

For the first time since his deposition in March, 1970, the ex-Cambodian Head of State, Prince Sihanouk, is reported to have received a "special envoy" from the "internal branch" of the "Royal Government of National Union" (RGNUC) and "National United Front of Kampuchea" (NUFK), established nearly 18 months ago in Peking. According to the pro-Sihanouk Cambodian Information Agency (ANI) on August 23, the envoy, Ieng Sary, arrived in Peking "directly from the front lines", thus demonstrating "the unity and the close and harmonious co-ordination between the internal and external branches of NUFK and RGNUC".

At a banquet given by the Chinese Prime Minister, Chou En-lai, in Peking on August 27, Ieng Sary, Chou En-lai and Sihanouk stressed the importance of unity and praised the "heroic struggle" of the "Peoples Armed Forces of National Liberation of Cambodia" (PAFNLC). Chou said that the Cambodian people were "united as one and closely co-ordinating with and inspiring each other in domestic struggles and international activities" (New China News Agency - NCNA - August 27).

At another banquet two days earlier, both Chou En-lai and Sihanouk referred to foreign reports suggesting that there was not complete unity and identity of views between the anti-government forces inside and outside Cambodia. Certain foreigners, according to Sihanouk, were "trying to make international opinion believe that the Khmer resistance at home and the Khmer resistance abroad are two different movements". But "my nationalist, progressive and Marxist compatriots have decided of one accord to reject all ideological distinction or differences between them" (NCNA, August 25).

The special envoy's trip is no doubt seen as a way to achieve greater unity among Sihanouk's "government" and supporters, suggesting that an attempt is being made to paper over the cracks which have developed during the last 18 months. Apart from the obvious difficulties of communications between the "internal" and "external" branches of the RGNUC and the NUFK, there are also the problems of disunity inside the "liberated area" itself. Friction between the pro-Sihanouk PAFNLC and the traditionally anti-Sihanouk Khmers Rouges in a continuing problem.

This is hardly surprising in view of Sihanouk's attempts to suppress the rebellious Khmers Rouges while he was still in power in Phnom Penh. The three principal ministers of the RGNUC's "internal branch", Khieu Samphan ("Vice-Premier" and "Defence Minister"), Hou Youn (Interior) and Hu Nim (Information and Propaganda), disappeared in 1967 after being involved in subversive activities. All three are reported to have been killed.

Until now all co-ordination between the "internal" and "external" branches of the RGNU and the NUFK appears to have been through messages and broadcasts. Although Sihanouk has often said that the real leadership of the "anti-imperialist struggle" lies with the "ministers" in Cambodia's "liberated areas", they have not shown themselves to the outside world for several years. However, messages and appeals said to have been issued by them are frequently carried by AKI: on August 19, for example, AKI broadcast a message dated August 8 from Khieu Samphan supporting Sihanouk's 24th message to the Khmer nation.

Three days earlier, AKI broadcast an article by Sihanouk which had been published in the July issue of Le Bulletin Mensuel de Documentation, entitled "It is my compatriots of the resistance inside the country who expressly asked me to continue my mission in Peking". In the article Sihanouk replied to criticisms of his "cowardice" in failing to go to Cambodia's "liberated areas" and lead the struggle. He quoted a message of April 30 said to have been sent to him by Khieu Samphan from the "liberated areas" listing various reasons why he should remain in Peking. Among these were the problems of security in Cambodia's eastern provinces and the "better material conditions for the struggle of the external branch" offered in Peking. Sihanouk claimed that he had asked the "authorities" several times to help him to return to Cambodia. He would be prepared to accept the risks, knowing that "the only possible path, of course, is the Ho Chi Minh trail". (The North Vietnamese, who have never explicitly admitted the existence of the infiltration trail through Laos, cannot have welcomed this indiscretion.) Khieu Samphan's message, however, made it clear that he should remain in Peking to strengthen the "unity that the enemy is trying to shatter".

Ieng Sary's banquet speech on August 27 acknowledged that "Cambodia and the People's Republic of China are several thousand kilometres apart"

although linked by the Mekong River - "the image of the natural and close ties of solidarity and friendship".

An earlier request by Sihanouk to go to the "liberated areas" had been objected to by the North Vietnamese Prime Minister since his safety could not be guaranteed, Sihanouk told the Egyptian newspaper, Al-Jumhuriyah, (November 21, 1970). It seems likely that Sihanouk's presence in Cambodia might exacerbate differences between his own supporters and the Khmers Rouges, and even between the Khmer insurgents as a whole (estimated to number 15,000) and the Vietnamese Communist forces, believed by the Khmer High Command to be four times as many. A Sihanoukist who had escaped after a year under Vietnamese Communist control in Siem Reap province said in April, 1971, that pro-Sihanouk troops in the province (numbering about 700) had refused to obey Vietnamese Communist orders after realising that the war was more in Hanoi's interest than in Sihanouk's. They had been disarmed and placed under arrest in February, 1971, but 50 of them escaped to Kompong Thom and surrendered to the Khmer authorities.