

Cambodian Villagers Torn Between Fear of Rulers

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Special to The New York Times

BANTEAI-CHEI, Cambodia, April 5—"The 'Government of Salvation' is here," said the youth, placing his left fist on the far left edge of the table.

"Our Chief of State, Prince Norodom Sihanouk, is here," he said, laying his right fist on the right side of the table. "I am here" he added, placing both hands directly in front of him, "in the middle."

The young man—a fisherman like almost everyone in this bustling village on the northern edge of Cambodia's great inland sea, the Tonle Sap—is torn, as are many other country folk,

between a deep love for the ousted Prince and feelings of respect and fear for his successors in the "Government of Salvation."

"What should I believe?" he asked. "The Government says Prince Sihanouk allowed the Vietcong to occupy Cambodian territory. Peking Radio says the Prince did not allow the Vietcong to come in." He shrugged his shoulders.

He said that he was getting his news—as were most of the village—from the Government radio and from Chinese Communist broadcasts over which Prince Sihanouk has made appeals for a national uprising in Cambodia. No newspapers, Gov-

ernment or otherwise, reach here.

The young man, who wore a white shirt, dark trousers and rubber sandals, said he was 21 years old. He would not give his name. He said he was afraid of the Government.

"Everybody here is afraid," he said in French. "On the outside they go along with the Government. In their hearts they are for Prince Sihanouk."

On the surface, Banteai-Chei betrays no sign of the villagers' inner struggles. The village—about 20 miles south of the fabled ruins at Angkor and about 15 miles south of Siem Reap, Cambodia's second largest city—consists of about 50 twig and palm-frond cottages

on stilts on inlets. The main building is a small cottage flying a blue and white banner where the fishermen report their daily catch to wildlife authorities.

All day, at the village's main plaza on the water, the fishermen unload their catch of sole and carp and minnows into huge wooden tubs and haul them to market in carts drawn by motorcycles, bicycles or buffalo.

Activity is always hectic and the work is hard. Building a wood fishing boat involves first sawing down a large tree, then sawing it into planks by hand. The old-timers say they can still remember the days when the lake was so sparsely fished that emboldened fish would sometimes jump right into the boats.

The only outward sign that these are not normal times is the absence of the photographs of the Prince that adorned all outside walls before his ouster March 18. The pictures were removed on the reluctant orders of the village chief.

Campaign Has Not Spread

But the official campaign of vilification of Prince Sihanouk and his wife, Princess Monique, has not spread here. "If anyone would speak out against the Prince publicly in the village he would be shot by the people," said the young man.

Asked why the Prince had been so popular among the country folk, the youth was silent. After a moment he said wistfully: "I remember once, when Prince Sihanouk visited Siem Reap. He couldn't come here because the road is too bad."

When it was suggested that the people adored the Prince as a god, the young man burst

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and Love for Sihanouk

into laughter—often a Cambodian's reaction to a painfully embarrassing moment.

He laughed again when asked whether the people had destroyed their pictures of Prince Sihanouk or merely hidden them away on the chance that he might return.

His views of the Vietnamese corresponded to a widespread national prejudice. "Vietnamese are brutal," he said. He said that the Vietcong must be ousted from Cambodian land—an opinion firmly held by the

new leadership—but he showed no enthusiasm for joining the army and fighting against them.

There were, he said, no Vietcong in the area and no demonstrations, Vietcong-sponsored or spontaneous, in favor of Prince Sihanouk. "The people are afraid," he said.

Asked whether he would join a "national liberation army" to restore Prince Sihanouk to power if the Prince returned to Cambodia, the young man replied: ?