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The Nature and Role of Ideology in the Modern Cambodian State

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After regaining independence from France in 1953, Cambodia was ruled by successive regimes according to specific ideologies which were presented as charters for constructing a modern state. For the past 20 years, however, Cambodian politics has been dominated by the seemingly non-ideological Prime Minister Hun Sen. In his public rhetoric and the stated goals of the current regime, it may be possible to identify if not ideology, then ideas about how the Cambodian people are to be governed in a post-ideological era.

Cambodia's modern history in the half-century since regaining independence from France has been divided into six clearly defined regimes. The first of these, for the purpose of this article, will be identified as the *Sangkum Reastr Niyum* (People's Socialist Community) or simply the *Sangkum*, because this mass political movement created by Prince Sihanouk in 1955 is more alive as an entity in popular memory than the official Kingdom of Cambodia, which governed the country constitutionally from 1947 until the *coup d'état* of 18 March 1970 delivered the Khmer Republic. Five years of bitter civil war sparked by the coup gave victory to the radical social revolutionaries who ruled over Democratic Kampuchea until they were driven out in January 1979 by members of a more moderate, Vietnam-backed faction of the original Communist Party of Kampuchea (CPK) which created the People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK).[1] In April 1989, this regime transformed itself into the State of Cambodia, which served as a bridging government until an internationally sponsored peace process helped to create a political environment considered sufficiently neutral for democratic elections, which took place in May 1993. The government of what is now known once again as the Kingdom of Cambodia is now in its third legislature.

Each of these regimes governed according to a written constitution approved, in most cases, by a popularly elected legislative assembly. In general, however, Cambodian

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1 The Khmer People's Revolutionary Party, founded in 1951, was renamed the Communist Party of Kampuchea at the Third Party Congress in 1963 when Pol Pot was declared its leader. A brief Party Congress was held in Memot on 5 Jan. 1979, just two days before the overthrow of the Pol Pot regime, to reorganize the party, now re-named Kampuchean People's Revolutionary Party. However, references to the 'CPK' continued to appear regularly, even on official documents, throughout the early years of the PRK.

citizens have been poorly served by their constitutions. In the absence of supporting state institutions, particularly an impartial judiciary, rights guaranteed by successive constitutions have not been delivered or protected, or have been only poorly so. The same politicians who swear defence of the constitution just as easily subvert, manipulate or simply ignore it with impunity. Instead of constitutional guarantees, Serge Thion notes, nepotism, corruption and factionalism – and he might have added politically motivated killings – have been 'means of governing' Cambodia since independence from France in 1953.[2] These features of government apply with some variation in degree but little by way of nature to each of the post-independence regimes, which otherwise differed radically in political persuasion and generally divorced themselves from the preceding regime by forceful and even brutally violent means.

The Cambodian constitutions, according to Raoul Jennar, are not representative and are not 'snapshots' of the corresponding regime. 'At the very most', he argues, 'they allow one to observe the principal preoccupations of the ruling class, including the image of the country they hoped to offer to the outside world.' Those preoccupations, which are consistent, he says, include territorial integrity, claims to neutrality and non-alignment and the permanence of an omnipresent state. It is this third characteristic that draws the most fire from Jennar's analysis of the constitutions:

> Even in the 1993 constitution which appears to be the most liberal, state pretensions to interfere in the private sector and to shape individuals according to cultural or ideological criteria are still present. . . . Any liberties proclaimed are always conceded, always subject to the discretion of the authorities. . . . Until now, the ruling class has always refused to accept Cambodians as responsible actors. The rights and liberties which they have sometimes enjoyed did not belong to them. Being granted, they could also be taken away.[3]

If we accept the argument that the Cambodian state, as evidenced by successive constitutions, aims 'to shape individuals according to cultural or ideological criteria', what ideology or ideologies have provided the basis for these criteria? Despite the vast differences in political orientation, have there been consistent preoccupations within the ideologies of successive Cambodian regimes since independence, as there have been within the constitutions? An answer to this latter question may help to explain the ideological underpinnings, or lack of them, of the Hun Sen regime and perhaps provide reasons for its longevity. This article is concerned with ideology as theory or 'ism', rather than with its social function as an instrument of hegemony. As Jennar implies, hegemony is taken for granted by the Cambodian ruling elite, who have historically assumed the passive acquiescence of the masses – particularly the rural masses – and relied upon the unifying force of Khmerness, the spiritual sense of belonging to a discrete cultural group, to legitimise their use of power. Unlike the drafting of constitutions, formulation of state ideology does not invite mass participation.[4] Ideology is the domain of the ruling group,

2 Serge Thion, 'The pattern of Cambodian politics', *International Journal of Politics*, 16, 3 (1986): 128.

3 Raoul M. Jennar, *The Cambodian constitutions (1953–1993)* (Bangkok: White Lotus, 1995), pp. 2 (preoccupations) and 3–4 (long quote).

4 During the drafting of the 1981 constitution, persistent efforts were made to involve the people in the process. On 4 Mar. 1981, for example, the People's Revolutionary Council announced (No. 2SPrK) that it was disseminating copies of the draft constitution 'in order that cadres, staff, workers, and youth serving in

whose members are recognized as its adherents; thus, by corollary, those who do not share its worldview are excluded from the benefits of power-holding, from the exercise of those 'means of governing' to which Thion referred.

As will be demonstrated, successive Cambodian state ideologies fit well with Theda Skocpol's definition of them as 'idea systems deployed as self-conscious political arguments by identifiable political actors . . . developed and deployed by particular groups or alliances engaged in temporally specific political conflicts or attempts to justify the use of state power'.[5] Ideologies, Douglas Kellner adds, 'provide theories about the economy, state, or education that legitimate certain dominant institutions and ideas, and prescribe conformist acceptance. . . . [They] are value-laden to the core, and are directly related to social practice . . . but not effective or credible unless [they] achieve resonance with people's experience'. The power of an ideology, he contends, 'resides in its ability to give birth to a new view of the world and to motivate its advocates to political action'.[6]

Until early 1985, when the National Assembly confirmed the appointment of Hun Sen, former minister for foreign affairs and deputy prime minister, as prime minister of the PRK, each Cambodian post-independence regime ruled in the name of an idiosyncratic idea system, an identifiable ideology, to justify its use of state power and to explicate a worldview to which the masses were expected to commit themselves. King Norodom Sihanouk abdicated in 1955 in order to involve himself directly in the *Sangkum* government, and he personally developed its ideology of Buddhist socialism. The Khmer Republic, which idealized the modern political principles of the United States, adopted Neo-Khmerism to justify usurping the throne. The Khmer Rouge struggled to fit their class analysis into orthodox Marxism and to proceed with revolution 'in one country' as the Chinese Communist Party had done until, as if defeated by the effort, they resorted to the xenophobia of the preceding regime in order to unite their forces and justify their power.

Early leaders of the PRK, trained in socialist theory and dialectic in Vietnam, believed they could revive the revolution by taking it back to 'genuine' Marxism-Leninism. Their efforts had already failed some years before international socialism itself lost appeal as the ideology of a worldwide leftist movement. Immediately after taking executive power, Hun Sen used his position and his party status to effect sweeping changes to the administration in order to facilitate liberal economic reforms. These were pragmatic reforms; the PRK did not espouse capitalism or liberalism between 1985

the KPRAF as well as all the people throughout the country can discuss and make contributions. . .'. Handwritten notes testify that this mass participation did take place with questions such as whether monks could vote and whether women students should be sent to study abroad. See the documents attached to 'Panhha piseng piseng dael ban leuk laung pi pieksa sdei ampi kumrong prieng rodththoamanon' [Various issues raised in discussion concerning the draft outline of the new constitution], 28 Feb. 1981, in State Archives [henceforth ANC], Phnom Penh, PRK files, unsorted. During the drafting of the present (1993) constitution, the Women's Sectoral Group, for instance, representing both government and non-government organizations were encouraged to – and indeed did – submit their opinions. Rights gained by women under the previous revolutionary regimes were retained in that charter.

5 Theda Skocpol, 'Cultural idioms and political ideologies in the revolutionary reconstruction of state power: A rejoinder to Sewell', *Journal of Modern History*, 57 (1985): 91.

6 Douglas Kellner, 'Ideology, Marxism and advanced capitalism', *Socialist Review*, 42 (1978): 44, 50, 53.

and 1989, it simply discarded socialist economic practices. During peace talks leading up to the resolution of the Cambodia problem in October 1991, it was agreed that the monarchy would be restored in a manner to be defined by the constitution.

In the two decades that Hun Sen has been his country's prime minister, Cambodia has seemingly lacked an indigenous idea system to identify the philosophical character of its ruling elite. The restoration of Cambodian society and state institutions has been effected in the absence of any discernible overarching ideology. By contrast, each previous regime up to 1985 left behind documentary evidence attesting to its core principles. In the case of the *Sangkum*, there was such a surfeit of propaganda literature that, according to Milton Osborne, 'the country's one mass political movement came close to being befuddled by words and speeches into imagining that there was a consistent and operative link between these public expressions of views and the actions which the prince's government took'.[7] This was indeed the case. Those persistent 'means of governing', along with other entrenched official habits, always intervened to thwart the ideologues. The aim here is not to assess the ideology of successive Cambodian regimes in terms of applied outcomes. Through the study of a selection of key documents, however, some consistent characteristics should emerge which can be tested against statements and goals of the current regime in order to propose what might loosely be termed an ideology for the Hun Sen era of Cambodian politics.

Ideology in the *Sangkum*

Prince Sihanouk argued that ideology was an imperative factor in the construction of a modern state. In an article entitled 'Notre *Sangkum*' which first appeared in *Le Monde* in October 1963, he explained:

> [T]he creation of the People's Socialist Community did not only respond to the necessity of putting an end to the quarrels and rivalry of parties and political groupings and bringing them together in a vast movement of unity. In fact, independent Cambodia imperatively had to give itself a political and social ideology on which it could support itself while building itself as a modern nation.

The monarchy and the Buddhist religion, those 'irreplaceable factors of unity' in Cambodia, had to be complemented by what he termed the 'birth or rebirth of a constructive dynamism' which would lead the country to modernization. 'Finally', he added, 'there must be the political, social and economic education of the people to give them the consciousness of their possibilities and of the task to accomplish.'[8] This ideology of unity, modernization and dynamism was later expounded in a brochure entitled 'Our Buddhist Socialism', prepared by the prince and published by the Ministry for National Propaganda in November 1965. The brochure is replete with theological arguments and references to works on Buddhism by Western authors to support the prince's hypothesis that '[h]istory shows all religions, whether for good or ill, have created ideologies including

7 Milton Osborne, *Politics and power in Cambodia, the Sihanouk years* (Camberwell, Vic.: Longman, 1973), p. 4.

8 *Le Monde*, 8 Oct. 1963, reproduced in *Le Sangkum: Revue politique illustrée*, 1 (Aug. 1965). Translations from French and Khmer are by the author.

nationalism . . . so why should not Buddhism be able to guide a state on a political path or produce an ideology for the state'.[9]

A more cogent definition of this ideology had already been made in an official communiqué of the Executive Committee of the *Sangkum* and the royal government in 1961. Entitled *Politique économique du SRN*, it begins:

> Our socialism . . . differs profoundly from Marxist socialism or Communism. It is essentially Khmer, taking inspiration directly from our religious principles, preaching mutual assistance and social action with a moral concern for all, implying a great respect for the human person and establishing its aim as the well-being and fulfilment of the individual.

The core value of the ideology was balance or equilibrium, 'a stable balance between public action and private action in order to allow the free development of individual initiative. The state works together with the individual to increase his welfare and not to serve it'. This balanced approach applied to both the political and economic domains: 'Neutrality in the political domain consists of staying outside blocs, between capitalism and Communism. On the economic plane, it means a balanced adaptation of the two systems for the organization of the country.'[10]

Economically, this meant state capital supplementing private investment 'to allow the state a right of supervision and sufficient authority in order to safeguard national interests against the activities and greed of some privileged capitalists, national or foreign'. The state would control key economic sectors, such as energy, transport and mines, while other sectors, notably industry, agriculture and commerce, were targeted for mixed enterprise, 'where individuals keep the freedom to display their personal merit and are assured of government protection'. The aim of the mixed enterprise system was to re-establish a 'more normal sharing of wealth' and also to stimulate savings. The lack of private capital and technicians, the authors argue, was a key reason why the state could not afford to leave all to private initiative.[11]

'This middle line of economic equilibrium', the communiqué declares, 'is natural, normal and also conforms to the religious spirit and the material understanding of the people and their actual and future capacity to work and to produce.' The new worldview was thus integrated with the real experience of the Cambodian citizen. The purpose was not to change the nature of the individual; this, the authors note, would only make him unhappy:

> To go and meet his simple and wise hopes by enforcing draconian economic and financial measures would certainly be a constraint for the Cambodian individual, a brake on his fulfilment and, consequently, a lessening of his well-being and his happiness. These are the wise recommendations for a middle way, social equilibrium, and personal merit [derived from] our Religion which must inspire the economic policy of equilibrium of the Kingdom of Cambodia.[12]

9 *Lotte sangkumneyum Puttsasana robas yeung* [Our Buddhist Socialism], copy held in ANC, Box 319, 1965.
10 ANC, Box 269, *Politique économique du SRN*, official communiqué of the *Sangkum Reastr Niyum* and the Royal Government, 1961.
11 Ibid.
12 Ibid.

A further tract, *Considérations sur le socialisme khmer*, published by the Ministry of Information in the same year, expanded on these principles and attempted to explain how the ideology of the *Sangkum* would act as a kind of state charter, pointing the way for action plans which would deliver the goal of a modernized yet essentially traditional Cambodia where the individual would be guided by the state but still be free to develop his potential. The document is significant because it develops further the arguments about socialism and what elements were to be extracted from it and applied to the reality of Cambodia. Apart from the years of the Khmer Republic when this debate about the nature of Khmer socialism was forced underground or driven out to the *maquis*, far from the seat of power, it would rage until 1989 when the State of Cambodia, as its name suggests, abandoned all pretence of socialism.

Marxism, the authors of this tract contend, should be considered merely as a 'form' of socialism, 'and not as the socialism which has existed under one form or another for centuries and in all human societies'. They reason that Khmer socialism should keep only 'the largest part of the system' whereby the state controls the national economy, protects the citizen from exploitation by a privileged class, 'assures his existence and dignity and gives him the material means to find happiness'. Otherwise, the methods and means of applying this socialism should depend essentially 'on the idiosyncrasies of each people and the national conditions of their environment'. Therefore, they argue, 'Our socialism is not Marxist ... [because] our civilization, our morality, our customs and our traditions, all that makes us particularly Khmer, disallows that a philosophical doctrine ... can present a character of universality.'[13]

Cambodia, the tract maintains, did not have an agrarian problem which could justify reform and collectivization of land: 'landlordism is practically non-existent and our rural masses are made up of small owners'. Moreover, the industrial proletariat was insignificant and workers employed in state industries were never subjected to abuse. 'The class struggle is never affirmed in the bosom of Khmer society, and opposition between the forces of production and the social organization on which historical materialism is founded has never expressed itself throughout our history.'[14] Cambodia, they declare, offered the rare example of a society which had never known feudalism or colonial exploitation, apart from foreign colonial exploitation.

Khmer socialism, therefore, was pragmatic and adapted to the political and economic evolution of the country; 'we are not international socialists', the document asserts. The roots of Khmer socialism were in the past, originating with the kings of Angkor and the patterns they established for land use and ownership as well as for social action. Buddhism, through its aspect of struggle against social injustice, was a socialist doctrine. Rural Cambodian society offered many examples to demonstrate that it was 'the most egalitarian and the most democratic it can be'. Through Khmer agrarian socialism, each rural family would be assured of full ownership of the land it was capable of developing as well as freedom over disposal of the 'fruits' of its work. Rural communities would be provided with the means to improve yields as well as assistance to develop resources apart from agriculture; they would be guaranteed the best conditions for sale of

13 ANC, Box 592, *Considérations sur le socialisme khmer* (Phnom Penh: Ministère de l'Information, 1961).
14 Ibid.

their products. Community development would improve lifestyle through a 'rationalization of social space', meaning villagers would be helped to manage the environment, the health infrastructure, schools, and so on. The five-year national plan aimed to raise annual revenue by three percent and especially to begin to redress the serious imbalance between the incomes of urban and rural populations. Persuasion and not authoritarian measures would guide the plan into action; 'the state does not impose but guides and advises through the voice of its technicians of all disciplines'.[15]

Ideology and the Republic

While Prince Sihanouk was absent from the country in March 1970, he was overthrown by right-wing forces within the *Sangkum* government. The presence of Vietnamese Communist troops in Cambodia for purposes of sanctuary and transit acted as a catalyst for the challenge to the monarchy. Almost immediately after taking power, the regime declared war on the Vietcong. It is impossible to discuss the ideological nature of the Khmer Republic without the hindsight of its drastic failure both militarily and administratively. Writing in June 1972, midway through the regime's brief history, Milton Osborne referred to 'the painful ineptitudes of the new Phnom Penh regime and its supporters' and 'a quite remarkable disinclination to face reality'.[16] The dual task of conducting war while managing the state proved too much for these inexperienced republicans.

The event of 18 March, as Elizabeth Becker correctly specifies, was 'merely a *coup de chef d'état*'.[17] Sihanouk had been dismissed but the government and state apparatus remained as before. In Phnom Penh, where he had never enjoyed the esteem he held in the countryside, there was popular pressure for a republic, but the intention of the coup-makers themselves was less clear. General Lon Nol had long been Sihanouk's loyal and obedient servant and therefore seemed an unlikely republican; Prince Sisowath Sirik Matak, a modern politician, preferred to maintain the monarchy, favouring his brother Essaro for the role of reinvigorating the ancient institution.[18] By 5 October, however, when the National Assembly and the High Council of the Kingdom together voted for a republic, even Sirik Matak was supportive of this dramatic change in Cambodia's history.

The urban middle class, Justin Corfield notes, were 'quickly buoyed with a new sense of patriotism and national identity'.[19] Their elation, however, was short-lived and '[i]n little time the educated class of Phnom Penh felt trapped in Lon Nol's holy war' against the North Vietnamese and Vietcong.[20] By the end of June, the general population was mobilized for war, ostensibly against this foreign enemy. Until the final months of the Republic, Lon Nol refused to believe that the real enemy was Khmer, the forces of the

15 Ibid. For a full discussion of how the ideology of the *Sangkum* was translated into economic action, see Rémy Prud'homme, *L'économie du Cambodge* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1969).
16 Osborne, *Politics and power*, p. 116.
17 Elizabeth Becker, *When the war was over: Cambodia and the Khmer Rouge revolution* (New York: Public Affairs, 1986), p. 114.
18 Justin Corfield, *Khmers stand up!: A history of the Cambodian government 1970–1975* (Clayton, Vic.: Monash University Centre of Southeast Asian Studies, 1994), p. 82.
19 Ibid., p. 106.
20 Becker, *When the war was over*, p. 128.

Cambodian Communist movement supported by the disaffected peasantry.[21] In his 22 May 1970 broadcast to the nation, declaring martial law effective from 1 June, Lon Nol, as president of the Council of Ministers, began:

> We are Khmer. Khmers are descendants of the warrior race, courageous in struggle and never bowing down before their enemies. They sacrifice their life for the service of the nation. Khmers, fervent Buddhists, know perfectly how to distinguish between good and evil. So each compatriot must bear himself honestly and accomplish dignified acts of the citizen who truly loves his country.[22]

This chauvinism, not republicanism, was the ideology of the state. 'Some who had cheered the prince's demise and flocked to the new republic's side realized they had been fooled; Lon Nol had no intention of allowing Cambodia to become a democracy. It was becoming a Buddhist military state.'[23]

The Khmer Republic was proclaimed on 9 October by In Tam, chairman of the National Assembly; the investiture of the ministerial Cabinet was presided over by Sirik Matak, minister for national defence and delegate for the ailing Lon Nol. With little in the way of preamble or rhetoric, Sirik Matak stated the regime's three objectives: to defeat the Vietnamese aggressors, to elaborate the constitution and to solve economic, financial and social problems through 'an acceptable equilibrium' which did not compromise the war effort. The new government would carry through its policy of economic liberalization, but he warned that it would not hesitate to intervene in order to protect some industries or to take control of others if liberal mechanisms were not functioning in a satisfactory way. He made it clear that 'the price of essential products will be fixed and controlled [and] severe sanctions will be taken against speculators'. All efforts would be taken to raise living standards and to protect workers, 'our final aim being, without doubt, social justice'. With regard to foreign policy, 'the new government will continue to respect the principles of active neutrality: we will collaborate frankly with those who declare themselves our friends'.[24]

One week later, the Chamber of Commerce, a powerful backer of the Republic, reflected on what it called 'a decisive turning point in our history. A radical change in almost all domains is being made. The time of improvising, of making decisions without reflection, of temper tantrums, of irresponsible advice is gone. Something solid, reflective, studied should take its place.' Stability was needed, of a type that favoured evolution and the search for constant improvement, and this could be achieved by planning. 'By plan', the writer advised,

> [W]e mean looking ahead, making a programme, studying future perspectives and the means of attaining certain ends, researched and fixed in advance. One knows where one is going. . . . One cannot speak of direction as this contradicts liberalism. Perhaps one could define this new line of our economic policy in our republican constitution.

21 For a chronology of events for the Khmer Republic, see ANC, Box 601, *The struggle continues*, 1, 8 (Feb. 1975): 4–7. Lon Nol invited the Khmer Rouge to negotiate without prior conditions on 30 Nov. 1974; the invitation was, unsurprisingly, ignored.

22 Agence Khmère Presse, No. 7005, 23 May 1970, reproduced in *Bulletin bi-hebdomadaire, Chambre Mixte de Commerce et d'Agriculture*, 26 May 1970, p. 1. Copies of this periodical are in ANC, Boxes 144ff.

23 Becker, *When the war was over*, p. 128.

24 ANC, Box 357: *Speeches on the occasion of the declaration of the Khmer Republic: 9, 10, 11 October 1970* (Phnom Penh: Ministry of Propaganda, 1970).

The alternative, he prophesied, did not bear thinking on: '[a] disastrous economy leads sooner or later to a catastrophic political situation which will make flow the blood and tears of innocent victims'.[25]

Despite these hopes and visions, the Khmer Republic regime stumbled from the beginning. There would be nine governments in all, each shorter and less effective than its predecessor. The worsening war situation and ongoing political crises were grist for Lon Nol's mill. In March 1972, despite partial paralysis from a stroke the previous year and the total defeat of his Chenla II operation in which at least 3,000 Republican Army troops were killed – 'a disaster that broke the spirit of the army forever' – Lon Nol moved against his remaining rivals, ousted Cheng Heng (head of state since the 1970 coup) and assumed full power over the Republic.[26] He was sworn in as president on 14 March, a position in which he was confirmed by national elections in June. The constitution, which gave virtually dictatorial powers to the president's office, was adopted by referendum on 30 April and promulgated on 10 May. In an ironic twist of fate, the only candidate who would accept the impotent role of prime minister was his long-term critic, Son Ngoc Thanh, who remarked that 'all these changes may be a little hard for Westerners to understand. The Khmer revolution is not like Western politics, it is not strictly logical, it is more like a complex piece of Angkor sculpture that unfolds slowly to the viewer.'[27]

With Lon Nol's power now unchallenged, he 'developed grandiose ideas of building the Khmer Republic into a "Mon-Khmer" super-state'.[28] The president presented his new state ideology in a booklet entitled, in official French translation, *Neo-Khmerisme*. This manifesto had none of the sustained argument or rhetorical flourishes of the *Sangkum* documents; rather, it rambled between diatribe and random notes. Its goal, nevertheless, was modernizing: 'to bring about socio-economic, cultural and scientific development of the Khmer people in the image of other developed countries'. It was also modern in the sense of drawing on 'new worldviews' and adapting them to protect 'our freedom, our culture and our religion which has excellent traits'. These traits were defined as sincerity and justice ('for peaceful conflict resolution'), peace and fraternity ('our Khmer Islam brothers could take refuge and live with us after the fall of Champa'), courage and mutual assistance.[29]

According to the president, Neo-Khmerism would achieve socialism through nationalism, republican democracy and popular well-being, not with 'savage class struggle and sending monks to work in the ricefields'. Indochinese Communism was very destructive, he warned, and historical capitalism also entailed 'faults and errors'. Neo-Khmerism, on the other hand, was quintessentially Khmer but at the same time syncretic, 'fusing the spirit of liberty, equality and fraternity of Europe with the very deep influence of Buddha'. Incongruously, the word 'salvation' came to attach itself to

25 Sim Thai Pheng, 'Notre opinion: L'économie cambodgienne au tournant', *Bulletin bi-hebdomadaire, Chambre Mixte de Commerce et d'Agriculture*, 16 Oct. 1970.
26 Becker, *When the war was over*, p. 132.
27 Corfield, *Khmers stand up!*, p. 132, quoting from the *New York Times*, 19 Mar. 1972.
28 Ibid., p. 162.
29 ANC, Box 357, Maréchal Lon Nol, *Néo-Khmerisme* (Phnom Penh, undated); Corfield dates its publication to late 1972 (ibid., p. 162).

the doomed regime of the Khmer Republic. According to the 'new formula' of national salvation, Lon Nol argued, the political, economic, social and cultural rights of Khmers had to be fulfilled. The conditions existing in the country which denied the people enjoyment of these rights were identified as: universal poverty; a lack of adequate education, transport and communications, electricity, hygiene, administration (banking, economic, financial) and security; a shortage of capable economic cadres; a lack of capital (no local savings or foreign investment); and the absence of a social welfare system.[30]

Despite these seemingly intractable problems and their vast scale, Lon Nol was optimistic, declaring that 'our country, which has only eight million inhabitants, has an area capable of supporting thirty, forty or even fifty million inhabitants and we have very important natural resources'. To achieve his regime's nation-building goals, he affirmed, 'we have chosen the road of revolution, a revolutionary spirit, the revolutionary process for achieving our mission. . . . There will no longer be master and subject, poor and rich. Each one is a responsible member of the state and a controller of the country.'[31]

Despite the momentous change from monarchy to republic, the Khmer Republic was not genuinely revolutionary. Once more, Cambodian leaders had chosen strongman rule over the development of strong institutions. Ideology, in this case republicanism, was merely window-dressing. The 'real' revolution was in the wings, waiting for the exit of Lon Nol, who left Phnom Penh by US military aircraft on 1 April 1975; Sirik Matak, the genuine patriot and reluctant republican, refused to leave and was executed in the city 18 days later.

Ideology and revolutionary Kampuchea

The political nature of the Democratic Kampuchea regime has been debated and analysed by foreign scholars of Cambodian history like no other regime in its past.[32] The radical course taken by the revolutionary regime, as much as the scale of political killings, shocked adherents of the Left as much as it did those of the Right. Neither side wanted to line up ideologically with the Khmer Rouge. Democratic Kampuchea lasted about one year less than its predecessor, the Khmer Republic, and together they constituted almost a decade of Cambodian history. During the 1970s, civil war, radical revolution and the massive aerial bombardment by US aircraft wreaked havoc on the land, its infrastructure and its population on an almost unimaginable scale. With the hindsight of the hellish aftermath of Cambodia in the 1970s, therefore, it is reasonable for scholars to shy away from what surely must have been the reality, that many ordinary Cambodians – chronically indebted villagers, neglected by corrupt politicians without legitimacy to rule, harassed by Republican troops and terrified by B-52 bombing raids – found the ideology of the CPK both attractive and reassuring.

30 Ibid.

31 Ibid.

32 Some key works for the history of this period include David Chandler, *The tragedy of Cambodian history: Politics, war and revolution since 1945* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991); Michael Vickery, *Cambodia 1975–1982* (North Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1984); Stephen Heder, 'Kampuchea's armed struggle: The origins of an independent revolution', *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*, 11, 1 (1979): 2–24; and Ben Kiernan, *How Pol Pot came to power: A history of Communism in Kampuchea, 1930–1975* (London: Verso, 1985).

Like its predecessors, the ideology of Democratic Kampuchea made claims to originality, that is, to being specially formulated for the Khmer people. Kate Frieson has commented on the CPK's repeated assertions as to the 'unique' and 'independent' nature of its revolution, and what she calls its 'ideological exclusiveness'. 'One of the most striking impressions to be gained from a survey of official Democratic Kampuchea documents and radio broadcasts is the near complete absence of references to Marx, Lenin, or Mao'. She points out, however, that 'this does not . . . necessarily mean that the men and women ruling Democratic Kampuchea did not have Communist goals or that the party, *en masse*, did not view itself as being a legitimate Communist party'.[33]

The CPK's goal, as stated in a captured document dated 1975, was 'to lead the people to succeed in the national democratic revolution, to exterminate the imperialists, feudalists and capitalists, and to form a national revolutionary state in Cambodia. The long-range goal of the party is to lead the people in creating a socialist revolution and a Communist society in Cambodia.'[34]

Once the revolution succeeded, however, the goals were redefined as

> [two] experiments . . . yoked together. These are the socialist revolution and building socialism on the one hand, and defending the country and providing a lesson for the future on the other. . . . The socialist revolution encompasses everything. . . . To be sure, building socialism and defending the country are important factors, but they stand on the socialist revolution itself, both for the immediate and the distant future.[35]

This conjunction of revolution and national defence, Frieson argues, was both significant and controversial: 'In my view, the socialist revolution in Cambodia was perceived by the leaders of Democratic Kampuchea as the means by which to secure the goal of survival for the Khmer nation and the Khmer state under Leninist-style leadership.'[36]

Socialism, the CPK leaders believed, would act as the means to solve the problems of dependency, economic backwardness and social inequality. As Party solidarity imploded under the weight of factional fighting and coup attempts, however, and the regime found it increasingly difficult to maintain control, let alone feed its people and support its fracturing army, Pol Pot made national salvation his regime's self-justification and rallying cry, just as Lon Nol had done in 1974:

> Without a socialist collective system, we could never be able to defend our country, we would lose our country and our Kampuchean race would disappear. In fact, our socialist revolution has set up a strong base for our collective system in our nation, thus turning the whole country into a bulwark which can totally and independently guarantee our national defence task.[37]

33 Kate Frieson, 'The political nature of Democratic Kampuchea', *Pacific Affairs*, 61, 3 (1988): 407 (ideological exclusiveness), 408 (striking impressions), 409 (legitimate Communist party).
34 'A short guide for application of Party statutes', in *Communist Party power in Kampuchea*: *Documents and discussion*, ed. Timothy Carney (Ithaca: Cornell University Southeast Asia Program, 1977), p. 56.
35 'Report of activities of the Party Center according to the general political tasks of 1976', in *Pol Pot plans the future: Confidential leadership documents from Democratic Kampuchea, 1976–1977*, ed. and tr. David Chandler (New Haven: Yale Southeast Asia Studies, 1988), pp. 182–3.
36 Frieson, 'Political nature', p. 409.
37 *FBIS*, 29 Sept. 1978, quoted in ibid., p. 410.

In 1978, Pol Pot and his faction took the next foolish step, fatally unrealistic and ideologically driven, of trying to take Kampuchea Krom back from Vietnam by armed force and to reincorporate it into the rejuvenated Kampuchea. (Kampuchea Krom is that area of the Mekong Delta in southern Vietnam with a large ethnic Khmer population, which is still contested by many Khmers as Cambodian territory.) Defeat was inevitable, and the Vietnamese had already organized the group who would replace the CPK in governing Cambodia. Its very name was an echo of the ideological bases of former regimes: National United Front for the Salvation of Kampuchea (FUNSK). For propaganda purposes, the FUNSK was founded by a Congress of around 200 people's representatives ('workers, peasants, petty bourgeois, intellectuals, Buddhist monks and nuns, young people, women, ethnic minorities, patriotic insurgents') which was held on 2 December 1978 in the clearing of a rubber plantation at Snoul in Kratie Province, close to the Vietnamese border.[38]

The Congress elected a Central Committee with Heng Samrin as president; he was identified as a 'former member of the Executive Committee of the Communist Party of Kampuchea for the Eastern Region, and former political commissar and commander of the Fourth Division'. Among the other 13 committee members were Chea Sim, 'former secretary of the Party Committee for Region 20, and former member of the Kampuchean Assembly of People's Representatives'; and Hun Sen, 'former regimental chief-of-staff and deputy commander in Region 21, representing the Youth Association for National Salvation'.[39] The Congress adopted the Front's 11-point declaration on the tasks and objectives of the Kampuchean revolution which was about to be re-routed from its deviationist line. The joint declaration of the FUNSK began by recalling history:

> Throughout the long years when Kampuchea was under the yoke of colonialism, imperialism and feudalism, many of our compatriots, cadres and combatants developed our forefathers' glorious tradition, and, despite innumerable difficulties and sacrifices, relentlessly struggled with sublime heroism against French and US imperialism to regain independence and freedom for the country, thus bringing glory to the magnificent Land of Angkor.

The 'glorious victory' of 17 April 1975 represented total liberation, 'opening up for the Kampuchean nation a new era of independence, freedom and socialism', the declaration continued. Peace, national reconstruction and solidarity with other socialist countries would have reigned had not the 'reactionary Pol Pot–Ieng Sary clique and their families totally usurped power, betrayed the country and harmed the people'. These 'traitors' had severed 'all sacred ties' among the people and 'abolished villages where our people have lived for thousands of years'.[40]

The declaration mourned the cultural destruction of the previous regime's extremism: 'The clique have trampled underfoot all the fine traditions, customs and habits of our people, and wrecked our nation's honoured culture. They have banned freedom of religion, organized forced collective marriages, dislocated families and debased

38 *Vietnam Courier*, 1 (1979): 8.
39 Ibid.
40 Ibid., p. 10.

our nation's ethical standards.' The FUNSK aimed to unite the people and topple the Democratic Kampuchea regime 'to establish a people's democratic regime, to develop the Angkor traditions, to make Kampuchea into a truly peaceful, independent, democratic, neutral, and non-aligned country advancing to socialism, thus contributing actively to the common struggle for peace and stability in Southeast Asia'.[41]

The declaration's 11 points were restorative rather than revolutionary. Politically, there would be general elections to a national assembly, a new constitution, and legislation to create an independent and democratic state. Revolutionary mass organizations would be built and affiliated with the Front, along with the Kampuchean Revolutionary Army. The economy would be 'both a planned and a market economy, meeting the needs of social progress'. Mutual aid and cooperative organizations formed 'on the basis of the full consent of the peasants' would help to boost production and improve living standards. A social welfare policy would 'restore the happy life of every family', realize gender equality, care for the people's health, and for the aged, infirm and orphans. There would be 'a new culture with a national and popular character' to eradicate illiteracy and develop national education. The foreign policy would be one of peace, friendship and non-alignment, and disputes with neighbouring countries would be settled through peaceful negotiations 'and on the basis of respect for each other's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity'. The nation's neutrality would be observed and no country would be allowed 'to build military bases on its territory or to send military equipment into Kampuchea'. As in previous regimes, the fear was extinction. 'Our nation is facing extermination! Our motherland is in danger!' cried the declaration.[42]

Nowhere did the declaration state the obvious fact that the FUNSK victory over Democratic Kampuchea on 7 January 1979 and the realization of the 11-point programme could only be guaranteed with the massive support of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam and, in particular, the People's Army of Vietnam. The PRK regime was never able to defend itself against the claims of its adversaries, encamped along the northwestern border with Thailand, that it was a Vietnamese lackey, a satellite of the traditional enemy. Nevertheless, it had stated its goals more realistically than most former regimes had done and it did legislate and work to achieve its programme of 11 points, although the outcomes were often a qualified success. At the Third National Congress of the FUNSK in 1981, membership was expanded, and it was renamed the Kampuchean United Front for the Construction and Defence of the Motherland. Heng Samrin announced the new front's agenda and concluded, 'The revolution is the cause of all the people. The building and defence of the nation is the special cause of all citizens who genuinely love the nation. . . . The cause of the revolution is endowed with justice for our people, so it must win.'[43]

41 Ibid.

42 Ibid.

43 ANC, PRK files (unsorted), 'Sekkedei thlaengkar robas Renakse Samakki Kosang Karpie Miettophum Kampuchea' [Declaration of the Solidarity Front for the Construction and Defence of the Kampuchean Motherland], 1981. For the history of this period, see Margaret Slocomb, *The People's Republic of Kampuchea 1979–1989: The revolution after Pol Pot* (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2003) and Evan Gottesman, *Cambodia after the Khmer Rouge: Inside the politics of nation building* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003).

For its first six years, the PRK was an ideological state and while not all of the Party leaders – and even fewer of the state functionaries – understood the goals of the regime in terms of that ideology, certain key players were dedicated socialists. These were the former 'Khmer Vietminh', who had left Cambodia after the Geneva Accords were signed in 1954 and had remained in Vietnam or other socialist countries, receiving tuition in politics and leadership skills, with only a brief year or two spent in the *maquis* in Cambodia after the 1970 coup. Pen Sovann, the regime's first prime minister and party secretary-general until his dismissal and arrest in December 1981, aimed to rebuild the Khmer People's Revolutionary Party as 'one that holds fast to pure Marxism-Leninism'. Its cause of revolution was a 'noble and very heavy' one: to develop solidarity with the people, build the people's state, defend the independence of the nation, re-develop and expand the economy, eliminate starvation and disease, and improve the people's living standards. 'At each step', he wrote, 'we will build our nation, progressing towards socialism'. He wanted to make a 'pure revolution' in Cambodia that was 'one part of the world revolutionary movement'. 'Separation from international proletarianism', he warned, 'leads us towards narrow nationalism.'[44]

The sum of ideologies

Thirty years of ideology during the period 1955–84 left Cambodia bitterly divided and dependent on the traditional enemy, Vietnam, for its very existence. Even the rice harvest failed disastrously in 1984 and the year ended with the death of its prime minister, Chan Si, in suspicious circumstances. There were, of course, multiple factors which reduced the Cambodian state to its nadir, but in terms of ideology, its leaders had made disastrous choices. All post-independence leaders wanted to change Cambodia; they referred to employing 'constructive dynamism' and 'revolution' so that it would be on par with, or even superior to, 'developed' countries.

Change, however, was not really intended to make Cambodia 'new'; modernization, even revolution, had to take place within the parameters established by the past. It was as though Cambodia was rushing headlong towards modernity while constantly looking back to tradition: to the kings of Angkor, to the religion of the ancestors and to the pragmatism of the Khmer peasantry. The ultimate purpose of change was to save Khmer civilization from extinction at the hands of the shadowy 'enemy', external or internal. All too often, in fact, the enemy was constituted by those loyal to the former regime, so ideological factors were constantly reinterpreted and incorporated into the idea system of the new regime, which could then claim superiority through ideological purity.

'Socialism' was the common ideological charter for modernization. Even Lon Nol preached socialism, which he could do because its meaning was already twisted out of shape by the *Sangkum*. It would become even more unrecognisable under Democratic Kampuchea. Each of the regimes believed that their own form of socialism was essentially Khmer because they saw it through the prism of the (misunderstood) traditional practice of mutual assistance, *brovas day kinear*, whereby rice farmers had to share their labour for

44 ANC, PRK files (unsorted), 'Kosang aoy roeng muam Pak Marx-Lenin koechie koddar komnot ney cheychumneah robas padewat Kampuchea' [Building the strength of the Marxist-Leninist Party is the key factor in the success of the Cambodian revolution], study document for the Party Plenary Congress, CPK Central Committee, 3 Apr. 1981.

ploughing, transplanting and harvesting so that all tasks could be completed within time limits enforced by the rains. This time-honoured practice allowed farmers to subsist in the erratic weather conditions and poor soils which are the norm in most of the Cambodian countryside. However, mutual assistance is not agrarian socialism. The cost value of each task was and still is carefully calculated and is repaid exactly in kind: one day's ploughing, for instance, is worth three days of transplanting rice seedlings. Farmwork is not ideological, no matter what politicians think. In this way, however, until Pen Sovann tried to point out the errors in definition in 1981, socialism became something 'exclusively' or 'uniquely' Cambodian. In fact, by that point it had become meaningless or worse.

Another common thread in the ideologies is the high value accorded to stability and equilibrium. Again, this was best explained and developed by the *Sangkum*. The 'middle way' is a core value of Buddhism, so policies of non-alignment and neutrality in foreign affairs and duality in domestic or economic affairs found a ready-made ideological foundation. The Khmer Republic, which declared a state of martial law soon after taking power, referred to its foreign policy as 'active neutrality'. The republicans also valued stability, equilibrium and 'evolution' – or so their writings would indicate. The stabilizing duality that they developed was nation-building and national salvation; these ideological themes persisted in the slightly different forms of construction (of socialism) and defence (of the Khmer race from extinction, of the independence of the motherland) right up through the end of 1984.

The more a regime claimed to value stability and equilibrium, it seemed, the more unstable and precarious life became for Cambodians. Change, rather than signifying progress or development, was just an order to 'about face', to reverse direction. As David Chandler has argued,

> At no time has a preceding regime been given credit for anything, or has continuity been favoured over change. . . . There is no inherent stability in the Cambodian 'system', which is always dependent on a given regime's style, on shifting patterns of patronage, and on the premises that winners take all and that political opponents, by definition, put their lives at risk.[45]

Ideology and the era of Hun Sen

By the end of 1984, the Khmer Vietminh faction that Pen Sovann had led was without influence in the Party.[46] In January 1985, Hun Sen was confirmed as the nation's prime minister; the Fifth Party Congress that year ranked him third in the Politburo after Heng Samrin and Chea Sim, and second in the Secretariat after Heng Samrin. At the age of just 32, Hun Sen had the power to implement if not revolution then at least an agenda

45 David Chandler, 'How to slice a century of Cambodian history', *Phnom Penh Post*, 24 Dec. 1999–6 Jan. 2000, p. 14.

46 By the end of 1981, Pen Sovann had fallen out with the Vietnamese over matters of sovereignty, particularly in relation to the new PRK armed forces. His Khmer Vietminh faction, trained in Vietnam, lost out to the former Khmer Rouge faction whose key political leaders were Chea Sim and Hun Sen. He was charged with treason (for having contact with the Thai military, perhaps as a prelude to defection) and imprisoned in Hanoi until the end of 1991. He formed the Khmer Sustaining Party, which contested the 1998 election and narrowly missed gaining a seat in the National Assembly.

of sweeping pragmatic reforms. In July 1988, private capitalists were permitted to form joint ventures with the state, while the Ministry of Planning was drafting an investment law to attract capital from overseas Cambodians and foreign companies to help rebuild the economy. The official dismantling of the PRK-instituted *krom samaki* (solidarity groups for agricultural production) was supposed to make way for further reforms in the rural areas in order to boost food production and farmers' incomes. In February 1989, a constitutional amendment recognized private ownership of land. 'Socialism doesn't mean that the state has to monopolize land', said a PRK official. 'Ideology must fit the actual situation. But the situation is changing [very] fast, and ideology is staying behind.'[47]

Ideology lagged too far behind the reforms and soon became redundant. An official was reported to have said, 'Many cadres who are ideologues are being moved. Before, if you understood Marxism-Leninism and were a good speaker, you were chosen. Now you have to show that you can produce.' 'For us socialism means we have to improve the living standard of the people', another said. 'We must try to develop a strata [*sic*] of businessmen to build our economy, while the state tries to protect the poorest people.' A Soviet diplomat called the changes 'silent *perestroika*'.[48] In April that year, the PRK transmuted into the ideologically neutral State of Cambodia; the state leaders put away the tattered remnants of their socialist ideology once and for all.

Since 1993, Cambodia has been a constitutional monarchy where the king reigns but may not govern. The Khmer Rouge have renounced the struggle and defected to the state. Multi-party elections have been held both nationally and locally and deemed 'free and fair' by impartial international observers. Cambodia is a full member of both the United Nations and ASEAN. For the first time in half a century, Cambodians are not at war with each other or with anyone else. Only a very superficial observer, however, would fail to note the deep disquiet in the kingdom about excesses of Thion's 'means of governing' (corruption, nepotism and factionalism) and the consequences for the mass of the people in terms of crippling poverty, environmental degradation and, most disturbingly, Cambodia's political and economic viability. Of the three 'means', only factionalism has been held in check so far. This is because the sharing of state properties from the former regime and the generous flow of international assistance and easy credit have benefited both factions of the ruling Cambodian People's Party (CPP), if not equally then at least more than sufficiently. Nepotism and corruption follow familiar patterns, but two decades of nepotism and carefully arranged marriages among families of the ruling elites have created a web of alliances which many fear, if dismantled, would bring down with it the whole structure of the state.

The preamble to the 1993 constitution defines the state as 'a multi-party liberal democratic regime guaranteeing human rights, abiding by law, and having high responsibility for the nation's future destiny of moving toward perpetual progress, development, prosperity, and glory'.[49] Liberal pluralistic democracy, or simply democracy, is therefore the ideology which the current state has adopted for its political identity and

47 Quoted in Murray Hiebert, 'Rising from the ashes', *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 12 Jan. 1989, pp. 16–17.
48 Ibid.
49 Jennar, *Cambodian constitutions*, p. 8.

orientation. After what is generally called 'the UNTAC election'[50] in 1993, democracy arrived in Phnom Penh like a pre-packaged assembly kit, complete with notions of civil society, good governance, decentralization, gender equity and – controversially at first – human rights. So far, progress in its construction throughout the country has been, at best, inconsistent.

Lao Mong Hay, a Cambodian academic and former director of the prestigious Khmer Institute of Democracy, acknowledges that 'a few democratic values such as freedom of expression in the form of demonstrations, regular elections, the workings of political parties, have gradually become part of the political culture of the country'. He warns, however, that these political reforms did not come 'from within' and that 'any relaxation on the part of [foreign] donors could well have adverse effects on democratic gains'. Implicit in his argument is a criticism of the ruling elite's lack of commitment to the new ideology. Since the start of the Hun Sen era there have been reforms, mainly economic but also political, such as in the armed forces.[51] On the other hand, if it is true, as Lao Mong Hay claims, that 'Cambodians have become more knowledgeable, more aware of rights, more sophisticated, more daring, and more willing to make themselves heard and participate in public affairs', then this is the result of pressure from external funding agencies and not because it is the will of state leaders.[52]

It is not enough to argue that the reluctance to embrace democracy stems from the fear that genuine democracy would put paid to those persistent means of governing, particularly nepotism and corruption. These evils are hardly the exclusive preserve of 'non-democratic' states. If we look back to the recurrent themes in state ideologies of former Cambodian regimes, however, liberal pluralistic democracy, while propounded by some politicians, was never the ideology of choice for those with real power. Under the various culturally adapted, domestic guises of socialism, Cambodian rulers were able to interpret 'modernization' and 'change' in traditional terms. They were not prepared to sacrifice traditions for the sake of change. Consequently, stability and equilibrium, not social and economic development, were the real aims; even radical revolution became regressive. Socialism was merely the excuse for what Jennar discerned as 'state pretensions to interfere in the private sector and to shape individuals according to cultural or ideological criteria'.[53]

Under socialism, stability and equilibrium could be assured because power could not be challenged. Pluralistic democracy is, however, inherently destabilizing; when the CPP lost the 1993 multi-party elections, there was thus genuine fear that the small measure of stability to which the people had become accustomed since 1979 would be lost. As in the first Kingdom of Cambodia under Sihanouk's *Sangkum*, the second Kingdom of Cambodia chose to resolve the problem with a deformed unity by bringing

50 The United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia, which oversaw preparations for and the process of the multi-party elections.

51 On 28 Jan. 1999, Hun Sen withdrew from the post of commander-in-chief, which was transferred to General Ke Kimyan. During the ceremony he said that 'the effort to promote neutralization of the national armed forces of Cambodia is an important context for liberal pluralistic democracy. . . . For this reason, I called it an imperative political reform.' The quotation is from a copy of his speech, provided by a source in Cambodia.

52 'Development of democracy in Cambodia', *Phnom Penh Post*, 24 Dec. 1999–6 Jan. 2000, pp. 6, 14.

53 Jennar, *Cambodian constitutions*, pp. 3–4.

all parties together into 'one big tent' – the term used after the 1993 election when the CPP lost but joined the government in a special power-sharing arrangement rather than forming an opposition. Within that space, trust and loyalty were assumed; opposition or dissent was treasonous. The special arrangement until 1998 which allowed for two (opposing) prime ministers even fitted well with ideals of Khmer exclusiveness and uniqueness.[54]

The democracy Cambodia espoused in the 1993 constitution is based on universal principles which cannot be culturally adapted without being lost. At first there was genuine confusion about the incontestable nature of human rights, but this debate has passed, and Hun Sen and the CPP have since followed the democratic process as though it were an election roadmap. At the same time, no one, least of all Hun Sen himself, believes that the process will diminish the prime minister's power or seriously alter the patronage system which reinforces that power. On more than one occasion, CPP leaders have referred to the democratic process as a sports game. In the lead-up to the local commune elections which were held in 2002, for instance, the deputy director of the CPP Cabinet was reported as saying, 'My party has the same mindset as an athletic team. We can compete in this democratic game.'[55] Chea Soth, a deputy prime minister of the PRK and long-serving theoretician of the party, has been called the coach of this 'team'. The deep coffers of the party virtually guarantee victory at the polls. Paul Mus once remarked that the era of French colonization had left the rural areas of Indochina and Africa with less a model than a caricature of capitalism.[56] In a similar way, what Cambodians got in 1993 was less a model than a caricature of democracy.

If not liberal multi-party democracy, then what consistent 'self-conscious political arguments' does Hun Sen make to justify the use of state power? What are his theories about the economy, state, or education that legitimate that power and, in Douglas Kellner's terms, 'prescribe conformist acceptance'? If, as Kellner contends, the power of an ideology 'resides in its ability to give birth to a new view of the world and to motivate its advocates to political action', what is the worldview that Hun Sen envisages?[57] In attempting to answer these questions, it is important to note two significant factors that affect an ideological interpretation of the public rhetoric of the Cambodian prime minister. The first of these is what he decries as 'international pressure': 'The phrase I hate most is international pressure. . . . International pressure only keeps detainees behind bars longer. . . . Don't destroy one country under the pretext of democracy. You can form NGOs, free forums, newspapers but absolutely not armed forces.'[58]

54 The so-called 'coup' of July 1997 effectively ended this arrangement. The nominal executive rule with two prime ministers continued, however, until the 1998 elections returned the CPP to power in its own right.

55 Lor Chandara, 'CPP strategy goes from gifts to achievements', *Cambodia Daily*, 5 Oct. 2001.

56 Paul Mus, *L'angle de l'Asie* (Paris: Hermann, 1977), p. 82.

57 Kellner, 'Ideology, Marxism', p. 53.

58 Pin Sisovann and Michael Cowden, 'PM defends judiciary, blasts int'l pressure', *Cambodia Daily*, 16 Aug. 2005, referring to the sentencing in the military court of opposition National Assembly deputy Cheam Channy on charges of attempting to form a 'shadow army'. The opposition Sam Rainsy Party claims it was merely forming a shadow cabinet along the lines of Western democracies that follow the Westminster parliamentary system.

The kind of international pressure which frustrates Hun Sen is different from that experienced by former regimes; Prince Sihanouk simply renounced US aid when he found the conditions unseemly, while Democratic Kampuchea and the People's Republic relied mainly on just one foreign partner. The current pressure, often in the form of criticism, comes from many quarters: emerging civil society groups within the country, bilateral and multilateral aid and credit agencies, and occasionally from within the large community of international non-government organizations which have field offices in Cambodia.

The country's economy and the provision of social services are both heavily dependent on external assistance because at least half of the annual national budget is funded by foreign sources. Hun Sen's government needs the aid, but it is very often tied to worldviews and theories about the economy, state or education which are not necessarily his own. The unusually stilted address he made to a meeting of public consultation on the draft of the long-awaited anti-corruption law illustrates this point:

> [T]he core of rectangular strategy of the Royal Government is good governance which focuses on combating corruption, law and judicial reforms, public administrative reform, and military reform. In the core of the rectangular strategy, fighting against corruption is an inter-related factor and necessary to forge a common strategy toward development entailing good governance. . . .[59]

The anti-corruption law is not a government initiative. The 2004 session of the donor consultative meeting, where pledges are made for financial assistance to Cambodia each year, set the adoption of the law in 2005 as a benchmark for the government's reform efforts. Cambodia's performance in combating human trafficking is tied to US economic aid sanctions. In the past, preferential garment export quotas have been linked to labour conditions inside factories in the country. International watchdogs actively monitor environmental and human rights concerns. This stick-and-carrot approach by the international community towards Cambodia naturally enough rankles with the prime minister. In his address to the United Nations General Assembly on 15 September 2005, he contended that 'politically driven hidden agendas and shifting ideologies to bring coercive influence on the recipients [of aid] must end. They serve only to punish the poor.'[60] International pressure also impedes the evolution of a domestic ideology for the state – assuming, of course, that Hun Sen is interested in developing one.

The second factor is more explicitly political. For most of the 20 years that Hun Sen has held executive power, and particularly since 1993, he has been preoccupied with the elimination of opposition or perceived threats to his power. Two of the three groups that formed the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea (CGDK) in 1982 to better wage war against the People's Republic, and which were involved in the international peace process and later invited to take part in the 1993 election – namely the Khmer Rouge and the KPNLF – have abandoned the political stage.[61] The third group, the

59 'PM speaks against corruption' – edited comments, *Phnom Penh Post*, 26 Aug.–8 Sept. 2005.
60 William Shaw, 'PM paints positive picture at UN summit', *Cambodia Daily*, 17–18 Sept. 2005.
61 The Khmer People's National Liberation Front was nominally led by Son Sann but consisted of several factions.

Funcinpec (now the Funcinpec Party), which was so soundly beaten in the brief *coup de force* of July 1997, is now the CPP's coalition partner in government. The relationship is so close that Hun Sen was invited to attend the 2005 Annual Funcinpec Congress as its guest of honour. 'We will continue to work together for at least fifteen years', Hun Sen is reported to have said. 'The coalition will ensure that investment in Cambodia won't face any risk in the future. Investors will never throw money away in war.'[62] Only the Sam Rainsy Party remains in opposition and efforts to break it are persistent, including punishing use of the defamation law and charges of criminal intent.

Control of the courts is therefore essential to the maintenance of political power. At the same time, legal and judicial reform is necessary to attract and protect investment, and it was fundamental to Cambodia's entry into the World Trade Organization in 2004. On the pretext of judicial reform, Hun Sen has vowed to hold court officials responsible. His 'iron fist' campaign was launched during a speech he made on 3 March 2005. Unlike the address on combating corruption, the rhetoric here is far more relaxed and immediately recognizable as Hun Sen's own: 'There are three legs on which the cooking pot rests: the legislative, the executive and the judicial. One of these legs is broken. We will have to hang the pot up and we will use the iron fist, Hun Sen's iron fist, to do it.' It is too early to judge the real motives behind this campaign, although it seems that a purge of sorts is underway to remove certain court officials and judges. Some court officials are reported to be 'working in fear'.[63] Politics, not the rectangular strategy, appears to be the driving force. This narrow political focus on the elimination of opposition and threats has also impeded the development of a consistent worldview.

It is more reliable to name those ideologies that Hun Sen does not espouse than to attempt to label him with one. It is clear that he is not a proponent of liberal multi-party democracy and despite the repeated claims of his opponents to the contrary, he is not and never has been a Communist. Although he joined the forces of the Cambodian revolution in the late 1960s, everything that he has done in the public domain since coming to power in 1985 suggests that his impulse to join the revolution was idealistic rather than ideological. In an age of globalized technology and trade, perhaps there is no need for a particularistic idea system to chart a course for the state to follow or to rally the people's support. An attempt to formulate one might put Cambodia at odds with those 'politically driven hidden agendas and shifting ideologies' of the aid donors that he criticized at the General Assembly.

Hun Sen has survived at the top of the power pyramid for longer than any other regime leader since independence, and after 20 years his position seems assured. He is an astute politician and has so far used pragmatism to very good effect, at least in the political arena. In the economic arena, however, his pragmatic policy of '*Reas mean mun rodth*' (the people become rich before the state) or classic economic rationalism has left too many Cambodian citizens in dire poverty. In an interview with *Asiaweek* in May 1999, he gave his own answer to the question about what he stands for: 'Sometimes people wonder what is Hun Sen really. . . . In communist countries I was called a liberalist and in liberal

62 Kay Kimsong, 'PM: Coalition will provide stability for Cambodian investors', *Cambodia Daily*, 12 Aug. 2005.

63 Lee Berthiaume and Prak Chan Thul, 'Iron fist court reform seizes one of its own', *Cambodia Daily*, 19 Aug. 2005.

countries I was called a communist. Finally I had to tell myself Hun Sen is Hun Sen. Hun Sen belongs to the Cambodian people.'[64]

By 'the Cambodian people', we may be sure that Hun Sen means the 9.6 million people – almost 85 per cent of the total population – who live in the countryside.[65] Like Sihanouk 50 years ago, Hun Sen is not popular with the citizens of Phnom Penh, who vote consistently and overwhelmingly for the opposition. (The CPP won only four of the city's 12 seats in the National Assembly at the 2003 general election.) His popular base is very much in the countryside. His rhetoric in public speeches, his orders to close down karaoke bars and for female popular artists to 'cover up' on stage, his preferred residence outside the city – all of this resonates with the rural electorate far more than any complex ideology could.

By abandoning ideology, Hun Sen may very well have broken the mould of brief, erratic reign which has dogged the leaders of post-independence Cambodia, but there are patterns in the past that signal caution. Writing in 1973, Milton Osborne noted that nothing in Cambodian history gives credence to the view that the support of the rural population guarantees political survival. 'In other centuries, as in 1970', he pointed out with reference to the inevitable demise of the Khmer Republic, 'it was the urban elite's support that was necessary for a regime's survival'.[66] Thirty years ago, the urban elite was destroyed in the Democratic Kampuchea catastrophe. The new emerging urban elite's impatience with Hun Sen's style of government, however, may augur ill for a further term in office. By way of example, the outrage expressed by many citizens of Phnom Penh following the arrest and imprisonment of four leading activists after a rally to celebrate International Human Rights Day in December 2005, and their subsequent release, may indicate that while the old ideological era may have passed, the great debate of ideas about how people are to be governed is still very much alive in Cambodia, and it serves as a timely warning that more is expected of a leader than mere economic management.

64 'Hun Sen moves ahead', *Asiaweek*, 21 May 1999.
65 *General population census of Cambodia 1998: Final census results* (Phnom Penh: National Institute of Statistics, July 1999), p. xi.
66 Milton Osborne, *Politics and power*, p. 112.