

BROTHER NUMBER ONE

A Political Biography
of **POL POT**



REVISED EDITION

DAVID P. CHANDLER

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David P. Chandler

Westview Press

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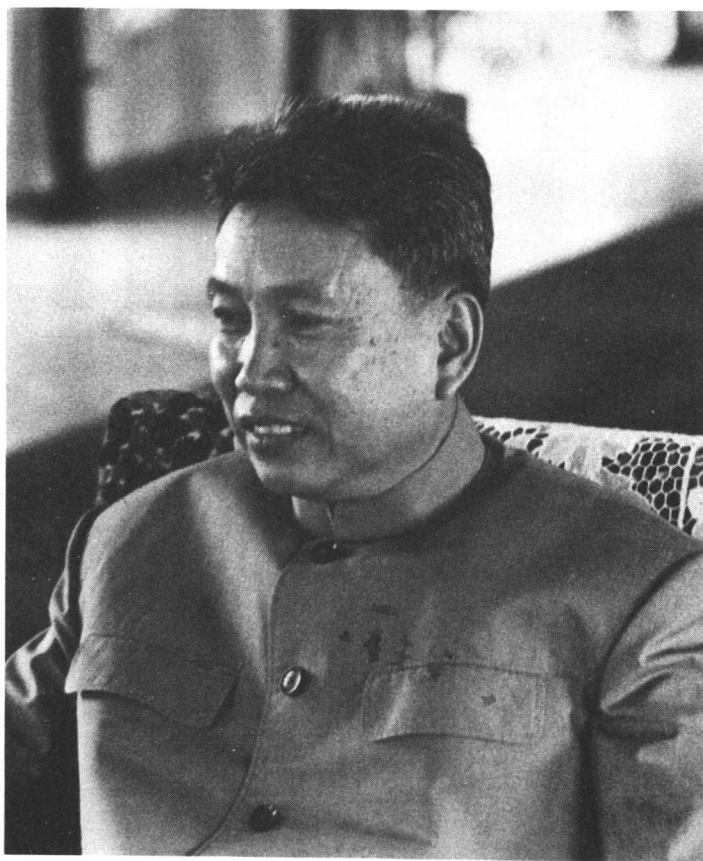
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Pol Pot in Phnom Penh, December 1978. Photo by Richard Dudman.
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Chorus:

*Who fights for communism must be able to fight and not to fight,
to say the truth and not say the truth, to render and to deny
service, to keep a promise and to break a promise, to go into
danger and to avoid danger, to be known and to be unknown.
Who fights for communism has of all the virtues only one: that
he fights for communism.*

Bertoldt Brecht, *The Measures Taken*

Preface to the Second Edition

I am grateful to my editors at Westview Press, Rob Williams and Kristin Milavec, the project editor, for encouraging me to prepare a second edition of this book. In bringing the narrative up to date, closing with Pol Pot's death in April 1998, I have invaded the text and the end notes to insert new data and to correct minor errors pointed out by correspondents and reviewers. In addition, I have updated the bibliographical essay at the end of the book. The text has also benefited enormously from Jennifer Swearingen's helpful copy-editing.

In the time between the appearance of the first edition and Pol Pot's death six years later, some interesting new biographical data have emerged, thanks in large part to enterprising research conducted by David Ashley, Chhang Youk, Stephen Heder, and Nate Thayer. I am grateful to these four people for providing me with transcripts or summaries of their interviews, and to Thayer for sending me a copy of Nuon Chea's draft history of the "struggle movement," which he composed in 1997. My own study of the S-21 archive in 1994–1998 revealed some new information about the Vietnamese military base known as "Office 100," where Pol Pot and his colleagues sought refuge from Sihanouk's police in the early 1960s; my interviews with Lim Keuky and a former Chinese diplomat speaking on condition of anonymity provided some insights, respectively, into Pol Pot's early married life and into his friendship with the notorious Chinese official K'ang Sheng. My revision of the final chapter benefited from conversations with Terry McCarthy, Seth Mydans, and Nate Thayer. The new data have altered the chronological outlines of Pol Pot's life by making it four years longer, as I now prefer the birth-date of 1925 to the 1928 one I had supported in the first edition.

Pol Pot wanted to be judged by history, as his interview with Nate Thayer in October 1997 makes clear. Unfortunately from his point of view, perhaps, the material that has emerged about his life since 1992 has not made his personality any more accessible or his career any easier to admire.

David Chandler
Washington, D.C.

Acknowledgments

I am delighted to acknowledge the help and encouragement I've received while working on this book. Research began in 1987, when Sally Furgeson, then with Westview Press, wrote to suggest that I write a biography of Pol Pot. I was attracted by the challenge and accepted it at once, but because of prior commitments I wasn't able to begin writing until 1990. I'm grateful to Ms. Furgeson and to Susan McEachern, who took over the project for Ms. Furgeson, for their patience and support. As the manuscript was being written and later, when she went over it, Ms. McEachern made many helpful suggestions. Deborah Lynes, the book's editor, made helpful comments at several stages, and I benefited enormously from Michele Kendall's fastidious, perceptive copyediting.

The Australian Research Council provided a generous grant, twice renewed, that defrayed the costs of research and overseas travel. At various times, I also received financial assistance from Yale University, the Social Science Research Council (New York), California State University at Long Beach, the Institute of International Strategic Studies, and the outside studies program of Monash University (Australia).

Kate Frieson, Christopher Goscha, Stephen Heder, and Serge Thion read the manuscript and suggested many improvements. My wife, Susan, read three successive versions. Without her insights and editorial skill, the book would be clumsier and more obtuse. Over the years, my work on Cambodia has profited from many discussions with these people, as well as with Nayan Chanda, Justin Corfield, May Ebihara, Claude Jacques, Ben Kiernan, Judy Ledgerwood, Jacques Nepote, Lionel Vairon, and Michael Vickery. Several of these friends have generously provided me with material from their personal archives unavailable elsewhere. My debts to the pioneering work on Cambodian radicalism by Heder, Kiernan, Thion, and Vickery should be apparent in the notes. When the book was nearly complete, I profited from the research in progress of J. Thomas Engelbert and Christopher Goscha; this research, since published, provided many valuable insights.

The collection of material took me to Cambodia, Canada, France, Thailand, and the United States. For hospitality and help in arranging interviews,

I am particularly grateful to Lionel Vairon, Judy Ledgerwood, Mika Levesque, Tom Sakara, Suon Kaset Sokho, Serge Thion, Hin Sithan, Charles F. Keyes, and Vora Huy Kanthoul.

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The men and women I interviewed more formally are listed elsewhere. Without the help of all these people and institutions, I would never have been able to write this book. And without their enthusiasm and kindness, I would have had less enjoyment writing it.

D. C.
Paris

BROTHER NUMBER ONE



Contents

<i>List of Illustrations</i>	xi
<i>Preface to the Second Edition</i>	xiii
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	xv
1 Introduction	1
2 “Original Khmer,” 1928–1949	7
Who Was Pol Pot? 7	
Palace Connections, 8	
Phnom Penh in the 1930s, 9	
The Weight of the Past, 12	
The Stirrings of Nationalism, 15	
Moving to Kompong Cham, 17	
Back in Phnom Penh, 21	
Working for the Democrats, 22	
3 Becoming a Communist, 1949–1953	25
The First Year in Paris, 25	
Political Developments in Cambodia, 1950–1951, 29	
Turning to the Left, 31	
Becoming a Communist, 37	
4 Multiple Identities, 1953–1963	41
Joining the Viet Minh, 41	
Geneva and the 1955 Elections, 43	
Becoming a Teacher, 49	
A Militant for the Party, 53	
Focusing the Party, 55	
A Cambodian Party Takes Shape, 59	
The Death of Tou Samouth, 60	
Talking to Monks and Students, 61	

5	"Red Khmer," 1963–1970	65
	A Hostage of the Vietnamese, 67	
	The Visit to Vietnam, 69	
	The Visit to China, 71	
	A Change in Tactics, 73	
	The Samlaut Uprising, 77	
	Armed Struggle, 1968–1970, 80	
	Sihanouk Loses His Grip, 82	
	Saloth Sar Travels North, 83	
6	Coming to Power, 1970–1976	87
	Saloth Sar Comes Home, 88	
	The National Democratic Revolution, 91	
	From Cease-Fire to Bombardment, 94	
	The Only Game in Town, 95	
	Sihanouk Visits Saloth Sar, 97	
	Preparing the Final Assault, 99	
	The Final Assault, 102	
	Saloth Sar Returns to Phnom Penh, 104	
	Inventing Democratic Kampuchea, 107	
	The Emergence of Pol Pot, 110	
7	Prairie Fire, 1976–1977	113
	The Four Year Plan, 114	
	The Crisis of September–October 1976, 122	
	Purges in Democratic Kampuchea, 1975–1977, 123	
	Purging Friends, 127	
	Pol Pot and the "Microbes," 129	
	Punishing the Intelligentsia, 130	
	Personal Details, 132	
	War with Vietnam, 133	
	Coming into the Open, 135	
8	Coming Apart, 1977–1979	137
	Pol Pot in China and North Korea, 137	
	Cambodia's War with Vietnam, 138	
	The War Begins, 142	
	Opening Up, 144	
	Attacking Enemies, 146	
	A Cult of Personality? 148	
	Pol Pot on Display, 153	
9	"Grandfather 87," 1979–1998	157
	The Discovery of Democratic Kampuchea's History, 159	

CONTENTS

ix

Concealing Democratic Kampuchea, 161	
Repentant Optimist, 1979–1981, 162	
Dropping Out of Sight, 1981–1986, 164	
Summing Up for the Defense, 165	
Solving the Cambodian “Problem,” 1986–1991, 170	
The UNTAC Period, 173	
“Grandfather 87,” 174	
The Implosion of the Red Khmer, 1994–1998 178	
<i>Chronology</i>	189
<i>Appendix 1: Non Suon’s Biography of Pol Pot</i>	197
<i>Appendix 2: Khmer Personnel at “Office 100,” 1963–1966</i>	201
<i>Notes</i>	203
<i>Bibliographic Essay</i>	243
<i>Index</i>	249

Illustrations

Pol Pot in Phnom Penh, December 1978	ii
Cambodia (map)	xvii
Chan Chhaya Pavilion, Royal Palace, Phnom Penh	11
Independence Monument, Phnom Penh, 1971	48
Aerial view of Phnom Penh, with the former Royal Palace in the foreground, 1970	48
Pol Pot attending a theatrical performance for Sihanouk, 1973	98
Pol Pot and his wife, Khieu Ponnary, with Prince Sihanouk at Phnom Kulen, Cambodia, 1973	98
Tuol Sleng	125
An interrogation room at Tuol Sleng	126
Pol Pot in Beijing, October 1977, with Chinese Premier Hua Guofeng	139
Pol Pot with Chinese opera troupe, Beijing, October 1977	152
Pol Pot being interviewed, January 1980, Thailand	168
Pol Pot in Thailand, early 1980	169
Pol Pot at Thai border, 1979	176
Pol Pot is led to a seat at his trial in the Cambodian jungle on July 25, 1997	182
Pol Pot sits and listens as he is denounced as a murderer of his countrymen	183
Pol Pot on his way to an interview in October 1997	184
Pol Pot is escorted away from the interview	185

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

On April 17, 1975, Cambodia emerged from five years of invasion, bombardment, and civil war when its capital, Phnom Penh, fell to the guerrilla armies known as the Khmer Rouge or Red Khmer, which had been besieging it since the beginning of the year. The city's population included over one million refugees, driven from their homes in rural areas. During the course of the civil war, perhaps as many as half a million Cambodians had been killed. People in the cities, without knowing much about the Red Khmer, presumed that peace would be better than war and that Cambodians, working together, could reconstruct their country.

What happened next took everyone but the Red Khmer commanders by surprise. Within a week, the people of Phnom Penh, Battambang, and other cities were driven into the countryside by the Red Khmer and told to take up agricultural tasks. Thousands of evacuees, especially the very young and the very old, died over the next few weeks. Some survivors, walking toward regions where they hoped their relatives would welcome them, were on the road for over a month. When they asked questions of the heavily armed young soldiers who accompanied them, they were told to obey the "revolutionary organization" (*angkar padevat*), which would act as their "mother and father." The evacuees were called "new people" or "April 17 people" because they had joined the revolution so late. Residents of the countryside were known as "base people" and were treated less harshly than the others.

After emptying the cities, the revolutionary organization embarked on a program of social transformation that affected every aspect of Cambodian life. Money, markets, and private property were abolished. Schools, universities, and Buddhist monasteries were closed. No publishing was allowed; the postal system was shut down; freedom of movement, exchange of information, personal adornment, and leisure activities were curtailed. Punishments for infractions were severe, and repeat offenders were imprisoned under harsh conditions or killed. Everyone was ordered to perform tasks set

for them by the revolutionary organization. For evacuee city dwellers, these tasks seldom had any relation to their training or skills. Instead, nearly all of them became peasants and were made to wear identical black cotton clothing.

The movement's leaders and their rationale remained concealed. To the outside world Cambodia was still ostensibly ruled by the United Front government, founded in Beijing in 1970 when Prince Norodom Sihanouk, Cambodia's chief of state, had been overthrown in a bloodless coup while he was abroad, replaced by a government that sought an alliance with the United States. The prince had been the figurehead leader of the resistance in Beijing. By 1972 the Red Khmer controlled the resistance but for the sake of international respectability continued to operate behind the facade of Sihanouk's coalition.

The charade continued for the remainder of 1975. In January 1976 the revolutionary organization dissolved the United Front, changed the name of the country to Democratic Kampuchea (DK), and promulgated a new constitution. The document praised collective values, identified the revolutionary organization with the people's interests, and formalized the collectivization of Cambodian life. The words *socialism* or *communism* appeared nowhere in the text. Soon after, Radio Phnom Penh announced that elections would be held for a national assembly and broadcast the names of ministers in the new regime. The elections, it seemed, were primarily for overseas consumption. Most "new people" were not allowed to vote; "base people" voted for candidates provided by the organization.

Most of the winners were unknown outside the Red Khmer movement, although some of the new ministers, such as Ieng Sary, Khieu Samphan, and Hu Nim, were prominent leftists who had joined the resistance against Sihanouk in the 1960s. Others elected were identified sooner or later as veteran revolutionaries.

The prime minister, a "rubber plantation worker" called Pol Pot, was impossible to identify. At the moment he took power, just when he might have been expected to step into the open, he concealed himself behind a revolutionary name.

Who was he?

For over a year he revealed almost nothing about himself. When he made a state visit to China in September 1977 and was photographed there, Cambodia watchers identified Pol Pot as a fifty-two-year-old former school-teacher named Saloth Sar, who had been secretary of the Central Committee of the clandestine Communist party of Kampuchea (CPK) since 1963. Pol Pot had announced the existence of the CPK for the first time in a triumphal speech recorded for Radio Phnom Penh just before he left for China. But very few Cambodians knew that Pol Pot was Saloth Sar. He admitted his former identity only after he was overthrown in 1979.