

Norwegian Delegation to Democratic Kampuchea 1978

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The Norwegian AKP was one of the more successful of the European maoists organisations, internationalists in outlook it retained a vigorous programme of solidarity activities with national liberation struggles in the third world, including south east Asia. There was a lingering and toxic effect for those who visited Democratic Kampuchea as part of a political delegation.

They were accomplices, these political pilgrims with **political and moral responsibility for the genocide in Cambodia, is an accusation still thrown at the AKP decades after the event.** Bernt Hagtvet, professor of political science, University of Oslo in a confrontational red-baiting intervention in the Norwegian press stated: Pål Steigan must personally stand trial for what happened by virtue of his ideological and political support to the perpetrators.

The AKP (ML) supported the Cambodian revolutionaries early in the 1970s, and support continued after Pol Pot was overthrown.

The AKP (ML) was one of several of those anti-revisionist organisations, aligned with China, who went out at the invitation of the DK government in 1978. Although the Scandinavian groups were among the largest of the Maoists in the west, their actual political gains and influence within their respective labour/working class movements were limited, drawing on an initial membership largely of radical students. [see [EROL](#)]

In autumn 1978, the AKP sent a delegation to Cambodia. Elisabeth Eide, Tron Øgrim, Pål Steigan and Sveinung Mjelde traveled around Cambodia along with representatives of the Communist Party of Kampuchea. In their own statement, they went about freely, and had meetings with both Ieng Sary and Pol Pot.



A delegation from the Norwegian AKP(ML) on September 24th visited the Siem Reap-Angkor sector via the north-western region. The friendly guests left Phnom Penh and travelled to Sisophon by train and then proceeded to Siem Reap town by car. In the Siem Reap-Angkor sector, the friendly guests visited the western Baray reservoir and the Ta kev, Bayon and Angkor Wat temples.” (FBIS October 4th 1978, H5]

Pol Pot assured the delegation that the allegations of human rights violations was a propaganda campaign, and that the population contrary benefited from human rights they had not had previously. Abuse and genocide were dismissed as propaganda and still the images from the “killing field” and Tuol Sleng (also called S-21) where only 7 of 16 000 prisoners survived form the dominant images of modern Cambodian history.

The delegation’s impression was published in the book “*The Assault on Kampuchea*” in 1979. The conclusion was that the people of Cambodia had conducted “a large-scale experiment”. In the chapter “Conversations with Pol Pot” rites Eide and Steigan wrote that Pol Pot had constantly a twinkle in his eye, and it would not take much for a smile beamed across his face. Eide and Steigan concluded that a total transformation of society has of course its price, although the price is not the one that the reactionaries claim.



The Norwegian position in support of Cambodian revolutionaries was in the context of an analysis that opposed both Superpowers – The USSR and the USA – underlined by the Chinese strategic foreign policy line that the struggle for national self-determination and the right to decide one’s own future is vital for all peoples in this age of imperialism. This struggle was politically seen as objectively part of the socialist world revolution.

They chose sides in the conflict between the Socialist Republic of Vietnam and Democratic Kampuchea.

Later analyzing the practice of the disbanded Communist Party of Democratic Kampuchea, **PÅL STEIGAN*** stated that:

between the Khmer Rouge ideology and AKP (ml) ‘s basic positions was a “sea of differences” . The main reason for Pol Pot terror, he explained, lies in an attempt to abolish – and “all at once” – classes, before the material basis was present. Khmer Rouge was according Steigan “neither Marxist nor Leninist”.

Stegian now says “I argue that the Pol Pot regime was never a Marxist one. It violates the fundamental points of the whole theoretical basis for Marxism. That I did not understand then, but I have thought that for 20 years now.”

Of the Tribunal judgement on Khieu Samphan and Nuon Chea, Pal Steigan wrote on his blog that,

“from everything else I’ve read about Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge, it seems as if the verdict is fair as far as I have read the terms and that the two have been guilty of the serious crimes they are convicted.”

“The verdict says however nothing about the American carpet bombing that preceded the Khmer Rouge takeover or about US aid to the Khmer Rouge after the Vietnamese invasion, and it is well why both the US and EU expressed great satisfaction with the verdict.”

He argues the point that any tribunal should explore all crimes against humanity in Cambodia from the US invasion in 1970 until today; that Americans killed 500,000 people with carpet bombing is being excluded in the proceedings. **“This was a violation of everything that is of the laws of war, international law and the Geneva Convention.”**

“The fact that we did not say traces of something that resembled terror proves nothing. Today I am not the slightest doubt that it was the totally unacceptable terror of Khmer Rouge. The extent I cannot comment on. Assertion of millions killed is insane.” Some of the worst atrocities of the Khmer Rouge did not come from a special bloodlust but an error of analysis and a wrong strategy.

Khmer Rouge ideology and responsibility for genocide [take from personal blog]

Bernt Hagtvet will discuss Cambodia and ask if AKP compared to Pol Pot’s ideology (KK 30 October 2002). The discussion I will be happy, even though today I can only respond on their own behalf.

Since I have answered questions related to terrorism many times before, it could be tempting to start with ideology. Was there anything ideological community between AKP and the Khmer Rouge? Superficial could look like in 1975 from the common struggle against US imperialism, the weight of the liberation of the poor countries of the Third World, etc. But if you just go a little more thorough, open up a sea of differences.

Khmer Rouge victory in 1975, ie immediately after the Chinese Cultural Revolution. Pol Pot believed that Mao made a huge mistake when he abolished classes at once (!) This should Khmer Rouge however do. There were extremist factions during the Cultural Revolution stood for similar thoughts, but it should be fairly clear that this is a fundamental break with the Marxist materialism. Marx denounced the kind of thoughts all in the 1840s, saying that if one went so far as to attempt to abolish classes before the material basis for it were present, they would achieve the opposite of what you said you wanted to achieve.

Also in class analysis was Pol Pot for something else than Marxism and Leninism. The working class and the industry did not matter at all. The “pure” class were poor peasants that is not the main force, as in Mao, but the real strength. There was an almost Old Testament hatred towns with Pol Pot. To Abraham’s God thundered against urban sin, and he towns, and the classes that were anchored there, as bearers of decadence and colonialism. This also applied to the working class. This means that large sections of the people was defined either as enemies or questionable.

Khmer Rouge scepticism towards Vietnam is understandable, since Vietnam tried to create hegemony over the smaller peoples of Indo-China. But as a counterbalance to this developed Pol Pot a theory of “Khmer race”, as the left is the opposite of Marxist theory. I discussed this with the head of the Cambodia office of China’s Foreign Ministry in 1981, partly on the basis of Khmer Rouge atrocities against the Chinese in the country. But he believed that an equally important reason why the Chinese

were affected was that they often were traders, artisans and intellectuals, ie classes and groups such as the Red Khmers world was dirty and corrupt.

There is also not much of Mao's teachings about the relationship between party and people, the so-called mass line, injunction to serve the people etc. In the theories of the Khmer Rouge. Just the fact that the Khmer Rouge continued to be secret also after taking power, an indication of this.

I do not know very much more about the Khmer Rouge ideology, but on these crucial issues we see at least that it differs radically from all Marxist thinking. Khmer Rouge was neither Marxist nor Leninist. The production that it should be possible to create a classless society before the material conditions for it are present, is so much in conflict with Marxism imaginable. It is true that this kind of idealism, as we call it, was conspicuous during the Cultural Revolution, and it also, in a very dimmed variant, given a certain resonance here at home. But it is about a generation ago it was taken a settlement with such thinking, and since there has been widespread image in AKP that if one were to try to create socialism or communism without a sufficient material foundation, it must end in disaster.

This brief review shows that the Khmer Rouge stood for something different and diametrically opposite of Marxism in areas that are fundamental for social understanding and strategy. It also applies to relations with contradictions under socialism, freedom of speech, freedom etc. AKP's fundamental opposition to any form of terrorism has been left clear, even in our most radical periods. Contrary to what our enemies said, did not drive we've kind of blacklisting of our opponents with the aim of "taking them after the revolution". The only people who practiced like that in Norway was NATO and POT, as the charted left side for possible detention in an emergency. That such lists were readily into liquidation lists showed developments in Greece after 1967 and Chile in 1973 all too evident. So if there is someone who has something to answer for in this area in Norway, it is completely different than the AKP.

The threat to democracy has not come from the left but from the right, and it applies even more so today.

As for Pol Pot terror, Hagtvet writes with reference to Ben Kiernan that "Pol Pot's terror regime" led to the deaths of 1.7 million people of a population of 8 million." Since Hagtvet has a sharp intellectual grip on the concepts, then I sure that he thinks murder. The interesting thing is that his source, Ben Kiernan, said that around a third of these "were massacred and executed, the rest died as an indirect consequence of misguided agricultural policies, domestic hunger in combination with riseksport, forced emptying of the cities, lack of medicines and hard labour ." Hagtvet equated starvation due to botched agricultural policy with murder, but I do not think he does it elsewhere than in Cambodia, possibly China. As is known millions of people die every year as a result of capitalism's failed economic policies in the Third World, without Hagtvet, what I've noticed, having used such strong words about it.

As known I was in Cambodia in 1978 and saw the consequences of America's long-term terrorist bombing of the small country. Cambodia is the size of southern Norway. US bombers carpet bombed this country from its safe position above the clouds. They did this year after year and let in all several tons of explosives than it fell across Europe during WW2. This was the worst bombing campaign to date in world history, and the devastation and human suffering was enormous. Especially in 1973 went bombing up to such an extent that the Finnish investigation commission, which also investigated the charges against Khmer Rouge, used the term genocide.

Hagtvet ask whether the AKP has made settlement, and I feel that we have done. But I do not think the United States and the West has taken some settlement with their responsibilities. Hagtvet is a man of moral integrity who enjoys well-deserved respect for his struggle for human rights, but precisely why it is important that he just clarify where he stands on some key points:

- The number of people who were directly murdered by Pol Pot regime shall, according to Kiernan be about the same as the number of people who were killed by the American terror bombing from 1969 to 1975, ie estimated half a million. Let's agree to condemn the atrocities of Pol Pot regime. But have you ever demanded that the American war criminals to justice, Hagtvet? You sit in a position of power where such a requirement would be noticed. Henry Kissinger still lives and well. Would you demand that he be held accountable for genocide?
- When a country becomes so thoroughly destroyed by a foreign state that it was Cambodia by the United States, what kind of foundation it lays for democracy and tolerance? Or put another way: look Hagtvet no liability in the United States and the West for having destroyed Cambodia, not only materially and economically, but also human and moral?
- In Kiernan (and Hagtvet?) Statistics rests for every victim of starvation in Cambodia since 1975 on the Khmer Rouge. Why do you put no blame on those who exploded in every village, every road and dam and peppered rice fields with napalm and anti-personnel mines? Was there really no one in Cambodia who died from the effects of war, Hagtvet?

Pål Steigan