

X: PC

14 Charles Lane
New York 10014

January 29, 1979

Dear Val,

The questions in your letter are good ones. None will be taken up in future articles, particularly the nature of the Cambodian regime. Here are some initial comments.

1. You write, "This part of the article left me the impression that we supported the Vietnamese action, sort of."

The article aimed at dispelling the idea that the Vietnamese regime is engaged in a campaign of imperialist conquest, aimed in this case (according to the imperialist propaganda) against another "communist" country. The Vietnamese goals were defensive. The Hanoi leaders were trying to protect the workers state against a tightening ring of military foes, and from the dangers posed by the current alliance of U.S. imperialism and theeking rulers. In particular this posed the danger of Cambodia emerging as an imperialist foothold on the Indochinese peninsula.

If the Vietnamese regime were revolutionary, it would be correct to give it the benefit of the doubt on the tactical question of the invasion. Certainly there is nothing sacred about borders when it comes to protecting or extending the socialist revolution.

But would a revolutionary regime have confronted this kind of problem? Could it have adopted that tactic? That is not possible for us to determine.

But we know that the Vietnamese Stalinist aims are not revolutionary. The invasion ~~is~~ is a tactic not in a strategy of extending the revolution, but in a strategy of peaceful co-existence with imperialism which is a corollary of the theory of socialism in one country.

The central question for us is how to advance the ~~the~~ Cambodian revolution as part of the international extension of socialist revolution.

We recognize that there were two wars in Cambodia. One was the defensive action of the Vietnamese army aimed at putting an end to a threat ~~it~~ on its borders. The other was the movement of ~~xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~ Cambodian oppositionists both inside Cambodia and in exile in Vietnam.

The essential nature of the situation was a bloc between the Vietnamese army and these ~~xxxx~~ Stalinist-led oppositional forces, with the Vietnamese providing most of the muscle for the overthrow of Pol Pot.

The Cambodian rebels have a perfect right to seek and accept Vietnamese help -- including massive military help -- to achieve their goals. And it is quite possible that Cambodian revolutionary Marxists would favor such a bloc in this situation. But we don't have enough information to make that judgement.

Certainly the fall of Pol Pot is progressive. It opens the possibility of ~~socialist~~ overturning capitalism. It blocks the road to a restoration of imperialist domination.

But will the ~~Vietnamese Stalinists~~ Vietnamese **Stalinists** ~~advance~~ advance the further course of the Cambodian revolution?

It is by no means certain that they will foster the establishment of a workers state in Cambodia despite the objective and mass pressures ~~that~~ in that direction.

And it is certain that the ~~Vietnamese~~ Vietnamese Stalinists will exert all their strength to block the establishment of workers and peasants democracy in Cambodia -- that would doom their own rule in Vietnam.

Our concern is with the extension of the socialist revolution. That is why we do not call for Vietnamese withdrawal from Cambodia. We ~~have~~ have no reason to believe such calls advance the struggle for socialism in Cambodia at this time, or the struggle against imperialism's attempts to strengthen its ~~position~~ position in the region.

We know that the reason the imperialists call for withdrawal so vociferously is that they fear the end result of the Vietnamese and Cambodian rebel actions will be the establishment of a workers state in Cambodia.

But the invasion has to be viewed as a tactic in an overall counterrevolutionary policy on the part of the bureaucratic caste that misrules the Vietnamese workers state. We can't give any confidence to this policy even when the actions have initial progressive consequences like the fall of Pol Pot.

The Vietnamese role here is not comparable to the Cuban role in Africa. In the latter case the goals are revolutionary even though mistakes are ~~made~~ made.

In this context, you might want to read Trotsky's writings on the Soviet invasion of Finland and Polish Ukraine in In Defense of Marxism. Trotsky explained the defensive goals of the Soviet bureaucracy, in answer to the petty-bourgeois opposition that saw the USSR embarked on a course of imperialist expansion. He took note of every progressive step toward the overthrow of capitalism in ~~the~~ occupied areas.

He urged revolutionists in the occupied area to take advantage of the opportunity presented by the invasion to completely extirpate the old regime, overturn landlordism, seize the factories, and overthrow capitalism.

But Trotsky took no responsibility whatever for the Stalinist methods of defending the USSR. He called for revolutionists in the occupied areas to have no confidence in the Stalinist rulers.

I think Trotsky's stance offers a broad outline of the approach to be taken by Cambodian revolutionists today. Advance the socialist revolution, but no confidence whatever in the Vietnamese Stalinists.

2. You wrote, "I find their (the Pol Pot regime's) policies too bizarre to believe they are a reflection of even an unusually rotten Stalinist leadership. Their particular view of cities, for example, seems alien even to Stalinists."

The Pol Pot-Ieng Sary grouping was a wing -- eventually the dominant wing -- in the Cambodian CP which has roots dating back to the 1950s. This party became more active in the 1960s ~~and~~ but won a mass base only in the 1970s.

It was always a recognized part of the Stalinist movement, although a relatively isolated one.

The Pol Pot-Ieng Sary grouping was trained in the Stalinist ~~school~~ in Paris. Ieng Sary was a member of the French CP.

This grouping participated in a popular-front type coalition with Prince Sihanouk in the early 1960s. Sihanouk subsequently kicked them out of the government and tried to hunt them down.

Their massive growth stemmed from a tight alliance in the early 1970s with the Vietnamese CP. The latter helped them build an army and administrative structure after the May 1970 invasion.

~~Their growth stemmed~~
They followed the Stalinist strategy of people's war in seeking power -- including the bloc with representatives of the ruling classes like Sihanouk.

Vietnamese sponsorship was rejected with the end of the war in favor of Peking. But ties were also retained with the North Korean, Yugoslav, and Romanian rulers.

And until the break with Vietnam in late 1977, no other Stalinist regime challenged the "Communist" credentials of the Cambodian government. The Soviet bureaucracy praised the expulsion of the urban population.

In power, the regime ruled through the historic Communist Party and defended its actions with ~~xxx~~ Stalinist ideology and arguments.

Splits from the ruling group -- and the purges it carried out against suspected dissidents -- indicate the Stalinist character of the Cambodian party's components. They usually aligned themselves with the Vietnamese Stalinists. The current leaders of the new Cambodian government were rather high officials in the Pol Pot regime.

The Stalinist origins of the Cambodian CP are unquestionable. It is therefore necessary to show a break with Stalinism ~~by~~ in order to remove it from the Stalinist category. No such qualitative break can be shown on the part of any component of the leadership up to the time it lost power.

The top leadership was, of course, made up of petty bourgeois xenophobes. But this is hardly alien to Stalinism. Stalinism is a petty bourgeois current in the world workers movement. ~~It~~ Stalinism in power is petty bourgeois nationalism.

Their antagonism to the urban ~~workers~~ working class hardly differentiates them from Stalinism. Such class hatred is of the essence of Stalinism.

In a 1932 article entitled "Peasant War in China and the Proletariat", reprinted in Trotsky on China, Trotsky predicted that the Stalinist leadership of a peasant movement could act as the Cambodians did:

"The commanding stratum of the Chinese Red Army has no doubt succeeded in inculcating itself with the habit of issuing commands. The absence of a strong revolutionary party and mass organizations of the proletariat renders control over the commanding stratum virtually impossible. The commanders and commissars appear in the guise of absolute masters of the situation and upon occupying the cities will be rather apt to look down from above on the workers.

"Nor should one forget such 'trifles' as the fact that within cities the offices and staffs of the victorious armies are established not in the proletarian huts, but in the finest city buildings, in the apartments and homes of the bourgeoisie; and all this facilitates the inclination of the upper stratum of the peasant armies to feel themselves part of the 'cultured' and 'educated' classes, in now way part of the proletariat.

Thus in China the causes and grounds for conflict between the army, which is peasant in composition and petty bourgeois in leadership, and the workers not only are not eliminated but, on the contrary, all the circumstances are such as to greatly increase the possibility and even the inevitability of such conflicts; and in addition ~~the~~ the chances of the proletariat are far less favorable to bein with than was the case in Russia.

The betrayal of the Cambodian revolution and the brutal suppression of the workers and peasants is another example of Stalinism's virulent counter-revolutionary capacities. But ~~it~~ were their actions really more horrible, more "unusually rotten" than what the Stalinists did in Spain, the Soviet Union, and China? Not in my opinion.

The actions of the Pol Pot regime are a good reminder that Stalinism in governmental power ~~will not inevitably~~ is not inevitably driven to establish a workers state, but can go off in a different and opposed direction.

The Cambodian regime followed an economic strategy ~~which~~ that, utilizing extreme forms of state intervention in the economy and crushing the workers, that fostered the growth of a capitalist class ~~in~~ in the state apparatus. Their strategy was to concentrate on the maximum exploitation of agricultural labor -- eliminating for a time all frills like higher education, medical care, entertainment, and other things that eat up the surplus -- in order to build exports and use these to finance industrial production. They were not opposed to cities on principle, or to industry, and had already begun to ~~establish~~ establish new industries and partially repopulate the cities (some estimates put the population of Phnompenh as high as 200,000 at the end). Their aim was to build a strong, independent, industrialized Cambodia ruled by themselves. Of course how realistic that strategy was ~~is~~ is another ~~matter~~ matter.

While state intervention was more extreme because of the depth of the economic collapse in 1975 and the civil war, the basic strategy ~~is~~ was similar to that followed in countries like Mozambique today or in Egypt under Nasser. And as in those cases, the ~~the~~ inevitable end result is deepening dependence on imperialism.

Thus in Cambodia, a government monopolized by a Stalinist party had to be overthrown in order for it to become possible for ~~the~~ the Cambodian people to establish a workers and peasants government and a workers state.

There will be more ~~in~~ in our press soon on these issues. I hope this provides some clarification for you.

Comradely,

Fred Feldman