

Khmer Rouge Acts to 'Purify' Nation

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Agence France-Presse

BANGKOK, May 8—Under the cover of total silence and unwitnessed by the outside world, Cambodia is now being "purified." It is likely to be a revolution unlike any other in modern times.

The revolutionary goal is to restore the original "purity" of the 6 to 8 million people of Kampuchea (Cambodia), to seal them off from all "decadent" foreign influence, to purge them of bourgeois urban Western thought and desires.

The sudden draconian depopulation of the capital of Phnom Penh, which we witnessed, and the destruction and forced abandonment of Western-style "luxury" articles of life appear to be the first steps toward the creation of the new Cambodia.

The Khmer Rouge forces which took over the country on April 17 after five years or intensified war had long ago prepared a plan to move millions of inhabitants into their "liberated zones" where they would be instilled with the spirit of service to the revolution.

Phnom Penh, when we



Associated Press

Khmer Rouge soldier angrily orders Phnom Penh shopkeepers into streets April 17.

left it, was a dead city, silent and empty. About 2 million residents of the capital had vanished in five days, apparently ordered out to the rice paddies. The only traffic was the occasional bicycle pedalled by a soldier.

The doors of town houses had been smashed open, the interiors ravaged. Shop windows had been shattered. Abandoned cars were everywhere, on the sidewalks and in the middle of the streets, with the car doors all hang-

ing open. The streets were littered with broken crockery, bits of clothing, burst cushions.

All along the route followed last week by the first
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United Press International

Khmer Rouge troops ride happily into Phnom Penh in this photo taken April 17 when city fell to the rebels.

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convoy of foreigners from the French embassy who were being expelled, it was the same. Like Phnom Penh, the population of the smaller cities and even large villages along the way had apparently been forcibly evacuated.

In Pochentong village near the airport, Kompong Chhnang, Pursat and Battambang there was the same silence. Water and electricity had been cut off. The streets were empty except for litter, which sometimes included scattered banknotes of the all but worthless currency.

When the evacuation convoy reached the town of Poi-pet on the Thai border, foreign journalists asked a Communist soldier where all the people had gone.

"They have gone to liberated areas organized to receive them," he said. "Later they will return to their homes, clean."

When the order to evacuate the capital was given, within hours of its fall, many left by car, but six miles outside Phnom Penh, in the middle of the countryside, drivers were told to abandon their cars and take only the barest minimum of possessions needed for survival.

A few straggling refugees were seen straining at the handles of their laden carts as they headed for the "purification zones." But they, too, had to abandon their "luxuries."



By Joseph P. Mastrangelo
—The Washington Post

Soon the roadside was dotted with everyday articles which the refugees from the city had discovered — or had been told — were dispensable after all. Sewing machines began to litter the roadside, then electric fans, a few folding beds, and the cars — hundreds of them, some pushed off into the rice paddies.

Off the highways as we passed last week we could see other debris as well. An abandoned army truck or howitzer already starting to rust, helmets, uniforms and boots discarded by the Republican army in flight. Everywhere, ownerless pigs rooted in the gardens of ransacked butts amid scattered papers and broken furniture that had been left behind.

As the convoy of foreigners neared the Thai border toward the end of the three-day journey, some of the Khmer Rouge soldiers did not seem to scorn consumer

goods. Many wore gaudy shirts and rode motorized bicycles. When they stopped and searched our trucks, they asked for foreign cigarettes.

The Khmer Rouge soldiers that seized the capital seemed tougher and more austere.

Before we left Phnom Penh for Thailand, I saw about 500 Khmer Rouge soldiers drawn up in ranks for 10 minutes of silent meditation in front of the stupa in the city center, said to contain a relic of Buddha. Loud-speakers played traditional music. At the head of each rank stood an officer, stiff-backed and solemn-faced, recognizable only by the ball-point pens in the top pocket of his uniform. It was 6 o'clock in the morning.

Other soldiers were emerging from their commandeered apartments. Some were sweeping up, their rifles slung on their shoulders. They neither talked nor smiled.

Some appear to be as old as 25 or 30, but a majority seem to be between 12 and 15 years old, children grown before their time.

When they make a gesture, which they rarely do, it is made with crisp authority.

The troops that seized Phnom Penh were dark-skinned peasants. Their close-cropped hair was covered by the traditional checkered peasant headcloth, their uniforms the faded remnants of

what had once been olive-green fatigues. They walked on Ho Chi Minh sandals made of old rubber tires.

But they were walking arsenals. They are reputed to know only their own commanding officer and to carry out his orders blindly and ruthlessly. They demonstrated this in their search for weapons in the city.

Many had probably never seen a city street or a lawn before. Their appearance was equally shocking to many of the residents of Phnom Penh.

The young peasant soldiers appeared puzzled and surprised by what they found in the city. One could not find a way to open a can of beer; another inspected an aerosol deodorant spray can a long time before giving it a wallop and throwing it aside. Some made fires on the hoods of automobiles to cook their rice.

One young soldier, a three-year veteran in Battambang, was asked if he would return to his family. "No," he said, "because now I must go and make revolution in Thailand."

These peasant soldiers seemed uninterested in the impression they left on the departing foreigners, and so did the rebel government they served.

Many of the foreigners watching from the windows of the besieged French embassy witnessed the pathetic forced exodus of the Cambodians from their capital—

feeble old persons, pregnant women, children, even hospital patients dragging their feet along the road to the "purification zones."

Some of the foreigners speak of the exodus as genocide by natural selection: Only the strong will survive the march. Not a single corpse was seen along our evacuation route, however.

Others believe the depopulation of the cities was a necessary part of a necessary race against time to prepare the rice fields for a new planting. Food is very short now, and much farm land has been devastated by the war.

All that is certain is that none of the foreigners who saw the start of the revolution will be able to witness its progress.

New Government Seen As Asian Albania

BANGKOK, May 8 (AP) — Many of the foreign evacuees and observers in Thailand see Cambodia as well on the road to becoming an Asian Albania. They regard it as a nation fearful of foreign contamination, choosing to rely on its own sparse resources rather than to risk the outside interference that sometimes accompanies foreign aid, even from its closest allies.

In one of the few official communiques out of Cambodia, the new government said last week that it opposed all forms of foreign "subversion and aggression" whether they were "military, political, economic, cultural,

social, diplomatic or under the forms of so-called humanitarianism."

Cambodia's new rulers are also believed to be seeking to forge a regimented classless society rooted in the soil.

"They are reconstructing society from a commercially oriented one to a simple, agriculturally based, revolutionary concept," one American who returned said. "They're going to readjust people's values and they're going to redistribute the agricultural and material wealth of the country. The Khmer Rouge will drag down the former elite and there will be hard times for those who fat-catted it."

"The Khmer Rouge went through great pains to point out that theirs was a unique, Cambodian revolution, not a Vietnamese or a Chinese one," said a New Zealander who spent four days in "liberated zones" after the fall of Phnom Penh. "We aim at a social upheaval and we want to start it right away," they told him.