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**The Role of Ideology in a Terror State:
Democratic Kampuchea, 1975-1978**

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THE ROLE OF IDEOLOGY IN A TERROR STATE:

DEMOCRATIC KAMPUCHEA, 1975-1978



Introduction

With a recent historical legacy of French colonial domination and the Cold War conflict in Vietnam threatening to engulf the entire region, the turn of the 1970s saw an increasingly volatile geo-political situation in Southeast Asia. Nowhere was this more the case than in Cambodia, Vietnam's neighbour to the West. In March 1970 a military coup d'état deposed the ruling monarch King Sihanouk from power, and embroiled the country in a civil war that precipitated mass bombings from the United States, territorial incursions from the Vietnamese, and an increasingly radicalised and unstable political situation inside the country.

On April 17th 1975 the Cambodian civil war ended with the victory of the Pol Pot-led Communist Party of Kampuchea (CPK, commonly referred to as the Khmer Rouge). This organisation took the reigns of power as a highly decentralised and secretive organisation, but went on to develop one of the most brutal and murderous regimes in modern history that has subsequently been described as 'genuine totalitarianism.'¹ The state of Democratic Kampuchea (DK) that was created by the CPK lasted only 3 years and 9 months before collapsing in January 1979, yet in that short time 'between 1.671 and 1.871 million people' lost their lives from a population of around 7.1 million.² In addition, it has been estimated that 527,000 to 680,000 of these deaths were executions carried out directly by the state.³ Such a bloody and tumultuous period of history deserves examination in order to explain the processes and motivations that drove this tragic event, and also to illustrate the practices and methods through which such a "terror state" developed.

Due to the secretive nature of the CPK and the policy of international isolation that it followed, much of the early historiography on the Cambodian revolution relied almost entirely on the eyewitness testimony of refugees fleeing the country.⁴ When

¹ Etcheson, C., *The Rise and Demise of Democratic Kampuchea* (Colorado, 1984) p.157

² Kiernan, B., "The Demography of Genocide in Southeast Asia: The death Tolls in Cambodia, 1975-79, and East Timor, 1975-80," *Critical Asian Studies* Vol.35, No.4 (2003) p.587 for discussion see also C. Etcheson "The Number: Quantifying Crimes Against Humanity in Cambodia" *Mapping Project 1999: The Analysis* (Phnom Penh, 1999) and C. Etcheson *Rise and Demise of Democratic Kampuchea* p.147-9

³ Meng-Try Ea, *The Chain of Terror: The Khmer Rouge Southwest Zone Security System* (Phnom Penh, 2005) p.14

⁴ Vickery, M., *Cambodia 1975-1982* (Chiang Mai, 1999) p.30

collected together in oral research projects, such sources have given a rich insight into the scope and nature of conditions inside Democratic Kampuchea, including regional and temporal variations between 1975-78. These oral projects are instructive for informing us, therefore, on the impact of political policies on the ground, and will be referenced in this study to illustrate these conditions. However, such a source base can tell us less about how and why policies were enacted, as they are far removed from the seat of political power that produced political policies.

Focusing on the internal documentation and the promulgations of the ruling elite may be a better source to illustrate both their motivations for policy and the structures that influenced the implementation of policy. Indeed, such sources have become more and more readily available in recent years, thanks to the publication of several collections of internal documents that the regime produced.⁵ This study will use sources that emanated directly from the party centre – including speeches from the leadership to party members, internal communications, “confessions” produced by the central security apparatus, and internal party propaganda - to determine what drove the creation of policies that produced such a tragedy.

Firstly, I will describe the ideology of the ruling CPK party in an attempt to determine what political principles informed and influenced the development of their policies. Killings are rarely conducted without motives, and in Democratic Kampuchea death, disease and hardship were both widespread and endemic. What motives drove the CPK in creating such a regime? How did the regime legitimise its actions internally? What are the key tenets of ideology that underpinned Democratic Kampuchea? This section aims at determining the belief system that founded, developed, and attempted to legitimise such violent rule. I will assert that 4 main features of CPK ideology emerge from their documentation: (1) the stratification of people into classes, (2) the principle of democratic centralism that emphasised the primacy of central authority and rigid hierarchy, (3) the principle of self-mastery that idealised independence and nationalism, and finally (4) an ideological principle

⁵ This includes Chandler, D., B. Kiernan, and C. Boua (eds), *Pol Pot Plans the Future: Confidential Leadership Documents from Democratic Kampuchea, 1976-1977* (New Jersey, 1988); De Nike, H. J., J. Quigley, and K.J. Robinson (eds.), *Genocide in Cambodia: Documents from the Trial of Pol Pot and Ieng Sary* (Philadelphia, 2000); and the extensive documentary trove published by the Documentation Centre of Cambodia, <<http://www.dccam.org/Archives/index.htm>> accessed 19/01/10

derived from a unique interpretation of dialectical materialism, which emphasised the influence of individuals and subjective factors in the implementation of policy, over the influence of objective factors.

In the second section, focus will turn to the structure of Democratic Kampuchea that the CPK created. Was the CPK's ideology successfully imbued into the structure of DK? What aspects of DK accurately reflected the ideology of the CPK, and what aspects did not? Can the structure of DK illustrate aspects of the regime's ideology that are not depicted in the regime's proclamations? Essentially, this section will examine the degree of coherence between the ideology of the ruling party and the structure of the regime they created. If DK's structure is coherent with the ruling elites ideology then the role of ideology may be assessed in the creation of such a "terror state". I will assert that not only was there a great degree of coherence between the ideology of the CPK and the structure of DK, but that in fact this coherence increased throughout the period as the party centre consolidated its control.

Finally, this study will examine the processes through which ideology and structure interacted. How did the regime seek to implement its ideology through and within the framework of DK's structure? What was the relationship between ideology and structure? Can the example of DK tell us anything about the nature of dictatorial regimes in general, and the processes by which they maintain and develop their rule? By focusing on the development and usage of the CPK's terror network I will illustrate that not only was the CPK ideology routinely implemented through violent purges, but that the methods by which this was achieved and the structures that facilitated its achievement were also highly coherent with the ideology of the ruling elite. From this, conclusions may be offered about the nature of the revolution that caused this tragedy, the processes by which terror and repression are constructed and maintained, and the role of ideology in creating such a system.

Chapter I - Ideology

Despite the regime claiming ‘resolute adherence’ to Marxism-Leninism in September 1976,⁶ the CPK does not provide us with a case of a classic or traditional communist party. As Vickery states, ‘the disparity among polities claiming to be Marxist, Socialist, or Communist... are so great that one might think the terms have lost all useful meaning.’⁷ Indeed, history is replete with regimes who also claim to adhere to Marxism-Leninism and whose societies were and are completely different to the Cambodian case, not least with regards to the degree of the loss of life as a proportion of the population. In what sense were the Cambodian revolutionaries Marxist-Leninists? How does such a description contribute to our understanding of Democratic Kampuchea? Scholars of the Cambodian revolution have raised questions such as these, and have produced some very disparate conclusions.

Vickery, for one, renounces the CPK’s claim to being Marxist-Leninist entirely, stating that ‘Cambodia... is a case in which nationalism, populism, and peasantism really won out over communism.’⁸ By contrast, analyses from observers including those connected to the American intelligence service tend to emphasise the Khmer Rouge’s similarities with and intellectual debt to Chinese and Soviet communism, summarised neatly by Kenneth Quinn when he wrote ‘in short, Pol Pot was implementing Mao’s plan with Stalin’s methods.’⁹ These examples illustrate that despite a relatively small source base, analysts have formulated ‘radically different assessment[s]’¹⁰ on the nature of the ideology that presided over this event.

At this point it is instructive to reference the approach of Craig Etcheson, who focuses on what he calls both ‘declaratory’ and ‘operational’ ideology, that is, ‘what the CPK *said* [and] what it *did*.’¹¹ Etcheson rightly points out that although the CPK ‘has never explicitly elaborated a single, coherent political ideology, a substantial image of

⁶ Foreign Broadcast Information Service – Asia and Pacific Region (FBIS), IV, No.183 (September 20, 1976), cited in Carney, T. (ed), *Communist Party Power in Kampuchea (Cambodia): Documents and Discussion* (New York, 1977) p.5

⁷ Vickery, *Cambodia 1975-1982* p.274

⁸ Vickery, *1975-1982* p.309

⁹ Quinn, K., “Explaining the Terror” in K.D. Jackson (ed), *Cambodia 1975-1978: Rendezvous with Death* (1989, New Jersey) p.236

¹⁰ Jackson, K.D., “Introduction: The Khmer Rouge in Context” in Jackson (ed), *Cambodia 1975-1978* p.3

¹¹ Etcheson, *Rise and Demise of Democratic Kampuchea* p.27, emphasis in original

its ideology can be gleaned from its various documents and broadcasts,' before adding that 'ideology can also be inferred on the basis of [political] behaviour.'¹² Using Etcheson's model can reveal useful insights into the beliefs and worldview of those who wielded power in Cambodia during the period, and opens up a new avenue for examining a movement that was notorious for its secretive nature. In this section I will mainly focus on the declatory ideology of the party, before moving on to see how coherent this was with their operational behaviour in developing political structures. What, then, are the main ideological tenets of the CPK's approach to revolution, governance, and the relationships both amongst the people and between them and the state?

Class Stratification

The first crucial element of the ideology that gave birth to Democratic Kampuchea was a formulation of class analysis. This element of Khmer Rouge thought was perhaps the most enduring, having been formulated by a number of Cambodian intellectuals who would later play key roles in the development and evolution of the Communist Party of Kampuchea. The first such formulation was made by Hou Yuon in his doctoral thesis *The Peasantry of Kampuchea: Colonialism and Modernisation*¹³ in 1955. Yuon was later to become the CPK Minister for the Interior before his disappearance shortly before the regime took power.¹⁴

Yuon's work focused on the key factors that had at that time inhibited the development of the Kampuchean economy and affected the living conditions of the majority of the country's population. Significantly, Yuon stratified the Cambodian peasantry 'into four main categories according to their mode of farming,'¹⁵ with a 'class apart from the peasantry: the landlord class'¹⁶ placed above them. Yuon further clarified these classes as 'the landlords, the rich peasants, the middle peasants, the poor peasants, and the semi-proletariat.' Of these classes landlords at the top of the social structure constitute 'a sort of tyrant caste,' whilst the rich and middle peasants

¹² Etcheson, *The Rise and Demise of Democratic Kampuchea* p.27

¹³ Yuon, H., "The Peasantry of Kampuchea: Colonialism and Modernisation" in B. Kiernan and C. Boua *Peasants and Politics in Kampuchea, 1942-1981* (London, 1982) pp.34-69

¹⁴ Carney, T., "The Organisation of Power", in Jackson (ed), *Cambodia 1975-1978* p.104

¹⁵ Yuon, "The Peasantry of Kampuchea" in *Peasants and Politics in Kampuchea*, p.39

¹⁶ Yuon, "The Peasantry of Kampuchea" in *Peasants and Politics in Kampuchea*, p.38

are to varying degrees 'the national bourgeoisie,' with finally the poor peasants and a semi-proletariat consisting of agricultural workers who sold their labour for wages making up the exploited working classes.¹⁷

Another examination of the Cambodian land situation and peasantry was made by Hu Nim in his 1965 doctoral thesis *Land Tenure and Social Structure in Kampuchea*,¹⁸ which predominantly substantiated Yuon's earlier work and clarified his social classes according to 'the size of their lands in relation to the fertility of the region.'¹⁹ Nim's analysis did not stray far from Yuon's, other than to suggest that economic pressures upon the peasantry had increased in the 10 years between each work, thus increasing the gaps between classes.²⁰ Nim went on to hold a far more senior position in the CPK than Yuon and for a longer period of time, becoming Party Secretary of Propaganda Ministry and Minister for Information in DK.²¹ In fact, Nim was 'one of the three people long considered to be the leaders of the Khmer Rouge movement,'²² and was therefore likely to have been one of the key figures in formulating ideology within the party until his purge in April 1977.²³

The CPK's conception of class stratification is further implied by the academic study of Cambodian land tenure by another prominent member of the movement, Khieu Samphan. Although the true extent of Samphan's influence in the party has been subject to some debate,²⁴ his positions as Chairman of the State Presidium of Democratic Kampuchea,²⁵ Chairman of Office 870 (the central

¹⁷ Yuon, "The Peasantry of Kampuchea" in *Peasants and Politics in Kampuchea*, pp.45-8

¹⁸ Nim, H., "Land Tenure and Social Structure in Kampuchea" in Kiernan and Boua, *Peasants and Politics in Kampuchea*, pp.69-86

¹⁹ Nim, "Land Tenure and Social Structure in Kampuchea" in Kiernan and Boua, *Peasants and Politics in Kampuchea* p.81

²⁰ See Nim, "Land Tenure and Social Structure in Kampuchea" in Kiernan and Boua, *Peasants and Politics in Kampuchea* pp.78-9 and the editors notes on p.86

²¹ 'Document on Conference of Legislature of the People's Representative Assembly of Kampuchea' dated 11-13 April 1976 <http://www.eccc.gov.kh/english/cabinet/caseInfo/107//E3_43_EN.pdf> accessed 19/01/10 p.22; T. Carney, "The Organisation of Power" in Jackson (ed) *Cambodia 1975-1978* p.104

²² "Planning the Past: The Forced Confession of Hu Nim" (May-June, 1977) in D.P. Chandler, B. Kiernan and C. Boua (eds), *Pol Pot Plans the Future: Confidential Leadership Documents from Democratic Kampuchea, 1976-1977* p.228

²³ See Kiernan, "Conflict in the Kampuchean Communist Movement" p.8

²⁴ For two differing opinions see, for example, S. Heder, *Working Paper 70: Pol Pot and Khieu Samphan* (Clayton, 1991) and Vickery, *Cambodia 1975-1982* pp.154-9

²⁵ "Document on Conference of Legislature of the People's Representative Assembly of Kampuchea" p.21

administrative organ of the CPK, a position Samphan inherited in early 1977),²⁶ and his regular presence in meetings of the Standing Committee of the CPK, despite not being a member,²⁷ all suggest that Samphan was at the very least well entrenched in the upper echelons of the CPK, and at the most a leading member of the ruling elite.

Although Samphan's focus was slightly different from Yuon's and Nim's, his doctoral thesis *Cambodia's Economy and Problems of Industrialisation*²⁸ also uses the same terminology and describes relations of land ownership to demonstrate class stratification in Cambodia.²⁹ The fact that several prominent leaders of the movement each described society as being stratified according to class strongly suggests it was an integral part of Khmer Rouge thought. Indeed, other documentation from the movement also indicates that class analysis continued to feature in Khmer Rouge thinking, as shown for example in the August 1973 edition of CPK youth publication *Revolutionary Young Men and Women* in its description of a 'feudal, imperialistic, capitalist, reactionary, and oppressor class' above the 'worker-farmers, poor and lower-middle class peasants.'³⁰ All these sources suggest that a key tenet of the CPK's ideology was the idea that the population could legitimately be stratified into distinct groups and categories of people. In particular, this was according to criteria over which the population often had little or no control.

Democratic Centralism

A second tenet of CPK ideology was the primacy of the leadership within the movement, and that authority at all levels of the system ultimately originated in and sprang from the authority of the party centre. This principle was known as "democratic centralism", and it implied that lower-level administrative units were to be held directly responsible for implementing policy by their superior level, right the way up the chain to the very top.

²⁶ Heder, *Pol Pot and Khieu Samphan* p.15

²⁷ Heder, *Pol Pot and Khieu Samphan* p.9

²⁸ Samphan, K., "Cambodia's Economy and Problems of Industrialisation" in *Indochina Chronicle*, No.51-52 (1976) pp.1-27 with an introduction from Laura Summers

²⁹ Samphan, "Cambodia's Economy and Problems of Industrialisation" pp.17-18

³⁰ "Revolutionary Young Men and Women" (August, 1973) p.13 cited in Carney *Communist Party Power in Kampuchea* p.12

One example that demonstrates the principle of democratic centralism can be found in the internal party statutes of the CPK, captured by the American military service in Phnom Penh in 1975.³¹ This guide is instructive for an understanding of some of the internal dynamics at play within the party and the motivations behind it, because of the fact that the intended audience for this document would have been CPK cadres who were in a position to implement it, that is, in a position of relative authority.

The most instructive passages of the document came under the heading “Organisational Statues of the Party,” which began ‘the organisational statutes of the party are *based on* democratic centralism’ and included:

a. Party leadership at the top echelon... is established by a vote. However, in places where conditions are not suitable, the party will make the decisions and appointments...

c. It is the duty of a member to respect the majority (the lower echelon must respect the upper echelon)... organisations at all levels of the party must respect the central leadership...

d. Party members and committees at all levels must respect and carry out all decisions and directives of the party...

f. Party organisations at all levels have the right to solve and manage their work according to the... decisions of the party. However, when they encounter important problems or problems that are beyond their capabilities, they must... ask for a decision from a higher party level³²

Each passage asserts the authority of the central leadership. Furthermore, point (f) especially demonstrates how the CPK distributed authority downwards to lower levels, whilst maintaining its position at the head of the organisation by virtue of its ability to be the final arbitrators on policy. Point (a) is also interesting in that it asserts that the party leadership was to be established by a vote, but conditions that would ‘not be suitable’ for such a vote are left purposefully ambiguous, and ‘the party’ is to decide in such circumstances. The implication is that a small core of central leadership

³¹ “A Short Guide for the Application of Party Statutes” in Carney, *Communist Party Power in Kampuchea* pp.56-61

³² “A Short Guide for the Application of Party Statutes” p.60

at the top echelon of the party was in charge of the entire apparatus beneath it. Indeed, research has shown that despite the party statutes promoting the Central Committee as the body of greatest political power, ‘in practice an executive committee... called the Standing Committee functioned as the most powerful organ of the party and of the state of Democratic Kampuchea.’³³

The party statutes are not the only source that asserts the principle of democratic centralism. For example, a special issue of the CPK’s internal magazine that communicated policy to lower-level cadres called *Tung Padevat (Revolutionary Flags)* tells cadre to adhere to ‘the political-consciousness management of line of the party,’ and attributes failures at local levels to the localised authorities in those areas.³⁴ Ieng Sary, long-standing key member of the Standing Committee and Deputy Prime minister of DK responsible for Foreign Affairs,³⁵ alluded to the principle in 1972, saying ‘it is indispensable that at each echelon there be a leadership core composed of men who are firm on principles and who know how to apply our political line... with precise aims.’³⁶

Self-Mastery

A third important element of the CPK ideology was a combination of staunch nationalism, a belief in autarkic economic development and international independence, and chauvanism, collectively referred to as “self-mastery.” This aspect of ideology is perhaps best demonstrated in the party’s *Four-Year Plan to Build Socialism in All Fields*.³⁷

As a source for historians, the party’s four-year plan is an immensely important document. This document was the keynote policy for the overall development of Cambodia under the party, and describes in precise detail exactly what economic and social achievements are expected from each area within the state. It was not long after

³³ Etcheson, C., *Overview of the Hierarchy of Democratic Kampuchea*, Criminal Case File No.002 presented to the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia, 18/7/07 <http://www.eccc.gov.kh/english/cabinet/caseInfo/99//E3_32_EN.pdf> accessed 19/01/10 p.2

³⁴ “Tung Padevat: Special Issue September-October 1976”, reprinted as Appendix B in Jackson (ed) *Cambodia 1975-1978* pp.267-91; cited points on p.285 & 291

³⁵ “Document on Conference of Legislature of the People’s Representative Assembly of Kampuchea” p.21; and Carney, “The Organisation of Power” p.102

³⁶ Carney, *Communist Party Power in Kampuchea* p.8

³⁷ “The Party’s Four Year Plan to Build Socialism in All Fields, 1977-1980” (July-August, 1976) in Chandler, Kiernan and Boua (eds) *Pol Pot Plans the Future* pp.36-118

this document was produced that serious political tensions arose within the party, probably as a result of disagreements within the party related to the aims and achievability of the plan.³⁸ The Pol Pot faction that was dominant in the Standing Committee of the party produced this document, and its policies were delineated to the Central Committee to implement. Therefore, this source can be taken as authoritative for discerning the CPK's ideology.

In the introduction the four-year plan claims that the CPK will solve economic underdevelopment and simultaneously build socialism 'by standing on agricultural capital, in accordance with our stand of independence, mastery, and self-reliance.'³⁹ In part two the authors criticise the approach of other socialist countries to economic construction, claiming that 'they haven't gotten clear from the capitalist framework,' citing Korea and China as examples.⁴⁰ The document implies that Kampuchea's decision to abolish currency and markets demonstrated that increased independence and superior socialist credentials were a result of this policy of self-mastery.⁴¹ The plan also ends with a list of five 'items of the Vanguard Standpoint' that are essential to the fulfilment of the plan, the first of which reads 'independence, mastery, self-reliance, and control over one's own destiny.'⁴²

As with Democratic Centralism, self-mastery is not only present in the exhortations of one major source but is instead laced throughout much of the regime's promulgations. For example, Pol Pot's 3 hour speech to the party on September 27, 1977 included the section 'now that we have established that we need a [political] line, what kind of line is it? A line copied from other people will do no good. This line should be based on the principles of independence, initiative, self-determination, and self-reliance.'⁴³ This stance was repeated a year later, with Pol Pot pronouncing that successes and achievements of the revolution were achieved 'by firmly abiding by the

³⁸ See Kiernan, "Conflict in the Kampuchean Communist Movement," p.51 and 58-62

³⁹ "The Party's Four Year Plan to Build Socialism in All Fields, 1977-1980" p.48

⁴⁰ "The Party's Four Year Plan to Build Socialism in All Fields, 1977-1980" p.107

⁴¹ "The Party's Four Year Plan to Build Socialism in All Fields, 1977-1980" p.40

⁴² "The Party's Four Year Plan to Build Socialism in All Fields, 1977-1980" p.119

⁴³ Cited in K.D. Jackson, "The Ideology of Total Revolution" in Jackson (ed), *Cambodia 1975-1978* p.40

position of independence, sovereignty and by relying on our own forces.’⁴⁴ The principle of self-mastery was also consistently referred to in the regime’s *Livre Noir*, the main CPK text that justified its aggression against its communist neighbour Vietnam.⁴⁵ Kiernan goes so far as to assert that the bitter nationalism and contempt for Vietnam, key facets of the principle of self-mastery, were actually the central influences on Khmer Rouge thought, over Marxism or socialism.⁴⁶

A Kampuchean Interpretation of Dialectical Materialism

The final important element of CPK ideology was based on a unique interpretation of the principle of dialectical materialism. The clearest elucidation of this aspect of CPK ideology came in the same *Tung Padevat* issue cited above, under the title “Review of Dialectical Materialism.”⁴⁷

The ‘four laws of dialectical materialism’ were listed as ‘(1) Everything is interrelated; (2) Everything undergoes transformation; (3) Everything undergoes transformation from quantity to quality; (4) Everything has contradictions,’⁴⁸ with each being expanded into greater detail in the article. The Kampuchean review was fairly rudimentary, however, and only included an examination of the dialectical method aspect of the theory whilst ignoring the aspects of philosophical and historical materialism.⁴⁹ In focusing on only the dialectical method, the CPK focused only on the methods and manifestations of dialectical materialism rather than the forces that supposedly drove it. As Kiernan asserts, ‘in a political context this translates into tactics and attitudes.’⁵⁰

⁴⁴ Pot, P., *Let Us Continually Hold Aloft the Banner of the Victory of the Glorious Communist Party of Kampuchea in Order to Defend Democratic Kampuchea, Carry on Socialist Revolution and Build up Socialism* (Phnom Penh, 1978), cited as “Pol Pot Speech, September 1978” hereafter

⁴⁵ For an abridged, translated version with notes see M. Osborne, *Aggression and Annexation: Kampuchea’s Condemnation of Vietnam. A Summary of the Pol Pot Government’s Livre Noir (Black Book) with a Commentary and Annotations* (Canberra, 1979); for the original in French see Department of Press and Information of the Foreign Ministry of Democratic Kampuchea, *Livre Noir* (Phnom Penh, 1978) <<http://www.megaupload.com/?d=5N7F7QIW>> accessed 29/01/10

⁴⁶ Kiernan, B., “Myth, Nationalism and Genocide”, *Journal of Genocide Research* (2001) Vol.3 No.2 p.193

⁴⁷ “Tung Padevat: Special Issue September-October 1976”, pp.287-291

⁴⁸ “Tung Padevat: Special Issue September-October 1976” p.287 and 291

⁴⁹ Kiernan, B., “Kampuchea and Stalinism” in C. MacKerras and N. Knight *Marxism in Asia* (Sydney, 1985) p.235-6

⁵⁰ Kiernan, “Kampuchea and Stalinism” p.236

Essentially, what emerges is that the most important aspect of the CPK's interpretation of dialectical materialism was that the influence of individuals and the significance of their actions were seen as more important than any considerations of objective factors.⁵¹ This is demonstrated in the original *Tung Padevat* article, in the examples used to illustrate the principle. The first example offered is that of a buffalo whose leg is injured and thus cannot work, and the reader is instructed to 'look for a person who has something to do with this matter,' whilst factors such as poor conditions or overwork are ignored. Another example given is that a dispute between co-operatives must be the result of the class-composition or incorrect leadership of one or other of the cooperatives, with no possible objective factors considered.⁵²

This primacy of subjective influence over objective factors can be found in other CPK documents. The four-year plan, for example, states that in increasing agricultural production 'technology is not the decisive factor; the determining factors of a revolution are politics, revolutionary people and revolutionary methods.'⁵³ Further on the plan states that 'the most important necessary factor for victorious achievement of the Party's first four-year plan is a strong vanguard party,' and even that '(we) must rely on subjective factors as the basis.'⁵⁴ Later, in December 1976, Pol Pot held an enlarged meeting of leading CPK cadres where he summarised the importance of implementing the four-year plan, before describing the problems that the party had faced in 1976 saying 'we can see that *the crucial problems are the problem of the party and the problem of cadre*.'⁵⁵ Each source emphasises the importance of the influence of the cadre and the party in overcoming their objective environment in implementing policy.

At the start of the review of dialectical materialism in *Tung Padevat* the author proclaims that 'dialectical materialism is the most basic document of the doctrine of Marxism-Leninism' and that 'grasping this document leads to a valid analytical standpoint in all facets.'⁵⁶ What emerges is that for the CPK, dialectical materialism

⁵¹ Kiernan, "Kampuchea and Stalinism" p.236

⁵² "Tung Padevat: Special Issue September-October 1976" p.288

⁵³ "The Party's Four Year Plan to Build Socialism in All Fields, 1977-1980" p.48

⁵⁴ "The Party's Four Year Plan to Build Socialism in All Fields, 1977-1980" p.117 and 118

⁵⁵ "Report of Activities of the Party Centre According to the General Political Tasks of 1976", (December, 1976) in Chandler, Kiernan and Boua (eds) *Pol Pot Plans the Future* p.186 emphasis in original

⁵⁶ "Tung Padevat: Special Issue September-October 1976" p.287

(that is, their own unique interpretation of it) was an extremely important ideological tenet. As Kiernan asserts, ‘that all phenomena are organically inter-related was perceived in CPK ideology in terms of the rationale for a witch hunt,’⁵⁷ and was to prove one of the key ideological reasons behind the sweeping purges that led to the deterioration of conditions in Cambodia.

⁵⁷ Kiernan, “Kampuchea and Stalinism” p.236

Chapter II - Structure

Having examined the declatory aspects of the CPK's ideology, I will now investigate the extent to which these beliefs were adhered to in Democratic Kampuchea. To what extent was the professed ideology of the CPK translated coherently and accurately into political and social structures? What instances are there of incoherence between structure and ideology? What can the level of coherence between ideology and structure tell us about the nature of the Cambodian revolution and its leaders?

In order to answer these questions I will take the 4 central tenets of CPK ideology outlined above and assess the extent to which each principle was adhered to in the structure of DK and in the behaviour and actions of CPK cadre. In assessing the degree of coherence between ideology and structure, an argument may be advanced on the extent to which the ideology of the political elite influenced the deterioration of conditions in Cambodia during the period. It may inform us on the extent to which the ideology of the CPK was the determinate factor in producing such a tragedy.

Class Composition

Having analysed the composition of Cambodian society and stratified the population across class, the CPK wasted no time in implementing a societal structure that reflected such stratification. Within three days of seizing Phnom Penh almost the entire population of the city had been evacuated to other areas,⁵⁸ an action that was mirrored in all the towns and cities in the country throughout the regime's lifespan.⁵⁹ This action was designed to 'level down the population to poor-peasant status,'⁶⁰ and was successful in this regard to such a degree that Pol Pot was able to claim in 1978 that 'more than 90 per cent of [the people] are [now] poor and middle-poor peasants.'⁶¹ The emptying of the towns and cities aimed to serve the CPK's class

⁵⁸ Etcheson, *The Rise and Demise of Democratic Kampuchea* p.144

⁵⁹ Barnett, A., "Democratic Kampuchea: A Highly Centralised Dictatorship" in D.P. Chandler and B. Kiernan (eds) *Revolution and Its Aftermath in Kampuchea: Eight Essays* (New Haven, 1983) p.218; and Kampuchean Inquiry Commission *Kampuchea in the Seventies: Report of a Finnish Inquiry Commission* (Helsinki, 1982) pp.15-17

⁶⁰ Vickery, *1975-1982* p.288

⁶¹ "Pol Pot Speech, September 1978" p.13

analysis by creating a society based on the lowest social strata, and will be referred to as the “rustication programme.”

One of the main effects of this policy that influenced the conditions under which the population lived was that ‘people were divided into various categories in a very hierarchical manner... based on the loyalty [the Khmer Rouge] had enjoyed from the peasants of the areas under their control during the war.’⁶² The basic dichotomy was between peasants who had lived in liberated areas of the country before the seizure of power in 1975, and those peasants who had lived in areas not under KR control which predominantly included the urban areas. The former group were labelled as “base” or “old” people, whilst the latter became known as “new” people. In general terms, new people were subjected to worse treatment and were more likely to be allocated to harsher working conditions because their identification as a new person made them a lower class of person,⁶³ although the treatment of such new people often depended strongly on the local cadre, the level of integration of new people into the base people population, and the ability of a new person to conceal their identity as a “new” person.⁶⁴ The splitting of the population into base and new people demonstrates coherence with CPK class analysis in that it exhibits the practice of stratifying the population according to criteria over which the individual has little or no control, and then treating them in different ways according to such stratification.

In fact, the split between base and new people was not the only stratification that was implemented. Cambodians were also divided into groups of “full-rights”, “candidates”, and “deposittes” with such groupings determining the political rights, access to party membership, and opportunity for working in local administration its members enjoyed. Members of the “full-rights” group were treated the best, with the highest degree of access to the party and the administration, with “candidates” having the opportunity to assume “full-rights” classification, and finally “deposittes” having no access to such positions and essentially no political rights. In addition, these

⁶² Kampuchean Inquiry Commission, *Kampuchea in the Seventies* p.21

⁶³ Vickery, M., “Democratic Kampuchea: Themes and Variations” in Chandler and Kiernan (eds) *Revolution and its Aftermath in Kampuchea* p.110-111; Kampuchean Inquiry Commission, *Kampuchea in the Seventies* p.21; Meng-Try, E., *The Chain of Terror: The Khmer Rouge Southwest Zone Security System* (Phnom Penh, 2005) p.5-6

⁶⁴ Vickery “Democratic Kampuchea: Themes and Variations” p.115; and Etcheson, *The Rise and Demise of Democratic Kampuchea* p.146

classifications were ostensibly justified by the party on grounds of the person's class.⁶⁵

The workforce of DK was also stratified into four distinct groups dependent on the type of work that they performed in the new society. Membership of the working group who conducted the heaviest labour were to receive the greatest food rations, with lower rations being provided down the scale.⁶⁶ Both of these examples again serve to demonstrate how the practice of stratifying people and treating them according to such classifications was present not only in the declatory ideology of the CPK, but was also an inherent feature of the structure of the society that was created in DK, that is, it was demonstrated by the operational behaviour of the CPK as well.

With the rustication programme and the employment of the population almost exclusively in agricultural work, the CPK's earlier class analysis based on land ownership and relations of production was no longer accurate. The party responded to this in the September-October 1976 issue of *Tung Padevat* by re-examining the class composition of Cambodia, in which it identified only two classes in the new society: worker-peasants and the "revolutionary ranks," which included the party, the core organisations and the army. Worker-peasants were considered the 'base,' with the revolutionary ranks as a 'power-holding layer... over the worker-peasant.'⁶⁷ Again, the implication is that one group of people should legitimately dominate another according to a constructed stratification.

Interestingly, the article identifies the army as a part of the revolutionary ranks that may 'become a separate strata,' and advises that 'its activities must be mixed with those of workers or peasants' to prevent this from happening.⁶⁸ The article proclaims that the army must be kept in its current position as 'the dictatorial *instrument of the*

⁶⁵ Vickery, *Cambodia 1975-1982* p.87; Lavoix, H., "Cambodia" in *Online Encyclopedia of Mass Violence*, <http://www.massviolence.org/Article?id_article=50> accessed 09/01/10 p.5; and R.A. Burgler, *The Eyes of the Pineapple: Revolutionary Intellectuals and Terror in Democratic Kampuchea* (Saarbrücken, 1990) p.65

⁶⁶ "Excerpted Report on the Leading Views of the Comrade Representing the Party Organisation at a Zone Assembly", (June, 1976), in Chandler, Kiernan and Boua (eds) *Pol Pot Plans the Future* p.20 and footnote 8, p.321; and "The Party's Four Year Plan to Build Socialism in All Fields, 1977-1980" p.111

⁶⁷ "Tung Padevat: Special Issue September-October 1976", p.276

⁶⁸ "Tung Padevat: Special Issue September-October 1976" p.277

party,⁶⁹ tacitly admitting that the party held the dominant position within the revolutionary ranks, yet stopping short of identifying the party as being a separate strata of its own. This implies recognition from the party that the army had the potential to develop its own ability to act separately from the centre, and thus could become a source of opposition. This depiction of the revolutionary ranks as one homogenous class aligns with the CPK's commitment to the 'collective principle in leadership'⁷⁰ and presents a picture of revolutionary solidarity. But, in a somewhat more subtle way, the depiction also suggests that hierarchical relationships based on class and other stratifications were not merely ideological constructs of the CPK centre, but were also actually present in the structure of society within DK.

Taken together, the rustication programme and levelling of the population to agricultural labourers, the dichotomisation of society into base and new people, the stratification of people according to the work they do and according to their political rights, and the reclassification of society into a two-class construct does not necessarily cohere *per se* with the original class analyses of the CPK leading figures from the 1950s and '60s. But coherence between the ideological element of class composition and the structure of DK is shown to a great extent in the way in that class stratification informed the CPK in its creation of policy and was consequently implemented onto the population through the rigid hierarchical structures that were defined by these stratifications. Such a practice dramatically influenced the quality of life of those subjected to it, and became a key element of Democratic Kampuchea. As Burgler argues, 'to justify mass murder, ideology needs a dehumanising component.'⁷¹ The implementation of the CPK's class stratification was one of the means by which the CPK achieved this dehumanisation, by segregating the masses from each other and attributing their persecution to membership of a class.

Democratic Centralism

One of the most significant characteristics of Democratic Kampuchea was its increasingly centralised structure. Although the constitution of DK appears to

⁶⁹ "Tung Padevat: Special Issue September-October 1976" p.277, emphasis added

⁷⁰ "The Constitution of Democratic Kampuchea", Article 4, reprinted in Etcheson *The Rise and Demise of Democratic Kampuchea* p.222

⁷¹ Burgler, *The Eyes of the Pineapple* p.214

‘indicate a real effort at checks and balances among separated powers,’⁷² the reality inside DK was that ‘the structure of power in Cambodia from 1975-1978 was that of the Communist Party of Kampuchea.’⁷³ Khieu Samphan admitted as much when he said that ‘our Assembly is worthless,’⁷⁴ whilst internal party documents claim ownership of the state, saying that the government ‘must be a pure party organisation. It is our own state.’⁷⁵ What evidence is there, then, on the degree to which DK was organised according to the principle of Democratic Centralism?

Firstly, Democratic Kampuchea was divided into broad zones named according to their geographic locations.⁷⁶ The zonal system strongly mirrored the organisational structure of the CPK military,⁷⁷ with each zone being administered by a Zone Party Committee and headed by a Secretary who was invariably a senior member of the party’s Central Committee.⁷⁸ Below the zones the administration was further divided into successive levels of authority, from zone to region, then district, subdistrict, the cooperative, and finally the village level, each with its own tripartite leadership and hierarchical administrative structure.⁷⁹ The party statutes delineated hierarchy within the party where the lower levels were subservient to the party centre,⁸⁰ but at the foundation of the regime in 1975 ‘real power was in the hands of the Zone Party Committees and their Secretaries’ by virtue of controlling ‘their own separate political and administrative structures and their own troops.’⁸¹ In his research on regional and temporal variations of policy throughout DK in the period, Vickery asserts that each region had a high degree of autonomy.⁸² Indeed, eyewitness testimony from both former members of the CPK military and from refugees corroborate that regional party members held a large degree of power and authority in

⁷² Vickery, *1975-1982* p.157

⁷³ Carney, “The Organisation of Power” p.97

⁷⁴ “Minutes of Meeting on Base Work” (March, 1976)

<http://www.eccc.gov.kh/english/cabinet/caseInfo/110//E3_44_EN.pdf> accessed 19/01/10

⁷⁵ “Decisions of the Central Committee on a Variety of Questions” (March, 1976) in Chandler, Kiernan and Boua (eds) *Pol Pot Plans the Future* p.7

⁷⁶ “The Party’s Four-Year Plan to Build Socialism in All Fields, 1977-1980” p.44 and pp.52-5

⁷⁷ Burgler, *The Eyes of the Pineapple* p.99

⁷⁸ Burgler, *The Eyes of the Pineapple* p.100-101

⁷⁹ Vickery, *Cambodia 1975-1982* p.73; and Burgler, *The Eyes of the Pineapple* p.99

⁸⁰ Carney, *Communist Party Power in Kampuchea* p.60

⁸¹ Burgler, *The Eyes of the Pineapple* p.100; see also Carney, “The Organisation of Power” p.94

⁸² Vickery, “Democratic Kampuchea: Themes and Variations” pp.99-135

their area,⁸³ even resulting in discernable differences between the character and appearance of different zone troops and administrations.⁸⁴ For example, the Eastern Zone under So Phim was described by refugees to be ‘quite different from the rest of the country, life was better than in other zones,’⁸⁵ as well as noting that the Eastern Zone army wore different military uniforms from other zone troops.⁸⁶

By contrast, upon seizing power in 1975 Pol Pot and his associates held the central leadership positions in the party and the army’s general staff, but crucially they had no military personnel of their own through the central organs.⁸⁷ This meant that the Pol Pot group had the ability to formulate general policy, but that implementation of policy was left to the zone Secretaries.⁸⁸ Did the regional autonomy of the zone administrations signify weak central control from the Pol Pot-dominated Standing Committee?

Not exactly. Whilst DK was characterised by regional variations in the implementation of policy, such an observation ‘does not disprove that the central authorities were imposing their rule.’⁸⁹ As Anthony Barnett and others have asserted, any suggestion that a centralised and complete state was implemented from the beginning of the regime in April 1975 would be ‘absurd,’ given the damage to the country’s infrastructure from 5 years of civil war, and the fact that the CPK organisation had grown as a clandestine movement in separate and autonomous areas of the country.⁹⁰ Indeed, other sources suggest that while the party centre may not have had complete control over the implementation of policy at the beginning of the period, the Pol Pot group increasingly consolidated its position and drew the autonomous zones increasingly under its control.

⁸³ Kiernan, B., *Genocide and Resistance in Southeast Asia: Documentation, Denial & Justice in Cambodia & East Timor* (New Brunswick, 2008) p.68-70; and Y. Kobelev (ed), *Kampuchea: From Tragedy to Rebirth* (Moscow, 1985) pp.73-4

⁸⁴ Burgler, *The Eyes of the Pineapple* p.116

⁸⁵ Vickery, *Cambodia 1975-1978* p.146

⁸⁶ Kiernan, B., “Wild Chickens, Farm Chickens, and Comorants: Kampuchea’s Eastern Zone Under Pol Pot” in Chandler and Kiernan (eds) *Revolution and Its Aftermath in Kampuchea* p.158 & 182

⁸⁷ Burgler, *The Eyes of the Pineapple* p.100; Vickery, *Cambodia 1975-1982* p.74

⁸⁸ Barnett, “Democratic Kampuchea: A Highly Centralised Dictatorship” p.216-7

⁸⁹ Barnett, “Democratic Kampuchea: A Highly Centralised Dictatorship” p.221

⁹⁰ Barnett, “Democratic Kampuchea: A Highly Centralised Dictatorship” p.221; Vickery, *Cambodia 1975-1982* p.74; Kiernan, “Conflict in the Kampuchean Communist Movement” p.23

The first important act in centralising power came in July 1975, with the “ceremony of the founding of the Revolutionary Army of Kampuchea throughout the country”, in which troops from regional administrations were given to the authority of the party centre.⁹¹ This gave the party centre ‘sweeping powers of intervention’⁹² in the zones, a power which was to be exercised with increasing frequency and ferocity throughout the period. The party centre also controlled the security network throughout the country, which was used extensively to “re-educate” or execute dissidents, right from the bottom level of society in the cooperative up to even members of the Central Committee.⁹³

Having authority over its own troops, as well as having a security system with which to process dissidents, enabled the Pol Pot group to gradually remove political opponents who had not implemented central directives fully or competently. In fact, the party centre’s “Summary of the Results of the 1976 Study Session” (in which the four-year plan was announced and discussed among leading CPK cadre) seems to suggest a series of ‘serious political divisions in the CPK which could only be resolved in the centre’s favour by massive and violent purges.’⁹⁴ Indeed, party documents demonstrate that important CPK cadre were increasingly purged from the administration, particularly from 1977 onwards, as Pol Pot attempted to implement the four-year plan and consolidate control over the movement,⁹⁵ a policy aimed at achieving self-mastery and at implementing the principle of democratic centralism. The autonomy of regions failing to implement Pol Pot policies was progressively reigned in; conversely, regions that demonstrated loyalty to the centre were rewarded with increased zonal autonomy, a greater degree of authority in the party for the zone

⁹¹ Kiernan, “Conflict in the Kampuchean Communist Movement” p.51

⁹² Barnett, “Democratic Kampuchea: A Highly Centralised Dictatorship” p.216

⁹³ Meng-Try, *the Chain of Terror* p.33; “Planning the Past: The Forced Confession of Hu Nim” p.228

⁹⁴ “Summary of the Results of the 1976 Study Session” (undated) in Chandler, Kiernan and Boua (eds) *Pol Pot Plans the Future* pp.164-176, especially p.167 and 171-4

⁹⁵ “Salute to Our Party’s Victory in the Liquidation of the Leaders of the Kampuchean Workers Party in the Pay of the CIA, June 3, 1978”, Document No. 2.5.16, in , H. J. De Nike, J. Quigley and K. J. Robinson (eds), *Genocide in Cambodia: Documents from the Trial of Pol Pot and Ieng Sary* (Philadelphia, 2000) p.391; and “Important Culprits (Arrested from 1976 to April 9, 1978)”, Document No. 2.5.24, in De Nike, Quigley and Robinson (eds) *Genocide in Cambodia* pp.397-408

leaders, and even increased financial and material contributions from the centre to that zone.⁹⁶

The autonomy of the zones coupled with the competing administrative structures at the zone and central levels gave the Pol pot group the incentive to promote those that demonstrated loyalty to the centre. The weak separation of party and state meant that Pol Pot was in a prime position to enact such a drive, given his position as Secretary of the Party and Chairmen of the Party Military Committee. What developed was a form of “political Darwinism,” in which the power and authority of different zones and their staff was dependent on their relationship with the centre.

But this was not all. As noted, each level of the administration had the authority to eliminate dissidents from the administrative level immediately below it, so long as their own actions were aligned with the policy of their superior level. This ‘authority to smash (people) inside and outside the ranks [of the party]’ was clearly and unambiguously delineated by the party centre in March 1976,⁹⁷ and demonstrates that authority was deferred down the administrative chain and originated from the party centre. This is in complete accordance with the principle of democratic centralism. Therefore, despite minimal coherence between the structure of DK and the ideological commitment to democratic centralism at the beginning of the regime, coherence increasingly developed throughout the period as Pol Pot and his associates consolidated their own power within the party and state apparatus.

Self-Mastery

In DK there was a genuine attempt at achieving a self-sufficient economy, with the collectivisation of agriculture, the cooperativisation of the workforce, and the promulgation of the four-year plan, which relied solely on the labour of the worker-peasant class to exponentially increase the size and wealth of the economy. These policies were all designed to reinforce the independence of DK and to improve self-sufficiency. Foreign relations were cut or suspended with the majority of other nations

⁹⁶ Kiernan, “Conflict in the Kampuchean Communist Movement” p.40-44; Burgler, *The Eyes of the Pineapple* p.102-104; “The Party’s Four-Year Plan to Build Socialism in All Fields, 1977-1980” pp.63-78

⁹⁷ “Decisions of the Central Committee on a Variety of Questions” p.1-3

(including rejecting the receipt of aid), Cambodia's borders were closed to outsiders (except specifically designated personnel predominantly from China and North Korea), and any historical or political connections Cambodia had shared with other nations before DK were unequivocally renounced – particularly those connections shared with Vietnam.⁹⁸

Yet in terms of gaining complete autarky, Democratic Kampuchea showed less coherence with its stated aims than its leaders would have liked to admit. Party documents show that military aid from China to the CPK was extensive,⁹⁹ as well as receiving aid and commerce shipments of consumables, medicine, raw materials, low-level agricultural goods and also mechanised agricultural goods from both China and North Korea.¹⁰⁰ By 1976 imports, whilst still paltry by international standards, totalled US\$19m.¹⁰¹

Furthermore, the economy was not to be founded solely upon the internal consumption of rice and domestically produced goods, but also to be built with increased capital income from the export of rice sold internationally. This was projected to generate almost US\$1.4bn over the four-year plan,¹⁰² and was expected to constitute 93% of government income in the period.¹⁰³ These trade relations demonstrate a significant divergence between the declatory ideology of the CPK and the operational behaviour of the party, because of the role of other nations afforded in the construction of DK. The comparison, therefore, between the ideological principle of self-mastery and the actual structure of Democratic Kampuchea could be said to show little coherence, at least in the economic sphere. What, then, was the influence of the ideological commitment to self-mastery in the structure of DK? Was there coherence between self-mastery and the DK structure in any realm other than the economy?

⁹⁸ Kampuchean Inquiry Commission, *Kampuchea in the Seventies* p.22

⁹⁹ “Excerpts from a Speech by Wang Shang Rung, Deputy Chief of the General Staff of the Chinese Army, at the Talks with Son Sen, February 6, 1976”, Document No. 2.5.05, in De Nike, Quigley and Robinson (eds) *Genocide in Cambodia* pp.381-5; “Bill on Arms and Other Military Equipment Sent by China as Nonreimbursed Aid to Kampuchea, 1976-1978”, Document No. 2.5.25a, in De Nike, Quigley and Robinson (eds) *Genocide in Cambodia* p.408-409

¹⁰⁰ “List of Aid Materials of All Kinds on Each Ship”, Ministry of Commerce of Democratic Kampuchea (March, 1976) cited in B. Kiernan, *The Pol Pot Regime: Race, Power, and Genocide under the Khmer Rouge, 1975-79* (New Haven, 1996) pp.128-32

¹⁰¹ Burgler, *The Eyes of the Pineapple* p.121

¹⁰² “The Party's Four-Year Plan to Build Socialism in All Fields, 1977-1980” p.56

¹⁰³ “The Party's Four-Year Plan to Build Socialism in All Fields, 1977-1980” p.106

The true influence of the commitment to self-mastery was within the party itself. Self-mastery was a policy that originated directly from the Pol Pot faction, and was one of the ideological features that defined their group as separate from other groups in the party Central and Standing Committees.¹⁰⁴ This is evident with reference to internal histories of the CPK written by the Eastern Zone Military Committee in 1973,¹⁰⁵ and the previously cited *Livre Noir* that was produced by the Department of Press and Information of the Foreign Ministry of Democratic Kampuchea in 1978.

The 1973 history was written before the army came under central control, and was produced in the midst of a civil war that the CPK had yet to emerge victorious from. Autonomous control in this region was still very much in place, particularly since Pol Pot's region of influence at this time was in the North of the country not the East.¹⁰⁶ It is reasonable, therefore, to assume that Pol Pot and his associates had limited influence in the production of this document. By contrast, the *Livre Noir* was published by DK's Foreign Ministry, which was controlled by staunch Pol Pot ally Ieng Sary. By 1978 the Pol Pot faction was also firmly in control of the Standing Committee of the CPK and the government of DK. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that the *Livre Noir* more closely resembles the history of the CPK that the Pol Pot group wanted to portray than the 1973 history did, and would therefore be more likely to represent the group's ideology. The wide discrepancies that emerge between the descriptions of the party's evolution between the two sources aptly demonstrate the wide divisions present within the party.

For example, the birthday of the party is disputed between the two sources, with the 1973 Eastern Zone history recognising a conference in 1951 as the founding date of the party,¹⁰⁷ whilst the centre's *Livre Noir* claims the party was formed in 1960.¹⁰⁸ This was done because Pol Pot had only risen to party secretary at the later meeting in the 1960s, and so was attempting to renounce the importance of the

¹⁰⁴ Kiernan, "Conflict in the Kampuchean Communist Movement" p.8-9; Burgler, *The Eyes of the Pineapple* p.102

¹⁰⁵ "Summary of Annotated Party History", Eastern Zone Military Committee (1973), reprinted as Appendix A in Jackson (ed) *Cambodia 1975-1978* pp.251-268

¹⁰⁶ Kiernan, "Conflict in the Kampuchean Communist Movement" p.23

¹⁰⁷ "Summary of Annotated Party History" p.251

¹⁰⁸ Department of Press and Information of the Foreign Ministry of Democratic Kampuchea, *Livre Noir* p.1

revolutionary movement in the period where his influence was minimal.¹⁰⁹ As the special issue of *Tung Padevat* explained, ‘the revolutionary organisation has decided that from now on we must arrange the history of the party into something clean and perfect, in line with our policies of independence and self-mastery.’¹¹⁰ In addition, the 1973 history recognised the influence of the Vietnamese in helping found and develop the fledgling CPK,¹¹¹ whereas the *Livre Noir* renounced any help or contribution at all, claiming ‘the CPK was born from an independent revolutionary movement’ and that ‘the Vietnamese not only gave no help whatsoever to Kampuchea; instead they tried to sabotage and to destroy the Kampuchean revolution in a systematic fashion.’¹¹²

The impression that emerges is that the Pol Pot group’s disdain for their Vietnamese neighbours was not a position widely shared among all the zone administrations. Indeed, sympathy for or relations with the Vietnamese from a CPK cadre often led to their removal from office by the centre, most notable in the Eastern Zone under So Phim and the Southwestern Zone under Chhou Chet.¹¹³ It is at this point that the true relevance of self-mastery emerges. As self-mastery was a direct policy of the Pol Pot group, any opposition to this policy represented a challenge to their personal authority. Conversely, accusations of being a Vietnamese sympathiser or “agent” provided a convenient vehicle for denouncing and removing political opponents of the group, regardless of the veracity of such claims.

The fact that many cadres were denounced in this way demonstrates how useful the principle of self-mastery became to the regime for removing its perceived opposition, as shown in the confessions of several high-placed CPK cadre during their interrogation after being purged.¹¹⁴ In terms of economics, self-mastery and autarky

¹⁰⁹ Kiernan, B., *How Pol Pot Came to Power: A History of Communism in Kampuchea, 1930-1975* (London, 1985) pp.190-3 and 200-202

¹¹⁰ “Tung Padevat: Special Issue September-October 1976” p.4, cited in D. Chandler “Revising the Past in Democratic Kampuchea: When was the Birthday of the Party? Notes and Comments”, *Pacific Affairs* Vol.56, No.2 (1983) p.289

¹¹¹ “Summary of Annotated Party History” p.254 & 259

¹¹² Osbourne, *Aggression and Annexation* p.8 & 12, quoting directly from the *Livre Noir*

¹¹³ See “Confession of Chheum Sam-aok alias Pang” (May, 1978) <http://www.eccc.gov.kh/english/cabinet/caseInfo/124//E3_63_EN.pdf> accessed 19/01/10 p.28; and Kiernan, “Wild Chickens, Farm Chickens, and Comorants” p.162

¹¹⁴ See, for example, “Planning the Past: The Forced Confession of Hu Nim” p.263-4, 271 and 290; “Confession of Chheum Sam-aok alias Pang” p.27-28; and “Confession of Cho Chhan alias Sreng” (February, 1977) <http://www.eccc.gov.kh/english/cabinet/caseInfo/125//E3_64_EN.pdf> accessed

were not strongly adhered to and therefore demonstrate a lack of coherence with the declatory ideology of the CPK. But in the political sphere, self-mastery became an influential tool of the CPK leadership, and distinctly influenced political relations within the DK structure in the way that it facilitated the Pol Pot group's consolidation of power and gradual move towards "democratic centralism".

Kampuchean Interpretation of Dialectical Materialism

The Kampuchean interpretation of dialectical materialism emphasised the primacy of the subjective agency of individuals over objective conditions in the implementation of policy. If any cadre was deemed to have failed his or her superior in the implementation of policy, that cadre would be attributed with responsibility for that failure, regardless of any influential or extenuating circumstances. With the centre increasingly asserting its control over the regional administrative apparatus, failure to meet the centre's unrealistic production targets increased the amount of cadres purged as a result of failure to implement the four-year plan. The achievability of the plan or the conditions on the ground in the country were never considered important.¹¹⁵

The most manifest influence this had on the structure of DK was to increase exponentially the level of violence in the system. As Meng-Try Ea describes, 'according to the Party's theory of dialectics, conflict caused loyal people with minor faults to unknowingly transform themselves into the enemies of *Angkar*, since everything was inter-related and would eventually lead along the chain to treason.'¹¹⁶ Achieving the centre's production targets as specified in the four-year plan became a personal test of revolutionary merit and administrative ability.¹¹⁷ In an enlarged meeting with CPK officials at the end of 1976, Pol Pot noted that 'a number of places have solved [the food shortages] nicely, but three-quarters of the country has failed to do so... The problem stems from personal factors within the party and from people grasping the line with insufficient firmness.'¹¹⁸ This demonstrates the increased

19/01/10 p.11-12

¹¹⁵ See "The Party's Four-Year Plan to Build Socialism in All Fields, 1977-1980" p.50 and footnote 6 on p.324

¹¹⁶ Meng-Try, *The Chain of Terror* p.7

¹¹⁷ See Burgler, *The Eyes of the Pineapple* p.102-3

¹¹⁸ "Report of Activities of the Party Centre According to the General Political Tasks of 1976" p.188

pressure on each successive level of the administration to achieve their targets, so as not to incur any consequences from the higher administrative level.

Just as self-mastery was used as an ideological tool to define and alienate enemies of the party, so too could dialectical materialism be used to construct the guilt of cadre failing to implement policy. In the words of Pol Pot,

*Contradictions in the party shouldn't be regarded lightly. They evolve. If we don't struggle now to expel individualistic elements, sooner or later they will turn from a quantitative problem into a qualitative one, and even turn into the enemies of the revolution*¹¹⁹

This theory was used directly in constructing the guilt of party cadre. Under torture from central authorities purged CPK member Pang wrote, for example, that the poor discipline of the troops under his command was ‘because *my* stance was not that of a revolutionary... *I was neglectful* and wasn't stouthearted about taking responsibility.’¹²⁰ Later in the confession several problems that occurred during the Fourth Party Congress are blamed directly on Pang, without any evidence being presented other than his authority in ‘making arrangements for the venue of the congress.’ The problems listed include a guard sentry falling asleep and problems with the electrical lighting system, problems that may well have been completely out of Pang's control.¹²¹ In this way, the principle of dialectical materialism contributed to the procedural activity of the party in the way that confessions of guilt were constructed during the purges.

The CPK's implementation of dialectical materialism thus influenced the structure of DK in making it increasingly more volatile, both for the cadres who intended to implement policy from above, and also for the population whose labour was increasingly extorted to meet this goal. As Burgler describes, ‘the system of terror was generalised, over the ordinary people to enforce the production of surplus for the centre's development needs, and turn[ed] inwards to achieve full control over the executive organs of state power.’¹²² In this way, strong coherence is demonstrated

¹¹⁹ “Report of Activities of the Party Centre According to the General Political Tasks of 1976” p.184-5

¹²⁰ “Confession of Chheum Sam-aok alias Pang” p.18, emphasis added.

¹²¹ “Confession of Chheum Sam-aok alias Pang” p.23

¹²² Burgler, *The Eyes of the Pineapple* p.118

between the declatory commitment to dialectical materialism, and its actual implementation during the regime, particularly in the way that it influenced the spread of purging.

Chapter III - The Purge Mechanism

Having found a significant degree of coherence between the declatory ideology of the CPK and the operational structure that they implemented in DK, particularly as the period progressed, attention must now focus on how and why this coherence developed. It is not enough to simply say that the ideology of the CPK was uniformly and comprehensively implemented from the start of the regime. This would be an extremely rudimentary argument that would ignore several fundamental aspects of Democratic Kampuchea, such as the regional differences in production, regional differences in levels of repression, the steady increase of state violence over the period, and the incessant purging that took place within the party. What were the mechanisms that drove these changes? Did ideology and structure interact to affect these changes, and if so what was their relationship? To what extent can answers to these questions elucidate the processes by which dictatorial states construct, maintain, and justify repressive systems of terror?

Motivation to Purge

At the seizure of power in 1975 it seems that ‘although in a strong position in the party, the Pol Pot group was far from holding complete sway.’¹²³ In a statement in 1978 Ieng Sary claimed that between 1976 and 1977 no less than four attempts were made at overthrowing Pol Pot from the head of the party, either by coup or assassination.¹²⁴ In addition, radio Phnom Penh announced on the 26th September 1976 that Pol Pot had resigned as Prime Minister and Nuon Chea replaced him as ‘Acting Prime Minister,’¹²⁵ an event Kiernan describes as ‘clearly a political dismissal.’ Kiernan goes on to describe significant changes to national policy in the two weeks before Pol Pot re-emerges as Prime Minister as evidence that ‘the Kampuchean government was now in the hands of a coalition’ opposed to Pol Pot.¹²⁶

Such tension is evident in the party’s own documentation. After promulgating the four-year plan to the party in September 1976, Pol Pot announced that despite

¹²³ Kiernan, “Conflict in the Kampuchean Communist Movement” p.51

¹²⁴ “Statement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Democratic Kampuchea” (March, 1978) Cited in Kiernan, “Conflict in the Kampuchean Communist Movement” p.51

¹²⁵ “Summary of the Results of the 1976 Study Session” p.165

¹²⁶ Kiernan, “Conflict in the Kampuchean Communist Movement” p.56

reaching ‘complete agreement with one another’¹²⁷ within the Central Committee on the implementation of the four-year plan, counterrevolutionaries ‘hide themselves in our revolutionary ranks, in the army, and in the ranks of the party.’¹²⁸ Later in the year in December, Pol Pot spoke of ‘a sickness inside the party,’ and that ‘we are encouraged to expel treacherous elements that pose problems to the party and our revolution.’¹²⁹ He goes on to comment that contradictions ‘have not disappeared. They exist inside the party,’ and that ‘a group of traitors has hidden and buried itself inside our flesh and blood... [who] would destroy our leadership.’¹³⁰ Hu Nim’s forced confession from May-June 1977 also describes dissident meetings between three zone Secretaries who plotted against the regime at the end of 1976.¹³¹

As Kiernan and Chandler assert, these documents seem to have been produced ‘in an atmosphere of considerable political uncertainty,’¹³² and that the late 1976 period ‘was a crucial and even unnerving one for the leadership of DK.’¹³³ Furthermore, the “Summary of Results” and “Report on the Activities” documents were produced by the party centre just after this period, before the first major wave of purges swept through the country, whilst Hu Nim’s confession was produced as a result of that sweep. Taken together, they not only reflect the genuinely tenuous nature of the position of Pol Pot and his associates, but they also demonstrate how acutely aware this group was of its own precarious position. On the most basic level, then, the purges in the CPK party and administrative structures were instigated from the top echelon of the party, in an attempt to increase and consolidate power and to ‘establish its control throughout the country.’¹³⁴

Why was there such opposition to the leadership from within the Party? How was it that someone of Hu Nim’s stature, for example, had become “counterrevolutionary” and represented a threat to the survival of the leadership of the

¹²⁷ “Summary of the Results of the 1976 Study Session” p.174

¹²⁸ “Summary of the Results of the 1976 Study Session” p.170

¹²⁹ “Report of the Activities of the Party Centre According to the General Political Tasks of 1976” p.183

¹³⁰ “Report of the Activities of the Party Centre According to the General Political Tasks of 1976” p.185 & 189

¹³¹ “Planning the Past: The Forced Confession of Hu Nim” p.309

¹³² “Summary of the Results of the 1976 Study Session” p.166

¹³³ “Report of the Activities of the Party Centre According to the General Political Tasks of 1976” p.177

¹³⁴ Barnett, “Democratic Kampuchea: A Highly Centralised Dictatorship” p.215

regime? To investigate the basis for opposition it is essential to look once again at the role of ideology, for it is this aspect that most clearly separates the Pol Pot group from the rest of the party.

Broadly speaking, since Pol Pot's rise to power in the early 1960s the CPK had been characterised by three prevailing groups, each with their own ideological identity, recognisable geographic location, and prominent members of the party associated to them. Kiernan sketches these groups as follows:¹³⁵ Firstly, a 'chauvinist,' 'militant' group based in the North and Northeastern regions of Kampuchea which was headed by Pol Pot and whose adherents included Ieng Sary, Khieu Samphan and Nuon Chea. Secondly was a group associated Hou Yuon and Hu Nim, that was connected to the Kampuchea-China Friendship association and who have been tenuously labelled the "Cultural Revolution Group" due to their sympathies with the Chinese model of socialism. This second group was based in the Southwest. Finally, a third group was located in the East on the border of Vietnam, and included high-ranking cadres such as East Zone Secretary So Phim. This group was more strongly associated to the Vietnamese model of socialism and the historical legacy of the Vietnamese-dominated Indochina Communist Party.¹³⁶

The first ideological conflict between these two groups is the extent to which they wanted to engage with the outside world in general, and with other communist parties in particular. As described above, the prevalence of self-mastery and national independence in the rhetoric of the regime after the Pol Pot group managed to take hold of the party apparatus strongly implies that this was a policy directly related to the Pol Pot faction. By contrast, the groups more strongly associated with China and Vietnam wanted increased contact and trade with their respective sponsors, a complaint aired in the Hu Nim confession.¹³⁷ So from the outset the three factions seemed to disagree on foreign relations, as a direct result of their differing ideological standpoints.

Opposition to Pol Pot policy also found a voice in the enlarged meeting of high-ranking CPK cadre that took place in the immediate aftermath of seizing state

¹³⁵ The Following outline is formed from Kiernan, "Conflict in the Kampuchean Communist Movement" p.8

¹³⁶ Vickery, *Cambodia 1975-1982* p.90

¹³⁷ "Planning the Past: The Forced Confession of Hu Nim" p.290

power in 1975, when several cadre expressed dissent at the abolition of money.¹³⁸ This was another policy that was a direct result of the Pol Pot principle of self-reliance, that stated that all that was necessary to improve the economy and the quality of life of the population was the internal increase in rice production.¹³⁹

Finally, the Hu Nim confession also demonstrates opposition to other aspects of Pol Pot policy. In describing a political education session he held, Nim describes how the policies of ‘class positions in the new Kampuchean society, about the abolition of private property... [and] money, about the evacuation of the people and about the collective system... greatly disturbed Prom Sam Ar and myself.’¹⁴⁰ This example is even more revealing than the first two, because it not only demonstrates opposition to Pol Pot’s ideologically driven policies from highly placed members of the administration, but it also demonstrates that confessions extracted by the security services attempted to denounce dissidents on ideological grounds and grounds of adherence to political policy.

From these examples it becomes clear that the motivation to purge cadre from the party was often based upon clear and overt opposition to ideological tenets of the Pol Pot group, as well as the political policies that represented them. However, Burgler rejects Kiernan’s groups of opposition, claiming that ‘the problem of factions and rivalling groups within the party is far more complicated than a simple tripartation into Pol Pot group, domestic Khmer Vietminh and cultural revolutionists would suggest.’¹⁴¹ Indeed, overt ideological opposition was not always a necessary condition for purging a cadre. But this does not mean that the motivation to purge was not still a consequence of the ideology of the Pol Pot group and the ways that it was implemented. In fact, the procedural method by which purging was implemented as a technique also served to construct opposition within the party, and deserves further attention.

¹³⁸ Kiernan, “Wild Chickens, Farm Chickens, and Comorants” p.178-9

¹³⁹ See, for example, “Pol Pot Speech, September 1978” p.19 & 31

¹⁴⁰ “Planning the Past: The Forced Confession of Hu Nim” p.311

¹⁴¹ Burgler, *The Eyes of the Pineapple* p.154

Purge as Technique

In the implementation of the purges, central security officials under the authority of Pol Pot adhered to a series of procedural methods that exponentially increased the number of victims absorbed by the terror network. In addition to the leading cadre in any given region, ‘whole strings of their supporters allies, friends, relatives, associates and colleagues, reaching far down into the administrative and military structures for which they [were] responsible’¹⁴² were also purged. Burgler asserts that in procedural and pragmatic terms this approach makes sense, because a movement like the Khmer Rouge was founded on ‘strings of personal relations between activists’ that developed during their period of clandestine resistance.¹⁴³ Burgler asserts that ‘conflicts within the top leadership about general policy, ideology, the exercise of power and other issues that seem purely political at that level lose more and more of their political character and become more a question of loyalty as they descend down to the lower echelons.’¹⁴⁴ The implication is that the purging of networks of cadres was done to combat this structural characteristic of regional loyalty, rather than as a direct implementation of policy and ideology.

To a certain extent, this assertion is correct. The nature of the CPK and the state they created was extremely hierarchical, with the authority to enforce policy uniformly devolved to the autonomous regional levels of the administration, each of whom had the ultimate form of coercion at their fingertips – the authority to kill.¹⁴⁵ It was inevitable that in such a situation, loyalty to your immediate superior was the difference between life and death. Furthermore, the Standing Committee of the CPK held strict control over all communications networks in DK, meaning that ‘if two sectors from different zones wanted to communicate, their messages were sent to the central apparatus, instead of flowing directly to each other.’¹⁴⁶ This meant regional cadre at lower levels of the administration only had communication links with their

¹⁴² Heder, S., *From Pot to Sovan to the Villages* (1980, Bangkok) p.12, cited in Burgler, *The Eyes of the Pineapple* p.123

¹⁴³ Burgler, *The Eyes of the Pineapple* p.123

¹⁴⁴ Burgler, *The Eyes of the Pineapple* p.124

¹⁴⁵ “Decisions of the Central Committee on a Variety of Questions” p.1; and “A Short Guide for the Application of Party Statutes” p.60

¹⁴⁶ Etcheson, C., *Overview of the Hierarchy of Democratic Kampuchea*, Criminal Case File No.002 presented to the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia, 18/7/07

<http://www.eccc.gov.kh/english/cabinet/caseInfo/99//E3_32_EN.pdf> accessed 19/01/10 p.9

direct superiors and their direct subordinates, implicating them in mistakes by virtue of guilt by association. In the words of Pol Pot, ‘contradictions exist. If we scratch the ground to bury them, they will rot us from within... If we don’t wage a deep, extensive socialist revolution, these contradictions will increase in strength.’¹⁴⁷

But the fact that this system encouraged loyalty towards individuals and not directly to the party or policy itself was not necessarily contradictory to the ideology that the Pol Pot group wanted to implement. Of course, this is not to say that the party encouraged cadres to be loyal to the regional administration over the centre. But the loyalty a cadre showed to their superior and that they could expect from their subordinates was a direct implication of the principle of democratic centralism, a key ideological tenet of CPK thought. The centre sought to replace networks of cadres who were deemed to be disloyal with those who were deemed to be loyal to its own authority, drawing lists of “guilty” associates via the confessions of dissidents under torture.¹⁴⁸ Similarly, the centre expected that those brought in to replace purged cadre would be able to command the same control over their own subordinate levels in implementing the centre’s policies. In this way, the process *itself* of removing whole networks of cadre was consistent with the theoretical content of democratic centralism, because it implied the guilt of lower level cadres down the chain by virtue of their presumed loyalty to a denounced regional leader.

So whilst Burgler’s point that the motivation for cadre behaviour on the local level was more driven by personal loyalty than higher-level policy is true to an extent, such an assertion does not ultimately mean that the policies and ideology of the Pol Pot group had necessarily “lost their political character” further down the administrative structure. On the contrary, such a characteristic actually lends weight to the assertion that the ideology of the CPK and the structure of DK cohered to a great extent, because it demonstrates a *procedural* coherence in the purging of cadre as well as a *structural* coherence to the Pol Pot group’s ideology in DK.

¹⁴⁷ “Report on the Activities of the Party Centre” p.184

¹⁴⁸ See “Confession of Cho Chhan alias Sreng”, p.1-3, 7 and 9; and “Confession of Chheum Sam-aok alias Pang”, p.24 and 33-4

Purging occurred at every administrative level. *Tung Padevat* told cadres to remain vigilant for dissidence ‘at every level’ and to ‘immediately eliminate’ it.¹⁴⁹ The party Standing Committee also reiterated in 1977 that ‘every unit, service, and ministry should take the initiative, within its organisation, to continue to purge and sweep away adversaries.’¹⁵⁰ Several sources suggest that zonal and regional cadres were diligent in carrying out this task,¹⁵¹ so much so that the Deputy Party Secretary for the Central Zone Sreng commented in 1977 that there had been ‘quite a powerful dynamism with regard to this matter’ from the lower levels.¹⁵² In this way, violence and instability spread throughout the system. A closer examination of the way that this violence spread will help illustrate the relationship between ideology, structure, and the purge technique.

The Endemic Spread of the Purges

Several sources of evidence suggest that despite the practice occurring throughout the period, purging really took off in early 1977. This was a direct result of the ‘extremely intense’¹⁵³ power struggle at the top of the party that occurred around September 1976 and the release of the party centre’s four-year plan. The top security centre in DK was designated as a prison for high-level political prisoners only, and was administered in Phnom Penh directly by the centre. This was the infamous Toul Sleng,¹⁵⁴ whose records show that political prisoners increased nearly threefold between 1976-77, from 2,250 to 6,330.¹⁵⁵ Furthermore, the party centre document “Important Culprits from 1976 to April 9, 1978” lists only 28 of 289

¹⁴⁹ “Tung Padevat: Special Issue September-October 1976” p.290

¹⁵⁰ “Excerpts from Minutes of the April 11, 1977, Meeting of the Standing Committee of the Party Central Committee”, Document No. 2.5.23, in De Nike, Quigley and Robinson (eds) *Genocide in Cambodia* p.397

¹⁵¹ See, for example, “Report on the General Political Tasks of the Party in the Northern Zone for the First Quarter of 1977 (From the Notebook of a Zone Official)”, Document No. 2.5.10 in De Nike, Quigley and Robinson (eds) *Genocide in Cambodia* p.387; “Report on the Activities of the Khmer Communist Party in 1977, November 8, 1977”, Document No. 2.5.15 in De Nike, Quigley and Robinson (eds) *Genocide in Cambodia* p.389; ‘To Respected Angkar 870’ Report from Office M560, (May, 1978) <http://www.eccc.gov.kh/english/cabinet/caseInfo/118//E3_58_EN_.pdf> accessed 19/01/10 p.1; and Comrade Pok, ‘Respectfully Submitted to Respected Brother Pol’ (April, 1976) <http://www.eccc.gov.kh/english/cabinet/caseInfo/120//E3_57_EN_.pdf> p.1

¹⁵² Cho Chhan *alias* Sreng, “I Would Like to Report on the Commissioned Officers Who Exited to the North Zone,” (March, 1977) pp.1-2 cited in Heder, *Pol Pot and Khieu Samphan* p.8

¹⁵³ Kiernan, “Conflict in the Kampuchean Communist Movement” p.56

¹⁵⁴ See Meng-Try, *The Chain of Terror* pp.2-3 and especially pp.32-4 for a description of Toul Sleng and its position in the security apparatus

¹⁵⁵ Burgler, *The Eyes of the Pineapple* p.123

detainees of important stature having been arrested before 1977, a fraction of only 11%.¹⁵⁶

Included in the first wave of purge was Touch Phoeun, minister of Public Works and described by Burgler as ‘a longstanding associate of Hou Yuon... [and who] was a member of Koy Thoun’s clan, the former North zone secretary who had been arrested in 1976.’¹⁵⁷ From the confessions of Thuon and Phoeun, 32 high-level cadres from the North zone were arrested, including Sreng (Thuon’s second in command in the North zone), Moul Sambath (aka Ros Nhim, Party Secretary for the Northwest Zone) and Hu Nim.¹⁵⁸ Subsequently the North Zone administration was thoroughly purged of Thuon’s associates, allowing Pol Pot loyalist and North Zone military commander Ke Pauk to move into the power void left by Thuon.¹⁵⁹ A similar process occurred in the Northwest and Eastern zones, with troops from Pol Pot’s favoured Southwest Zone purging and replacing cadres from these areas ‘en masse.’¹⁶⁰ This allowed the Pol Pot loyalists Mok and Keu to strengthen their positions by consolidating in these areas, both of whom had previously been the zone commanders of the Southwest and Northwest armies respectively.¹⁶¹ Each of the three zones that experienced the most extensive purges (North, Northwest and East) were run by Zone Secretaries that had been implicated in a coup plot in the Hu Nim confession, thus demonstrating how violence spread through denunciation in the terror network.¹⁶²

So the North, Northwest, and East zones were purged of cadre deemed disloyal to the centre and replaced with those under the authority of cadre whose loyalty the Pol Pot group was more assured of. This is significant because it demonstrates again that democratic centralism was being pragmatically implemented through the structure of DK. The central troops directly accountable to the centre were not used as replacements in the vacant administrative positions, thus placing them under direct central control; instead, the trusted networks of Pauk, Mok and Keu were imposed upon regional administrations. This allowed the Pol Pot group to

¹⁵⁶ “Important Culprits (Arrested from 1976 to April 9, 1978)” pp.397-408

¹⁵⁷ Burgler, *The Eyes of the Pineapple* p.118

¹⁵⁸ Burgler, *The Eyes of the Pineapple* pp.118-9

¹⁵⁹ Kiernan, *The Pol Pot Regime* pp.338-9

¹⁶⁰ Burgler, *The Eyes of the Pineapple* p.123

¹⁶¹ Burgler, *The Eyes of the Pineapple* p.123 and 134

¹⁶² “Planning the Past: The Forced Confession of Hu Nim” p.309

centralise power, without directly administering these regions themselves. In this way, not only was the ideological commitment to democratic centralism being fulfilled through centralisation of power, but also the characteristics of DK's structure that already resembled democratic centralism (personal loyalty, regional administrative structure, and zonal autonomy) facilitated the implementation of ideology and the suppression of dissent.

Why Pol Pot trusted Pauk, Mok and Keu over those they replaced seems, again, to be directly related to ideology. None of these cadres had been known to oppose Pol Pot's central ideological tenets of class-stratification, democratic centralism, self-mastery, or dialectical materialism, and instead had successfully implemented the policies that reflected these ideological tenets including the levelling of the population to poor peasant-status, avoiding contact with the Vietnamese, and conducting purges on behalf of the centre.¹⁶³ Interestingly, each of the three drew their power from the military rather than party structure. Since Pol Pot had been Chairman of the Party Military Committee for longer than Secretary of the CPK, and since the people who most benefitted from the purges were also high-level military personnel, the implication is that Pol Pot's own personal authority and power base was located within the military, rather than the party. This would certainly contribute to an explanation of why the ideology that emerged from him and his group was of such a militant nature, and also would help explain the widespread opposition he faced from people whose power bases were located more within the party structure.

There is one final element of the method of purging that also indicates a relationship between the purge as a technique, the ideology of the CPK, and the structure of DK, and this is the way in which cadres were denounced. High-ranking CPK cadres such as East Zone Secretary So Phim were not purged immediately, but instead often remained in their positions for 'up to a year' after implication.¹⁶⁴ This was to allow the security services the time, as Heder puts it, to build an "airtight case" 'to satisfy the Pol Pot leadership's pathologically perverse sense of due process.'¹⁶⁵ It is clear from a number of confessions that such "airtight cases" predominantly

¹⁶³ For discussion of these points see Vickery, *Cambodia 1975-1982* pp.105-7, 127-129, 131-2 and 139-40; Burgler *The Eyes of the Pineapple* pp.100-101 and 103-4

¹⁶⁴ Burgler, *The Eyes of the Pineapple* p150

¹⁶⁵ Heder, "Letter to the Editor" in *Far Eastern Economic Review* (July 1982) p.3, cited in Burgler *The Eyes of the Pineapple* p.150-1

indicated guilt on behalf of the cadre in deviating from the centre's political line. This is found both in the confessions professed transgressions from policy, as well as in their descriptions of the mistakes of others.¹⁶⁶ A critical line written in the confession of Sreng reads:

The crucial question with regards to implementing the Communist Party of Kampuchea's line in conformity with our own policies [of subversion and opposition] was... knowing how to deviate legitimately from the [party] line¹⁶⁷

In this passage, Sreng (under torture and the guidance of the central security centre) describes how his treasonous network attempted to deviate *legitimately* from the centre's policy, specifically in order to hide more serious counterrevolutionary activity. The implication is that *no* deviations from the line can be legitimate, since they must be a cover for a more serious threat.

This principle had two results. Firstly, any deviation from policy was taken as tantamount to treason, and dealt with the utmost severity. I have already discussed how the ideological principle of dialectical materialism influenced this approach. The second result was that conversely, deviation from the party line could also be retrospectively attributed to cadres to legitimise their removal and reinforce their supposed commitment to a traitorous network. This meant that not only did ideology influence who was to be purged in the first place, but also that the CPK's ideology could be used as a tool to denounce those already deemed surplus to requirement. In other words, ideology also provided the purge mechanism with a legitimising aspect, a means with which to achieve its grizzly ends.

What emerges is a complicated and tripartite relationship between ideology, structure, and the purge mechanism. On the one hand, ideology drove the CPK to construct Democratic Kampuchea in particular and specific ways. Ideology also provided the purge mechanism with a tool of legitimisation. On the other hand, the structure of DK influenced the application of ideology onto the movement, and determined, to an extent, who was to be purged and why. Finally, the purge

¹⁶⁶ See for example "Planning the Past: The Forced Confession of Hu Nim" p.249, 252-4, 280, 283, 290, 304, 311-4; "Confession of Cho Chhan alias Sreng", p.4-6; and "Confession of Chheum Sam-aok alias Pang" p.5, 17-28 and 30-1

¹⁶⁷ "Confession of Cho Chhan alias Sreng" p.6

mechanism itself was used by the CPK to assert and implement its own specific ideology, and the structure of DK facilitated the use of the purge mechanism. What conclusions can we draw from this relationship? What does such a relationship tell us about the nature of Democratic Kampuchea?

Chapter IV - Conclusions

Much of this study has been spent illustrating how the regime analysed and viewed its contemporary situation, in an attempt to explain how the CPK justified its rule and what principles instructed it in the creation of the structure of DK. I have demonstrated that not only was the ideology of the central leadership very specific, but that it was also applied literally and with increasing severity as the Pol Pot faction consolidated its power. In the words of Michael Vickery, ‘policy depends on theory, and the results of policy, good or bad, may be imputed in part to the theory.’¹⁶⁸

Furthermore, I have attempted to show coherence between the structure of DK and the ideology that the CPK believed in. This coherence demonstrates that the structure of DK accurately reflected the party’s ideology, and suggests that such a structure was, in many respects, a logical and faithful translation of theory into practice. I have also asserted that such structural coherence also actually facilitated the implementation of the CPK’s ideology and policy as the Pol Pot group consolidated its power.

Finally, in analysing the relationship between ideology and structure, I have asserted that the purge mechanism was the main method by which the CPK implemented and promulgated its ideology. Furthermore, the structure of DK greatly influenced the party’s decision to use the purge mechanism as its main means of asserting its power and implementing its policy, and to a great extent determined the use of the purge as a method. In this way, the purge as a technique was simultaneously promoted by the ideology of the CPK and also reflected it, making both ideology and structure necessary (but not sufficient) conditions on their own for the spread of violence and terror that characterised the period. I would argue that far from there being ‘no satisfactory explanation... for the all-consuming series of purges’¹⁶⁹ in DK, any satisfactory explanation would demonstrate that ideology was the predominant motor for such a practice, and that the practice itself was facilitated to a great extent by the structure that had been implemented in DK.

¹⁶⁸ Vickery, *Cambodia 1975-1982* p.273

¹⁶⁹ Carney, “The Organisation of Power” p.93

On reflection then, what can this study tell us about the nature of the Cambodian revolution and the regime that it produced between 1975-79? We know from refugee testimony, demographic study and internal documentation that the Cambodian revolution produced an extremely violent and murderous regime. How are we to make sense of this?

In concluding his impressive and thorough research, Vickery contends that ‘the excesses of DK... did not spring from the brains of Pol Pot or Khieu Samphan... [as] the result of reading, or misreading, Marx or due to Stalinist or Maoist influences. They lay in the very nature of a peasant revolution, which was the only kind of revolution possible in Cambodia.’¹⁷⁰ Instead, Vickery asserts that ‘populism, and peasantism really won out over communism,’¹⁷¹ characterised by ‘the supremacy of the will of “the people”... [and] a direct relationship between people and leadership, unmediated by institutions.’¹⁷²

This explanation has two major flaws. Firstly, in claiming that the revolution developed purely as a result of conditions in the country and not as a result of CPK theory, Vickery removes causal agency from the ruling elite. In a system where power emanated from a specific central authority down a rigid and increasingly controlled hierarchical apparatus, this analysis seems incorrect. The fact that Democratic Kampuchea became increasingly coherent with the ideology of the CPK suggests that the ruling elite in the Standing Committee were progressively imposing their authority more and more throughout the period, directly as a result of the application of their ideology. Causal responsibility for the tragedy should, therefore, be attributed directly to the top of the structure, which formulated and implemented this ideology.

Secondly, Vickery confuses the regimes “declatory” ideology with its “operational” structure. The Pol Pot regime did indeed emphasise the primacy of the peasantry and the lower classes in its speeches and promulgations, but in its actions the “will of the people” was almost entirely ignored in the pursuit of the central leaderships ideologically determined aims. The leadership maintained a clear distance from the people by governing through a highly developed and ideologically driven

¹⁷⁰ Vickery, *Cambodia 1975-1982* p.306

¹⁷¹ Vickery, *Cambodia 1975-1982* p.309

¹⁷² Vickery, *Cambodia 1975-1982* p.304

system of localised authority. This governance was enacted through policies that were coherent with the CPK's ideology, and facilitated by structures that also cohered strongly with this ideology. Consequently, I would contend that far from 'look[ing] beyond ideology' to explain 'the scope and duration of violence,'¹⁷³ any explanation of the Cambodian revolution must focus consistently on the character and manifestations of the ruling elite's ideology in the implementation of their policies.

In discussing Soviet state violence, Holquist asserts that 'the oft-drawn distinction between "purges" as a purely administrative practice limited to party members and a "terror" that swirled among the general populace... is untenable.'¹⁷⁴ I would argue that this is also applicable the Cambodian case, firstly given the almost entire lack of separation between party and state, and secondly because of the way that the structure of DK and the method of purging cumulatively and exponentially increased the number of victims absorbed in the terror network. As Holquist asserts, 'rather than distinguishing power from society, totalitarianism conflates them. It seeks to encompass power and society as part of one system, to homogenise social space.'¹⁷⁵ This was exactly what occurred in Democratic Kampuchea, and all of these factors were directly linked to the ideology of the CPK. Whether or not these consequences were intended or predicted by the Pol Pot group is irrelevant; the fact is that the high degree of coherence between the declatory ideology of the movement and the operational behaviour it conducted strongly suggest that the role of ideology in creating such a "terror state" was both wide and significant.

If we accept that ideology held a great degree of causal significance in the creation of the "terror state" of Democratic Kampuchea, then many more questions arise. For example, to what extent can the participation of individuals in the system be attributed to the influence of ideology, particularly as personal loyalty becomes more influential down the administrative scale? To what extent did the CPK's ideology change as Democratic Kampuchea developed? Was the ideology of the CPK unique, and how does its implementation compare with the practices of regimes with other similar ideological principles? There are other questions that deserve further attention

¹⁷³ Jackson, "Ideology of Total Revolution" p.56

¹⁷⁴ Holquist, P., "State Violence as Technique: The Logic of Violence in Soviet Totalitarianism" in A. Weiner (ed) *Landscaping the Human Garden: Twentieth Century Population Management in a Comparative Framework* (Stanford, 2003) p.31

¹⁷⁵ Holquist, "State Violence as Technique" p.21

also, such as the extent of the role of different individuals in the Standing Committee in the development of policy and the suppression of dissent, or the extent to which the Cambodian case was an example of ‘the dynamic process of establishing a one-man dictatorship’¹⁷⁶ rather than a true oligarchy.

Despite the difficulties of researching these questions, the process of answering them and the conclusions that may be reached are important, not only for the historical record, but also because they can help tell us how and why dictatorial and authoritarian regimes emerge and develop. Indeed, the ongoing “Khmer Rouge Trials” in the UN Sponsored Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia may prove instructive in answering some of these questions. This is not least because of the focus the courtroom setting places on ascertaining the guilt or innocence of the accused individuals (who were all members of the CPK Standing Committee), but also thanks to the increased access the trials are offering to the internal documentation of the regime.¹⁷⁷ However, it must be remembered that the aims and methods of law and history are different. Regardless of the progress of and results from the trials, the Cambodian revolution deserves scholarly and historical attention to help increase our understanding of how the apparatus of a “terror state” can develop and function. Recognition and examination of the significant role radical ideology plays in this is an essential facet for an understanding of these processes.

¹⁷⁶ Bartlett, “Democratic Kampuchea: A Highly Centralised Dictatorship” p.222

¹⁷⁷ See <<http://www.eccc.gov.kh/english/>> accessed 04/01/10; for transcripts of the only completed case so far; and for the materials presented in court see <<http://www.eccc.gov.kh/english/caseInfo001.aspx>> accessed 4/1/10

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