

POLITICAL COMMITTEE MEETING No. 3, January 25, 1979

Present: Barnes, Britton, Clark, Dixon, Hawkins, D. Jenness,  
L. Jenness, Kramer, Lyons, Ring, Seigle, Stone,  
Waters

Guest: Zárate

Chair: Hawkins

AGENDA: 1. Africa Tour  
2. New Zealand and Australia  
3. Membership Policy  
4. Cambodia  
5. World Movement  
6. Puget Sound District  
7. Birmingham Branch  
8. Joseph Hansen Publishing Fund

1. AFRICA TOUR

(Baumann, Harsch, Hart, Musa, Novack, Pérez, and Schwarz  
invited for this point.)

Harsch reported.

Dixon reported.

Discussion

2. NEW ZEALAND AND AUSTRALIA

(Baumann, Novack, and Pérez invited for this point.)

Waters reported on tour of New Zealand and Australia.

Discussion

3. MEMBERSHIP POLICY

(Novack invited for this point.)

Seigle initiated discussion on policy on admitting into  
party membership individual former leaders and members  
of opponent organizations.

Discussion

4. CAMBODIA

(Baumann, Evans, Feldman, Novack, Pérez, and Zimmermann  
invited for this point.)

Feldman reported. (See attached.)

(over)

Discussion

Motion: To approve the report.

Carried.

5. WORLD MOVEMENT

(Baumann, Novack, and Pérez invited for this point.)

Barnes reported.

Discussion

6. PUGET SOUND DISTRICT

Britton reported on the following proposals: That the Political Committee call a joint membership meeting January 27 of the Seattle and Tacoma branches to establish a Puget Sound District.

That the proposed agenda be the following:

1. Report on Political Committee proposal to establish Puget Sound District
2. Report from Boeing Fraction
3. Financial Report
4. Election of District Committee
5. Adoption of District Bylaws

That Gannon be the reporter for the Political Committee.

Motion: To approve all of the above proposals.

Carried.

7. BIRMINGHAM BRANCH

Stone reported on proposal from the Birmingham organizing committee to constitute a party branch in Birmingham.

Motion: To constitute a branch in Birmingham, Alabama.

Carried.

8. JOSEPH HANSEN PUBLISHING FUND

(Baumann, Gallo, Novack, and Prince invited for this point.)

Barnes reported on the launching of a special \$20,000 fund to publish speeches and articles by Joseph Hansen. (See February 2 Militant and enclosed letter.)

Discussion

Meeting adjourned.

# Vietnam's invasion of Kampuchea

By Allen Myers

**The sudden escalation of the Kampuchea-Vietnam border war is a major setback for the peoples of both countries and for the cause of socialism on a world scale.**

The long-expected dry season offensive began on December 25. By January 7, the attackers had captured the Kampuchean capital, Phnompenh, which was apparently not defended.

Also captured on the same day was the major Kampuchean port, Kompong Som. Forces loyal to the Pol Pot regime recaptured Kompong Som on January 15, but fighting is continuing in and around the city.

Once Phnompenh had fallen, the attackers drove rapidly westward, reaching the border with Thailand in less than two weeks.

## The new regime

Broadcasts from occupied Phnompenh claimed that the attackers were the army of the Kampuchean United Front for National Salvation. The KUFNS was set up on Vietnamese-occupied territory in the eastern part of Kampuchea last year.

The KUFNS is reportedly headed by defectors from Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge regime who led an unsuccessful army revolt last May. Most of the members are thought to be ethnic Kampuchians from southern Vietnam.

Hanoi has denied that its forces were involved in the attack—a claim that has deservedly met wide disbelief.

The KUFNS is believed to have had at most 20,000 troops, against the 80,000-100,000 of the Pol Pot government. Bombing raids followed by tank columns cleared the way for the invading

of internationalism. Both regimes preferred to encourage feelings of national chauvinism among peoples who only a few years earlier were symbols of internationalism for the whole world.

There are conflicting claims concerning the degree of popular support for the new regime. But the Vietnamese involvement in its establishment will make it appear to many Kampuchians as a creature of Hanoi—especially if, as many observers are predicting, the Vietnamese find it necessary to maintain garrisons in the country to counter guerrilla assaults from the Khmer Rouge.

## Fruits of Stalinism

The Vietnamese invasion follows years of escalating warfare along the Vietnam-Kampuchea border.

Because of the secrecy and lack of reliable information from both sides in that conflict, it is impossible to tell whether Hanoi or the Khmer Rouge bore the greater responsibility for initiating the border fighting.

But it is quite clear that neither side treated the dispute in a spirit

of internationalism. Both regimes preferred to encourage feelings of national chauvinism among peoples who only a few years earlier were symbols of internationalism for the whole world.

The conflict is thus one more rotten fruit of Stalinism. Both regimes were headed by privileged bureaucrats committed to building "socialism in one country." Inevitably, that means "socialism in *our* country—and to hell with the rest."

The criminal absurdity of "socialism in one country" was most clearly illustrated by the efforts of the Pol Pot regime to isolate Kampuchea from virtually the entire world.

It is not necessary to credit all the horror stories about Kampuchea that have appeared in the capitalist press. Nor is it possible, given the lack of adequate information, to determine the exact nature of the regime established by the Khmer Rouge after their military victory in 1975.

But the Kampuchean CP claimed it was building

"socialism" in a peasant society lacking virtually any industry, in isolation. This would have been sufficient to condemn the Kampuchean masses to decades of needless poverty.

It would clearly be in the interests of the working masses of the three countries of Indochina to develop the greatest possible degree of economic, political, and military co-operation.

But in the long run, the attempt by the Vietnamese leaders to impose their will by force or arms can only hamper real co-operation, create new sources of conflict, and provide openings for imperialist intervention.

## Sino-Soviet conflict

The Stalinist bureaucracies in both Moscow and Peking also bear a large measure of responsibility for the Vietnam-Kampuchea war. Rather than use their influence to encourage a negotiated settlement of the dispute, the Soviet and Chinese leaders have attempted to use the Indochinese countries as pawns

in their conflict with each other.

When Stalin first advanced the bureaucratic theory of "socialism in one country" more than 50 years ago, the Trotskyist Left Opposition predicted that this would lead to the national chauvinist degeneration not only of the Soviet Communist Party but also of any CP that accepted the theory.

The accuracy of this prediction is being confirmed anew in Indochina today. Revolutionary internationalism is not a luxury that must wait on the satisfaction of national needs; it is a burning necessity for the success of struggles by the working masses in every country.

Defence of their own privileges makes the narrow bureaucratic regimes in both Kampuchea and Vietnam incapable of internationalism. The struggle for the creation of fraternal relations between the two states can be successful only if it becomes part of a larger struggle against the bureaucracies themselves and for their replacement of their rule by a regime of socialist democracy.



AP Photo/Associated Press. Released under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike license.

# Socialists and the Indo-China war

The Vietnamese invasion of Kampuchea (Cambodia), in alliance with an indigenous opposition movement, is not the first effort of one Communist regime to overthrow another. The Soviet government twice intervened militarily in eastern Europe to overthrow communist governments—in Hungary in 1956, and in Czechoslovakia in 1968.

At least two differences distinguish the Vietnamese intervention from the Soviet. First, the Soviets ousted regimes reputed to be seeking a "liberalizing" form of communism. In the present case, a relatively "liberal" communist regime, the Vietnamese, is engaged in overthrowing a xenophobic and brutally repressive communist government. The Vietnam-sponsored Kampuchean government has declared itself committed to restoring liberties, freedom of religion, and normal international relations.

The Soviet interventions elicited widespread protests by governments and political movements throughout the world—including socialist ones. But the Pol Pot government has few foreign defenders; its record of brute force and murderous coercion is so odious that even Vietnam's enemies hesitate to come to the aid of the Pol Pot regime. China itself appears to be washing its hands, at least for the time being.

Second, the configuration of world politics is now qualitatively different from that of the 1950s and 1960s. Then, the most salient international conflicts revolved around the confrontation between world capitalism and world communism, in spite of divisions within each camp. Now, with the growing number of professed socialist states and socialist-led national movements, and in spite of the continuing Soviet-U.S. rivalry, the most salient conflicts in world politics involve those among communists and socialists—for example, the Sino-Soviet antagonism, and (though not necessarily exclusively) the conflicts in southern Africa,

Eritrea-Ethiopia, and most dramatically now in Indochina.

## Socialist conflict.

World socialism has "come of age," not putting an end to international conflict, but adding its own kind (modernizers vs. agrarians, centralizers vs. decentralizers, nationalists vs. regionalists, authoritarians vs. democrats, market-socialists vs. command-socialists, etc.) to those of capitalist origins.

The capitalist governments and their policy makers are adjusting their understanding, and their strategies, to the realities of a new era in world politics. We socialists must begin adjusting ours, too, at the cost of cynicism, disillusionment, and just plain loss of credibility, if we don't.

No less than others, socialists can no longer assume that socialism automatically brings enduring peace. Nor can we escape the realities of conflict among socialists and socialist states by labeling the side we like as "truly" socialist and the side we dislike as "not really" socialist, or some other ghastly epithet like "fascist" or "reactionary." We have to face the realities—the bad and the good, the contradictions—of both socialism and capitalism, so that we may all the more forcefully oppose capitalism and the more honestly, and hence more effectively, improve upon and develop socialism—as a system of social relations, as a political theory, and as an ethic of values in the service of expanding human freedom.

## Questions for socialists.

The issues in the Indochina war are still largely obscure, involving as they do great power politics among the U.S., China, and the Soviet Union, and national hostilities among the Indochinese peoples and states. But the war should make it clear that socialists, and especially American socialists, need to exert fresh thinking on some fundamental questions, such as:

•How do we distinguish "socialist internationalism" from imperialism?  
•When, if at all, is it right for socialists to advocate war?

•What are the criteria for relations between socialist states?

•What are the criteria for relations between socialist and capitalist states?

•By what standards—of human rights, civil liberties, social relations, and governmental forms—shall we judge socialist societies?

•What are the appropriate standards for socialists in capitalist states to apply in judging their respective governments' foreign policies?

Answers to such questions will be hard to come by. But it has been almost as hard to raise these questions among socialists (at least American socialists) for serious examination, and to impress upon ourselves the urgency of pursuing them in honest inquiry leading to historically valid answers, however tentative.

## Socialists and the war.

At the present writing, with the little information available, it seems to us that Vietnam is without justification in its invasion of Kampuchea. This notwithstanding the fact that the Pol Pot regime's brutalities in subordinating human needs and values to a preconceived system of production, rather than organizing production to serve developing human needs, are odious to us, as to others, and are not consistent with our ideas of socialism.

None of the big powers have played an honorable role in current Indochina affairs. China and the Soviet Union have subordinated to their own rivalry and national objectives attempts at reconciling Vietnamese and Kampuchean and at encouraging Kampuchean and Vietnamese opponents of the Pol Pot regime to achieve change without foreign intervention.

American policy bears equal, if not greater, responsibility for the tragic affairs in Indochina. Having waged a brutal and devastating war against revolution in Vietnam, Laos, and Kampuchea, the U.S. has refused to help these countries reconstruct (as it *did* help the much mightier Germany and Japan after World War II). Though the Carter administration has denounced the Pol Pot government's anti-human rights record, it "tilted" toward Kampuchea against Vietnam from considerations of big power maneuvering vis-à-vis China and the Soviet Union.

That in turn strengthened Vietnamese "hawks" fearing Chinese encirclement. And withholding aid to and diplomatic relations with Vietnam strengthened those Vietnamese seeking a greater Indochina "federation" built on Mekong River development to put over a policy of force to bring the Kampuchean in.

American socialists, we believe, should not take the side of one against the other in the Vietnam-Kampuchea conflict. We should exert whatever influence we may have toward stopping the war, toward Vietnamese withdrawal from Kampuchea, and toward a more democratic socialism in Indochina.

Above all, we should seek to influence American foreign policy toward speedy diplomatic relations with and generous aid to both Vietnam and Kampuchea, as well as Laos, and toward "de-linking" American Indochina policy from its China and Soviet policy.

That would be consistent with being helpful as socialists in the effort to replace national animosities with international friendship between two socialist states, and it would be consistent with acting, as American citizens, to actualize professed American objectives of promoting international peace and cooperation and respect for the right of each nation to self-determination. ■

From the February, 1979 issue of Lutte Ouvriere's  
monthly magazine Class Struggle.

## **CAMBODIA: The Only Question Is Who Really Represents the People's Will?**

The arrival of the Vietnamese forces in Phnom Penh seems not only to have brought down Pol Pot's regime but also to have dashed any support it had in the world, since no one seems willing to defend it any more. Pol Pot's envoy, former Prince Sihanouk, is careful to dissociate himself from the regime. Even the Chinese leadership has hinted that it defends Cambodia's independence more than Pol Pot's regime.

It seems that if the Vietnamese forces had been able to overthrow the regime without invading Cambodia, everyone would have applauded.

As a matter of fact Pol Pot's regime hardly seems to have carried much popular support within Cambodia itself. There is not the slightest evidence that the people rose up against the Vietnamese forces in order to defend Cambodia's regime.

Had Cambodian people attempted to do so, they might have failed, since it is indeed difficult to resist a well-equipped and powerful army.

However, whether finally defeated or victorious, the people would have been reported to have stepped in and fought. Supposing that after the Cuban revolution the U.S. army had invaded Cuba, the Cuban people would certainly not have allowed the slightest doubt as to the popularity of the Castroist regime, even if the latter had finally been defeated.

So much so that the U.S. army never embarked on such an expedition, except through Cuban migrants, in the failed Bay of Pigs invasion.

And one cannot but remember that the only reason why the Russian army invaded Czechoslovakia without fighting one battle in 1968, was that the Czech leaders never asked the people to fight the invaders.

As regards Cambodia, its army seems to have preserved its organization only to refuse to fight and to reach the Thai border all the sooner.

However it is difficult to know whether the reasons that prompted the North Vietnamese leaders to militarily overthrow the Cambodian

regime are equally valid in view of the interests of both the Vietnamese and the Cambodian people. One thing however is certain: the United States has no right to condemn them, since it fought the Cambodian and the Vietnamese people for years, nor does France, which had done exactly the same some years earlier (and which nowadays still readily sends its troops to Africa to back this or that dictator), nor does any of the great nations which use violence as soon as their interests are at stake.

It cannot of course be claimed that the Vietnamese rulers are genuinely defending the interests of the Vietnamese people, and even less those of any of the other peoples in that area. These leaders however long stood for the interests of the peoples in that area, first in the face of French imperialism, and then against U.S. imperialism. They did so by waging war on imperialism with the material and moral help of the people in that area. Even today, it may be the case that they still represent these interests, in spite of the intervention in Cambodia and the negative sides it may have.

Whatever their right to an independent existence, all ex-colonial countries have been coming up against the size of the small national territories designed and handed over to them by imperialism. Under the French colonial rule, Annam, Laos, Cambodia, Tonking and Cochin-China had been merged into one colonial unit, Indochina, since it appeared as a social and economic unit in the eyes of colonial administration. Only when French imperialism was driven out of Vietnam by the Vietminh guerrillas, did it divide the peninsula into smaller states, in the hope that this partition would prompt these states to fight one

another.

Imperialism has always been aware that it has to divide in order to rule, and that dividing means increasing the dependency of the countries concerned. This is why it is not willing to grant more than sham freedom.

This partition set up by French imperialism had of course little to do with any semblance of respect for the rights of the peoples involved. On the contrary it is a problem which the Vietnamese rulers are trying to solve.

After reuniting Vietnam (formerly Tonking, Annam and Cochin-China), the North Vietnamese rulers are prompted to try and gain control over their neighbor, Cambodia. Is this a solution, even a temporary one? Only the future will tell. But those who, for years, used violence and war to deny other people the right to be independent, have no right whatsoever to blame anyone for resorting to violence to preserve this independence.

It is impossible to assess the intervention of the Vietnamese troops in Cambodia without taking into account the attitude of the Cambodian people towards it. In this respect, everything will depend on how the new rulers will stand for and establish links with the people. If the new regime cannot gain popular support and has to go on relying on the Vietnamese troops for power, Vietnam itself will be affected. But if the new regime does muster popular support, which the Pol Pot's regime never achieved, the Vietnamese intervention will have been justified, even if Vietnam is blamed for it on the international scene.

It is clear that all this has little to do with socialism.

Socialism would mean other relationships between nations; it

would mean respecting the people, not the borders; it would mean unceasing revolutionary intervention into the affairs of other nations. The intervention launched by the Vietnamese leadership is not a socialist one.

But it does not mean, because those peoples did not choose the road to socialism, that we should not support them in the political moves they have chosen for themselves.

All imperialist rulers in the world will regard their intervention as justified if a head of state, even one abhorred by his people, calls on them for help. We, proletarians, whose home should not be restricted to any single country, consider that military intervention by a foreign state can be justified when it has the backing of a people calling for help, even in a fight against that people's own rulers. Along these lines only should we form our judgment.