peasants. Once this parasitic skimming would have been eliminated, a part of these saved sums could flow back to the peasants via higher prices in order to increase agricultural investments. This would result in higher agricultural yields, i.e. greater scope for exports, which would again lead to a better treasury. The crucial flaw in this chain of imagination was the assumption that state bureaucracy and state-directed cooperatives could easily replace the experience and connections of the previous private intermediary trade. Sihanouk had not reckoned with the fact that his bureaucracy, as it then became clear especially in the important rice province of Battambang, would clog all previous trade channels with a vortex of corruption. The conceptions were certainly not wrong in principle, only that Sihanouk's measures were simply not far-reaching enough for a radical initiation of primitive accumulation.

The failure of Sihanouk's essentially conservative line, as well as the strengthening of a growing resistance front, marked the great peasant revolt in Battambang in 1967. At the latest in connection with this uprising, a systematic persecution of the "Khmer Rouge" by the central government had begun. Thousands of them were liquidated without prior judgement. And Sihanouk made it clear in June 1968 that he would continue this practice in the future.

Above all, three resistance organisations are important in this context: Khmer Serei, Khmer Loeu and Khmer Rouge.

The origins of the Khmer Serei (Free Khmer) in the struggle for the political future of the country after 1945 have already been mentioned. It then stood united in opposition to Sihanouk from 1959 onwards, had good relations with Thailand, South Vietnam and finally also with the CIA of the USA. This movement reached its peak during the Battambang uprisings. After Sihanouk was overthrown in 1970, its leader Thanh worked with Lon Nol and even took over the chairmanship of the cabinet in March

1972. When he could not get his way, he retreated to Bangkok at the end of 1972 to conspire from there since.

The minorities of the Cambodian periphery are organised in the Khmer Loeu. The first major unrest flared up in 1968 in the north-eastern province of Ratanakiri, where peasants rose up against the takeover of their lands by state plantations. Similar unrest broke out shortly afterwards in the neighbouring province of Mondulakiri. When the Royal Army then tried to implement the "Khmerisation policy" by force of arms, it met with almost united resistance from these peoples and soon lost control over two thirds of the two provinces. The Khmer Loeu worked closely with the North Vietnamese in the following years, especially in the provinces that directly bordered Vietnam.

The Khmer Rouge is a largely unknown movement, albeit the most important in the country. Its beginnings go back to 1950, when the Việt Minh, in the course of their struggle directed against France, also sought to gain influence in Cambodia and for this purpose inspired a so-called Central Committee of the "Khmer Liberation Movement" (Khmer Issarak). In November, an Indochinese conference took place at which representatives of the Việt Minh, the Pathet Lao and the Khmer Issarak formed an anti-French alliance. At the latest since March 1951, a "Vietnam-Khmer-Pathet Lao People's Alliance Committee" was also established in the course of these decisions.

In 1954, the Khmer Liberation Movement was renamed the "Cambodian Resistance Government" and was immediately recognised in this capacity by the Viet Minh as well as by the Pathet Lao.

At the Geneva Conference, Hanoi failed to engage the liberation movements of Laos and Cambodia as official negotiating partners. This was not least due to China's compliance with protests from the USA. In contrast to the Pathet Lao, who in Geneva were at least granted two provinces as a collection area, the Khmer Issarak also came away empty-handed in territorial terms. Most of them then retreated to Vietnam.

The national-revolutionary movement received a strong boost precisely in the peasant uprising of 1967. Battambang province had a long tradition of revolts. Unlike in the otherwise smallholder-dominated Cambodia, here, indeed, otherwise atypical social conditions arose: As Battambang is by far the most profitable rice export province, numerous landowners had settled there. Almost a third of the rural population lived as leaseholders. In view of the high lease rates, but above all because of the far too low purchase prices of the state caused by corruption and bureaucratic bungling, extreme discontent arose.

In the course of these intensified social conflicts, a radical movement gradually reorganised itself, which also received a constant influx from the cities because of the pogroms on the part of the government. Three of the most prominent leftists in the National Assembly - including Khieu Samphan - fled to the jungle in 1967. By the end of 1968, 11 of the 19 provinces were already under Khmer Rouge attack. At the time of Sihanouk's fall (1970), these formations comprised about 1500-3000 men, operating in groups of 50-90 men. By 1972, the movement already counted about 50,000 well-equipped fighters. A high proportion of them were recruited from the Khmer Krom reservoir. These are Cambodians living in South Vietnam who were integrated into the Cambodian movement mainly by Việt Minh troops. Since the Khmer Kram comprised about 450,000 people, the potential was quite considerable.

[The US Intervention and the Front of the National Liberation Struggle](#)

Domestically, Sihanouk had experienced total bankruptcy. Cambodia, too, no longer lived up to the supposed idyll. His balancing act in foreign affairs also became increasingly risky with the intensification of the Second Vietnam War, and it certainly did not require any particular effort on the part of the USA to outmanoeuvre this "neutralist". After 29 years of rule, Sihanouk was overthrown in

1970, and under Lon Nol, Cambodia now fell entirely into the waters of the USA. In a few months, the force field around Cambodia had thus changed completely: Previously on the fringes of the Indo-Chinese war, the country was now fully included by the Americans and the army was increased from about 35,000 to about 170,000 men. Sihanouk at the time was on a foreign tour and took exile in Beijing. In the following weeks, with Chinese support, he began to form his "National Liberation Front" and a government-in-exile. Not least under the dictates of the Chinese, a "devil's pact" was formed here between former mortal enemies, which even later could never deny its fundamental internal tensions.

With the "National United Front of Cambodia" (FUNK - after "Front Uni National du Kampuchéa"), an association of different organisations emerged, above all "Sihanoukists", Khmer Loeu and Khmer Rouge. Monarchists, peasant revolutionaries and bourgeois intellectuals were thus thrown together here in an alliance of convenience whose sole aim was to overthrow the Lon Nol government. This strange alliance under the aegis of China also explains the distribution of roles among the actors.

While Sihanouk took up the national cause mainly from Beijing, the Khmer Rouge units fought within the country itself and were scrupulously careful not to let their former mortal enemy get too close.

On 5 May 1970, a twelve-member "Royal Government of the National Union led by the National United Front of Kampuchea" (GRUNK - "Gouvernement Royal d'Union Nationale du Kampuchéa") was constituted. Sihanouk traded here as "Cambodian Head of State and Chairman of the National United Front of Kampuchea". Also on 5 May, the "Political Programme" of FUNK was announced: The aim was to "bring about the broadest possible national union to combat all the manoeuvres and aggressions of the US imperialists, overthrow the dictatorship of their lackeys headed by Lon Nol and Sirik Matak and build a prosperous Kampuchea". Among other things, Buddhism was to be preserved as the state religion, private property was to be safeguarded and a national bourgeoisie was to be protected. In foreign policy, FUNK strove for a course of "national independence, peace, neutrality and non-alignment"³. Shortly after the formation of FUNK, the "Cambodian National Liberation Forces" (FAPLN - Forces Armées Populaires de Liberation Nationale) was also formed. These armed forces were composed of two force groupings, namely the "Khmer Armed Forces" - meaning the Khmer Rouge - and the "Loyal and Patriotic Khmer Units". The later tensions in this strange alliance of all national forces can only be understood, however, if one takes into account the properly heterogeneous constitution of the Khmer Rouge itself. There were in fact two tendentially hostile groups here. First, there were the Khmer Rouge proper. These are the younger generation of revolutionary patriots, mostly intellectuals from the cities, people like Pol Pot, Ieng Sary and Son Sen, who were the first to go into the jungle in 1963 to live with and organise the peasants. A second group, including Khieu Samphan, joined them in 1967. Most of the members of this current hail from an urban-intellectual climate. Many of them studied in Paris, which is why one could also speak of a "Sorbonne group".

These younger nationalists came up against the remnants of the cadres of the old Khmer Issarak, i.e. the representatives of the Indochinese nationalism of the 1940s and 1950s. Most of them had lived in Vietnam for years and thus represented "a long and deep tradition of cordial connection with the Vietnamese people".

In contrast, the Khmer Rouge did not exactly know the Vietnamese from the best side. While Sihanouk organised increasingly harsh extermination campaigns against what he coined the Khmer Rouge in the 1960s, the North Vietnamese cultivated increasingly better relations with this murderer of their comrades-in-arms. With the US re-engaging in the war, the North needed eastern Cambodia as a retreat and supply area. As long as Sihanouk allowed this to happen willingly, they fully supported his

³ cf. Beijing Review 20/1970.

policy. It was only when he began to take more serious action against the Vietnamese troops because of the de facto occupation of these areas from 1968 onwards that Hanoi remembered the Khmer Rouge again, which was then strengthened militarily against Sihanouk. Although the Khmer Rouge units would certainly hardly have found the required strength for their 1975 offensive without the support of the Vietnamese, they nevertheless always maintained an ambivalent relationship with their stronger patron. Above all and in the first place, however, they always remained Cambodian nationalists and thus enemies of the Vietnamese at heart.

Until 1972, these tensions within the Khmer Rouge had little effect. Both concentrated first of all on the isolation of the less well organised Sihanoukists and independent members. After the Paris Agreement of January 1973 and the agreement concerning Laos in July, the foreign "friends" demanded that the Cambodians also find a negotiated solution. The Khmer Rouge, on the other hand, rejected any form of negotiation, because they wanted to continue the struggle until total victory. In this, they certainly showed a healthy distrust of agreements with the imperialists. The Khmer Rouge therefore distrusted the Sihanoukists, who wanted a negotiated solution, as well as the pro-Vietnamese cadres of the old Khmer Issarak. Therefore, from 1973 onwards, the Khmer Rouge began to isolate and also eliminate these elements in the united front. On the other hand, they tried to put their people in key positions, both within the country and abroad as diplomats. The fact that the Vietnamese made an agreement with the USA without stipulating that the bombing of Cambodia would also have to be stopped certainly exacerbated the conflict within the Khmer Rouge. For while Hanoi was able to begin reconstruction, the Americans flew their worst attacks on Cambodia. Between March 1969 and August 1973, some 539,000 tonnes of bombs were dropped here, of which 240,000 tonnes, or about half, fell in the heartland around Phnom Penh between January and August 1973.⁴

The Events after the Fall of Phnom Penh and the Programme of Khieu Samphan, the Peasantry and the Enablers of Capital

With the end of the Indochina war in 1975, not much remained of Cambodia's economy either. More than half of the rice fields lay fallow, and the few industrial enterprises, the port facilities in Kampong Som, the railway lines and the bridges had been destroyed by US bombs. Although the figures are not unambiguous, their magnitude alone shows what heavy blood sacrifice imperialism also demanded of this people: In the five years of war, around 800,000 people were killed, more than 40,000 were maimed, almost 200,000 were wounded.

The constant flow of refugees inflated the capital from its original population of around 600,000 to over 3 million, meaning that by the end of the war almost half of the Khmer people were crammed into their metropolis. As is well known, the imperialist world press howled in horror and disgust when it learned of the forced exodus of this human aggregation. The US bombardment drove people from the countryside into the cities - the revolutionary nationalists had to force them back. Both actions were cruel and devastating for those affected, because both times they happened under terrible conditions, the first time under the imperialist hail of bombs and the coercion of its local police, the second time under the pressure of hunger and the state coercion of the newly installed revolutionary patriotic power. But for the imperialist propaganda machine there were no connections here. Of course, it only saw the terror of the Khmer Rouge, so supposedly **of Communism**. Here again was a wonderful opportunity to play out the bourgeois farce of humanism and love of one's neighbour to the full. No mention of the mass murders in the imperialist war against the Southeast Asian peoples, no mention of the unspeakable destruction of these only weakly industrialised agrarian societies. These sacrifices were noticed at most when the insane war spending of the USA threatened to drag the entire imperialist West into the vortex of economic problems as a result of the currency crises

⁴ according to US data, cf. Journal of Current Chinese Affairs, August 73 'Overview 18.

caused by it. After all, to this day, these gentlemen are consistently proud of their efforts to preserve "freedom".

Cambodia became the main object of these friends of mankind over the next few years. Here, indeed, all cherished values and conceptions were thrown overboard. A state without money, without postal services, without cars and motorbikes, without public transport, without telephones, television, books and the cities extinct. Only "communists" could have committed this crime; as is well known, they can be trusted with anything inhumane and in Cambodia they truly acted as the incarnation of "darkness" and "evil". What was perpetrated before in the name of the heroes of "light" and "reason" - not a word about that, of course. It was a central organ of the imperialist offensive on the human intellect - Reader's Digest - that first announced in 1977 that at least 1.2 million people had been murdered in the two years since the fall of Phnom Penh. Ever new figures were quickly added, which journalists claimed to have learned from the numerous refugees. It is not necessary to assume that all these reports were forgeries, because in fact the Khmer Rouge set an extremely radical course from the beginning, which certainly brought much horror, misery and also deaths. But today's sated imperialists should perhaps sometimes look at the history books: What misery, what terror, what torment against the population is archived there - and that over centuries. The French Revolution also produced at least 100,000 deaths in the most important four years - and it did so with a machine specially designed for the purpose. It was not by chance that it was the steam engine and the guillotine that inaugurated the industrial age in a revolutionary way. But do the distinguished British gentlemen, who even then scoffed at these butchers in Paris, have fewer lives on their consciences? Those who still don't know have to have it written on their cheat sheets all the time: The establishment of bourgeois rule has always been brutal and extremely bloody. The destruction of the traditional smallholder form of economy, the annihilation of small-scale trade and crafts always passed over those affected like a merciless steamroller. And under unspeakable tortures, the majority of these people who were expropriated without compensation were pressed into the factories and, if necessary, forced by brutal violence to slave as many hours of their day as possible for the lowest possible wages. All that was not so long ago. But it is always amusing how hastily today's representatives of capital pretend that these are youthful sins of foreign predecessors. And this process of constant dressing for factory labour, of the destruction of both man and nature, continues both in depth and in breadth. It will only come to an end when this capitalist basis has been revolutionarily annihilated because of the contradictions it constantly produces.

That this capitalist madness has a method and its very specific inner logic has been confirmed time and again by history. The war of the imperialists in Southeast Asia, like the dictatorship of the representatives of national renovation there, is a glaring proof of this. But this region is only one of the explosive zones of the world where the growing contradictions of capitalism are expressed in the course of its global expansion. And certainly it will not be the nationalists of Cambodia who will lay waste to the world in the looming next imperialist war between East and West. The most they could have done was to terrorise their people into finally becoming a nation of wage slaves. The strong capitalists, whose ideal lies precisely in this, are pushing their arms race in order to be able to dominate and exploit as many regions as possible on this earth. And that they will spare no human sacrifice for this claim has just been proven in Southeast Asia.

However, if one wants to understand the "mysterious" processes in Cambodia, one has to be clear above all about the material and social conditions. A devastated country that was still largely worked by small peasants; a chaotically bloated capital city to which the majority of these same peasants had fled. The terror of the bombs had charged this population, once peaceful and living in the eternal grind of farm labour, with fear, but above all with unbridled rage and blind hatred. Hatred against the city in which they had to take refuge, anger against the American bombers who destroyed their existence,

but particularly anger against their own corrupt aristocracy, the military as well as the city dwellers in general who sought to prolong their *raison d'être* by making a pact with imperialism. Now the old mixture of foreignness, subservient spirit and unease found its general discharge in a primal hatred of the rural population for their oppressors in the cities. A frenzy of revenge arose, which certainly accounted for most of the brutalities in the first year of liberation.

In order to understand this social side of this revolution in Cambodia, which gave it the ferocious expression of blood, revenge and chaos that one encounters in practically every revolution carried out mainly by peasants, one must always bear in mind the social structure already described. The strong urban-rural divide was not between agriculture and industry - the latter was practically non-existent - but it was the extreme contrast between agriculture and all the ominous trades that bourgeois statistics usually classify under the heading of "services". Here, actually "unproductive" administration and trade - moreover, predominantly created and nourished in the service of imperialism - and "productive" agriculture faced each other. Of the "peace population" in Phnom Penh of about 600,000, this included about 200,000 Vietnamese and over 100,000 Chinese, out of a total of about 800,000. So the Cambodians did not even make up the majority of the population in their capital. Aristocracy and officials on one side, poor peasants on the other, too poor to make a living in the countryside, coming to the city because they hoped for a job, or later bombed into it. Cambodians were almost completely excluded from the trade and merchant sectors. These sectors were mainly in the hands of the Chinese and Vietnamese.

In this approaching whirlwind of social unrest on the part of the peasants, which is growing in strength, another social force tries for its survival. Young intellectuals, most of them educated in Paris, the educational centre of the former colonial ruler, want to break the corrupt tangle of local aristocracy and foreign power by force. Without any reservoir in the own ranks of the urban bourgeoisie, for the latter is practically non-existent and if it is, then hardly to be enthused for nationalist accumulation programmes with a more rigorous cut; without a proper bourgeois class, these petty-bourgeois radicals lead a practically hopeless struggle for change. Forced very soon into the rural underground by Sihanouk's authoritarian regime, they try to implement their programme of industrialisation based on agriculture with the help of the only social class that counts - namely the rural population, the small peasants and farm workers.

What these intellectuals, who later became notorious as leaders of the Khmer Rouge, were up to in general can be learned from one document in particular: it is the dissertation of one of these leaders - Khieu Samphan - which he submitted to the Sorbonne in Paris on 13 May 1959 under the title "L'économie du Cambodge et ses problèmes d'industrialisation" (The Economy of Cambodia and its Problems of Industrialisation).

First, Samphan examines the economic structure of his country at the time. The reason for the socio-economic backwardness would lie in both agriculture and the young industry standing in the pull of foreign trade geared towards the metropolises, with Cambodia, as the weaker part, always playing a passive role. This foreign domination of the Cambodian economy would have begun with France and then increasingly shifted to the USA from 1955 onwards. While in Europe the transition from a natural to a barter economy and finally to capitalism would have been able to develop organically (!) over a long period of time, this process would have been imposed on the Cambodians from the outside in a very short time. No tariff and no non-tariff barrier would have protected the domestic economy. As a result of the flood of foreign influences that swept over Cambodia unchecked, the crafts, insofar as they did not serve the foreign demand for luxury goods, would have atrophied. The young industry would also have been under this imperialist dictate. The effects were an inevitable conservation of traditional agriculture, as well as a bloated tertiary sector in the cities. The integration of Cambodia into the international capitalist division of labour, by strengthening pre-capitalist elements such as the

favouring of unproductive occupations and a general world market orientation, would thus overall result in a growing impediment to the country's own development of productive forces. The burden of these imperialist-induced distortions would be borne by the pauperising peasants.

It is hardly surprising that with this diagnosis, a therapy is mainly based on the two slogans "autarky" and "productive labour".

"The task of industrialising Kampuchea," wrote Khieu Samphan, "presupposes above all another, more fundamental choice: either development within the framework of international integration, i.e. within the framework of free foreign trade, or autonomous development."

"International integration has apparently imposed rigid restrictions on the country's economic development. In today's circumstances, choosing to develop within this international framework would mean bowing to this mechanism, which has caused crafts to disappear, pre-capitalist structures to be reinforced and economic life to be steered in a one-sided direction, that of export production and a bloated intermediate sector. To put it differently, agreeing to international integration means adjusting the mechanism of structural adjustment of the now underdeveloped country to the requirements of the dominant, developed economies. Accepting international integration means: accepting the mechanism that deepens structural overbalance and causes instability, which in turn leads to violent uprisings, namely when this becomes unbearable for an increasingly large part of the population.... Self-assured, autonomous development is therefore objectively necessary."

"It is noteworthy that all historical experiences in the past of all advanced capitalist countries confirm the necessity to control external relations. In the past, during the mercantilist era, industrialisation took place in parallel with the almost complete ban on imports. Protectionism has extended over a long period of time in capitalist-liberal countries."

And about the postulate of free trade, it is said:

*"It is precisely behind this abstract principle of freedom of foreign trade that in actuality the lack of freedom for national entrepreneurs is hidden, and freedom for foreign companies alone remains. Friedrich List already proved this in his time. List accuses the liberal school in particular of pretending that the world would consist of isolated individuals who produce and exchange goods in full freedom. Such a state of affairs, however, does not exist. In practice, individuals cluster in nations with whose welfare they are closely connected. The fact that a nation is flourishing undoubtedly does not mean that all its members would be personally rich. But what is certain is that individuals cannot separate their destiny from that of the nation to which they belong. If it goes downhill, they will have to bear the consequences. If it thrives, they are more likely to have the opportunity to see their situation improve. **The proper fact that should attract the attention of economists is therefore not the individual, but the nation...** List contrasts the liberal theory of exchange values with the theory of 'productive forces'; and List is categorical on this point: a country cannot industrialise under a system of free exchange, whatever the resources it possesses."*

Internally, this economy, which is sealed off from the outside world, would then have to be fundamentally restructured:

"From our point of view, the essence of the measures to be taken resembles more a political and social programme designed to dismantle the old pre-capitalist economic relations and to establish a homogeneous national-capitalist system than a technical programme for the provision of financial means. We are not at all proposing to make disappear the classes that claim the most essential state revenues for themselves.... The structural reform we propose is not aimed at ending the participation of this group. Rather, we think that one can and must redirect their possibility of participation by

striving to transform these landowners, middlemen, money lenders into a class of capitalist entrepreneurs. So efforts will have to be made to redirect their unproductive activity, to get them to participate in production."

"The distinction between productive and unproductive labour made by the Scottish political economist Adam Smith must be carefully considered here. Of course, this does not mean at all that, for example, a civil servant or a soldier would be useless to society, but it means that the more you reduce the number of individuals employed in the social organisation, the greater the number of those who can contribute to production and the faster the nation enriches itself."

One simply has to quote these illuminating passages of the Khmer Rouge's "chief ideologist" at length, because after all the imperialist wailing, one probably does not think it possible that these "monsters" can think at all. (A Trotskyist group, persistent in its obtuseness, even opined that these "monsters" were the embodiment of... a return to feudalism!) One thing is immediately quite clear: these petty-bourgeois intellectuals, widely referred to as Marxists, communists, etc., are never ever in the tradition of the "German" Karl Marx, but of the German Friedrich List, who, under the slogan "Freedom is the goal, limitation is the necessity", set his protectionist credo against the imperialist ideology of the free traders in the last century. The Khmer Rouge leaders are thus spiritual sons of the ancestors of today's imperialists, those imperialists who now see in them the personified devil of communism, although they only wanted to be flesh of their flesh.

These views of Samphan and thus the leaders of the Khmer Rouge were also quoted at length because they are so popular today. In the face of the growing exploitation of the countries of the so-called Third World by Western imperialism, theories are emerging everywhere that vehemently propose the same position of "cutting off" the "underdeveloped" countries from the dominance of the world market ruled by Western capital as a panacea. And it is certainly no coincidence that one of the main representatives of these academic "revolutionaries", the Egyptian Samir Amin, raves about the radicalism of the Khmer Rouge even after their expulsion and predicts a chain of new "Kampuchéas" for the African future. Against the massive reality of the increasing internationalisation of capital and the growing global control of Western and increasingly Eastern imperialism, such "progressive" petty-bourgeois theorists place their faith in autarky, national accumulation and so-called autocentric development. Against the capitalist propaganda of progress and prosperity through freedom of trade and capital investment, which in reality in fact produces nothing but growing pauperisation and exploitation, the Good News on the other side says: Only if one can free oneself from imperialism at least for as long as it takes to be able to develop its productive forces independently, only then will one achieve prosperity and security for humanity.

In this respect, both sides represent only two sides of the same coin. Both claim to be able to achieve "the greatest happiness for the greatest number" within the framework and through capitalism - as the forefather of these bourgeois tendencies, Adam Smith, already formulated this elementary lie of capital.

Against this, Marxism has always put forward its scientific truth that capitalism only brings exploitation and thus misery, and that with the development of capitalism, this proletarianisation and pauperisation must come to a head both in depth and in breadth, that with the increasing internationalisation of capitalism, ever larger strata would be thrown into the vortex of this mode of production, and that the antagonistic relationships between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie would develop to the point of a revolutionary rupture due to an irrevocable polarisation of social wealth and mass poverty on an international scale.

And nothing else is happening in reality. The utopians of capital have to acknowledge time and again that, contrary to their proclamations, the social antagonisms both within the "developed" and

"underdeveloped" countries and between these countries are becoming increasingly acute. And while capitalism is pushing the development of the productive forces ever more sharply in order to satisfy its insatiable hunger for surplus value, it is precisely because of this highly productive technology that it is less and less able to transform the pauperised masses into active proletarians, i.e. to force them to the machines or into the office. While the imperialists, in their frenzied mania for surplus value, are at least throwing the whole world into growing unrest and undermining ancestral immobile relations ever more thoroughly, the heralds of an apparently radical autarky are causing nothing but confusion in the ranks of the pauperising masses. They talk of economic independence, stable economic cycles and adapted technology - all concepts that really bring out their illusionist anachronism.

And to see Cambodia of all places as a concrete approach or even an example for the feasibility of such utopias seems almost tragicomic in view of the results that are now available. But it is also a total misreading of the factual development under the Pol Pot government. Demonisation and idealisation of the Khmer Rouge have the same basis. They assume that the measures taken after the conquest of power in Cambodia were deliberate and planned. One side sees only the terror and coercive measures with which the leaders, supported by relatively small armed forces, tried to get a grip on a witch's cauldron of panic and violence and to escape the total catastrophe of starvation - and the chaos that would ensue in turn. They see this terror and these coercive measures as completely detached from the economic and social emergency. The others confuse the factual state of extreme social backwardness in Cambodia and the emergency measures taken with an economic and social programme.

But it is enough to confront Samphan's early theses and the programme of FUNK with actuality to determine that everything went quite differently than the Khmer Rouge leaders had imagined and wished, and that the later programmatic declarations are nothing more than an attempt after the fact - and admittedly only on paper - to make a virtue out of necessity.

We have already quoted Samphan's theses. Samphan certainly did not want to handle the parasitic agents of imperialism and bloodsuckers of the peasants with kid gloves only so as not to frighten his French professors. Rather, he was serious. For the programme of FUNK, the national united front, was also undecided in the economic field and devoid of any brutality. There it says about the economic policy, among other things: Confiscation of the lands and goods of the traitors, the active accomplices in the service of the US imperialists and those guilty of crimes against the people; the confiscated lands and goods will be distributed to the needy peasants. - Guarantee of the peasants' right of property in the land they cultivate; establishment of a just system of ground rent and interest rate on loans, - Helping peasants solve the agrarian problem by finding a just solution to unjust debts. Incidentally, the programme also guarantees the property rights of the "national" bourgeoisie and the possibility of exploiting wage labour, but its protective rights are extended.

We have outlined the devastating situation in Cambodia shortly before the moment of liberation. However broad and deep the peasant unrest in the countryside may have been at the time, it must be remembered that a large proportion of these peasants stayed in the capital out of necessity during the main phase of the fighting. In any case, the Khmer Rouge, hardly more than 70,000 men anyway, fought for a long time mainly in the sparsely populated outskirts of Cambodia.

When the Khmer Rouge troops approached the capital in 1975 - likely with only about 20,000 men - it soon became clear that it was imperative to deal radically with this hopelessly bloated big head. Estimates vary, but it can be assumed that of the 7-8 million Cambodians, at least 2.5, but probably over 3 million were crammed into the capital ("peace population" as mentioned 600,000). With the severing of the umbilical cord to imperialism, Phnom Penh was up in the air as its former bridgehead. There was no possibility whatsoever to control or even feed this veritable hell of collaborators and

starving refugee masses. The general shortage of rice had driven prices to dizzying heights: from 10 riel per kilo in December 1971 to 125 riel in December 1973 and on to 300 riel in early 1975, reaching a record 340 riel in mid-February. The retreat of the imperialists and the advance of the Khmer Rouge must have acted as a double signal: On the one hand, to storm against the hated parasites and the urbanites in general, on the other hand, to return to the countryside in chaos. The Khmer Rouge had to evacuate the city and channel the returning flow to avoid a total catastrophe. The fact that the displaced people left a wide trail of blood behind them on their way out of the city (for the time of the Khmer Rouge government, there is consistent talk of at least 1 million deaths) was unavoidable under the given conditions. It is significant that the majority of the massacres affected the urban population and certain national minorities: precisely intellectuals, military officers of the old Lon Nol regime, Sihanoukists, capitalists, merchants etc., and apart from the Cham (Muslims) almost exclusively the Vietnamese and Chinese minorities, whose social situation we have already pointed out.

Whether it was spontaneous peasant terror or executions organised by the Khmer Rouge, it was partly revolutionary violence against the supporters of the old regime, which as such does not speak against but for the Khmer Rouge, and partly pogroms, which the leaders at most accepted and tried to direct in the interests of the state monopoly on the use of force. But it is not so important whether the Khmer Rouge leaders had to accept or order these massacres. What is decisive is that they were forced by material development to eliminate or to let eliminate precisely those strata on which they wanted to rely. This, together with the evacuation of the cities, deprived them of any social support other than the peasantry. Thus they were at the mercy of this peasantry, which had to be disciplined for the actualisation of their "programme". The conflict with it was therefore programmed for the time after the famine had been averted.

The peasantry backed the evacuation and all measures that served to restore the conditions of bare survival as well as the eradication of foreign domination. But as far as the immediate relations of production are concerned, the peasant in Cambodia also wanted to be able to cultivate his land again in the usual way, self-sufficiently and as undisturbed as possible by urban bloodsuckers. He wanted to have his land back, or rather to distribute and appropriate the large estates and in general the possessions of the rich. Under the given pre-capitalist relations, his "programme" could not be the programme of the modern farmer, but only that of the self-supporter - small farms without a market economy and monetary intercourse. In their original and decidedly moderate reformist statements, the Khmer Rouge leaders relied precisely on this "programme" as the basis for the development of commodity production under conditions of extensive autarky.

And yet, the question of agriculture had to be tackled in a completely different way at first, since all the economic and social framework conditions were largely disrupted. The petty-bourgeois promises of the time before liberation could not be fulfilled. One had to rely on the traditions of mutual aid and the need to survive. In a country where historically - except in Battambang province - there had been almost no large-scale landed property, all arable land was now collectivised. The peasants were expropriated in the truest sense of the word and disciplined under strict conditions for collective labour deployment. Mobile labour teams were deployed for earthworks in the different regions. The whole Cambodian economy thus became a crude plantation economy, and even food was regimented at the end.

After the worst of the chaos had been overcome, it was attempted to use these structures, which had prevailed in a rather primitive way during the hunger phase, for one's "industrialisation programme" by maintaining and further intensifying collectivisation. Necessity was to become a capitalist virtue. The complete lack of such "civilisational" achievements as the intercourse of money and commodities was supposed to make for an ideal, indeed classic, "truck system", i.e. payment in kind alone. The peasants were forced into ever new production battles, because now surpluses were to be produced

for export - i.e. for exchange with foreign means of production - which indeed happened and animated the leaders even further. The general command was under the iron slogan: "Work hard and try to achieve maximum results with a minimum of investment", and the focus was on absolute labour effort.

The regime was so proud of these achievements that it immediately enshrined them in its constitution, contrary to the economic programme originally envisaged and in complete ignorance of the factual character of the "experiment":

"All important means of production are the collective property of the people's state and the collective property of the people's community. The goods of daily use remain the personal property of the individual."

And in the preamble it says in general terms about the social system:

"Considering the aspirations of the whole people of Kampuchea and the whole revolutionary army of Kampuchea who desire an independent, united, peaceful, neutral, non-aligned and sovereign Cambodia with territorial integrity and a society where happiness, equality, justice, actual democracy without rich and poor, without exploiting class and exploited class prevail (. ...), in which all the people live in harmony and great national unity and associate to participate in production and to build and defend the country together..."⁵ etc. etc.

We will come back to this ideological wish list, whose petty-bourgeois nature is unmistakable: It is particularly conspicuous by certain "omissions".

The confusion of desire and reality, the transfiguration of this reality into a new programme that had - of course - always been pursued, is also very clearly expressed in an interview Pol Pot gave to Turkish Maoists:

"Immediately after liberation, the Fourth Congress of the CPK, held in January 1976, laid down a strategic plan for the construction of the country. It envisages that from 1977, the poor and backward agrarian economy, destroyed by the five-year war of aggression of the US imperialists, will be transformed into modern agriculture within 10-15 years, and the country will have all the basic industries within a period of 15-20 years. We develop agriculture, and the capital accumulated by agriculture we use to build industries, firmly adhering to the principle of independence, sovereignty and self-reliance."⁶

Once a sufficient level of production had been restored, however, the whole construction was bound to collapse completely sooner rather than later. Anyone who has even a pale inkling of the travails of the infamous Stalinist collectivisation in Russia - and the Russian state was on an incomparably higher social level and had quite different means of power at its disposal - can easily imagine, how the intellectual would-be enablers of capitalism in Cambodia, then practically hanging in the air, would have to perish in an orgy of violence - unless, with the help of a foreign power, they could get a grip on the chaos and create more stable conditions through a series of concessions to the peasantry. Most likely, however, they would be finished even then, like a man trying to hold on as long as possible to a wildly thrashing bull and then falling to the ground exhausted. In any case, the arena crowd was already eagerly awaiting the outcome of the tragedy.

Only nationalism, the threat of Vietnam, the fear of national oppression and of the return - which indeed happened - of a large part of the fled officials, landowners and parasites in tow of the

⁵ in "One Year of Democratic Kampuchea", published by the Embassy of Democratic Kampuchea in Berlin (GDR), June 1976.

⁶ in "This World Unity", New Delhi, No.14, February 1979.

Vietnamese army kept the front together. And if the regime did not collapse from its internal contradiction through the flight and revolt of the peasantry, it was because it did not have the time. The Vietnamese offensive broke through in full before this point, which it had initially delayed. But even then, the front was obviously already so fragile that resistance could not be maintained as massively as might have been expected despite the overwhelming Vietnamese effort.

Although they knew they were in a "besieged fortress", the peasant masses very soon found themselves betrayed, which is also the point of the numerous reports of increasing political contradictions and struggles from around 1977 onwards. Parallel to the growing social tensions runs a chain of coup attempts and purges in which the "radical" faction around Pol Pot had to assert itself. These are, by and large, the representatives of the line that tried to break the back of the peasant movement at home by all force in order to escape the threat from outside - above all the annexation by Vietnam in the form of "special relations".

Sovereignty, neutrality, non-alignment - this credo runs through all declarations as a complement to "autarky". But already in the face of the first offensive by the Vietnamese, it must have slowly become clear to the Khmer Rouge leaders that these fine words could only have one meaning in our unpleasant world, namely to place themselves under the protection of the People's Republic of China. In Pol Pot's interview, which we have just quoted, a strange acronym appears: CPK. This means "Communist Party of Kampuchea". And yet, to the boundless amazement of bourgeois commentators, the Khmer Rouge had never tried to dress up their declarations or their constitution with Marxist or pseudo-Marxist vocabulary - which is certainly very sympathetic to us. On the contrary, they have displayed an obvious and pedantic aversion to these concepts. Neither "vanguard of the proletariat" or "communist party" nor "proletarian internationalism", neither "classless society" nor "dictatorship of the proletariat", but also not "new democratic revolution", "mass line", "creation of a new man", "peaceful coexistence" etc. etc. had ever been spoken of. If similar contents had to be expressed, they were paraphrased with other words. But this did not happen because the Pol Pot folks would have been particularly honest and wanted to do us Marxists a favour. This happened because in their dogged nationalism they wanted to distance themselves clearly from their neighbours Vietnam, but also China, who professed to be "socialist". The national character of all these revolutions and states, the national character of their confrontations and of their whole politics is expressed even in the fact that the weakest link feels compelled by the instinct of self-preservation to dispense with the "Marxist" or "socialist" cloak for the capitalist programme! This is what "socialism in one country" has come to! And the adoption of the "Marxist" "vocabulary" here is a sign of the surrender of the so sacred national sovereignty. If, as already mentioned, no announcement had ever mentioned a party or revolutionary phases (there was always talk of a "revolutionary organisation" and even of "Angkor traditions"), Pol Pot told his astonished people and all those who wanted to know the following story on 27 September 1977: the CPK had already existed in Cambodia since 30 September 1960 and had achieved this miracle of a national-democratic revolution. He told it the day before he left for Beijing, on which, fighting a losing battle against the Vietnamese, he has been completely dependent ever since.

As a "plaything of foreign powers", the nationalist intellectuals of Cambodia perished. The peasantry, largely decimated under the pressure of the imperialist frenzy and its consequences, as now under the pressure of Vietnam's national expansion, is an example of the fate that capitalist society reserves for small and weak peoples in its emergence and development. To such peoples the proletariat alone would and will secure the right of self-determination, because unlike the bourgeoisie it does not seek national privileges but wants to abolish them, because unlike the bourgeoisie it can create voluntary union, because unlike the bourgeoisie it liberates itself not by exploiting others but by abolishing all exploitation.

Source: "Kommunistisches Programm", 1980, N.25/26, p. 53-64.