

Supplement || On eve of Vietnamese invasion Canadian Communist League (Marxist-Leninist) delegation visits Kampuchea

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Among the last foreigners to visit Kampuchea and speak with Prime Minister Pol Pot before the recent Soviet-Vietnamese invasion was a delegation from the Canadian Communist League (M-L). The Canadian delegation, led by CCL Chairman Roger Rashi, arrived in Phnom Penh Dec. 23 and left the country Dec. 30. Rashi gave the following interview to *The Call* on their return.

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The Call: *You were in Kampuchea when the Vietnamese invasion began. What was happening in that country at the time?*

Rashi: The Vietnamese aggression started Dec. 25, particularly in the Northeast part of the country. The Kampuchean army was able to withstand this first attack. A few days after we left Kampuchea, the main blow was struck in the Southeast.

We travelled through areas which the puppet front had described as strong bases, particularly in the Southeast. We saw absolutely no signs of any insurgency, no signs of any revolt whatsoever, but instead, saw the unity of the people around the government. So we can very definitely say that it was purely Vietnamese aggression, without any kind of internal insurgency.

How prepared were the Kampuchean people for the invasion?

From our talks with Prime Minister Pol Pot and Deputy Prime Minister Ieng Sary it seems very clear that the Kampuchean people were prepared and expecting the attack for a long time.

Pol Pot told us very clearly that the strategy and tactics of the Kampuchean people were basically peoples war.

This is what Pol Pot told us: “Strategically the Vietnamese cannot take Kampuchea. The leadership of the Party, united people and the army are steeled through many years of fighting the U.S. Tactically, however, we must be very vigilant. The enemy can penetrate, especially under cover of heavy airpower, artillery and tank forces.

“But when the war keeps carrying on, Vietnam will face many problems.

“Since the battles take place on our territory, they may have lots of plane attacks, but the determining factor is to have a lot of infantry forces. They will have neither the people nor the food. They have to bring everything to supply their troops.

“We start on protracted war. Based on this, we are confident of success. The U.S. attacked us ferociously. Lon Nol had tens of thousands of troops against us. The Theiu-Ky army invaded us. And we still won.

“So whatever temporary difficulties the Vietnamese cause us, we know we will win against them.”

Pol Pot attached a lot of importance to the heavy use of airpower in this offensive. He said that last year the Vietnamese offensive was essentially done with tanks and infantry. But this year, he predicted that there would be heavy use of airpower.

Pol Pot very clearly said that the extensive use of airpower stemmed from the fact that most of the planes were being piloted by Russian pilots. He said that the Kampuchean armed forces were able to monitor communication between the planes and the ground bases which were in Russian.

Secondly, he said, many of the tank crews were Russian or belonged to the Warsaw Pact forces. He also specifically said that, as far as logistics went, a lot of the military experts on the ground were East German or belonged to other Warsaw Pact troops.

Because of the heavy use of air power, Pol Pot took into account the possibility of having certain losses in the early stages of the war and he said very clearly that the Kampuchean forces will not let themselves be engaged in any frontal battle with the Vietnamese.

The essential tactic was to concede the roads and the cities, which were empty anyway; let the Vietnamese extend their line as deep as possible into Kampuchean territory; then attack from the countryside. They would basically attack the flank and the rear of the incoming enemy column with the aim of cutting them into smaller groups, which then could be annihilated easier by the Kampuchean armed forces.

So the impression we had was that they were perfectly prepared in terms of political strategy and military strategy for the Vietnamese attack.

From what you saw, what was the morale of the Kampuchean people in the face of the Vietnamese aggression?

From our trip all around the country we could gauge the morale as being fairly high. Quite a few of the commanders and soldiers that we spoke to made frequent comparisons between the present situation and the situation during the 1970-1975 national liberation war.

They said, if we were able to withstand saturation bombing by the U.S. at the time and still win, there is no reason that we couldn't win this present war with Vietnam.

The second thing was that the army is still organized on the basis of a people's army. They have what they call regular troops, regional troops and guerrilla units. The basis of the army was still guerrilla units, which were attached to every cooperative.

We saw one thing in the Southeast. We were five kilometers from the battle-line. There, a mobile brigade, which is basically a group of peasants that is sent to work in various fields, was working just about under the enemy gun.

When we asked them how could peasants work in such conditions, they said, "After ten years' experience with war and with a high development of political consciousness due to the work of our Party, our peasants understand very well that fighting isn't only pointing a gun and pulling a trigger. It is also being able to keep up production to the last moment in the face of the enemy and harvest as much rice as possible."

They said, "All these people that you see working right now in the fields can be converted within an instant into a fighting force."

How would you compare the reports being printed in the Canadian and Western press about the invasion with what you saw happening while you were there?

The main thing which seems to be distorted in the Western press is the underestimation of the capacity of the Kampuchean people in their ability to lead the people's war.

In other words, based on the fact that the Vietnamese aggressors have taken the main road and the cities which are empty anyway, the Western press has jumped to the conclusion that the "Khmer Rouge" regime has collapsed.

I think a careful analysis of the situation based on the knowledge we have gathered through our travels in the country and our discussion with Pol Pot would point to the opposite.

We got the impression that the evacuation of the cities and the development of guerrilla units in the countryside was part of a plan which developed over the past three years in order to answer any invasion or large-scale attack on the country.

The fact that the country was organized into cooperatives which were autonomous and self-sufficient, was part of a plan to prevent the economy from being disrupted by any kind of large-scale offensive. That would allow any part of the country to be able to go on functioning almost autonomously, and this would provide the food and nourishment necessary for any locally based guerrilla units.

So I think all these factors, both economic, military and political, are really important in order to understand whether a successful guerrilla war can be waged or not at the present time in Kampuchea. This is not taken into account at all in the Western press.