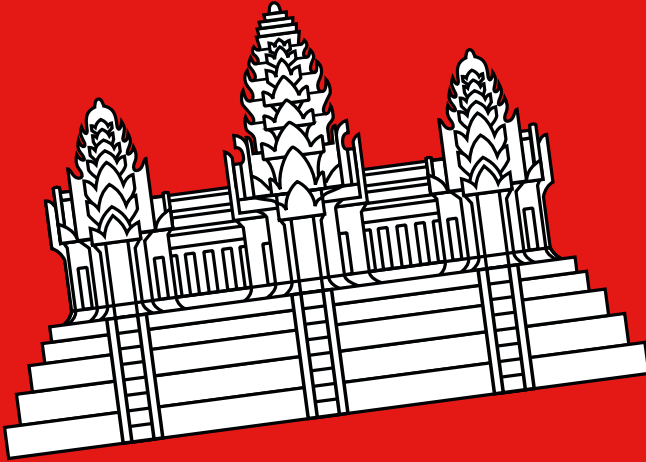


Ros Chantrabot



The Khmer Republic
1970 - 1975

Translated into English by Michelle Vachon

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FORWARD

I have been working in Phnom Penh for the past 17 years, mainly as a lecturer and President of CamEd Business School, an institute I founded. During these busy years I have made intermittent attempts to understand the history of the country and how it came to its unique stage of development and politics.

This led me to read a number of histories covering pre-colonial Cambodia, colonial Cambodia, King Sihanouk, the Khmer Rouge regime, and the post Khmer Rouge period. There remained a blind spot, what the Khmer Rouge had replaced, the Khmer Republic of 1970 - 1975.

In conversations with younger Cambodian friends and associates, I noticed that they themselves were inadvertently ignorant of the Khmer Republic as well. On the topic of the Khmer Republic they could only muster the speculative cliché “the CIA used Lon Nol to overthrow Sihanouk”.

The only text I could find on the subject was the French language *La République Khmère* by Dr. Ros Chantrabot, who also happened to be a professor in my school. Knowing Dr. Chantrabot to be a respected academic with a powerful memory and a talent for writing, I knew his book would benefit myself and Cambodia's youth. I proposed to him that we produce a translation. He accepted. I proceeded to produce both English and Khmer language translations.

As the reader will learn, this history is a personal one to Dr. Chantrabot. Dr. Chantrabot was a newspaper publisher, teacher, and associate of Lon Non during the Khmer Republic. He also helped to write the Khmer Republic constitution that was approved in a referendum in 1972. Thus, as a first hand witness, Dr. Chantrabot is able to give unique insight on the various Khmer Republic players and their motivations. At the same time, this book takes the perspective of one living in the Khmer Republic and thus we are in the dark as to the plans, motivations, and intentions of external actors such as the Khmer Rouge, North Vietnam, and Prince Sihanouk.

Ultimately, the intentions of the Khmer Republic's opponents were to destroy it, and they did. Those living in Phnom Penh, the last bastion of the

Khmer Republic, were subject to mass murder and slave labor. Khmer Republic officials and leaders remaining in Phnom Penh in 1975 were rounded up and killed. The destruction of the Khmer Rouge explains much of why the Khmer Republic is largely unknown to Cambodians today.

This book preserves the memory of the hopes, efforts, and failings of the Cambodians who supported the Khmer Republic. The Khmer Republic presented itself to be an attempt to introduce a democratic government that had remained elusive under then Prince Sihanouk. A wide array of citizens, academics, and politicians devoted their energy towards creating a functioning democracy, with a constitution approved by the people. But it failed in a morass of infighting, corruption, and war.

Many negative aspects of the Khmer Republic illustrated in this book are alive today. Nevertheless, Cambodia today is at peace and experiencing dramatic economic growth. Free market capitalism has done much to alleviate the burden of the people. Yet in the long run, the sustainability and stability of the country will require avoiding the errors of yesterday. I hope this book inspires them to do so.

February 24, 2016
Phnom Penh, Cambodia
Casey Barnett

CHAPTER I

MARCH 18, 1970

Following the 28th National Convention of the [Sangkum Reastr Niyum] political party, which had taken place on December 27, 1969, the Head of State Prince Norodom Sihanouk's cabinet announced that he would soon leave for France to undergo medical treatment.

Prince Sihanouk's departure was set for the end of February 1970.

On January 5, 1970, while the Prince was hospitalized at the Calmette medical center, notification was issued that he would leave the center around 4 p.m.

At exactly 4 p.m., the Prince's escort came out of the hospital but without him. Around 8 p.m., a second departure was staged. Then at 11 p.m., [the Prince's wife] Princess Monique discreetly left the Calmette medical center without an escort and still without the Prince. And all that was taking place in peace and quiet.

According to those charged with Princess Monique's safety and who lived in the Prince's Chamcar Mon compound—[Prince Sihanouk had moved there from the Royal Palace where his mother, Queen Sisowath Kossamak, still lived]—Princess Monique had returned to Chamcar Mon to pack suitcases. The operation had involved a great deal of commotion during which valuable objects had been packed.

On the following day, Prince Sihanouk finally left the Calmette medical center. His escort took him to the Royal Palace where, in the Prasat Khemarin residence, the country's two Samdech Sangha Reach¹ gave him a "chay yantor," or blessing.

Then, without even stopping at Chamcar Mon, the Prince's convoy headed for Pochentong International Airport.

¹ The heads of the two Buddhist religious orders in Cambodia. Theravada Buddhism in the country consisted of two orders: the Thammayut monastic order considered more elitist and which was supported by the monarchy, and the Mohanikay order that had a more popular appeal.



Prince Sihanouk with Vietnamese Premier Phan Van Dong in Hanoi on May 25, 1970. Photo by Bettmann/CORBIS.

Such an unheralded departure was quite unlike the usual procedure for those occasions. The public had not been informed and, of course, had not been told the reason for this hurried move.

This very much resembled a getaway. The more so that some observers would later report that, during his stay in France, the head of state was kept unaware of what was happening in Phnom Penh; that as days went by, he was more and more oblivious of the situation in the country; and that an atmosphere of court in exile already reigned in his circle.

Events that led to his deposition began on March 8, 1970, in the province of Svay Rieng along the Cambodian-Vietnamese border.

On that day, people from Svay Rieng City and from the districts of Chantrea, Kompong Ro, Rumduol and Romeas Hek demonstrated together against the presence of North-Vietnamese and Vietcong troops on Cambodian territory. The fact is that, in that region, people felt quite strongly how much those communist forces were starting to impose rules and regulations in a country that was not theirs. Those “friends,” as Prince Sihanouk usually called them, who were based in the region were imposing traffic restric-

tions on Cambodians, requisitioning carts and manpower for their transport needs. Rumor was that, in some areas, they were going as far as imposing a form of management that was not only annoying but bordered on “colonial.”

These North-Vietnamese and Vietcong doings were well known. For years, they had been talked about among the population. Prince Sihanouk himself had denounced on several occasions the Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia’s territory along the Vietnamese-Cambodian border. On opening day of the National Assembly’s 1968-1969 session, he had declared: “As for the Red, we are not better treated since, after declaring that they would recognize and respect our borders, they keep on violating our territories along the border².” Moreover, the period of 1966-1970 had been marked by an actual campaign targeting not only communists in the country but also China, North Vietnam and the Vietcong. During that campaign, Prince Sihanouk had given one speech after the next and held numerous press conferences.

As a result, by early 1970 public opinion in the country was ready for measures to prevent an eventual “Vietnamese invasion” and to initiate a conciliation policy with the United States.

On March 11, 1970, a big demonstration took place in the capital as a follow-up to the one that had been held in Svay Rieng City.

This demonstration cannot be said to have been spontaneous. Orders had been sent from “high up” to every director of schools and education institutions, ministries and businesses. And, although everyone was glad because this amounted to a day off, most people did not exactly know what they were meant to do. As for students, they did not ask any questions and were happy to join the march.

On that particular day, the National Assembly was in the process of debating the case of Colonel Oum Mannorine, defense secretary for infantry, Colonel Sosthène Fernandez who was security secretary, and Keo San, vice president of the National Assembly, who were involved in a contraband case. On February 3, 1970, they had been caught in the act of smuggling fabric from Hong Kong for about 3.5 million riel [around US\$70,000].

² Agence khmère de presse (AKP) or Khmer press agency, May 21, 1969.

2. Acreage and production for the main seasonal crops, except for paddy¹

| Crop | Acreage (hectare) | | | Production (tons) | | |
|--------------------|-------------------|---------|---------|-------------------|---------|---------|
| | 1969-70 | 1970-71 | 1971-72 | 1969-70 | 1970-71 | 1971-72 |
| Red Corn | 85,600 | 76,100 | 41,600 | 115,000 | 101,900 | 61,700 |
| White Corn | 161,823 | 17,700 | 14,600 | 22,000 | 19,200 | 17,900 |
| Manioc | 2,800 | 1,400 | 1,900 | 30,100 | 14,900 | 21,000 |
| Potatoes | 2,500 | 2,100 | 2,200 | 22,100 | 17,300 | 20,800 |
| Green Beans | 53,700 | 30,600 | 35,500 | 34,200 | 19,500 | 27,600 |
| Cotton | 12,100 | 1,300 | 80 | 6,500 | 700 | 50 |
| Jute Fiber | 14,200 | 7,800 | 3,800 | 9,400 | 9,300 | 3,500 |
| Ramie | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Kapok Fiber | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Mulberry | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Castor Bean | 350 | 100 | 100 | 300 | 100 | 100 |
| Peanuts in Shell | 22,900 | 15,700 | 17,000 | 23,000 | 16,800 | 23,600 |
| Sesame | 16,300 | 15,000 | 9,100 | 10,800 | 9,900 | 7,700 |
| Soy Bean | 6,700 | 3,300 | 900 | 5,500 | 2,600 | 800 |
| Copra, Coconut | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Sugar Palm (trees) | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Sugar Cane | 7,400 | 3,700 | 4,400 | 58,900 | 29,600 | 35,100 |
| Fruit Crops | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Market Crops | 23,500 | - | 19,000 | 235,000 | - | 190,000 |
| Coffee | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Pepper | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Tobacco | 25,100 | 14,900 | 14,100 | 16,300 | 9,700 | 8,900 |
| Rubber Plants | - | - | - | - | - | - |

¹ Data from the Agriculture Administration, Agriculture Statistics Division3. Acreage and production for the main permanent crops¹

| Crop | Acreage (hectare) | | Production (tons) | |
|-----------------|-------------------|---------------|-------------------|----------------|
| | 1969-70 | 1970-71 | 1969-70 | 1970-71 |
| Rubber Tree | 47,708 | - | 51,836 | 12,763 |
| Coconut Palm | 8,750 | 8,730 | 7,970 | 7,950 |
| Sugar Palm | 11,700 | 11,690 | 34,180 | 22,560 |
| Kapok Tree | 4,510 | 4,500 | 3,880 | 3,950 |
| Mulberry Tree | 910 | 900 | 23 | 10 |
| Banana Tree | 20,060 | 20,050 | 133,950 | 133,900 |
| Mango Tree | 3,230 | 3,230 | 31,360 | 31,350 |
| Pineapple Plant | 2,840 | 2,850 | 32,780 | 32,800 |
| Longan Tree | 250 | 245 | 590 | 550 |
| Rambutan | 270 | 260 | 720 | 570 |
| Durian Tree | 198 | 195 | 1,250 | 1,020 |
| Mangosteen | 7 | 6 | 9 | 8 |
| Cashew Tree | 505 | 505 | 330 | 330 |
| Orange Tree | 2,440 | 2,440 | 38,950 | 38,900 |
| Mandarin Tree | 200 | 200 | 1,900 | 1,900 |
| Grapefruit Tree | 490 | 490 | 4,680 | 4,680 |
| Lemon Tree | 290 | 290 | 1,480 | 1,480 |
| Pepper Tree | 576 | 576 | 1,670 | 1,670 |
| Coffee Tree | 292 | 292 | 460 | 600 |
| Tea Plant | 19 | 19 | 2,250 | - |
| TOTAL | 105,245 | 57,468 | 350,268 | 296,991 |

¹ Data from the Agriculture Administration, Agriculture Statistics Division