

Cambodia Under Pol Pot - II

Lead: With the end of the war in Vietnam in 1975, Cambodia too was seized by a communist regime, a very brutal one.

Intro.: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.

Content: Pol Pot was born into a peasant family and then began preparations for the Buddhist clergy. He dropped out, tried his hand at carpentry and then joined Ho Chi Minh anti-French resistance in the 1940s. On a technical scholarship he studied in Paris, but spent most of his

time on revolutionary activities and had to return to Cambodia when he failed his exams and his funds were cut off.

By the 1960s he was hard at work building up the Communist Party, known as the Khmer Rouge. Largely ineffective against the Cambodian government of Prince Norodom Sihanouk when the U.S. backed coup of 1970 installed an anti-Communist regime, the fortunes of the Khmer Rouge began to improve. With arms supplied by North Vietnam and taking advantage of the deteriorating situation in South Vietnam, the Khmer Rouge seized the capital of Phnom Penh in April 1975 and changed the

name of the nation to Kampuchea. Sihanouk returned, but not for long.

By early 1976 Pol Pot was the undisputed power in the country and began one of the most brutal exercises in social upheaval in modern history. Believing they could better control the masses if they were in the countryside, the cities were emptied, industry and commerce were abolished. Religion was banned, temples were destroyed, and Buddhist monks were routinely executed. Anyone having any connection with the previous regime was rounded up, often brutally tortured and then shot. Between one and three million Cambodians lost their lives at the hands of Pol Pot before he too was overthrown by a

Vietnamese invasion in 1979. Despite his tyrannical reputation, he was significant player in Khmer Rouge affairs until the late 1990s.

Research assistance for this series on Pol Pot was provided by David Arthur.

At the University of Richmond, this is Dan Roberts.

Copyright by Dan Roberts Enterprises, Inc.

Resources

Chandler, David. *Brother Number One: A Political Biography of Pol Pot*. .Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1992.

Jackson, Carl D. *Cambodia, 1975-1978: Rendezvous with Death* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989.

Kelemaen, Paul. "How Pol Pot Came to Power," *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* 20(4, 1988): 62-71.

Kiernan, Ben. *The Pol Pot Regime: Race, Power, and Genocide in Cambodia Under the Khmer Rouge, 1975-1979*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996.