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On May 1, 1977, the New York Times published an account of the "painful problems of peace" in Vietnam by Fox Butterfield. He describes the "woes" of the people of the South, their "sense of hardship" and the grim conditions of their life, concluding that "most Southerners are said to appear resigned to their fate." His evidence comes from "diplomats, refugees and letters from Vietnam." In journals of the War Resisters League and the American Friends Service Committee of March-May 1977, in contrast, there are lengthy reports by Carol Bragg on a visit to Vietnam earlier this year by a six-person AFSC delegation, including two who had worked in Vietnam and are fluent in Vietnamese. The group traveled widely in the South and spoke to well-known leaders of the non-Communist Third Force who are active in the press and government, as well as ordinary citizens. They report impressive social and economic progress in the face of the enormous destruction left by the war, a "pioneering life" that is "difficult and at times discouraging," but everywhere "signs of a nation rebuilding" with commitment and dedication.

Butterfield claims that "there is little verifiable information on the new economic zones — no full-time American correspondents

have been admitted since the war — but they are evidently not popular." While it is true that American correspondents are not welcomed in Vietnam, there is nonetheless ample expert eyewitness testimony, including that of journalists of international repute, visiting Vietnamese professors from Canada, American missionaries and others who have traveled through the country where they worked for many years. Jean and Simonne Lacouture published a book in 1976 on a recent visit, critical of much of what they saw but giving a generally very positive account of reconstruction efforts and popular committment. Max Ediger of the Mennonite Central Committee, who worked in Vietnam for many years and stayed for thirteen months after the war, testified before Congress in March 1977 on a two-week return visit in January, also conveying a very favorable impression of the great progress he observed despite the "vast destruction of soil and facilities inflicted by the past war." There have also been positive accounts of the "new economic zones" in such journals as the Far Eastern Economic Review and the Canadian Pacific Affairs.

But none of this extensive evidence appears in the New York Times's analysis of "conditions in Indochina two years after the end of the war there." Nor is there any discussion in the Times of the "case of the missing bloodbath," although forecasts of a holocaust were urged by the U.S. leadership, official experts and the mass media over the entire course of the war in justifying our continued military presence. On the other hand, protests by some former antiwar individuals against alleged human rights violations in Vietnam are given generous coverage. This choice of subject may be the only basis on which U.S. — as opposed to Soviet — dissidents can get serious attention in the mass media today.

The technical name for this farce is "freedom of the press." All are free to write as they wish: Fox Butterfield, with his ideological blinders, on the front page of the Times (daily circulation more than 800,000); and Carol Bragg, with her eyewitness testimony, in New England Peacework (circulation 2,500). Typically, reports

which emphasize the destruction caused by the United States and the progress and commitment of the Vietnamese reach a tiny circle of peace activists. Reports that ignore the American role — Butterfield can only bring himself to speak of "substantial tracts of land made fallow [sic] by the war," with no agent indicated — and that find only "woes" and distress, reach a mass audience and become part of the established truth. In this way a "line" is implanted in the public mind with all the effectiveness of a system of censorship, while the illusion of an open press and society is maintained. If dictators were smarter, they would surely use the American system of thought control and indoctrination.

It was inevitable with the failure of the American effort to subdue South Vietnam and to crush the mass movements elsewhere in Indochina, that there would be a campaign to reconstruct the history of these years so as to place the role of the United States in a more favorable light. The drab view of contemporary Vietnam provided by Butterfield and the establishment press helps to sustain the desired rewriting of history, asserting as it does the sad results of Communist success and American failure. Well suited for these aims are tales of Communist atrocities, which not only prove the evils of communism but undermine the credibility of those who opposed the war and might interfere with future crusades for freedom.

It is in this context that we must view the recent spate of newspaper reports, editorials and books on Cambodia, a part of the world not ordinarily of great concern to the press. However, an exception is made when useful lessons may be drawn and public opinion mobilized in directions advantageous to the established order. Such didacticism often plays fast and loose with the truth.

For example, on April 8, 1977, The Washington Post devoted half a page to "photographs believed to be the first of actual forced labor conditions in the countryside of Cambodia [to] have reached the West." The pictures show armed soldiers guarding people pulling

plows, others working fields, and one bound man ("It is not known if this man was killed," the caption reads). Quite a sensational testimonial to Communist atrocities, but there is a slight problem. The Washington Post account of how they were smuggled out by a relative of the photographer who died in the escape is entirely fanciful. The pictures had appeared a year earlier in France, Germany and Australia, as well as in the Bangkok Post (April 19, 1976) with the caption "True or False?" In fact, an attempt by a Thai trader to sell these photos to the Bangkok Post was turned down "because the origin and authenticity of the photographs were in doubt." The photos appeared in another Thai newspaper two days before the April 4th election. The Bangkok Post then published them, explaining in an accompanying article that "Khmer watchers" were dubious about the clothes and manner of the people depicted, and quoting "other observers" who "pointed to the possibility that the series of pictures could have been taken in Thailand with the prime objective of destroying the image of the Socialist parties" before the election.

This story was reported in the U.S./Indochina Report of the Indochina Resource Center in July 1976, along with the additional information that a Thai intelligence officer later admitted that the photos were indeed posed inside Thailand: "'Only the photographer and I were supposed to know,' he confided to a Thai journalist." The full details were given in the International Bulletin (April 25, 1977; circulation 6,000). A letter of April 20 to the Washington Post on these points has not appeared. In short, the "freedom of the press" assures that readers of the International Bulletin will get the facts.

Even if the photographs had been authentic, we might ask why people should be pulling plows in Cambodia. The reason is clear, if unmentioned. The savage American assault on Cambodia did not spare the animal population. Hildebrand and Porter, in their Cambodia: Starvation and Revolution, cite a Cambodian Government report of April 1976 that several hundred thousand draft an-

It is a fair generalization that the larger the number of deaths attributed to the Khmer Rouge, and the more the U.S. role is set aside, the larger the audience that will be reached. The Barron-Paul volume is a third-rate propaganda tract, but its exclusive focus on Communist terror assures it a huge audience. Ponchaud's far more substantial work has an anti-Communist bias and message, but it has attained stardom only via the extreme anti-Khmer Rouge distortions added to it in the article in the New York Review of Books. The last added the adequately large numbers executed and gave a "Left" authentication of Communist evil that assured a quantum leap to the mass audience unavailable to Hildebrand and Porter or to Carol Bragg. Contrary facts and even authors' corrections of misstatements are generally ignored or inadequately reported in favor of a useful lesson (we note one exception: an honest retraction of an editorial based on Lacouture in the Boston Globe. We noted earlier that the Monitor editorial and other press comments built on the Lacouture review offer at best a fourth-hand account. The chain of transmission runs from refugees (or Thai or U.S. officials), to Ponchaud, to the New York Review, to the press, where a mass audience is reached and "facts" are established that enter the approved version of history.

imals were killed in the rural areas. The Post did not have to resort to probable fabrications to depict the facts. A hundred-word item buried in The New York Times of June 14, 1976, cites an official U.N. report that teams of "human buffaloes" pull plows in Laos in areas where the buffalo herds, along with everything else, were decimated (by the American bombing, although this goes unmentioned in the Times. Much the same is true in Vietnam. Quite possibly the U.N. or the Laotian Government could supply photographic evidence, but this would not satisfy the needs of current propaganda.

The response to the three books under review nicely illustrates this selection process. Hildebrand and Porter present a carefully documented study of the destructive American impact on Cambodia and the success of the Cambodian revolutionaries in overcoming it, giving a very favorable picture of their programs and policies, based on a wide range of sources. Published last year, and well received by the journal of the Asia Society (Asia, March-April 1977), it has not been reviewed in the Times, New York Review or any mass-media publication, nor used as the basis for editorial comment, with one exception. The Wall Street Journal acknowledged its existence in an editorial entitled "Cambodia Good Guys" (November 22, 1976), which dismissed contemptuously the very idea that the Khmer Rouge could play a constructive role, as well as the notion that the United States had a major hand in the destruction, death and turmoil of wartime and postwar Cambodia. In another editorial on the "Cambodian Horror" (April 16, 1976), the Journal editors speak of the attribution of postwar difficulties to U.S. intervention as "the record extension to date of the politics of guilt." On the subject of "Unscrambling Chile" (September 20, 1976), however, the abuses of the "manfully rebuilding" Chilean police state are explained away as an unfortunate consequence of Allendista "wrecking" of the economy.

In brief, Hildebrand and Porter attribute "wrecking" and "rebuilding" to the wrong parties in Cambodia. In his Foreword to

Cambodia: Starvation and Revolution, Asian scholar George Kahin observes that it is a book from which "anyone who is interested in understanding the situation obtaining in Phnom Penh before and after the Lon Nol government's collapse and the character and programs of the Cambodian Government that has replaced it will, I am sure, be grateful…" But the mass media are not grateful for the Hildebrand-Porter message, and have shielded the general public from such perceptions of Cambodia.

In contrast, the media favorite, Barron and Paul's "untold story of Communist Genocide in Cambodia" (their subtitle), virtually ignores the U.S. Government role. When they speak of "the murder of a gentle land," they are not referring to B-52 attacks on villages or the systematic bombing and murderous ground sweeps by American troops or forces organized and supplied by the United States, in a land that had been largely removed from the conflict prior to the American attack. Their point of view can be predicted from the "diverse sources" on which they relied: namely, "informal briefings from specialists at the State and Defense Departments, the National Security Council and three foreign embassies in Washington." Their "Acknowledgements" mention only the expertise of Thai and Malaysian officials, U.S. Government Cambodian experts, and Father Ponchaud. They also claim to have analysed radio and refugee reports.

Their scholarship collapses under the barest scrutiny. To cite a few cases, they state that among those evacuated from Phnom Penh, "virtually everybody saw the consequences of [summary executions] in the form of the corpses of men, women and children rapidly bloating and rotting in the hot sun," citing, among others, J.J. Cazaux, who wrote, in fact, that "not a single corpse was seen along our evacuation route," and that early reports of massacres proved fallacious (The Washington Post, May 9, 1975). They also cite The New York Times, May 9, 1975, where Sydney Shanberg wrote that "there have been unconfirmed reports of executions of

that he has produced no evidence to support this judgement. But if postwar Cambodia is more similar to France after liberation, where many thousands of people were massacred within a few months under far less rigorous conditions than those left by the American war, then perhaps a rather different judgement is in order. That the latter conclusion may be more nearly correct is suggested by the analyses mentioned earlier.

We disagree with Lacouture's judgement on the importance of precision on this question. It seems to us quite important, at this point in our understanding, to distinguish between official government texts and memories of slogans reported by refugees, between the statement that the regime "boasts" of having "killed" 2 million people and the claim by Western sources that something like a million have died — particularly, when the bulk of these deaths are plausibly attributable to the United States. Similarly, it seems to us a very important question whether an "inhuman phrase" was uttered by a Thai reporter or a Khmer Rouge official. As for the numbers, it seems to us quite important to determine whether the number of collaborators massacred in France was on the order of thousands, and whether the French Government ordered and organized the massacre. Exactly such questions arise in the case of Cambodia.

We do not pretend to know where the truth lies amidst these sharply conflicting assessments; rather, we again want to emphasize some crucial points. What filters through to the American public is a seriously distorted version of the evidence available, emphasizing alleged Khmer Rouge atrocities and downplaying or ignoring the crucial U.S. role, direct and indirect, in the torment that Cambodia has suffered. Evidence that focuses on the American role, like the Hildebrand and Porter volume, is ignored, not on the basis of truthfulness or scholarship but because the message is unpalatable.

Thai newspaper, a considerable difference. The quoted paragraph was written by a Thai reporter who claims to have had an interview with a Khmer Rouge official. In his corrections, Lacouture notes the error, and adds that this Khmer Rouge official "said, as Ponchaud writes, that he found the revolutionary method of the Vietnamese 'very slow'…" A more accurate statement would be that the Thai reporter *claims* that that is what was said — by now, a sufficiently remote chain of transmission to raise many doubts. How seriously would we regard a critical account of the United States in a book by a hostile European leftist based on a report in Pravda of a statement allegedly made by an unnamed American official? The analogy is precise. Why then should we rest any judgment on Ponchaud's account of a Thai report of an alleged statement by an unnamed Khmer Rouge official? What is certain is that the basis for Lacouture's accusations, cited above, disappears when the quotes are properly attributed: to a Thai reporter, not a Cambodian Government newspaper.

Lacouture's review contained other errors, as he notes in his corrections. Thus he attributed to "texts distributed in Phnom Penh" what in fact appear to be slogans remembered by refugees, again a rather considerable difference. None of the examples he quotes is specifically attributed by Ponchaud.

In his corrections, Lacouture raises the questions whether precision on these matters is very important. "Faced with an enterprise as monstrous as the new Cambodian Government, should we see the main problem as one of deciding exactly which person uttered an inhuman phrase, and whether the regime has murdered thousands of hundreds or thousands of wretched people?" He adds that it hardly matters what were the exact numbers of the victims of Dachau of Katyn. Or perhaps, we may add, whether the victims of My Lai numbered in the hundreds or tens of thousands, if a factor of 100 is unimportant.

If, indeed, postwar Cambodia is, as he believes, similar to Nazi Germany, then his comment is perhaps just, though we may add

senior military and civilian officials … But none of this will apparently bear any resemblance to the mass executions that had been predicted by Westerners," and that "Here and there were bodies, but it was difficult to tell if they were people who had succumbed to the hardships of the march or simply civilians and soldiers killed in the last battles." They do not mention the Swedish journalist, Olle Tolgraven, or Richard Boyle of Pacific News Service, the last newsman to leave Cambodia, who denied the existence of wholesale executions; nor do they cite the testimony of Father Jacques Engelmann, a priest with nearly two decades of experience in Cambodia, who was evacuated at the same time and reported that evacuated priests "were not witness to any cruelties" and that there were deaths, but "not thousands, as certain newspapers have written" (cited by Hildebrand and Porter).

Barron and Paul claim that there is no evidence of popular support for the Communists in the countryside and that people "fled to the cities" as a result of the "harsh regimen" imposed by the Communistrs — not the American bombing. Extensive evidence to the contrary, including eyewitness reports and books by French and American correspondents and observers long familiar with Cambodia (e.g., Richard Dudman, Serge Thion, J.C. Pomonti, Charles Meyer) is never cited. Nor do they try to account for the amazingly rapid growth of the revolutionary forces from 1969 to 1973, as attested by U.S. intelligence and as is obvious from the unfolding events themselves.

Their quotes, where they can be checked, are no more reliable. Thus they claim that Ponchaud attributes to a Khmer Rouge official the statement that people expelled from the cities "are no longer needed, and local chiefs are free to dispose of them as they please," implying that local chiefs are free to kill them. But Ponchaud's first report on this (Le Monde, February 18, 1976) quotes a military chief as stating that they "are left to the absolute discretion of the local authorities," which implies nothing of the sort.

These examples are typical. Where there is no independent confirmatory evidence, the Barron-Paul story can hardly be regarded as credible. Their version of history has already appeared in the Reader's Digest (circulation more than 18 million), and has been widely cited in the mass media as an authoritative account, including among them, a front-page horror summary in the Wall Street Journal, an article in TV Guide (April 30, 1977; circulation more than 19 million) by Ernest Lefever, a foreign policy specialist who is otherwise known for his argument before Congress that we should be more tolerant of the "mistakes" of the Chilean junta "in attempting to clear away the devastation of the Allende period," and his discovery of the "remarkable freedom of expression" enjoyed by critics of the military regime (The Miami Herald, August 6, 1974).

Ponchaud's book is based on his own personal experiences in Cambodia from 1965 until the capture of Phnom Penh, extensive interviews with refugees and reports from the Cambodian radio. Published in France in January 1977, it has become the best-known unread book in recent history, on the basis of an account by Jean Lacouture (in the New York Review of Books), widely cited since in the press, which alleges that Ponchaud has revealed a policy of "auto-genocide" (Lacouture's term) practiced by the Communists.

Before looking more closely at Ponchaud's book and its press treatment, we would like to point out that apart from Hildebrand and Porter there are many other sources on recent events in Cambodia that have not been brought to the attention of the American reading public. Space limitations preclude a comprehensive review, but such journals as the Far Eastern Economic Review, the London Economist, the Melbourne Journal of Politics, and others elsewhere, have provided analyses by highly qualified specialists who have studied the full range of evidence available, and who concluded that executions have numbered at most in the thousands; that these were localized in areas of limited Khmer Rouge influence and unusual peasant discontent, where brutal revenge killings were ag-

days worth of rice on hand on the eve of the surrender" (Agence France-Presse, Bangkok; New York Times, May 9, 1975). Nor does he cite the testimony of U.S. AID officials that Phnom Penh had only a six-day supply of rice (William Goodfellow, New York Times, July 14, 1975).

In fact, where an independent check is possible, Ponchaud's account seems at best careless, sometimes in rather significant ways. Nevertheless, the book is a serious work, however much the press has distorted it.

As noted, Ponchaud relies overwhelmingly on refugee reports. Thus his account is at best second-hand with many of the refugees reporting what they claim to have heard from others. Lacouture's review gives at best a third-hand account. Commentary on Lacouture's review in the press, which has been extensive, gives a fourth-hand account. That is what is available to readers of the American press.

As an instance, consider the Christian Science Monitor editorial already cited, which gives a fair sample of what is available to the American public. This editorial, based on Lacouture's review, speaks of the "reign of terror against the population" instituted by the Khmer Rouge. Lacouture, like Ponchaud, emphasizes the brutality of the American war, which laid the basis for all that followed. These references disappear from the Monitor editorial, which pretends that the current suffering in Cambodia takes place in an historical vacuum, as a mere result of Communist savagery. Similarly, an earlier editorial (January 26, 1977), based on Barron and Paul, also avoids any reference to American responsibility, though there is much moralizing about those who are indifferent to "one of the most brutal and concentrated onslaughts in history" in this "lovely land" of "engaging people."

The newspaper report that elicited these judgements, on which the press uncritically relies, does appear in Ponchaud's book. The source, however, is not a Cambodian Government newspaper but a

Ponchaud's book lacks the documentation provided in Hildebrand and Porter and its veracity is therefore difficult to assess. But the serious reader will find much to make him somewhat wary. For one thing, Ponchaud plays fast and loose with quotes and with numbers. He quotes an unattributed Khmer Rouge slogan, "One or two million young people will be enough to build the new Cambodia." In an article in Le Monde (February 18, 1976) he gives what appears to be the same quote, this time as follows: "To rebuild the new Cambodia, a million people are enough." Here the quote is attributed to a Khmer Rouge military commander, along with the statement misrepresented by Barron and Paul, noted above (Lacouture changes the numbers to 1.5 million to 2 million, attributes the quote to an unnamed Marxist, and concludes that it goes beyond barbarism). This is one of the rare examples of a quote that can be checked. The results are not impressive.

Ponchaud cites a Cambodian report that 200,000 people were killed in American bombings from March 7 to August 15, 1973. No source is offered, but suspicions are aroused by the fact that Phnom Penh radio announced on May 9, 1975 that there were 200,000 casualties of the American bombing in 1973, including "killed, wounded, and crippled for life" (Hildebrand and Porter). Ponchaud cites "Cambodian authorities" who give the figures 800,000 killed and 240,000 wounded before liberation. The figures are implausible. By the usual rule of thumb, wounded amount to about three times killed; quite possibly he has the figures reversed.

More significant is Ponchaud's account of the evacuation of Phnom Penh in April 1975. He reports the explanation given by the revolutionary government: that the evacuation was motivated by impending famine. But this he rejects, on the ground that rice stocks in Phnom Penh would have sufficed for two months, with rationing (what he thinks would have happened after two months, with no new harvest, he does not say). He gives no source for this estimate, and fails to observe that "According to Long Boret, the old Government's last Premier, Phnom Penh had only eight

gravated by the threat of starvation resulting from the American destruction and killing. These reports also emphasize both the extraordinary brutality on both sides during the civil war (provoked by the American attack) and repeated discoveries that massacre reports were false. They also testify to the extreme unreliability of refugee reports, and the need to treat them with great caution, a fact that we and others have discussed elsewhere (cf. Chomsky: At War with Asia, on the problems of interpreting reports of refugees from American bombing in Laos). Refugees are frightened and defenseless, at the mercy of alien forces. They naturally tend to report what they believe their interlocuters wish to hear. While these reports must be considered seriously, care and caution are necessary. Specifically, refugees questioned by Westerners or Thais have a vested interest in reporting atrocities on the part of Cambodian revolutionaries, an obvious fact that no serious reporter will fail to take into account.

To give an illustration of just one neglected source, the London Economist (March 26, 1977) carried a letter by W.J. Sampson, who worked as an economist and statistician for the Cambodian Government until March 1975, in close contact with the central statistics office. After leaving Cambodia, he writes, he "visited refugee camps in Thailand and kept in touch with Khmers," and he also relied on "A European friend who cycled around Phnom Penh for many days after its fall [and] saw and heard of no … executions" apart from "the shooting of some prominent politicians and the lynching of hated bomber pilots in Phnom Penh." He concludes "that executions could be numbered in hundreds or thousands rather than in hundreds of thousands," though there was "a big death toll from sickness" — surely a direct consequence, in large measure, of the devastation caused by the American attack. Sampson's analysis is known to those in the press who have cited Ponchaud at second-hand, but has yet to be reported here. And his estimate of executions is far from unique.

Expert analyses of the sort just cited read quite differently from the confident conclusions of the mass media. Here we read the "Most foreign experts on Cambodia and its refugees believe at least 1.2 million persons have been killed or have died as a result of the Communist regime since April 17, 1975" (UPI, Boston Globe, April 17, 1977). No source is given, but it is interesting that a 1.2 million estimate is attributed by Ponchaud to the American Embassy (Presumably Bangkok), a completely worthless source, as the historical record amply demonstrates. The figure bears a suggestive similarity to the prediction by U.S. officials at the war's end that 1 million would die in the next year.

In the New York Times Magazine, May 1, 1977, Robert Moss (editor of a dubious offshoot of Britain's Economist called "Foreign Report" which specializes in sensational rumors from the world's intelligence agencies) asserts that "Cambodia's pursuit of total revolution has resulted, by the official admission of its Head of State, Khieu Samphan, in the slaughter of a million people." Moss informs us that the source of this statement is Barron and Paul, who claim that in an interview with the Italian weekly Famiglia Cristiana Khieu Samphan stated that more than a million died during the war, and that the population had been 7 million before the war and is now 5 million. Even if one places some credence in the reported interview nowhere in it does Khieu Samphan suggest that the million postwar deaths were a result of official policies (as opposed to the lag effects of a war that left large numbers ill, injured, and on the verge of starvation). The "slaughter" by the Khmer Rouge is a Moss-New York Times creation.

A Christian Science Monitor editorial states: "Reports put the loss of life as high as 2 million people out of 7.8 million total." Again, there is no source, but we will suggest a possibility directly. The New York Times analysis of "two years after the Communist victory" goes still further. David Andelman, May 2, 1977, speaks without qualification of "the purges that took hundreds of thousands of lives in the aftermath of the Communist capture of Phnom Penh

on April 17, 1975." Even the U.S. Government sources on which journalists often uncritically rely advance no such claim, to our knowledge. In fact, even Barron and Paul claim only that "100,000 or more" were killed in massacres and executions — they base their calculations on a variety of interesting assumptions, among them, that *all* military men, civil-servants and teachers were targeted for execution; curiously, their "calculations" lead them to the figure of 1.2 million deaths as a result of "actions" of the Khmer Rouge governing authorities, by January 1, 1977 ("at a very minimum"); by a coincidence, the number reported much earlier by the American Embassy, according to Ponchaud. Elsewhere in the press, similar numbers are bandied about, with equal credibility.

Ponchaud's book is serious and worth reading, as distinct from much of the commentary it has elicited. He gives a grisly account of of what refugees have reported to him about the barbarity of their treatment at the hands of the Khmer Rouge. He also reminds us of some relevant history. For example, in this "peaceful land," peasants were massacred, their lands stolen and villages destroyed, by police and army in 1966, many then joining the *maquis* out of "their hatred for a government exercising such injustices and sowing death." He reports the enormous destruction and murder resulting directly from the American attack on Cambodia, the starvation and epidemics as the population was driven from their countryside by American military terror and the U.S.-incited civil war, leaving Cambodia with "an economy completely devastated by the war." He points out that "from the time of Sihanouk, then Lon Nol, the soldiers of the government army had already employed, with regard to their Khmer Rouge 'enemies,' bloodthirsty methods in no way different from those of Democratic Cambodia" (the Khmer Rouge). He also gives a rather positive account of Khmer Rouge programs of social and economic development, while deploring much brutal practice in working for egalitarian goals and national independence.