

The Pol Pot Regime

Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge of Communist Party of Kampuchea came to power in April 17, 1975. After they took the power, they established the state known as Democratic Kampuchea and ruled the country until January 1979. During the Khmer Rouge led the country, they created policies that were anarchy and disregarded human life. They caused repression and massacres on a massive scale. Cambodia was turned into a genocidal place, which later became a killing field for nearly two million people. In this term paper, it contains a discussion on some main points of the Pol Pot regime's history included the Khmer Rouge and their power, the Cambodian genocide, the Khmer Rouge's ideology, and the end of the Khmer Rouge regime.

The Khmer Rouge followers came from the Cambodian communist party that appeared from the country's struggle against French colonization 1940s, and was influenced by the Vietnamese. The movement of the Cambodian communist party took roots and began to grow since that time period. The power of the Khmer Rouge and their members had increased in size during 1970 Cambodian revolution that was led by General Lon Nol, a Cambodian politician who had formerly served as prime minister during the Khmer Republic and had Prince Norodom Sihanouk as the head of state. The Khmer Republic was successfully overthrown by General Lon Nol through his collaboration with America. This event drove even more new members to the Khmer Rouge. The Khmer Rouge guerrilla was arranged to become a major player in the Cambodian Civil War that had Prince Sihanouk and Vietnamese communists as supporters to fight against Lon Nol's army. The Khmer Rouge established Communist Party of Kampuchea that had Pol Pot as a leader. Pol Pot was born in Cambodia and known as Solath Sor. He had been educated in France and become a member of the French Communist Party. He joined secret communist

movements and began his rise up the ranks; he later became one of the world's most infamous dictators. The Khmer Rouge members received army training from the Chinese and got aid from the Vietnamese. The Lon Nol's army was defeated under the suppression of both the Khmer Rouge and the Vietnamese communist army on Cambodia territory. Because America was busy having the war with Vietnam, they could provide minimum assistance to General Lon Nol's activities. According to Kiernan, "Although it was indigenous, Pol Pot's revolution would not have won power without U.S. economic and military destabilization of Cambodia, which began in 1966 after the American escalation in next door Vietnam and peaked in 1969-73 with the carpet bombing of Cambodia's countryside by American B-52S. This was probably the most important single factor in Pol Pot's rise" (Kiernan 16). The result of this tragedy caused the mass death of innocent Cambodian and Cambodian peasants. This turned many, such as those who survived the U.S bombings or had lost family members, to the Khmer Rouge's revolution, which was fought against the Lon Nol and the US army. Two years in battle, the Khmer Rouge army under command of Pot Pol had put the end of the Lon Nol's government. By 1975, more than 85 percentage of the armies were the Khmer Rouge members in Cambodian territory. On the 17th of April 1975, they captured Phnom Penh and seized the government. Cambodia was trapped and fell to the communist forces and the second phase of the Cambodian tragedy had begun. After the Khmer Rouge took control of Cambodia, they renamed Cambodia from the Communist Party of Kampuchea to the Democratic Kampuchea.

Kiernan writes, "After Cambodia became Democratic Kampuchea, all cities were evacuated, hospitals cleared, schools closed, factories emptied, money abolished, monasteries shut, libraries scattered" (Kiernan 8). For almost four years under the Pol Pot regime, Cambodians completely lived independent of the press, movement, worship, organization, association, and

discussion all entirely disappeared. The Khmer Rouge forced all civilians in Phnom Penh and other cities into the countryside to undertake agricultural work, which caused thousands of people to die during the evacuations. In the meantime, the Khmer Rouge began to use their communist rules by focusing on radical Maoist and Marxist-Leninist transformation programs (Kiernan 26). During the Pol Pot regime, Cambodian society was transformed into a rural, classless society in which there were no rich people and no poor people. They declared the year zero and began to purify society. They eliminated money, normal schooling, religious practices, private property, foreign clothing styles, free markets, and all Cambodian culture. In support of an extreme form of peasant communism, public schools, pagodas, universities, shops, and government buildings were shut down and the regime turned those infrastructure into prisons and rehabilitation camps. They abolished all public or private transportation, private property, and all kind of entertainment. The borders were closed, foreign embassies and all kind of agencies expelled, and religion was banned. All leading Buddhist monks were killed and all temples severely destroyed. Newspapers and television stations were shut down, radios confiscated, mail and telephone use suppressed, the speaking of foreign languages punished (Kiernan 9). People no longer were allowed any kind of leisure activities. People in regime were forced to wear black costumes, which was called a traditional Pol Pot regime's clothes. The whole nation was kidnapped and people were deprived of their basic rights. Civilians lived like the prisoners, they had to stay inside their control all the time. The regime created the restriction rules and did not allow people to gather or hold group discussions. Any person who disobeyed the rules, would be accused of being enemies and they were arrested and sometimes executed. Children were taken from their parents and placed in separate forced labor camps and trained to be part of the cruel army. They taught them to respect only the Khmer Rouge as their true parents. Under Pol Pot's leadership, the Khmer Rouge

established their government called the Organization in Cambodia language wrote Angkar that represented each branch of the Khmer Rouge leaders. The rules also discouraged any relationship or any affection between family members, because the Khmer Rouge ordered all people to obey, respect, and follow the Angkar only.

Soon after the Khmer Rouge seized power, they arrested and killed thousands of soldiers, military officers, and civil servants from the Khmer Republic regime was led by General Lon Nol. Over the next three years of their holding power, they executed thousands of opposed people, educated people, minority like Cham, Vietnamese, and Chinese, all intellectuals, and all un-communist members, who were accused of being traitors. Kiernan writes that “mass killing started before 1978, only big people had been killed. The new rulers executed not only the local leaders, but also the little people, anyone. In all, thirty of the village’s one hundred families were slaughtered” (Kiernan 243). Other members who the Khmer Rouge considered useless to them, they either put them in the prisons and used the different kinds of cruel punishment or gather them in the killing field and murdered them, together with their extended families. The most important prison during the Khmer Rouge operation, known as S-21, held approximately 14,000 prisoners and only about 12 survived (Kiernan 352). Many other Civilians and Cambodian peasants who undertook agriculture were treated violently and suffered badly from labor intensive practices with no adequate food and medicine. Many of them died of starvation and overwork. In his book, Kiernan interviewed with Ms. Sovannary, a former villager in Region 5, who said that, “starvation on a large scale in 1977-78’. Back in her home village, too, ‘in 1977 food began to be taken away and six people died of starvation there in one night.’” (Kiernan 243). Cambodian genocides were carried out by the Khmer Rouge regime led by Pol Pot between 1975 to 1979 in which it’s estimated approximately 2 million people died.

The communism had its roots in the Khmer Rouge ideology since their birth. The Khmer Rouge was formed in 1968 as a branch of the Vietnamese army from North Vietnam, the Viet Cong, and Pathet Lao during the Vietnam War against the anti-communist forces. After the Khmer Rouge won the victory over the military dictatorship of the Khmer Republic, they installed their own government Democratic Kampuchea in 1975 that had Pol Pot as the leader. During the execution of the power, the Khmer Rouge carried out the ideals of communism that referred to society with no private property, no economic classes, and no profits. Kiernan writes that “a former Cambodian comrade claims that Pol Pot ‘said that everything should be done on the basis of self-reliance, independence and mastery. The Khmers should do everything on their own’” (Kiernan 8). This means that Pol Pot was in the favor of Marxism, the theoretical state of perfect, classless, stateless, government-less, man-made, and man-maintained worldly perfection founded by Karl Marx. Moreover, Khmer Rouge’s interpretation of Maoist communism allowed them to believe that they could create a classless society where everyone could work according to their needs, but this idea of Pol Pot and his followers was used to cover their cruelty and inhumanity. In addition to this, Short claims that: “communist regimes everywhere have sought to level income disparities; to make law an instrument of policy; to monopolies the press; to limit movement from the countryside to the cities; and to control postal and telecommunications links with the rest of the world. But Cambodians chose more radical, more insane solutions” (Short 11). This was because Pol Pot and his followers chose to control and manipulate the power for their own selfish goal. Another main reason of the Khmer Rouge’s desire was to build the ideal communist society and combat the capitalism of the Khmer Republic. This was a reason that the Khmer Rouge evacuated all civilian from cities to the countryside to undertake the agriculture and discarded classes. Short writes, “By instigating ‘Year Zero’ Pol Pot wished to create a State focused on their rural idyll,

with all citizens pledging loyalty to the State in a way which prohibited all personal, community or religious allegiances” (Short 43). The Khmer Rouge used reconstruction methods that began with “Year Zero” because they believed that Cambodia would return to the old time when the land was cultivated by peasants and the country was ruled by the poorest amongst society. The communist Pol Pot wanted to create a new type of man, originating from the lowest classes of society, ideologically pure, immune from foreign influence and easy to mold according to norms set by the party. They wanted to get rid of educated city individuals, who the Khmer Rouge believed corrupted enemies and took advantage of the poor people. The Khmer Rouge’s ideology was that they killed all educated people because they considered those people as “capitalist” or “class hatred” who refused to join the revolution and would disrupt the communist power. The Khmer Rouge enforced the breaking of religion and family and forced people to obey them as their true parents. People were not allowed to choose their own marriage partners. They established the rules by separating all children with their parents and placed children in the labor camps and created the children’s armed soldiers because the Khmer Rouge considered children central to the revolution. The Khmer Rouge soldiers had been indoctrinated to believe in a mysterious ruling entity known as Angka. Children soldiers were taught to follow their order without hesitation even killing their own parents if necessary. Hatred and fear sustainably were developed in children soldiers’ thought in order to build their senses of violence. Based on what the Khmer Rouge did when they were in power, it was clear that their ideologies were affected by the true communism and they used the power to achieve their own selfish goals.

The Khmer Rouge’s power began to fall at the end of 1976 when they had a war with Vietnam. By the end of 1977, the violent confrontation between the Khmer Rouge and Vietnam were escalated. On January 7, 1979 Vietnam invaded Cambodia, and overthrew the Democratic

Kampuchea. Vietnam built a new socialist regime that consisted of the Khmer Rouge defectors. The rest of the Democratic Kampuchea party fled west into the jungles along the Thailand border. The Khmer Rouge secretly carried out guerrilla attacks against the Vietnamese. The Khmer Rouge re-established their army in the Thai territory, where they received aid from Thai and China. When the United Nations prepared elections to seek for the resistance movement against communists, the Soviet Republic sought to keep Cambodia's seat at the UN and had the U.S to support this too. Under the assistance of China and the Soviet Union, the Khmer Rouge gained their power and fought against the Vietnam government in Cambodian territory. The escalating war, chaos, and instability in Cambodia caused the deaths of thousands of Cambodians, and forced a massive influx of hundreds of thousands refugees into Thailand to search for food, medical care, and security. In 1989, Vietnam decided to withdraw their troops under suppression of the U.S and the Soviet Union. In 1991, a temporary coalition government was established and a peace agreement signed between the new government and the old government that was formed by Vietnam. National Elections were held in 1993, and Prince Norodom Sihanouk was elected as the head of state. The rebellion of the Khmer Rouge and their leader Pol Pot continued until 1999. The Khmer Rouge's members finally were arrested, defected, some died, and some were placed under house arrest.

The Cambodian genocide was unlike other human tragedies of similar scale. It was not perpetrated on an ethnic group but on social and ideological basis. Nearly two million civilians died of summary executions, overwork, starvation, and disease after being evacuated from their homes and communities. Cambodia has suffered badly from the Pol Pot regime and its legacy lives on, and is still a prominent memory for millions of Cambodians today.

Annotated Bibliography

Kiernan, Ben. *The Pol Pot Regime: Race, Power, and Genocide in Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge, 1975-79*. The United States of America: Yale University. 2nd ed, a Yale Nota Bene book. 2002. Print.

In this book, Kiernan describes what happened while Pol Pot was in power, from 1975 to 1979. He provided very detailed information, most of it was gathered through his number of interviews. Based on his specific research studies, Kiernan was able to fit these information together into a clear overview of events that illustrated the real setting of the Pol Pot regime.

Short, Philip. *POL POT: ANATOMY OF A NIGHTMARE*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, LLC. 2005. Print.

In this book, Philip Short describes Pol Pot based on his research study. For his research, Short interviewed former Khmer Rouge leaders and worked with Khmer and Vietnamese assistants. This book has provided me some useful information that related to Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge's ideologies throughout the Cambodian genocide period, which is beneficial to my term paper research study.

Andrews, Tom. (2006).The Cambodian Genocide. *The Cambodian Genocide Online*. Retrieved from <http://endgenocide.org/learn/past-genocides/the-cambodian-genocide/>

The "United to End Genocide" website provides an overview of summary information of the Cambodian genocide, which give me the main ideas to write the content of this term paper. Also, the concise details of the Khmer Rouge events have guided me to briefly understand the whole main story that happened in the Pol Pot regime from 1975 to 1979.

http://www.rfa.org/english/blog/cambodiablog/blog6_cambodia_southerland-20060720.html

<http://hmd.org.uk/genocides/khmer-rouge-ideology>

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