

A HISTORY OF DEMOCRATIC KAMPUCHEA (1975-1979)

DOCUMENTATION CENTER OF CAMBODIA 2007

KHAMBOLY DY



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ពេញវិស័យស្វែងរកការពិតដើម្បីការចងចាំនិងយុត្តិធម៌: ១៩៩៧-២០០៧
Ten Years of Independently Searching for the Truth: 1997-2007

មជ្ឈមណ្ឌលឯកសារកម្ពុជា
Documentation Center of Cambodia (DC-Cam)
P.O. Box 1110, Phnom Penh, Cambodia
Tel.: + 855 (23) 211-875
Fax.: + 855 (23) 210-358
E-mail: dccam@online.com.kh
Homepage: www.dccam.org

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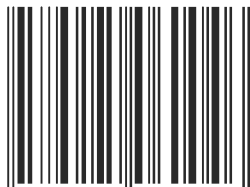
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Cambodians working on an irrigation project. Dam "January 1st," Chinith River, Kampong Thom Province, 1976.

(Documentation Center of Cambodia Archives)

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FOREWORD

Chinese diplomat Chou Ta-kuan gave the world his account of life at Angkor Wat eight hundred years ago. Since that time, others have been writing our history for us. Countless scholars have examined our most prized cultural treasure and more recently, the Cambodian genocide of 1975-1979. But with Khamboly Dy's *A History of Democratic Kampuchea*, Cambodians are at last beginning to investigate and record their country's past. This new volume represents two years of research and marks the first such text written by a Cambodian.

Writing about this bleak period of history for a new generation may run the risk of re-opening old wounds for the survivors of Democratic Kampuchea. Many Cambodians have tried to put their memories of the regime behind them and move on. But we cannot progress—much less reconcile with ourselves and others—until we have confronted the past and understand both what happened and why it happened. Only with this understanding can we truly begin to heal.

Intended for high school students, this book is equally relevant for adults. All of us can draw lessons from our history. By facing this dark period of our past, we can learn from it and move toward becoming a nation of people who are invested in preventing future occurrences of genocide, both at home and in the myriad countries that are today facing massive human rights abuses. And by taking responsibility for teaching our children through texts such as this one, Cambodia can go forward and mold future generations who work to ensure that the seeds of genocide never again take root in our country.

Youk Chhang
Director
Documentation Center of Cambodia

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I am deeply indebted to DC-Cam's Director Youk Chhang, who taught me, encouraged me, and offered me the opportunity to write this history of Democratic Kampuchea. He supervised the project and reviewed the text for accuracy and validity, as did Wynne Cougill, the project's advisor and editor, who helped me in many ways during her stay at DC-Cam. Wynne made many useful comments to improve this text.

The text has been made credible through the critical reviews of both national and international historians who are expert in Cambodian history. I am most grateful to Professor David Chandler, who reviewed the text and worked closely with me to improve it. My special thanks also go to Professor Frank Chalk, an expert in genocide studies at Concordia University, both for his editorial reviews and helping me gain a good grasp of genocide when I audited his courses during my three-month visit to Canada. I would also like to extend my gratitude to US Ambassador to Cambodia Joseph A. Mussomeli. His recommendation letter for my internship at the US Holocaust Memorial Museum and Voice of America enabled me to learn more about comparative genocide and how a museum is run.

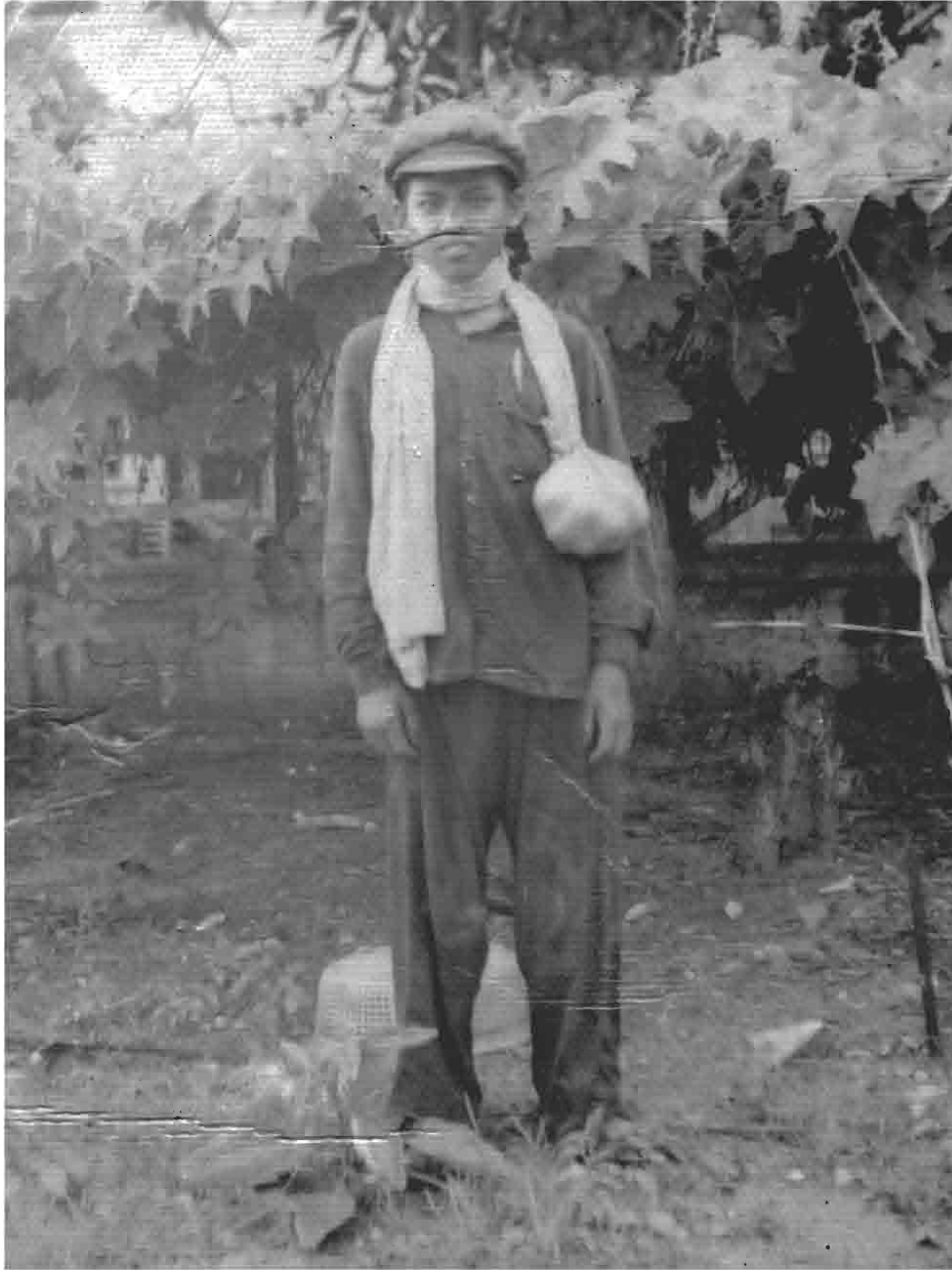
In addition, I would like to acknowledge the work of Professor Sambo Manara of the Royal University of Phnom Penh's History Department, who reviewed and made sensitive and useful comments on drafts of the text.

I am indebted to two of my colleagues at DC-Cam who were important contributors to this volume: Kalyan Sann and Sampeou Ros. Kalyan collected the stories of people who lived during Democratic Kampuchea and Khmer Rouge slogans that appear in the text, while Sampeou led tours of Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum to gauge Cambodian students' knowledge of Democratic Kampuchea and attitudes toward learning more about the regime. Their contributions have enriched the text and made it appropriate for the public, especially high school students, throughout Cambodia. My thanks are also extended to all my colleagues at DC-Cam, who helped me in many ways in producing this text.

Khamboly Dy
Researcher

ABBREVIATIONS AND TERMS

Angkar Padevat	The leaders of the Communist Party of Kampuchea
CGDK	Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea
CIA	US Central Intelligence Agency
CPK	Communist Party of Kampuchea
DK	Democratic Kampuchea
ICP	Indochinese Communist Party
KGB	KGB: Komitet Gosudarstvennoi Bezopasnosti (Soviet Secret Police)
KPNLF	Khmer People's National Liberation Front
KR	Khmer Rouge
KPRP	Khmer People's Revolutionary Party
PRK	People's Republic of Kampuchea
RGC	Royal Government of Cambodia
UNTAC	United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia
WPK	Workers' Party of Kampuchea



A Khmer Rouge cadre carrying fruits in his *krama* (a traditional checkered scarf that can be used for various purposes).
(Documentation Center of Cambodia Archives)



Youth at a conference in Siem Reap Province, March 23, 1973. (Documentation Center of Cambodia Archives)

CHAPTER 1

SUMMARY

“Khmer Rouge” was the name King Norodom Sihanouk gave to his communist opponents in the 1960s. Their official name was the Communist Party of Kampuchea (CPK), which took control of Cambodia on April 17, 1975.

The CPK created the state of Democratic Kampuchea in 1976 and ruled the country until January 1979. The party’s existence was kept secret until 1977, and no one outside the CPK knew who its leaders were (the leaders called themselves “Angkar Padevat”).

A few days after they took power in 1975, the Khmer Rouge forced perhaps two million people in Phnom Penh and other cities into the countryside to undertake agricultural work. Thousands of people died during the evacuations.



The Khmer Rouge also began to implement their radical Maoist and Marxist-Leninist transformation program at this time. They wanted to transform Cambodia into a rural, classless society in which there were no rich people, no poor people, and no exploitation. To accomplish this, they abolished money, free markets, normal schooling, private property, foreign clothing styles, religious practices, and traditional Khmer culture. Public schools, pagodas, mosques, churches, universities, shops and government buildings were shut or turned into prisons, stables, reeducation camps and granaries. There was no public or private transportation, no private property, and no non-revolutionary entertainment. Leisure activities were severely restricted. People throughout the country, including the leaders of the CPK, had to wear black costumes, which were their traditional revolutionary clothes.

Under Democratic Kampuchea (DK), everyone was deprived of their basic rights. People were not allowed to go outside their cooperative. The regime would not allow anyone to gather and hold discussions. If three people gathered and talked, they could be accused of being enemies and arrested or executed.

Family relationships were also heavily criticized. People were forbidden to show even the slightest affection, humor or pity. The Khmer Rouge asked all Cambodians to believe, obey and respect only Angkar Padevat, which was to be everyone's "mother and father."

The Khmer Rouge claimed that only pure people were qualified to build the revolution. Soon after seizing power, they arrested and killed thousands of soldiers, military officers and civil servants from the Khmer Republic regime led by Marshal Lon Nol, whom they did not regard as "pure." Over the next three years, they executed hundreds of thousands of intellectuals; city residents; minority people such as the Cham, Vietnamese and Chinese; and many of their own soldiers and party members, who were accused of being traitors.

Secrecy was central to the operations of Democratic Kampuchea. The Khmer Rouge had a slogan: "Secrecy is the key to victory. High secrecy, long survival."

Under the terms of the CPK's 1976 four-year plan, Cambodians were expected to produce three tons of rice per hectare throughout the country. This meant that people had to grow and harvest rice all twelve months of the year. In most regions, the Khmer Rouge forced people to work more than twelve hours a day without rest or adequate food.

By the end of 1977, clashes broke out between Cambodia and Vietnam. Tens of thousands of people were sent to fight and thousands of them were killed.

In December 1978, Vietnamese troops and the forces of the United Front for the National Salvation of Kampuchea fought their way into Cambodia. They captured Phnom Penh on January 7, 1979.



The Khmer Rouge leaders then fled to the west and reestablished their forces in Thai territory, aided by China and Thailand. The United Nations voted to give the resistance movement against communists, which included the Khmer Rouge, a seat in its General Assembly. From 1979 to 1990, it recognized DK as the only legitimate representative of Cambodia.

In 1982, the Khmer Rouge formed a coalition with Prince Sihanouk and the non-communist leader Son Sann to create the Triparty Coalition Government. In Phnom Penh, on the other hand, Vietnam helped to create a new government – the People’s Republic of Kampuchea (PRK) – led by Heng Samrin.

The Khmer Rouge continued to exist until 1999 when all of its leaders had defected to the Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC), been arrested, or had died. But their legacy remains. Under DK, nearly two million Cambodians died from diseases due to a lack of medicines and medical services, starvation, execution, or exhaustion from overwork.¹ Those who lived through the regime were severely traumatized by their experiences.



“Escort of the Khmer Rouge leaders” in the Khmer Rouge controlled zone, 1973. (Documentation Center of Cambodia Archives)



Khmer Rouge leaders riding on a train. (Documentation Center of Cambodia Archives)

CHAPTER 2

WHO WERE THE KHMER ROUGE? HOW DID THEY GAIN POWER?

1. THE EARLY COMMUNIST MOVEMENT

The Cambodian communist movement emerged from the struggle against French colonization in the 1940s. In April 1950, during the first Indochina War,² 200 delegates assembled in Kampot province and formed the communist-led Unified Issarak Front, known as the Khmer Issarak. This group cooperated with Vietnam in struggling against the French.

The Front was led by Son Ngoc Minh (A-char Mien). He was a lay official at Unnalaom Pagoda. Chan Samay was the Front's deputy and Sieu Heng was its secretary. Almost all of the Front's members were Cambodians who spoke Vietnamese. Some of them became members of the Indochinese Communist Party (ICP), which

was created in Vietnam.³ Most of the Front's new members were peasants drawn to the revolutionary cause. Others were nationalist students who became communists while studying abroad.

Some of these students would later become leaders of the Communist Party of Kampuchea (CPK). They included Saloth Sar (Pol Pot), Son Sen, Khieu Samphan and Ieng Sary. These men saw peasants and poor people throughout the world as enslaved and repressed by capitalism and feudalism. They thought a Marxist-Leninist revolution was the only way Cambodia could attain independence and social equality.

2. THE CREATION OF THE KHMER PEOPLE'S REVOLUTIONARY PARTY (KPRP)

In 1951, as fighting against the French intensified in Indochina, the Vietnamese communists guided the formation of the Khmer People's Revolutionary Party.⁴ The members of its secret Central Committee were:

- Son Ngoc Minh held the top position
- Sieu Heng was in charge of military affairs
- Tou Samouth (also known as A-char Sok, a former Buddhist monk from Kampuchea Krom) took charge of ideological training.
- Chan Samay was in charge of economic matters.

When the first Indochina War ended in 1954, French forces withdrew from Indochina and Viet Minh⁵ combatants withdrew from Cambodia. However, some Vietnamese military personnel and advisors remained in Cambodia. Concerned about the revolution's security when the political system changed, Sieu Heng, Chan Samay and over a thousand KPRP cadres and activists fled to Vietnam, where they joined Son Ngoc Minh and others who had gone there earlier.

Sieu Heng soon returned to Cambodia accompanied by Nuon Chea (a member of the ICP who had been trained in Thailand and Vietnam) and other senior cadres. With the party's leader Son Ngoc Minh in Hanoi, the KPRP was run by a temporary Central Committee. Sieu Heng was secretary and Tou Samouth was his deputy. Nuon Chea ranked number three and So Phim (who became chief of the East Zone during Democratic Kampuchea) was the fourth member. The management of the party was in the hands of a Vietnamese

POL POT

(original name Soloth Sar)
Pol Pot was born in 1925 (year of the Ox) in Kampong Thom province. His father was a prosperous landowner. At the age of six, he went to live with his brother, an official at the Royal Palace. In Phnom Penh, he was educated at a series of French language schools and as a Buddhist novice.

In 1949, he was awarded a scholarship to study in Paris, but failed to obtain a degree. While in Paris, Pol Pot became a member of the French Communist Party and devoted his time to political activity.

Upon returning to Cambodia in 1953, he taught history and geography at a private high school and joined the clandestine communist movement. He married Khieu Ponnaryin 1956. In 1960, he ranked number three in the then-Workers' Party of Kampuchea. He was named its second deputy secretary in 1961 and party secretary in 1963. He later led the Khmer Rouge army in its war against the Lon Nol regime.

Pol Pot became prime minister of Democratic Kampuchea in 1976 and resigned in 1979, but remained an active leader of the Khmer Rouge. He lived in exile, mainly in Thailand, until his death on April 15, 1998. His body was cremated on April 17, 1998.

cadre, Pham Van Ba, who lived in Cambodia and claimed that Vietnam should continue to control Cambodian communist movements.

Tou Samouth took charge of the organization's activities in urban areas, assisted by Nuon Chea and Saloth Sar, who had recently returned from studying in France. The communists in Phnom Penh used Pol Pot as their link to establish a legal party called the People's Party. This party contested the 1955 national election promised by the Geneva Agreements.⁶ It was chaired by Keo Meas, a protégé of Tou Samouth.

Pol Pot helped to formulate the party's statutes and political program. He also made connections with the Democrat Party, which would compete with Prince Sihanouk's newly established Sangkum Reastr Niyum (the People's Socialist Community Party) in the 1955 election. Pol Pot believed that the Democrats, who had anti-feu-



Khmer Rouge soldiers drinking coconut juice. (Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum Archives)

dalist and anti-capitalist tendencies, would win the election and give the communists some political influence.

However, Pol Pot miscalculated badly. The Sangkum Reastr Niyum won all the seats in the National Assembly, while the People's Party won only 3%. Sieu Heng soon came to believe that the communist cause

in Cambodia was hopeless, for nearly everyone strongly supported Prince Sihanouk's political programs rather than the idea of revolution. Moreover, some Issarak movements gave up their resistance and joined with Prince Sihanouk's government.

In 1956, Sieu Heng secretly contacted the Prince's Army Chief of Staff Lon Nol, who offered him guarantees of safety. In 1959, Sieu Heng defected to the Sihanouk's government, enabling authorities to pinpoint and arrest many clandestine KPRP cadres. According to Pol Pot, from 1955 to 1959, about 90% of the KPRP's members were arrested and killed. By the beginning of 1960, only about 800 cadres remained active and only 2 rural party branches were still functioning fully:

- The East Zone with its base in Kampong Cham province (led by So Phim) and
- The Southwest Zone with its base in Takeo province (chaired by Chhit Choeun alias Ta Mok).

Tou Samoth, Pol Pot and Nuon Chea continued to run the party's activities in Phnom Penh, with assistance from Ieng Sary and Son Sen, two other intellectuals educated in France.

3. THE WORKERS' PARTY OF KAMPUCHEA (WPK)

A secret KPRP congress was held on the grounds of the Phnom Penh railroad station on September 28-30, 1960. It was attended by seven members from the organization's urban branches and fourteen from its rural branches. The congress reorganized the party, set up a new political line, and changed its name to the Workers' Party of Kampuchea (WPK). Tou Samouth became its secretary and Nuon Chea its deputy secretary. Pol Pot ranked number three at that time, and became second deputy secretary in 1961.

After Tou Samouth disappeared in 1962, the party held an emergency congress in February 1963.⁷ It elected Pol Pot as secretary. Nuon Chea, who had a higher position in the party, was not chosen as secretary because he was

NUON CHEA

(original name
Runglert Laodi)

Nuon Chea was born in 1926 in Battambang province. In 1942 he attended high school in Bangkok, where he stayed in Benjamabopit Pagoda. In 1944 he studied law at Thammasat University in Bangkok, where he joined the Communist Party of Thailand.

He returned to Cambodia in 1950 and transferred his membership to the Indochinese Communist Party. He attended a training course in Hanoi in 1954 and returned home in 1955. He was elected deputy secretary of the WPK in 1960.

During Democratic Kampuchea, Nuon Chea was appointed president of the People's Representative Assembly. He was also deputy secretary of the party's Central and Standing Committees. He played a key role in security matters and as the second-highest party member, was responsible for enforcing the harsh policies laid down by the Standing Committee.

He went into exile on the Thai-Cambodia border in 1979 and defected with Khieu Samphan to the Royal Government of Cambodia after Pol Pot's death in 1998.

related by marriage to the defector Sieu Heng. Nuon Chea, moreover, was a loyal communist who wanted the WPK to be strong, so he did not compete with Pol Pot for the position. He remained deputy secretary and a powerful figure in the communist movement for over thirty years.

Soon after being named party secretary, Pol Pot took refuge at a Vietnamese military base in the northeast part of the country called “Office 100.” In 1965, he walked up the Ho Chi Minh Trail to Hanoi for talks with the North Vietnamese. He also visited China and North Korea. Pol Pot was treated more cordially in China than in Vietnam and resented the idea that his party had to continue to be subservient to Vietnam.

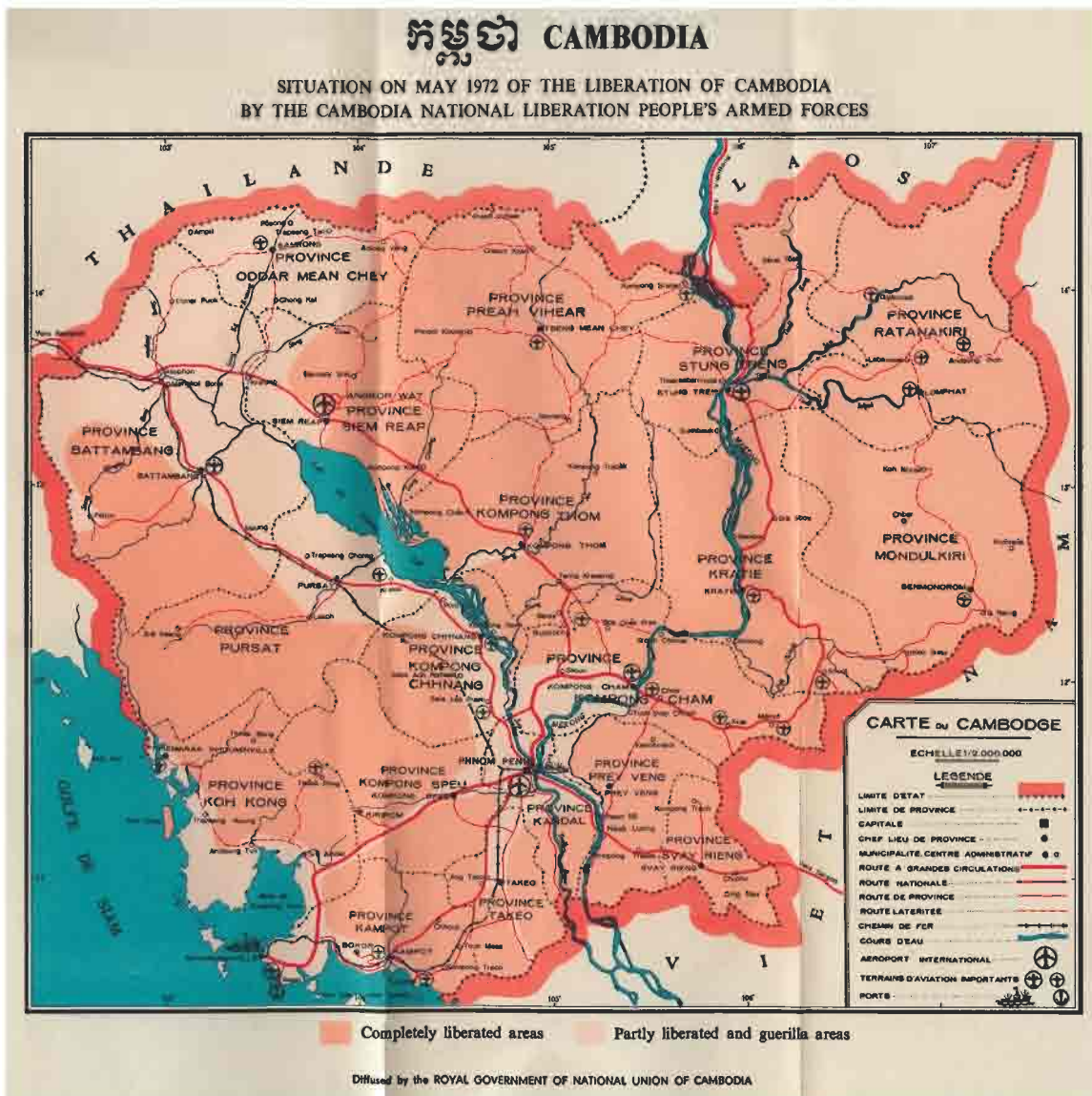
4. THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF KAMPUCHEA (CPK)

In September 1966, after coming home, Pol Pot changed the party’s name to the Communist Party of Kampuchea (CPK) because he wanted to lessen Vietnamese influence and strengthen relations with China. The Central Committee at this time consisted of Pol Pot, Nuon Chea, Ieng Sary, Vorn Vet (a former teacher at Chamroeun Vichea High School in Phnom Penh), and Son Sen.

During the late 1960s, the CPK (whom Prince Sihanouk had dubbed the Khmer Rouge) gained more new members. Many of them lived along the Vietnamese border in remote areas out of the reach of the Prince’s armed forces. The party’s headquarters from 1966 to 1970 was in Ratanak Kiri province.



CPK Conference. (Documentation Center of Cambodia Archives)

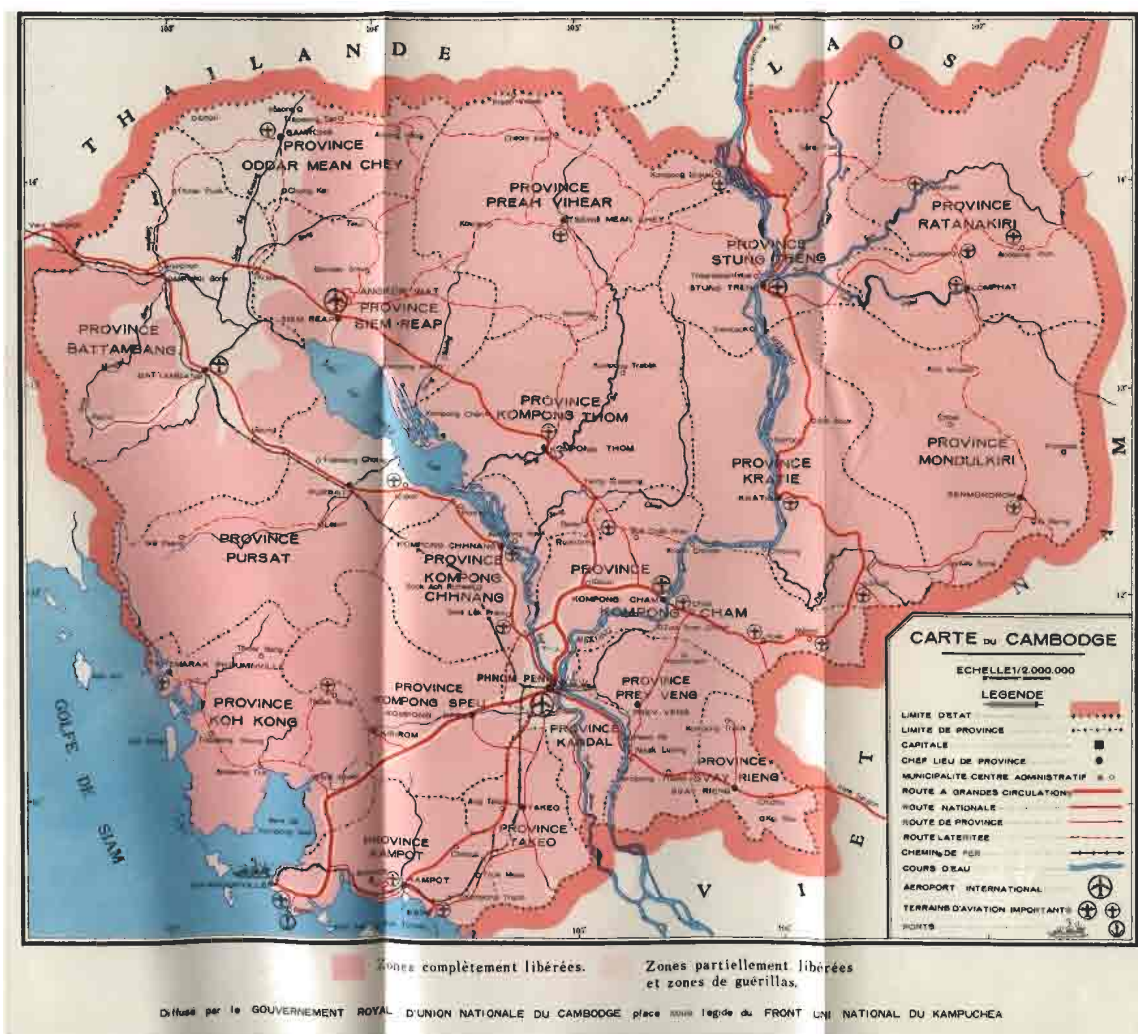


Khmer Rouge liberated zone, May 1972. The dark pink areas denote the territory occupied by the Khmer Rouge, while the light pink areas represent territory still under the control of the Khmer Republic government. (Documentation Center of Cambodia Archives)

In March 1970 Marshal Lon Nol and his pro-American associates staged a successful coup to depose Prince Sihanouk as head of state. Soon after, the Viet Minh and Khmer Rouge gained control over much of the country. Tens of thousands of people refused to support the American-backed government—Lon Nol’s Khmer Republic—and joined the Khmer Rouge to help restore Prince Sihanouk to power. At this time, Prince Sihanouk went into exile in China. With the encouragement and support of China, North Vietnam and the CPK, he formed a National United Front of Kampuchea and a government in exile called the Royal Government of the National Union of Kampuchea.⁸ Members of the CPK were members of this government.

These developments created opportunities for the Khmer Rouge. North Vietnam and China supported them, and Prince Sihanouk appealed to the Cambodian people to run into the *marquis* (forests) to help overthrow the Lon Nol government. And the heavy bombing of communist supply lines and bases by the Khmer Republic





Khmer Rouge liberated zone, May 1973. The dark pink areas denote the territory occupied by the Khmer Rouge, while the light pink areas represent territory still under the control of the Khmer Republic government. (Documentation Center of Cambodia Archives)

government, with assistance from the US, created more support for the Khmer Rouge, whose armed forces were increasing in number.

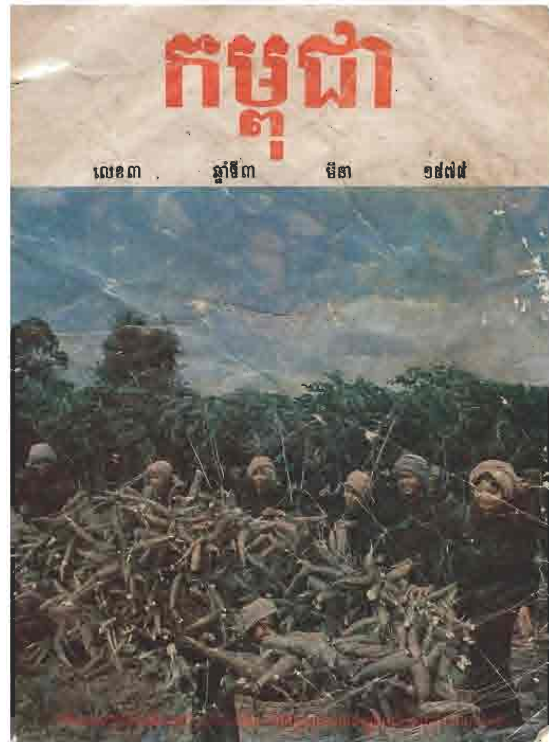
Vietnamese communist forces moved deep into Cambodia in 1970 and worked with the Khmer Rouge to recruit and train soldiers for the insurgent army, which grew from about 3,000 soldiers in 1970 to over 40,000 in 1973. Aided by the Vietnamese, the Khmer Rouge began to defeat Lon Nol's forces on the battlefields. By the end of 1972, the Vietnamese withdrew from Cambodia and turned the major responsibilities for the war over to the CPK, although several thousand Vietnamese remained behind as technical advisors.

From January to August 1973, the Khmer Republic government, with assistance from the US, dropped about half a million tons of bombs on Cambodia, which may have killed as many as 300,000 people. The

bombing postponed the Khmer Rouge victory, while many who resented the bombings or had lost family members joined their revolution.

Khmer Rouge soldiers were more active and disciplined than those of the Khmer Republic government, and they were able to withstand shortages of food and medicine. Moreover, some “Khmer-Hanois”⁹ returned to Cambodia to assist the Khmer Rouge. These men and women were given junior positions throughout the country, but by 1973, after most of the Vietnamese advisors had returned home, they were secretly assassinated under orders from the CPK leadership, who wanted the party to be free of Vietnamese influence.

By early 1973, about 85% of Cambodian territory was in the hands of the Khmer Rouge, and the Lon Nol army was almost unable to go on the offensive. However, with US assistance, it was able to continue fighting the Khmer Rouge for two more years.



Cover of the DK magazine, *Kampuchea*, March 1978.
(Documentation Center of Cambodia Archives)



A performance in the Khmer Rouge liberated zone of Kratie province. (Documentation Center of Cambodia Archives)



Khmer Rouge officials and a foreign delegation inside the Royal Palace. (Documentation Center of Cambodia Archives)

CHAPTER 3

THE KHMER ROUGE COME TO POWER

1. THE KHMER ROUGE MARCH INTO PHNOM PENH

April 17, 1975 ended five years of foreign interventions, bombardment, and civil war in Cambodia. On this date, Phnom Penh fell to the communist forces.

Black and green-uniformed rebels entered the capital from every direction. The city's people crowded on the roads, cheering and waving white cloths. However, many hid in their houses for fear that they would be arrested or shot, for the Khmer Rouge soon declared over the radio that they did not come to talk to anybody and would execute high-ranking officials and military commanders from the former government.¹⁰

Hundreds of foreigners and some Cambodians sought refuge in the Hotel Le Phnom (now Hotel Le Royale), which the International Red Cross had declared as a neutral zone. But when the Khmer Rouge invaded the hotel, foreigners, journalists, and perhaps a hundred Cambodians fled to the French Embassy. The Khmer Rouge

ordered the Cambodian nationals taking shelter there to go to the countryside to work as peasants. Some 610 foreigners spent two more weeks in the embassy before they were taken to the Thai border by truck.

Soon after liberating Phnom Penh, the Khmer Rouge executed three senior leaders of the Khmer Republic government and hundreds of other officials and military officers. The three leading figures were Prime Minister Long Boret, Prince Sisowath Sirik Matak, and Lon Non, brother of Lon Nol, who had left the country earlier with US \$1,000,000 as a pension. The United States had offered to take these three men to the US, but they refused to leave. Prince Sirik Matak wrote a letter to the US Embassy:

I thank you sincerely for your letter and your offer to transport me to freedom. I cannot, alas, leave in such a cowardly fashion. As for you, and in particular your great country, I never believed for a moment that you would have the sentiment of abandoning a people which have chosen liberty. You have refused us protection and we can do nothing about it.... I have only committed the mistake of believing in Americans. Please accept, Excellency, my dear friend, my faithful and friendly sentiments.

2. THE EVACUATION OF THE CITIES

Most of the people in Cambodia's cities believed they would live in peace under their new rulers, and that everyone would work together to reconcile the country. But a few hours after they captured Phnom Penh, Khmer Rouge soldiers began firing into the air as a signal to leave town.

The Khmer Rouge soon forced about two million Phnom Penh residents, including over a million wartime refugees, into the countryside. Within a week, the people of Phnom Penh and other cities that had been controlled by the Khmer Republic government were moved to rural areas to do agricultural work.

Sim Soth aka Koy, who was a cyclo driver in Phnom Penh, recalled what he saw during the evacuation:



Khmer Rouge cadre with Chinese advisors standing in front of Hotel Le Phnom.
(Documentation Center of Cambodia Archives)



DK leaders meet with a foreign delegation. (Documentation Center of Cambodia Archives)

On April 17, 1975, I went out to earn a living as usual. A few hours later, I witnessed Khmer Rouge soldiers entering Phnom Penh. People came out, waving white cloths and white shirts, welcoming the Khmer Rouge. Suddenly, they fired into the air, ordering people to leave the town, alleging there would be American bombing. Like other people, I hastily departed at 10 o'clock with my brother, my colleagues from the pagoda and the monks. On the crowded road, I heard the voices of people asking for their parents and relatives, and the voices of hungry children asking for food. The Khmer Rouge confiscated people's belongings. Those who refused would be killed or taken away. While I was walking, a female Khmer Rouge soldier grabbed my collar and asked if I was a soldier. She pushed me backward when I told her I was a student. I continued my journey to Takhmau. On the way, I saw a lot of recently swollen dead bodies. After three days of walking, I reached Takeo province.

There were no exceptions to the evacuation. Hospitals were emptied of their patients. Thousands of the evacuees, especially the very young, old and sick, died while on the road. Many pregnant women died while giving birth with no medicine or medical services. Some children became separated from their parents. Most people had no idea of what was happening.

So Ry of Takeo province also recalled the evacuation of Phnom Penh. Her husband was a Lon Nol soldier

whose thigh was injured while fighting the Khmer Rouge. He was sent to a hospital in Phnom Penh:

The Khmer Rouge soldiers asked us to leave town. I said, "I cannot go because I am pregnant and my husband is seriously injured." They forcibly insisted that we had to go. We were crying a lot because my husband could not walk. Then we found a horse cart, so I carried my husband on to the cart. I tied the cart with my scarf, put the scarf around my neck and towed it. We wanted to go to Takeo, but the soldiers forced us to go forward on National Road 5. We passed Prek Kdam and stopped in order to cook rice. After eating, they told us to go forward. I towed the cart until my groin became inflamed. On the way, my husband was taken and killed. I cried a lot, but could do nothing. Finally, I arrived at Chamkar Leu district, Kampong Cham province. One month later, I gave birth to my daughter.



At the Pochentong (Phnom Penh) airport, April 1975.
(Documentation Center of Cambodia Archives)

The Khmer Rouge gave a number of reasons for why they had to empty the cities. During the evacuation, they told people that American was going to bomb Phnom Penh, and that they need not lock their homes because they could return in two or three days.

DK's vice premier in charge of foreign affairs, Ieng Sary, later justified the evacuation in terms of the lack of facilities and transportation to bring food to the cities. Pol Pot, visiting China in October 1977, said that the evacuation was to break up an "enemy spy organization."

Most historians agree that the Khmer Rouge were determined to turn the country into a nation of peasants and workers in which corruption, feudalism, and capitalism could be completely uprooted. They felt that cities were evil and that only peasants in the countryside were pure enough for their revolution.

After the evacuation, Phnom Penh became a “ghost city,” with only about 40,000 inhabitants. Those who remained were administrative officers, soldiers and factory workers. The only shop in the city (Central Market) was a store that catered to diplomats. The Khmer Rouge isolated the country from the outside world. They did not allow any foreigners into the country and no Cambodians were allowed to leave.

A few days later, after Pol Pot and other CPK officials entered the empty city, the Khmer Rouge held a ceremony to pay homage to those who had died during the war. In Beijing, more than 10,000 people and many Chinese leaders celebrated the victory of the communist forces over the American-backed government.

However, Prince Norodom Sihanouk, the figurehead leader of the insurgents, did not attend. He was at the bedside of his mother, Queen Sisowath Kossamak Neary Roth Serey Vattana, who was dying in Beijing. Prince Sihanouk had been in exile in Beijing since 1970, where the Chinese government had given him both political and emotional support, as well as a comfortable villa. The Prince later made a statement praising the Khmer Rouge victory.



Khmer Rouge cadres in the field. (Documentation Center of Cambodia Archives)



DK leaders and members of the Standing Committee of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Kampuchea (CPK). Facing forward from the left, Pol Pot (CPK Secretary and Prime Minister of Democratic Kampuchea), Nuon Chea (Deputy Secretary of the CPK and DK President of the People's Representative Assembly), Ieng Sary (Deputy Prime Minister for Foreign Affairs), Son Sen (Deputy Prime Minister for Defense), and Vorn Vet (Deputy Prime Minister for Economy).

(Documentation Center of Cambodia Archives)

CHAPTER 4

THE FORMATION OF THE DEMOCRATIC KAMPUCHEA GOVERNMENT

1. THE ANGKAR¹¹

Although the Khmer Rouge had fought against Lon Nol's Khmer Republic for five years, very little was known about the movement or its leaders. The CPK maintained this secrecy for most of the time that it ruled Cambodia.

Angkar Padevat, "the revolutionary organization," was made up of men and women who were members of the Communist Party of Kampuchea. They were led from the shadows by Pol Pot.

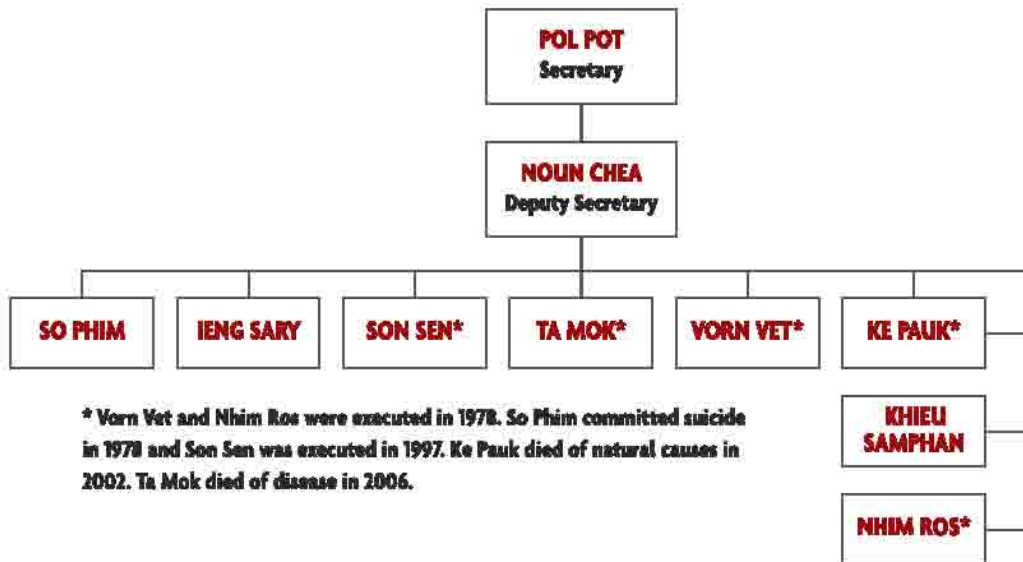
In September 1975, the CPK's Central Committee comprised Pol Pot, Nuon Chea, So Phim, Ieng Sary, Son Sen, Ta



Mok and Vorn Vet. In 1977, three other members (Nhim Ros, Khieu Samphan and Ke Pauk) were added to this committee. Pol Pot, Ieng Sary, Son Sen and Khieu Samphan were educated in France, while Nuon Chea was educated in Thailand and Vietnam. The other members of the Central Committee, although literate, had less education.



LEADERS OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF KAMPUCHEA, 1976-1978



2. PRINCE SIHANOUK RETURNS TO CAMBODIA

Until the end of 1975, the Khmer Rouge called itself the Royal Government of the National Union of Kampuchea (this was the organization that had been founded in Beijing in 1970 with Prince Norodom Sihanouk as head of state). By 1972, they controlled almost all the resistance, but for the sake of international recognition and internal support, they continued to operate behind the façade of Prince Sihanouk and his government in exile.

In July 1975, the Khmer Rouge invited the Prince, who was then living in exile in Pyongyang, North Korea, to come home. Before returning to Cambodia, he flew to Beijing to meet Chinese President Mao Zedong and Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai, who was in the hospital. He later said, "My decision to return to Cambodia did not express the fact that I agree with the Red Khmers, but I have to sacrifice myself for the honor of China and His Excellency Zhou Enlai, who helped Cambodia and myself so much."¹² He returned with his wife in early September, accompanied by Pen Nuth (premier of the Royal Government of the



Cover of the DK magazine, *Revolutionary Flag*, April 1978. (Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum Archives)





A meeting with foreign officials. (Documentation Center of Cambodia Archives)

National Union of Cambodia), Khieu Samphan, Ieng Terith and some members of the royal family.

The Prince soon presided over a cabinet meeting, but was not allowed to speak. The title of chief of state the communist rulers had given him carried no power. Three weeks after his return, the Prince was sent to the United Nations to claim Cambodia's seat at the General Assembly. Inside the country, many of his supporters had vanished without a trace. About twenty members of Prince Sihanouk's family died during DK, and at least seven other members of the royal family were executed at Tuol Sleng.

3. THE CONSTITUTION

From December 15-19, 1975, the text of a constitution was approved by a 1,000-member National Congress in Phnom Penh and was promulgated on January 5, 1976. The country was officially renamed Democratic Kampuchea. The constitution established a 250-seat House of Representatives, with 150 members representing peasants, 50 representing laborers and other working people, and 50 representing the revolutionary

DEMOCRATIC KAMPUCHEA'S NATIONAL ANTHEM

17 APRIL, THE GREAT VICTORY

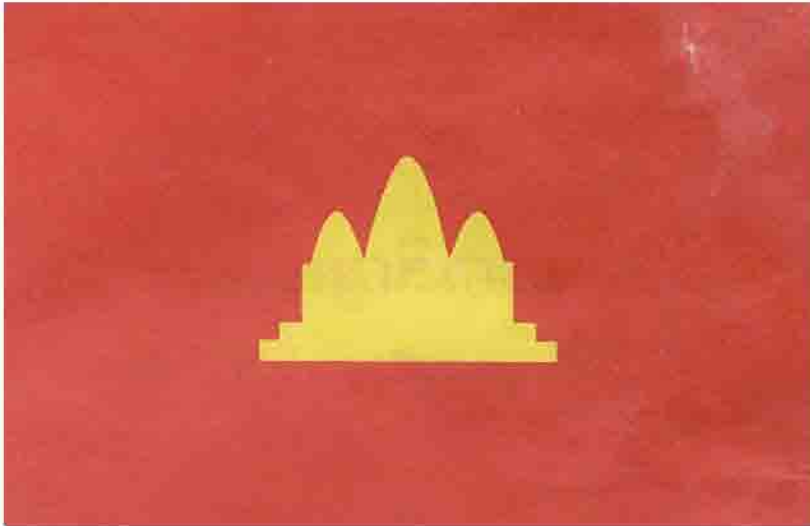
Glittering red blood which blankets the towns and countryside of the Kampuchean motherland! Blood of our splendid workers and peasants!

Blood of our revolutionary youth! Blood that was transmuted into fury, anger and vigorous struggle! On 17 April, under the revolutionary flag! Blood that liberated us from slavery!

Long life 17 April, the great victory! More wonderful and much more meaningful than the Angkar era! We unite together to build up Kampuchea and a glorious society, democratic, egalitarian, and just; Independent-master; absolutely determined to defend the country, our glorious land;

Long life! Long life! Long life new Kampuchea, democratic and gloriously prosperous; Determine to raise up the revolutionary red flag to be higher; build up our country to achieve the glorious Great Leap Forward!





DEMOCRATIC KAMPUCHEA'S FLAG

Article 16 of the Constitution describes the design and meaning of the national flag: The background is red, with a yellow, three-towered temple in the middle. The red background symbolizes the revolutionary movement, the resolute and valiant struggle of the Kampuchean people for the liberation, defense, and construction of their country. The yellow temple symbolizes the national traditions of the Kampuchean people, who are defending and building the country to make it ever more prosperous.

army. The constitution said nothing about the CPK. The Assembly met only once in April 1976.

The new national anthem was called "17 April, the Great Victory." Its words were written by Pol Pot. The new national flag was red with a yellow three-towered image of Angkor Wat in the middle.

4. PRINCE SIHANOUK RESIGNS AS HEAD OF STATE

On March 11, 1976, the CPK's Standing Committee met to discuss the resignation of Prince Norodom Sihanouk. They agreed that they would accept his resignation, but they would not allow him to leave the country, to speak out, or to meet foreign diplomats. Cambodia's monarchy, which had existed for nearly two thousand years, had ended.



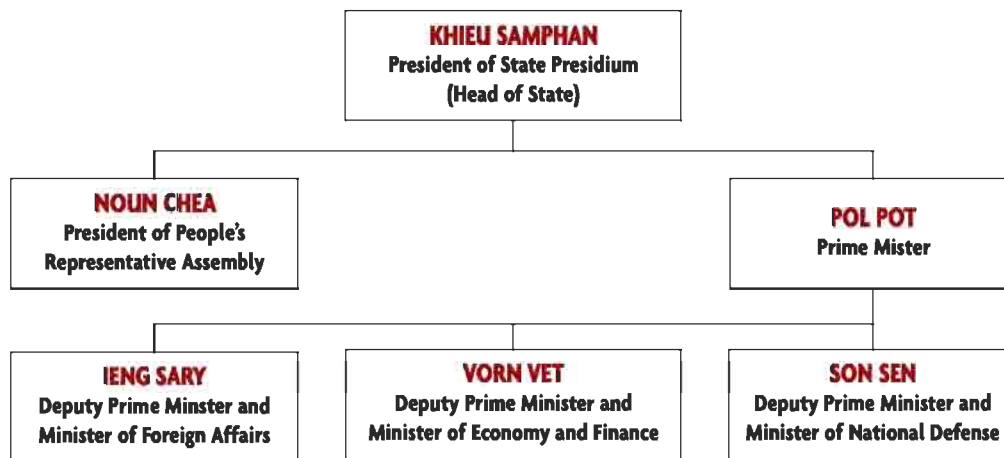
NATIONAL EMBLEM Article 17 describes the national emblem of Democratic Kampuchea: The national emblem consists of a network of dikes and canals, which symbolizes modern agriculture, and factories, which symbolize industry. These are framed by an oval garland of rice ears, with the inscription "Democratic Kampuchea" at the bottom.

In April 1976, the Kampuchean People's Representative Assembly held its first and only session. The Assembly unanimously agreed to Prince Sihanouk's retirement request, giving him an annual \$8,000 pension that was never paid. He and his family were put under house arrest in a small villa in the Royal Palace compound. The Prince remained there until January 1979, just before the collapse of DK.¹³

5. ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE OF DEMOCRATIC KAMPUCHEA

The only active organization in Democratic Kampuchea was the concealed Communist Party of Kampuchea.

STRUCTURE OF THE STATE OF DEMOCRATIC KAMPUCHEA



The ministries with high volumes of work established in Phnom Penh included the Ministry of Foreign Affairs headed by Ieng Sary, the Ministry of Defense under Son Sen, the Ministry of Industry led by Cheng

An, and the Ministry of Economy chaired by Vorn Vet. The only committee that had the authority to make decisions and government policies and statutes was the CPK's Standing Committee, with Pol Pot as the secretary and Nuon Chea his deputy. The CPK leaders never paid attention to the constitution or regulations that they themselves had adopted. Members of the Standing Committee and Central Committee also had ministerial responsibilities.¹⁴

KHIEU SAMPHAN
(aka comrade Hem)
Khieu Samphan was born in 1931 in Svay Rieng. After being awarded a scholarship to study in France, he finished his doctorate in economic science and returned home in 1959. Then Prince Sihanouk appointed him Secretary of State for Commerce. In 1964, he resigned from his post, but remained in the National Assembly for four more years.

In 1967, accused of being a communist agent, Khieu Samphan went into hiding in the jungle. In 1976, after the resignation of Prince Sihanouk, he was appointed President of DK's State Presidium. He joined Pol Pot in exile from 1979 to 1998, when he defected to the Royal Government of Cambodia.

6. CHANGING THE PARTY'S ANNIVERSARY

In March 1976, the Central Committee decided to set the date of the CPK's birth to 1960 rather than 1951. The leaders decided that anyone who joined the party before 1960 would no longer be considered as a party member. They did not want to admit the importance of Vietnamese guidance before 1960. They wanted to deny Vietnam's influence on the party and to break any links with Vietnam.

The CPK continued to lead the country secretly under the name of Angkar. In September 1977, however, just before visiting China, Pol Pot publicly admitted the existence of the Communist Party of Kampuchea and his own position as prime minister of DK.



Khmer Rouge officials in the field. (Documentation Center of Cambodia Archives)

CHAPTER 5

ADMINISTRATIVE DIVISIONS OF DEMOCRATIC KAMPUCHEA

In 1976, the CPK divided Democratic Kampuchea into six geographical zones. The zones incorporated two or more old provinces or parts of old provinces. The CPK then divided the zones into 32 regions, and gave all the zones and regions numbers. Below the regions were districts, sub-districts, and cooperatives.

East Zone (Zone 203). So Phim was the secretary of this zone; he committed suicide in May 1978. The East Zone consisted of Prey Veng and Svay Rieng provinces, part of Kampong Cham east of the Mekong River, one district from Kratie province (Chhlong) and some parts of Kandal province (Khsach Kandal, Lvea Em, and Muk Kampoul). The zone was divided into five regions: Regions 20, 21, 22, 23, and 24.

Southwest Zone (Zone 405). Chhit Choeun aka Ta Mok was its secretary. This zone held Takeo and Kampot provinces, two districts of Kampong Speu (Kong Pisey and Samrong Tong), and five districts of Kandal (Kandal Stung, Sa-ang, Koh Thom, Kean Svay, and Leuk Dek). Its regions were Regions 13, 33, 35 and 25.

North Zone (Zone 303). Koy Thuon alias Thuch was the zone's secretary from 1970 to early 1976. After he was arrested and executed at Tuol Sleng in 1976, Ke Pauk became the secretary until 1977, when he was assigned to the newly established Central Zone. At that time, Kang Chap became the North Zone secretary. This zone consisted of Kampong Thom province, part of Kampong Cham west of the Mekong River, and one district of Kratie (Prek Prasap). Its regions were 41, 42, and 43.

Northwest Zone (Zone 560). Nhim Ros was this zone's secretary. The zone comprised Pursat and Battambang provinces, and had seven regions: 1,2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7.

West Zone (Zone 401). Chuo Chet was its secretary. It consisted of Koh Kong and Kampong Chhnang provinces, and parts of Kampong Speu province. Its five regions were 31, 32, 37, 15, and 11.



Khmer Rouge and a foreign delegation. (Documentation Center of Cambodia Archives)



Khmer Rouge officials in the field. (Documentation Center of Cambodia Archives)

Northeast Zone (Zone 108). This zone's secretary, Ney Sarann aka Ya, was purged in 1976. It comprised Rattanak Kiri and Mondul Kiri provinces, parts of Stung Treng west of the Mekong River, and part of Kratie province. Its six regions were 101, 102, 104, 105, 107, and 505.

In 1976, DK also created two autonomous regions, which reported directly to the Central Committee, not through a zone: Siem Reap–Oddar Meanchey Region (Region 106) and Preah Vihear Region (Region 103). Kampong Soam (now Preah Sihanoukville) was organized separately from the zones.

The Central Zone was established in 1977. It occupied the former North Zone, while the new North Zone was moved to the Siem Reap–Oddar Meanchey and Preah Vihear regions. Kratie Region (Region 505) and Mondul Kiri Region (Region 105) were taken from the Northeast Zone and made autonomous regions.



The zones and regions of Democratic Kampuchea in 1976
 Source: DK Ministry of Education, 1976. (Documentation Center of Cambodia Archives)



The Khmer Rouge cadre harvesting rice. (Documentation Center of Cambodia Archives)

CHAPTER 6

THE FOUR-YEAR PLAN (1977-1980)

The Khmer Rouge emptied the cities in order to abolish urban living and to build a new Cambodia based on the expanded production of rice. In early 1976, the CPK hastily wrote the first four-year plan (1977-1980), which called for the collectivization of all private property and placed high national priority on the cultivation of rice. After national defense, collectivization was the most important policy of Democratic Kampuchea.

People in Cambodia had never been collectivized in the past. But in 1976, everyone was required to bring their private possessions (including kitchen utensils) to be used collectively. As part of the process, Cambodian families were split up and people were assigned to work groups. Husbands and wives were separated, and children were separated from their parents.

The four-year plan aimed at achieving an average national yield of three tons of rice per hectare. This was an impossible task because Cambodians had never been forced to produce that much rice on a national scale before. Moreover, the country had been devastated by war and lacked tools, farm animals and a healthy work force.

The four-year plan also included arrangements to plant vegetables, and hoped to generate income from timber, fishing, animal husbandry, tree farms, etc. The leaders of Democratic Kampuchea hoped to make Cambodia completely independent in both the economic and political spheres, and turn Cambodia from an undeveloped agricultural country to a modern agricultural country.

However, the leaders ignored the difficulties of implementing this plan and the miseries that flowed inevitably from overwork, poor living conditions, and malnutrition, lack of freedom and basic rights, and untreated diseases.



Khmer Rouge women's unit harvesting rice. (Documentation Center of Cambodia Archives)

Throughout the period of Democratic Kampuchea, the living conditions of people were very poor. In addition, the regime robbed nearly all Cambodians of their happiness and dignity. Most people know that a country needs educated people to develop. However, the Khmer Rouge killed many intellectuals and technicians, and closed all universities, schools and other educational institutes throughout the country. They then brought poor peasants from the countryside with no technical experience to work in Phnom Penh's few factories.

The leaders of DK divided the country's rice fields into number-one rice fields and simple

rice fields. For the simple rice fields, the required yield was 3 tons per hectare, while farmers in the number-one rice fields were required to achieve 6 to 7 tons per hectare. In addition, the yields were to increase every year.

In theory, the crop was divided into four portions. Some of it was intended to feed people; everyone was entitled to receive 312 kilograms of rice a year or 0.85 kg a day. Some of the remaining crop was to be retained as seed rice and some was to be kept as a reserve. The last and biggest portion of the crop was to be sold abroad to earn foreign exchange, which could then be used to purchase farm machinery, goods and ammunition.

Unfortunately, because production almost never reached the required levels, almost no rice was saved for the people or for seed. Instead, most of the harvest was used to feed the army and factory workers, or was exported to China and several other socialist countries.

In DK, almost no one ever had enough to eat; in most cases they had only rice porridge mixed with corn, slices of banana trees, or papaya tree trunks. Most people received less than half a milk can of rice a day. Only the Khmer Rouge cadres and soldiers received cooked rice. All survivors of the regime agree that what they

remember most aside from hard labor and execution was the extreme shortage of food.

Um Saret, a 57-year-old woman living in Phnom Penh, described how painful life was without enough to eat:

In 1976, being unable to withstand hunger, my father caught tadpoles for food. He thought that they were small fish. One day, a Khmer Rouge cadre killed a poisonous snake and placed it on the fence. Though he knew that it was poisonous, he still ate that snake, which killed him. My sister and her children died of starvation. My own family was in the same condition. We had done a lot of farming, but never had enough rice to eat. Being too hungry, I picked wild arum as food. After eating, all of us became very itchy. My children cried a lot. One day, I went to fish. The unit chief said, "You behave with very low character. Be careful! Angkar will take you for execution." Because of inadequate food, one of my children became seriously sick, so I exchanged my last necklace for rice and cooked it for her. She ate a lot, but became sicker. She died as a result. The other two children and my husband also became sick because of malnutrition. However, we miserably managed to survive.



Youth performance. (Documentation Center of Cambodia Archives)



Transporting dirt on an irrigation project. (Documentation Center of Cambodia Archives)



Base people: mother and son. (Documentation Center of Cambodia Archives)

CHAPTER 7

DAILY LIFE DURING DEMOCRATIC KAMPUCHEA

1. THE CREATION OF COOPERATIVES

During the 1970-1975 civil war, most of the people living in the areas liberated by the Khmer Rouge were organized into “mutual aid teams” of 10 to 30 families. However, starting in 1973 and especially after the 1975 victory, mutual aid teams were organized into “low-level cooperatives,” which consisted of several hundred people or an entire village. By 1977, low-level cooperatives were reorganized into “high-level cooperatives,” which consisted of about 1,000 families each or an entire sub-district.

The CPK's leaders established cooperatives as part of their move to abolish private ownership and capitalism, and to strengthen the status of workers and peasants. To the Khmer Rouge, a cooperative meant that people were supposed to live together, work together, eat together, and share each other's leisure activities. This resulted in severe restrictions on family life. Cambodian families had eaten together for thousands of years, so eating in cooperatives, especially when food was so scarce, was unpleasant and cruel. In addition, everyone in a cooperative had to give all of their property, which was their important means of production, to be used collectively. Such property included tools, cattle, plows, rakes, seed rice, and land.

The cooperatives were designed to be as self-sufficient as possible. The Khmer Rouge leaders described cooperatives as "great forces" for building up the country and as "strong walls" for protecting Democratic Kampuchea against its enemies.

2. TWO NEW CLASSES

Although the Khmer Rouge claimed they were building a nation of equals and tearing down class barriers, they in fact created two new classes in Cambodia. They named these "the base people" and "the new people."

The base people, or old people, were those who had lived in rural areas controlled by the CPK prior to April 17, 1975. The Khmer Rouge classified them as full-rights people or candidates. Full-rights people were those who had no relatives who had worked for the Khmer Republic. They were members of the poor or lower-middle classes (farmers and laborers). They were allowed to vote and to run for elections, although only one election was held during DK, on March 20, 1976 (this election was not in accordance with international standards, and those voted in as members of the National Assembly were not announced publicly). Full-rights people could also become chiefs of cooperatives and other units. Candidates were people who had relatives associated with the Khmer Republic; they were tolerated as long as they worked hard.

The new people, or 17 April people, were those evacuated from the cities and towns in April 1975. However, many of them were from the countryside and had gone to the cities to



A Khmer Rouge dancer. (Documentation Center of Cambodia Archives)



Khmer Rouge dance troop at the ancient temple of Banteay Srey. (Documentation Center of Cambodia Archives)

escape the war. They were considered unreliable and were viewed by Angkar with hatred and suspicion. They were classified as “parasites” and had no rights as the Khmer Rouge slogans asserted: “17 April people are parasitic plants. They are the losers of the war and prisoners of war.” Another slogan, recalled by many survivors, was: “To keep you is no gain; to lose you is no loss.” New people were treated much more harshly than base people. But the degree of harshness differed from one region to another. For example, people in Svay Rieng and Prey Veng provinces in the East Zone were treated somewhat better than those evacuated to Pursat and Battambang in the Northwest Zone.

Chap Sitha, a 65 year-old woman living in Phnom Penh, described her life as one of the 17 April people:

During the evacuation in 1975, my family consisting of 14 members fled to Koh Thom district, Kandal province. There, Angkar assigned me to plant vegetables and do farming. One day, at nine o’ clock at night, Angkar requested my husband to go to study. I had been waiting for him, but he never returned. A woman in the village told one of my children: “You don’t have to wait for your father and be careful with your words. Your entire family could be taken away. Your father had a big working history.”

I knew that my husband must have been killed since he was a governor of Kandal province. Two months later, Angkar told me to move to Phnom Penh. In fact, they took us to Battambang. Angkar gave us a small decayed cottage. We were separated to live in different units. Only my six year-old child stayed with me. Life in Battambang was an unforgettable experience for me. Within ten days, four sons and one daughter of mine died one after another. Some of them died of malnutrition and disease, while others were accused of being enemies and were killed. A while later, my 70-year-old mother-in-law died of malnutrition. Life there was so fearful. Every day, I never slept well. Many of the villagers were taken away by Angkar and disappeared.

3. MARRIAGE

DK weddings were completely different from traditional ones. Couples were married in mass ceremonies in which there were as few as 3 to 10 couples and as many as 30 to 50, or even more than 100, at each ceremony. Most men and women were not allowed to choose their partner; instead, each couple was designated by Angkar, which claimed to be everyone's parents. Some couples did not know the name of their future spouses or what they looked like until the ceremony. Their family members, in most cases, were not allowed to attend the wedding or



A Khmer Rouge dance performance. (Documentation Center of Cambodia Archives)

be involved in any decision. Traditional clothes, dancing, singing, and religious ceremonies were prohibited.

Women were sometimes forced to marry soldiers who had been injured during the war and lost a hand or leg. Those who refused to accept the disabled men might be imprisoned, severely tortured, or forced to do hard labor far from their homes. Some women facing forced marriage committed suicide.

Mousa Sokha of Kratie province was president of a women's sub-district association during DK. She recalled her marriage:

In 1974, at the age of fifteen, I got married to an ammunition-delivery worker, Noh Loas. We were lucky that we got married one month before a new rule was passed banning people from decorating their bodies with imperialist jewelry. Everything used for bodily decoration was considered imperialist, even fake jewelry. By that time, five to ten couples had already been forced to marry. If a couple rejected each other, they would be summoned for reeducation. Newly married couples were separated. In my wedding, I was accompanied by bridesmaids and wore jewelry, but I dressed in black clothes and tire sandals. Only three days after our marriage, my husband was summoned to go to the battlefields because Angkar needed more forces to overthrow Phnom Penh. I begged the



A Khmer Rouge wedding. (Documentation Center of Cambodia Archives)



A Khmer Rouge wedding. (Documentation Center of Cambodia Archives)

village chief to let my husband stay, but he refused. In 1976, I gave birth to my first son, but he died of disease just a week later.

Forced marriage increased after the Khmer Rouge victory in 1975. More couples were forced to marry at one time. Pheng Hang from Kampong Cham described his marriage:

In 1978, just a month before the regime collapsed, they pointed to my name on a list and forced me to get married. The next day, I sat on a chair at the ceremony, determined to do what they said. Along with 160 couples, my wife and I promised to live together and have a child within a year. The Khmer Rouge gave us new black clothes and a cotton scarf, and they had food to eat at the ceremony. After the revolution, we came home and now have five children.

On the wedding day, men and women were asked to stand in two rows. Then the village chief would ask couples to hold each other's hands and to vow to live together for the rest of their lives; that signified they were married. The brief celebration ended when some food was served.

Once married, the couple was allowed to stay together for a few days and then went back to their work groups. They would be allowed to come back home to see each other once every seven to ten days.

The Khmer Rouge saw the traditional Khmer wedding as they saw all religious practices and education at schools or universities: it was a waste of time and no help in producing rice. Mass weddings were established because they

took so little time; the time saved would be devoted to cooperative work and to what the Khmer Rouge called the “super great leap forward revolution,” a slogan derived from communist China. The leaders of DK wanted to make sure that children were born who could continue the revolution. The main purpose of weddings, for the Khmer Rouge, was not to form family units, but to produce children who could serve the revolution.

4. ABUSES OF CHILDREN’S LABOR AND RIGHTS

In Democratic Kampuchea, there were no formal schools. Instead, children were sent to study under trees or people’s houses. Their teachers were often poor peasants who could only read and write a little. Although some regions of Democratic Kampuchea saw a little improvement in education in 1978 (children were given two or three hours a day of primary education), there was never any fully functioning school. The Khmer Rouge said that “There are no more diplomas, only diplomas one can visualize. If you wish to get a Baccalaureate, you have to get it at dams or canals,” and that “Study is not important. What’s important is work and revolution.”

While children were taught their ABCs, most of their education was devoted to political instruction. Young children were routinely taken from their homes and made to attend indoctrination sessions so they could serve as soldiers, bodyguards or messengers.

Children were also set to work during DK. They collected manure, cut small plants, collected human waste to make fertilizer, and carried weapons to the battlefield, where they were sometimes killed or injured. In addition, children were usually separated from their parents and never enjoyed the pleasures of family life.



Children of the Khmer Rouge high officials. (Documentation Center of Cambodia Archives)



Children learning about harvesting. (J. Kofmann/Documentation Center of Cambodia Archives)

Phin Ratha, 40 years old, from Phnom Penh, recalled her experiences as a ten-year-old in 1975:

We were evacuated to Kiri Vong district, Takeo province. Angkar gave each family a small house. We first lived by finding crabs and shells as food. After a political meeting with the village chief, everyone had to eat collectively and I could no longer catch crabs as food. Because of too much hunger, I usually stole vegetables we had planted around the house. I was asked to work in a children's unit far from my home. Angkar allowed me to visit home within three or four months. My task was to work in the rice fields. I did not want to do this because I was very afraid of leeches. The unit chief always beat me, so I ran home many times, asking for help from my parents, but they could not help.

The Khmer Rouge had slogans about education:

"Angkar makes the shadows under the trees into schools and meeting places."

"You should learn while working. The more you work, the more you learn."

So, I hid in the forest for a while. I survived by eating wild leaves and fruit and stealing villagers' food. Unable to bear such hard living conditions, I came back home. For fear of Angkar, my parents sent me back to the children's unit. There, the unit chief tortured me and warned me not to run away again. I was assigned to dig up water vegetables and then to collect pig dung. One day, I was so tired that I fell down and spilled the dung, so the unit chief whipped me with a lash, which flew into my eyes. From day to day, my eyes became painful and I became blind as a result.

Ros Sampeou, a Phnom Penh resident, lost all of his family under the Khmer Rouge regime. He recalled:

The five members of my family were moved to Tra Loak Mountain in Preh Net Preh district, Battambang province. I and other children were assigned to dig earth and build dikes, to look after animals and to cut small plants. We had to complete our assignment; otherwise, our food ration would be cut and we would be tortured. My father died of malaria and my older sister died of a disease that made her belly swell. One day after work, we gathered and told each other about our backgrounds and families. A moment later, a man came in and told me that my mother had been killed by Angkar. Hearing this, I unconsciously cried. I was thinking that I had nothing left; I even did not know how much longer I could survive. The only other member of my family, my older brother, disappeared without a trace.

Young children were taught that, “Angkar is the parent of all children as well as male and female youths. If parents beat their children, it means they look down on Angkar, so Angkar will have no pity on them.” Cadres asked children to spy on their families. These children even dared to kill their own parents if they were told to do so by Angkar. As time passed, tens of thousands of children came to believe only what Angkar had told them and learned to obey Angkar’s commands.

In the war against Vietnam in 1977-1978, many soldiers were killed or seriously injured. The Khmer Rouge then recruited children to go to the front lines, where thousands of them were wounded or killed.

5. FORCED LABOR

Everyone in DK was assigned to work. Young children performed light tasks, while elderly people looked after small children or animals and made baskets. Adults (those over the age of 14) were given the most difficult tasks. They had to dig canals and reservoirs, build dikes, cut logs, clear land for cultivation, and plant and harvest rice. A few thousand men and women who were trusted by the party were sent to work in factories in Phnom Penh.



Khmer Rouge cadres. (Documentation Center of Cambodia Archives)