**Holocaust in Cambodia**

**By Jeff Calkins**

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The inhumanity which continues to exist in Cambodia is beyond rational description . . .. No circumstances since the death camps of Germany more nearly describe the circumstances which presently exist in Cambodia." These were the words of Leo Cherne of the International Rescue Committee when he described what has been going on in Cambodia for the past three years.

**Sadistic Madmen**

Most of what we know about present conditions in Cambodia has come from interviews with refugees who have escaped to Thailand or North Vietnam. These refugees all tell pretty much the same stories. And the stories they tell are nothing less than sickening. As one reporter, Jack Anderson, puts it, "A half dozen sadistic madmen .. . have brought on their country the worst suffering, the worst conditions brought on any country in this bloody century." In the words of one refugee who escaped just a few months after the Communists took over Cambodia in the spring of 1975, "It appears that the Khmer Rouge, as the Cambodian Communists call themselves, may be guilty of genocide against their own people." And an Australian journalist uses the phrase "autogenocide" to describe the same conditions.

No one knows exactly how many people have died at the hands of the Khmer Rouge. One U.S. State Department official, Richard Holbrooke, has estimated the number of deaths at 1.2 million. This is also the figure given by John Barron and Anthony Paul in their authoritative account of the Cambodian holocaust, Murder of a Gentle Land. But even this figure is dated. Newsweek has estimated two million people have died ; Chang Song, a former government official, puts the figure even higher: "For three long years men , women, and children have been taken away and are unheard from. **Out of 7 million people in my country, as many as 2.5 million have been systematically slaughtered** .. .. The regime of Pol Pot [leader of the Khmer Rouge] is killing its own citizens."

No matter at what precise figure the grisly total is placed, the human suffering that it represents is staggering. It is as if approximately 57 million Americans had been systematically executed, starved, and beaten to death by their own government. When the Khmer Rouge took over they marked for execution anyone who had ever had anything to do with the previous government, who had ever held a professional job, who had a seventh grade education or more. Most of these executions have already been carried out. According to refugee accounts, such wholesale slaughter began immediately after the takeover. Moreover, in a literally obscene manner, the bloodguiltiness of the Khmer Rouge regime is glorified in Cambodia's new national anthem. **The anthem's words are full of an almost satanic obsession with bloodletting:**

"The red, red blood splatters the cities and plains of the Cambodian fatherland.

"The sublime blood of the workers and peasants,

"The blood of revolutionary combatants of both sexes,

"That blood spills out into great indignation and a resolute urge to fight.

"17 April, that day under the revolutionary flag,

"The blood certainly liberates us from slavery."

**The Bloodbath**

Upon taking power, the Khmer Rouge immediately began the premeditated extermination of anyone who had been or might become a potential opponent. They began with firing squads, but soon decided that bullets were "too precious" to waste on victims, and resorted to other, more hideous methods of execution.

For example, there were the men in General En Sam's unit who had surrendered to the Khmer Rouge at the end of the war. Intelligence reports described the scene: "Each man was blindfolded, led to the edge of a ditch and beaten to death with a hoe. The executions took most of the day to complete. Although the first few groups of officers were not aware that they were going to die, the latter groups struggled strenuously to escape since **the air was permeated with the stench of blood**."

Another instance of Khmer Rouge cruelty bears a poignant resemblance to the execution scene in the TV series Holocaust in which a number of helpless Jewish men were stripped of their clothing and machine-gunned down. As one refugee tells the story, on April 21 , 1975, Khmer Rouge troops took prisoner a number of government troops (about 200) at a school. After taking their weapons, the Communists told their prisoners that they would be taken to the capital to hail Prince Sihanouk, a former (and non-Communist) leader of Cambodia. The prisoners were herded into several trucks, which were driven about eight kilometers south. Then, suddenly, the trucks halted and the prisoners were ordered into a field beside the road. Suddenly explosions erupted in their midst. The Khmer Rouge had led their captives into a mine field which they detonated as soon as the prisoners had reached the center. After the dust cleared , the Communists threw hand grenades into the group of screaming wounded. But some were still alive, crying out in pain. A squad armed with pistols moved through the corpse-strewn field to finish them off.

**Villagers Slaughtered**

At the village of Kauk Ton, all 360 inhabitants- every last man, woman, and child- were machine gunned because some of the men were suspected of being spies. At the village Khal Kaber, the Khmer Rouge buried approximately forty wives and daughters of former government officials up to their necks, then stabbed them in the throat one by one. At Mongkol Borei, ten families, about sixty people, were rounded up, their hands were tied behind their backs, and they were taken to a clearing. According to one refugee account reprinted in Commentary ("After the Dominoes Fell," by Carl Gershman, May 1978), what followed was a sickening, barbarous atrocity: "Weeping, sobbing, begging for their lives, the prisoners were pushed into a clearing among the banana trees, then formed into a ragged line, the terrified mothers and children clustering around each head of family. With military orderliness, the Communists thrust each official forward one at a time and forced him to kneel between two soldiers armed with bayonet-tipped AK-47 rifles. The soldiers then stabbed the victim simultaneously, one through the chest and the other through the back. **Family by family, the Communists pressed the slaughter, moving methodically down the line**. As each man lay dying, his anguished, horror struck wife and children were dragged up to the body. The women, forced to kneel, also received simultaneous bayonet thrusts. The children and the babies, last to die, were stabbed where they stood."

**The Cruel Exodus Out of Phnom Penh**

On the 17th of April, 1975, the Communists seized the Cambodian capital of Phnom Penh**. Within two days they forced everyone who had been living in the city to leave their homes and march into the jungle. The marchers were deprived of food , water, shelter at night, and medicine. Soon the old people and children began to die. Anyone who fell behind was given one or two curt warnings and then shot. The dead were left unburied: The smell of rotting flesh was said to be unbearable.**

This was a march of an incredible three million people. Women and children, the sick and the elderly, were all forced to keep pace or be shot. Pregnant women had to give birth along the roadside. Few of the children 'survived.

As it turned out, not only had the people of Phnom Penh been forcibly evacuated, but people in every major city and town in Cambodia had been forced to leave their homes and march into the jungle.

As a sign of special cruelty, the Communists concentrated on emptying the hospitals first. When Communist troops stormed the Preah Ket Melea Hospital in Phnom Penh, they shouted to everyone who was there, "Out! Everybody get out! Get out!" Operations in progress were interrupted, with both patients and doctors forced to leave. As Barron and Paul describe it in Murder of a Gentle Land: "Hundreds of men, women and children in pajamas limped, hobbled, struggled out into the streets, where the midday sun had raised the temperature to more than 100 degrees .... One man carried his son, whose legs had just been amputated. The bandages on both stumps were red with blood , and the son ... was screaming, 'You can't take me like this! Please kill me!' " Lost children, thirsty and hungry, helpless, were among the most pitiable sights of the evacuation. Parents clung desperately to their small children lest they be crushed by the enormous crowd.

But worse was even yet to come as the refugees were herded in to labor camps and forced to live on starvation rations. Pin Yathay, a refugee who later escaped to Thailand, recently told a Washington, D. C., news conference: "I will now tell you a story that I lived myself. [Because the Khmer Rouge purposely forced people to work long hours on starvation rations] a teacher ate the flesh of her own sister. She was later caught; she was beaten from morning to night until she died, in the rain, in front of the whole village as an example, and her child was crying beside her."

**Starvation and Slavery**

In the labor camps each family had to build its own hut without materials or tools. Thereafter everyone was forced to work from six in the morning to five at night- and sometimes until II if there was a full moon seven days a week. Except for the midday break, Khmer Rouge guards allowed neither rest nor conversation.

*Murder of a Gentle Land* relates this nightmarish incident about what life is like in these camps: "About mid-June, while working in the field , Ngy stepped on a sharp piece of bamboo which penetrated almost all the way through his foot. His whole leg swelled, he developed a high fever and pains shot up to his waist. . .. That night .. . [Communist] village committee members took turns berating him: 'You must learn to live with pain. You must not be soft. You must not be lazy, trying to get out of work .' There followed a litany: Ngy was free. Ngy was equal. Ngy was happy." There are no holidays from the relentless work. There are no days off. A meal is a cup of rice gruel. The only relief from the grinding regimen is political meetings held every two weeks. The meetings are held in the communal dining halls and are led by Khmer Rouge administrators. The theme is always the same: Work, work, work harder.

**Life in the Slave State**

For those Cambodians who have survived the forced labor, the starvation diet, the forced marches, the executions, life remains a nightmarish , egalitarian hell. In the words of one writer who is apologetic for the Khmer Rouge, "Complete equality prevails: Every member of the cooperative receives one black linen suit of clothes from the state every year. ... the . . . noteworthy characteristic of this society is the principle of egalitarianism, really 'collective socialism' . . .. There is highly centralized state control which obligates the state to distribute everything from rice to the annual suit of clothes for each citizen" ("Kampuchea , Three Years Old," Seven Days magazine, May 19, 1978).
Even in Communist China, the communes pay each person according to his work. In Cambodia all positive incentives have been eliminated. There is only the ever present threat that if one falls behind in his work he will be scolded and later shot. In the labor camps it is against the rules to engage in any kind of philosophical or political conversation. **It is against the rules to read books, or sing traditional folk songs, or even to dance**. And anyone who breaks the rules in the labor camps is subject to immediate execution usually being clubbed to death with a pick handle.

**The Khmer Rouge has deliberately separated families, sending children away to work in other provinces**. There is no recreation, no gaiety or amusement, no leisure time. There are no books. When the Khmer Rouge took over, they ransacked libraries, offices, and archives in order to find any written material to destroy. Hundreds of thousands of books have been burned. **The book burnings have been part of a deliberate campaign on the part of the Khmer Rouge to root out every last vestige of the past in Cambodian culture.**

There is no private property. Everything belongs to "the people," who are, of course; "represented" by the Khmer Rouge. The only personal possessions a person is allowed are his one suit of clothes and a sleeping mat.

**Tyrants and Sadists**

Who are the sadists who, as leaders of the Khmer Rouge, have committed these ghastly crimes? According to John Barron, they are a remarkably homogeneous lot. He told an interviewer for *Human Events* magazine : "They all came from middle-class families, all were educated in the 1950s in France: they all became ardent Communists at a time when the French Communist party was very much under the Stalinist wing of the Soviet party . . .. They were all, or most of them, wedded to theory. They were all, with one exception, very puritanical. . . . All of them had spent most of their adult life outside of Cambodia, or in the jungles detached from the mainstream of their country's life. None of them has ever worked with his or her hands, yet they extol physical labor above all else" ("Cambodia: The Face of Evil," *Human Events*, May 21 , 1977).

One refugee suggested that the leaders of the Khmer Rouge think of themselves as the supreme Communists, who look down on other Communists who haven't had the "vision" or "courage" to do what they have done. **Clearly they are men obsessed with utopian visions**. They believe that every individual in Cambodia should be happy to spend his life toiling in the fields to serve the will of the Khmer Rouge.

Their beliefs, in the words of one intelligence report, are "a grotesque caricature of Marxism mixed with radical French leftist intellectualism and stirred up in the crucible of the jungle."

**The Deafening Silence**

Before the fall of Cambodia, a number of prominent Western politicians and commentators urged that America drop all aid to the anti Communist government then in power. **Senator George McGovern (D-South Dakota) said that the Cambodians would be "better off" if the U.S. let them work things out "in their own way."** Rep. Bella Abzug of New York said that 100,000 lives would be saved by refusing to aid the anti-Communist government. New York Times columnist Anthony Lewis said that "more American military aid- if it has any effect- can only prolong the agony of Cambodia." Where are the people who were oh-so-concerned about human suffering when the anti-Communists were in power?

Where are they now? The world has heard American ambassadors carry on about "human rights" and not once mention the atrocities in Cambodia. **And while President Carter belatedly described the Cambodian Communist regime as "the worst violator of human rights in the world today," his public pronouncements on human rights have tended in the main to ignore the Cambodian issue. And where is the U.N. with all its pompous rhetoric about human rights?** The few protests against the Khmer Rouge's terrible cruelties have met with deafening silence and inaction. (See box on page 41.)

The fact is that in world reaction to the atrocities in Cambodia there is a morbid parallel to the international blindness that first met the news of the death camps in Nazi Germany. **Even today one detects a distinct reluctance on the part of the liberal media- the major American television networks, and several big city daily newspapers- to expose the full horrors of the Pol Pot Khmer Rouge regime.**

**The Great Tribulation**

One cannot, or should not, read about the cruelties of the Cambodian Communists without thinking of the Bible's prophecy of the Great Tribulation: "For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be" (Matt. 24:21). Quite literally, it is difficult to imagine any worse tribulation than except possibly if it were to take place on a wider scale. At any rate, the atrocities of the Khmer Rouge are sobering reminders of this Bible prophecy.

In the same context, the words of Pin Yathay are equally haunting. Most of his family met horrible deaths at the hands of the Khmer Rouge: Some had been starved, others died from disease or had been clubbed. That left only his child, his wife and himself, sick and swollen, forced to do hard manual labor. He spoke for many helpless Cambodian peasants when he said, "You understand at this point that death seemed normal. It would have been a deliverance."

Deliverance indeed! Pin Yathay's words evoke the prophecy of Revelation: "And in those days shall men seek death, and shall not find it; and shall desire to die, and death shall flee from them" (Rev. 9:6).

And yet, despite the human suffering- the little children left homeless, the families ripped apart, the innocent, simple villagers hacked to death because they violated some arbitrary rule imposed on them by their overlords- the Khmer Rouge press on in building their utopian hell. They have turned their country into a death camp, and the scripture which Alexander Solzhenitsyn has used to vividly describe the Siberian labor camps of the Soviet Union even more aptly portrays the Khmer Rouge: "Neither repented they of their murders" (Rev. 9:21).

In the prophetic sense it is significant that one writer has used the word "energumen" to describe Cambodia's official ruler, Pol Pot. In political parlance, an energumen is a tireless, crazed fanatic who would kill his own family to further his cause. But perhaps there is something here which is even more than mere human fanaticism. One cannot read the accounts of the atrocities, the horrors, and 'the butcheries which Pol Pot and his coterie of fanatics have committed without thinking of the literal meaning of energumen : "demon-possessed."

The Cambodian holocaust is not the Great Tribulation of Bible prophecy, but it is a ghastly forerunner of such demoniacal inhumanity, a sobering reminder that we are living in a world which is held in the grip of mankind's great archenemy, Satan the devil (Rev. 12:9), who is wrathful because he knows that his time of rule is soon to draw to a close (verse 12).

**The Hope of a Better World**

The holocaust in Cambodia is, politically, the result of utopian fanaticism. It is grisly testimony to what happens when man tries to create the Kingdom of God on earth by himself

Indeed, as the eminent philosopher Eric Voeglin has warned, every time man attempts to create a millennium on earth through his own efforts, he ends up instead creating a hell.

That is the irony: In their zeal to build a utopia, no matter what the human cost, the Khmer Rouge has demonstrated the crying need for not more of man's government, but God's government to bring about a real millennium of peace and prosperity.

Contrast the suffering and pain which this article has only briefly touched on to the vision of the prophet Isaiah : "They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea" (Isa. II :9). There was a reason that Christ told His followers to pray for His Kingdom to come. The blood of millions of dead Cambodians cries out for that Kingdom.

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**The Holocaust: An Eyewitness Account**

**Editor's note: The following is a firsthand . account of a former U.S. State Department official who witnessed the results of the terrible cruelties of the Khmer Rouge while he was working in the refugee camps just before the Communist takeover in April 1975.**

He's. dead now. Not surprising when you consider he wasn't much alive when I saw him a short while ago. Most of them will die; even the few that had been kept alive at the child nutrition center on the outskirts of Phnom Penh where the weekly death toll averaged from twenty to thirty-six percent of admissions. These children were starving slowly. Debilitated and weakened, they contracted a host of other diseases and perished before anyone realized they were alive at all. Returning from Cambodia after having seen these happy, resilient people besieged by war is an agonizing and indelible nightmare. As a frequent traveler, I feel the character of the Cambodians, of all the peoples I've encountered, is one of the most appealing. They are gentle, kind, quiet and trusting. I never had an unpleasant moment caused by a Cambodian, for every smile is returned and every laugh soulful and sincere. They attempted to hide nothing and seemed incapable of deceit. It is this that accentuates the horror of seeing their little children lifeless or limbless, or with gaping abdominal wounds purposely inflicted by a vengeful foe, whom, until recently, were simply referred to by the Cambodians as "the other side."

It was with shock and disbelief that I saw photographs presented me by a Cambodian officer. They were taken at the February 2, 1975, massacre at Kompong Speu. The Khmer Rouge penetrated feeble village defenses, burning an entire Catholic Relief Services refugee village to the ground. There was no accident in the pictures of mutilated corpses: women with babies in their arms, knifed and slashed open; children charred into unrecognizable monsters, burned alive in their straw huts. I saw the smoldering ashes, the leveled village, the clay cooking pots still containing the simple fare the refugee women were preparing. Their possessions were scorched and stark ... bicycles, water jars, cooking pots; an ugly, sad aftermath of rage and hate. Ten children had been kidnapped, later found along the roadside with their throats cut.

In the midst of the ashes, the little ones that had not been killed or kidnapped by the Khmer Rouge came out to see us, fire-ash dirty. Those beautiful little children with their sweet, innocent smiles. A few of the adults left alive just sifted through the rubble, mechanically, vacantly carrying water to their little gardens spared by the fire.

Cambodia is not just another nameless, faceless place that newspapers have made legend with their exorbitant tales of suffering and bloodshed. It is a land of love in God's own sense of the word. It is a rich, beautiful land where a seed strewn out takes root and will grow. A land whose gentle, soft-spoken people and sweet children will melt your heart. Such an unlikely place for tragedy; such an unlikely place for war, yet five years of it brought these people to the verge of disaster. To see little children dying, their tiny bodies swollen or shriveled by disease, is a disgrace to humanity.

To see them carried by weakened mothers, hardly able to walk into refugee camps, is heartrending. These camps, for the most part, were operated by 'Catholic Relief Services and other U.S. voluntary agencies. A British doctor treating people from the camps who met us after a morning of visiting clinics was completely overwrought and visibly disturbed, recounting: "I've had a perfectly dreadful morning. Children are dying all over the place." It was all said in an outwardly stiff manner, yet so thinly veiled, a profound grief.

The handful of American and expatriate "do-gooders," as Washington-based people are fond of calling them, have sacrificed and labored so hard, and .. . it isn't easy to take. Picture seeing a young boy in a simple green fatigue uniform, his teenage face staring vacantly at the remnants of his legs. Perhaps this story should not be written.

Perhaps it is only a self evident epilogue. Still somehow it must be told in the hopes and prayers that someone, somewhere, somehow can resolve the terrible suffering of the children. What manner of mankind is it that is capable of looking into the face of an innocent, sweet child and . . . slashing his throat?

-John Christopher Fine

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**Why the United Nations Won't Act**

In the face of the terrible suffering which has taken place in Cambodia for the last three and a half years, one would think that a body called the United Nations Commission on Human Rights would at least have issued, in the name of simple humanity, a condemnation of Khmer Rouge brutality.

**But the Human Rights Commission's response has been feeble indeed**. The body, which regularly issues condemnations of the world's "approved whipping boys"-Israel, South Africa and Chile-recently reluctantly managed to send the record of "allegations" of human rights violations to the government of what is now called "Democratic Kampuchea," inviting it to respond.

This action was the product of a British-sponsored initiative originally calling in strong terms for a "complete investigation" into the atrocities committed by the Khmer Rouge. Before the resolution could be passed, however, it had to be considerably watered down to satisfy the Third World block on the Human Rights Commission.

For their own part, the Western delegates involved stress that getting the Human Rights Commission to take even the most emasculated action against any country other than Israel, South Africa or Chile is a tremendous step forward. They point out that countries like the Soviet Union and Uganda have seats on the Human Rights Commission, which makes it difficult to get anything done.

In the Cambodian case, the Khmer Rouge surprised everyone by even deigning to respond to the grave allegations of genocide. But the nature of their response was no surprise. Ignoring the charges, they instead accused the British of the very crimes they have committed themselves. The Kampuchean Foreign Ministry said: "The English imperialists, therefore, have no right to speak of the rights of man. More than that, they are the ones who are accused. The world knows well their barbarous and abject nature. The world knows that in Britain the English imperialist monopoly capitalists are living in opulence on top of piles of corpses, belonging to those whom they have pillaged, exploited and oppressed. across the centuries."

Why are the Third World countries so loathe to condemn the worst horrors since World War II? A member of a Western delegation told The Plain Truth that **the main reason is that if the horrors in one Third World country, Cambodia, are exposed today, the horrors in other Third World countries will reach the light of day tomorrow. The Third World delegates feel that if a strong anti-Khmer Rouge resolution came out of the Human Rights Commission, it would be "their turn next."**

Beyond this, Third World countries are very jealous about their sovereign pride. They consider human rights violations to be internal matters, the exposure of which might breach and infringe upon their sovereignty. And, as one delegate told us, Third World countries are loathe to take any criticism of any kind from their "former colonial masters," the Western powers. Of course, it is only the Western powers who are likely to bring up the matter of human rights violations in Communist or socialist countries.

For their own part, there is even a reluctance among some Western delegations, including that of the United States, to really get vociferous about the horrors in socialist or Communist countries such as Cambodia. Part of the reason for this is Guilt (with a capital "G") over participation by the United States and some of its allies in the Indochina war. Another major factor is cultural relativism. This is the idea that human rights (that is, civil and political rights) are not really universal, but only a concern of "Western culture," and therefore not really applicable to the Third World. Certain nations are more or less "expected" to deal harshly with their populations.

Along this same line, it is stressed that the economic and social distribution of goods in Third World countries must take precedence over such "luxuries" as human freedom from governmental abridgement of life, liberty or property. The problem with this thinking is that the most gross dictator can justify the torture or slavery of his suffering countrymen on the grounds that it is necessary to ensure that " the people" -meaning those left after the bloody purging- get their economic right to a "fair" distribution of wealth.

The Human Rights Commission's limp response to the atrocities in Cambodia also graphically reveals the inability of the United Nations and its related agencies to deal with such issues. When, as one Western official told us, it becomes "bad manners" to criticize too strongly the horrors committed by a Third World regime, it is clear that the U.N. itself has lost all sense of proportion. This ugly reality is further amplified by a recent and very vivid example: In the face of the continued valiant efforts on the part of the British delegates to bring human rights violations in Communist countries to the U.N.'s attention, Third World delegates huffily voted to deny Britain its seat on the Human Rights Commission!

A former American representative to the Human Rights Commission, William Buckley, summed up the U.N.'s moral debility very well when he said: "In the United Nations, one is not permitted to tell the truth, because protocol is higher than truth."