

Call editor in Kampuchea

Report from a liberated zone

Special to The Call

Dangrek Mountains, Kampuchea—A two day visit to a secret base of the Democratic Kampuchean government here by a team of foreign journalists, including *The Call's* Dan Burstein, has revealed that the anti-Vietnamese resistance is still very much alive and well inside Kampuchea.

In an ironically calm and tranquil banyan forest, Khieu Samphan, who has replaced Pol Pot as Prime Minister of Democratic Kampuchea, gave an exclusive interview to Burstein, describing what he called the "new strategic policy" of his government.

The essence of that policy is to seek to put aside all past differences among various Khmer political factions and unite into one common front against the Vietnamese occupiers. To do that, Samphan explained, his forces are prepared to put aside much of their past program for the socialist transformation of Kampuchea, as well as promise not to reintroduce much-criticized policies of evacuation of urban centers, abandonment of currency, and restrictions on the freedom of movement and religion.

The 49-year-old Prime Minister, who holds a doctorate in economics from the University of Paris and has long been regarded as one of Kampuchea's most brilliant politicians, said he believed it was possible in the coming months to reconstruct the



KHIEU SAMPHAN, Premier of Democratic Kampuchea, talks with The Call's Dan Burstein at secret base inside Kampuchea. (David Hume Kennerly photo)

united front with Prince Sihanouk as well as numerous sections of the Khmer Serei. "In this struggle," Samphan said, "all patriots will meet at some point down the road."

In talks with the journalists gathered for the occasion, including correspondents of the New York Times,

Time Magazine and Italian, Japanese and Yugoslav news agencies, Samphan as well as Foreign Minister Ieng Sary sought to clear the air about the controversial past of Democratic Kampuchea which has drawn widespread condemnation in the Western countries.

While denying the charges that the Pol Pot government murdered three million of their own people, Samphan acknowledged that 10,000 were in fact executed and that "even good cadres" made "many mistakes"

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(David Hume Kennerly photo)

KHIEU SAMPHAN, Prime Minister of Democratic Kampuchea.

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in the turbulent years of 1975-78 prior to Vietnam's invasion.

"All this is in the past," said Ieng Sary. "For our part, we could raise with the United States the coup d'etat that overthrew Prince Sihanouk and the massive bombing of our country that followed 1970. But this is past history. We should forget past differences and concentrate on the future."

Linking Vietnamese activity in Kampuchea to the invasion of Afghanistan and global Soviet strategy, Samphan said that it was time the United States and other Western countries cooperated with his government to pursue a common goal of checking Soviet expansionism.

With several guerrilla troop perimeters stretched out around the base

area—and the base area itself heavily mined, booby-trapped and inlaid with punji stakes—the Kampuchean leaders were able to visibly demonstrate their effectiveness inside their own country by hosting the visiting journalists and showing them around a 20-square-mile area. The nearest Vietnamese positions were said to be about 18 miles from the center of the camp.

A guerrilla company of 105 men outfitted in Chinese fatigues and sporting an assortment of old Chinese and American weapons were assembled for review by the journalists. But the commander of the unit explained that since last May, the guerrillas have stopped fighting in large formations altogether, and use only highly mobile detachments of 6 or 12 men to stage raids against the enemy. "From January to May of

last year," he said, "we suffered 30,000 casualties. But since adopting our new method of warfare, we have only had 2,000 casualties."

Throughout the base area, numerous indications pointed to the viability of the resistance. A field hospital was functioning with a small array of sophisticated drugs and medicine. Children and teenagers were engaged in learning basic guerrilla skills—from assembling a radio to honing punji stakes. Some basic cultivation of rice and other crops was going on. Food packets were being prepared for the front, although the dinner meal we observed amounted to no more than three spoonfuls of rice in a soup made of leaves for each person.

The local villagers and rank-and-file troops who were interviewed indicated a high level of morale and

a determination to carry out their part to oust the Vietnamese invaders from the country. They were painfully aware of the hardships involved—no one was eating very well, malaria victims lay suffering in the hospital, and not a family had gone without losing loved ones in the conflict.

It was also obvious that the whole village of about 1,000 people had been on the run from one place to another, finally able to set up camp here four months ago, and not knowing how much longer they might be able to stay.

But a 17-year-old soldier put it this way: "There is nothing else but the struggle; there is nothing else to do but fight. We are Kampuchean and this is our country. We cannot live here if the Vietnamese come. For us, all is lost if the Vietnamese come. So we must fight. It doesn't matter what the hardships are. There is no other choice."