

Xs: PC

Socialist Challenge

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Children in Kampuchea — waiting for aid that doesn't come

Kampuchea — neither fish nor fowl

JOHN Pilger stated in the *Daily Mirror* that the Pol Pot regime was a product of imperialist savagery. Clive Turnbull argued in *Socialist Challenge* last week that Pol Pot was the product also of Stalinism. In their different ways both are correct. The question that arises, however, is the attitude of socialists towards this regime, the subsequent invasion by Vietnam, and what exists today.

It is widely accepted within the Trotskyist movement that the class character of a state can be easily ascertained. It is either a capitalist state or a workers state. In general, of course, this is correct. But history can, on occasion, be cruel. Exceptions, albeit of a limited and temporary duration, can exist.

I would maintain that Kampuchea under Pol Pot was neither a capitalist state nor a workers state. It was a historical aberration and its future was always unstable. If the Vietnamese had not overthrown Pol Pot it is very likely that imperialism (utilising the refugees and Thailand) would sooner or later have made a push in that direction.

It is true that Pol Pot was not creating a capitalist state. Everything was taken over by the state (including personal belongings). It is also true that the means of production and the working class were smashed. Stalin's atrocities did have a rationale: heavy industrialisation, i.e. increasing the weight of the working class. Pol Pot destroyed the tiny working class as a social class. All human rights were

taken away.

It wasn't a case of substituting politically for the working class as the bureaucracy normally does. It was something completely different, which defies characterisation in terms normally used on the left. It is easy to sit back and say that it would have been infinitely better if Pol Pot had been overthrown by the Kampuchean masses. It would have been. However, there is a danger that Pol Pot would have exterminated what was left of the population before he went down himself.

So we should admit that the Pol Pot regime was neither fish nor fowl. And as such it was characterised by an instability which was reflected in its barbarism. Its overthrow was a tiny step forward for the Kampucheans who are still alive. And one can agree with Clive that pressure should be built up in the labour movement to press for all forms of aid.
TARIQ ALI, North London

Little angels?

IN AN article generally favourable to kids, David Holland's 'Whose Consent?' (20 September) was remarkably weak on paedophilia. To say that 'cross generational sex is a side issue...' (rather a silly euphemism for paedophile sex, aren't sexual relations between a girl/boy of 16 and woman/man of 60 cross generational?) is plainly incorrect. Daughter/father relationships, lesbian/feminist custody cases, and child/mother relationships all in their various ways proclaim the prolific nature of paedophile relationships. I find it amusing that David

Holland should quote Lewis Carroll or Peter Pan as a 'little angels idyll' in contrast to the 'savage' attacks on children's sexuality taking place outside the playhouse. Both J.M. Barrie and Carroll were paedophiles, and tolerated as such as the medium by which the Victorian middle class came to terms with the existence of, and their cravings for, sexual children. Under age sexuality was recognised and wrapped up in a cloying innocence. Embedded in Peter Pan is the image of the paedophile as an immature adult, 'the person who never grew up', and that image embodies many deep felt — but denied — fantasies that adults have for children.

Paedophiles are adults who love children. The number of adults who love children is immense. But the number of paedophiles...?

Well, just stop for a moment and muse over parent/child relationships. Pretty mundane, you might say. But if I were to turn up on your doorstep dear (adult) reader, and strike up a similar relationship with 'your' child, how long would it be before I was being carted off to the local nick with perhaps ten years (or much more) inside after the court case?

And what if dear 'little x' decided to go to Paris with me for a dirty weekend? Or forever? So much for biological parenthood. (This paragraph constitutes a Conspiracy to Corrupt Public Morals, so please regard it in a hypothetical light... until it happens.)

Show me an adult who is not a paedophile. Then I'll join Mary Whitehouse and believe in immorality. Sex with children is wonderful and can be highly recommended to all SC readers. (Oops! Another Conspiracy to Corrupt.) Children are wonderful and they should not be subjected to any kind of guilt trip or legal shit about their bodies and their sexuality. It is theirs, and nobody else's.
TIM BROWN, London N19

Sanctions

RON Todd's pledge that the Transport and General Workers Union will impose sanctions on the Smith-Muzorewa regime if the Tories lift them (27 September) can only be welcomed. However there is a small problem. In order to impose sanctions the TGWU will have to win the support of its members. And there's the rub.

I wonder how many of the white airport workers who welcomed Smith at Heathrow were members of the TGWU. The fact that racism is so widespread means that the TGWU leaders will face some problems. They should be aware of these before they launch any campaign.
Asha Patel, Ealing

Socialist Challenge

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Kampuchea—how it happened

JOHN PILGER'S recent reports from Kampuchea have revealed a nation reduced to a vast charnel-house. A staggering two million people have died in the 1970s — the bulk of them after the overthrow of Lon Nol by the Khmer Rouge guerrillas in 1975.

The reaction of socialists throughout the world to the uncovering of Nazi-style extermination camps and the like has been one of horror and revulsion. How did it happen? Below CLIVE TURNBULL offers an explanation. We invite further contributions to this discussion.

FROM 1970 a saturation bombing campaign was secretly begun by Nixon and Kissinger. The effect on Kampuchea was equivalent to five Hiroshimas. The rain of destruction outdid even the carnage of the First World War. The population of the capital, Phnom Penh, soared as hundreds of thousands of peasants fled from the countryside for their lives.

Out of this baptism of fire the Khmer Rouge emerged to lead the struggle to overthrow Lon Nol. So dependent was this puppet regime on US aid that the Khmer Rouge forces were able to bring its tottering structures crashing down despite their own lack of mass support.

Shrine

Pilger describes Phnom Penh after the Khmer Rouge marched in: 'It is a Luddites' shrine, a cemetery of machines: cars, ambulances, fire engines, typewriters, generators, television sets. There is a separate pile of burned telephones; all modern communications, including post, were "illegal".... Some two and a half million people were ordered out of the city at gunpoint on that April day, and most of them are said to be "missing".'

Measures such as these defy any capitalist rationale. No Hitler, coming to power as a last resort of the capitalist class, obliterates the capitalists and their property. The Khmer Rouge leadership didn't change places with Lon Nol and proceed to enrich themselves from the old sources of profits, plunder and graft. On the contrary, they destroyed the old regime lock, stock and barrel.

The entire machinery of Lon Nol's government was smashed — the army, police and civil service. All property was nationalised — not just the factories, banks and land, but even the smallest items of personal property. Money was abolished, and a monopoly of foreign trade established (a formality, as foreign trade actually ceased). All resources were centralised by the state and directed towards agricultural production.

Mao

Most socialists were agreed that in Vietnam such measures signified the overturn of capitalist rule, politically and economically. In its place a workers state was established, although one in which the Vietnamese Communist Party kept a bureaucratic monopoly of power. This consideration must



'Nazi-style extermination camps have caused socialists to react in horror' be set against the extreme brutality of the Pol Pot regime.

The Khmer Rouge leaders modelled themselves on Mao Tse-tung and the victory of the Chinese CP. Like Mao, they concentrated on building a peasant army which would win the countryside and then take the cities.

Kampuchea's backwardness determined for them the primitive agricultural base from which reconstruction would have to begin. At the same time they were faced with the problem of how to feed the swollen population of the cities — urban centres which they saw as corrupt nests for counter-revolutionary activity.

The methods they adopted came naturally from their training in the Stalinist school:

forced evacuation of the cities and regimentation of the masses into work brigades. Stalin had carried through forced collectivisation of the land in the 1930s and '40s in just the same way, with 'liquidation of the middle peasants as a class' and the transportation of whole peoples like the Crimean Tartars from their homelands.

Nor is it a matter simply of the historical example of Stalinism. The bureaucrats in Moscow and Peking today bear their share of responsibility for what happened in Kampuchea after 1975. They had the resources to feed and support the population. No such aid was given.

Today, however, the most burning issue is not whether Pol Pot was a Stalin or a Hitler — it is the fact, as John Pilger testifies, that the people of Kampuchea face extinction.

Today the process begun by Kissinger is nearing completion... "We have six months to save three million people, the majority of the population, from starvation and related diseases", said Jacques Beaumont (a UN official). "Eighty-five per cent of the women have stopped menstruating, because they are malnourished and exhausted and, like everybody, they have not recovered from the trauma of the terror".

A massive labour movement campaign for aid to the Kampuchean people is vital.