

INTERVIEW WITH PRINCE NORODOM SIHANOUK, LE MONDE, March 7, 1975, with Alain Bouc

Peking-- For the past several days Prince Sihanouk has been very busy. Requests for interviews with him are coming from many places, mainly from Americans, prompted by the recent declarations of President Ford, Mr. Kissinger and Mr. Schlesinger that Phnom Penh would fall into FUNC [National United Front of Cambodia] hands within several weeks if emergency funds were not appropriated to replenish the stock of arms and ammunition. While the White House worries, the Cambodians in Peking are excited about the prospects of returning to their country.

Their joy, however, is restrained. The United States' resources are well known, and the delegation of American congresspeople which recently toured Phnom Penh didn't seem convinced that they should give up. The Prince began speaking about this:

"The American representatives are not candid," he said. "They only met the American ambassador and Lon Nol and didn't even speak to the students, who would have accurately described the situation. They returned and said it was now necessary to avoid a bloodbath which, according to them, would inevitably accompany the fall of Phnom Penh. There will be no bloodbath. At the Second Congress [of FUNC and GRUNC February 24 and 25, held under the direction of Khieu Samphan] a general pardon was granted which excluded only the seven traitors who now hold power. How could we, entering Phnom Penh, massacre an unarmed population? Ieng Sary, special aide to Khieu Samphan, the vice premier, arrived from the front March 1. He told me in the name of the resistance:

"We give a formal guarantee that there will be no bloodbath. We are not rebels. We are a state. Our army is that of the Cambodian state."

As a state, we have responsibilities toward the 62 countries which have recognized us. We can't just enter the capital like that and indulge in reprisals."

We were in the large salon where not long ago the leader of the resistance, Mr. Khieu Samphan, had held a press conference marking his first departure from the underground. A portrait of Mao Tse-tung hung beside that of the Prince. The leader of FUNC had regained the gaiety which 15 months of disputes within the resistance movement had shaken.

"With music, flowers and songs..."

"However," he added, "you must put yourself in the Cambodian context. Between us it must be said, Cambodians are ultra opportunists. Worse than the Thais! At the moment of victory they will vow loyalty to Khieu Samphan and the Khmer Rouge. Everything will end with a carnival, with music, flowers and songs. That is how it will happen, and the words of the American congresspeople on the bloodbath are not valid. In reality, what the United States cannot face is the loss of Cambodia, for according to the famous domino theory this loss would threaten their gradual expulsion from the region. After the Cambodian victory, Thailand will lose its role as a base for American aggression in Indochina. The American bases feed Bangkok's budget and provide many of the people's livelihoods, from hotel servants to masseuses for the soldiers. Then Thailand will have difficulties. Our victory will encourage the guerrillas there and even those in Laos. Our neutrality doesn't mean that with regard to Vietnam we will stay neutral toward Nguyen Van Thieu. We will express our solidarity in many ways with our Vietnamese brothers. Agitation will begin in Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia one after another, then the

Philippines, Taiwan and Korea. A bloodbath? It's already happening. Remember in the first days, the killings of Vietnamese and Lon Nol's repression, then the arrival of the Saigon troops, then after the signing of the Paris Agreement and until August 15, 1973, the destruction by the B-52s.

"We are reproached for the rockets which are falling on Phnom Penh. I must tell you that although supplies are regular, North Vietnam doesn't have enough trucks, so that we don't have regular launchers. We make them from bamboo; this is improvised equipment, nothing more. After firing we clear out right away to escape shelling. Real launchers, though, would be dangerous because they would give away our positions. Thus there are accidents. But our targets are only military targets."

Suddenly the Prince's expression hardened: "I said that it would end with a carnival, yes, but on one condition: this is that the United States not interfere, that it not encourage the Phnom Penh regime to resist up until the very end. Because we can guarantee nothing more. If we are fired on we have no choice but to strike back. So, I say, all the aid that Washington provides now to the Lon Nol army is just so much more oil thrown on the flames of war. The Americans must end their aid, and the men of Phnom Penh must turn their coats. The Cambodian Congress announced that it wishes to establish relations with the United States. They don't even have to close their embassy. They must, of course, face the realities. The future of the country belongs to the Khmer Rouge. Just as China passed irreversibly into the hands of Mao Tse-tung. The White House will have to deal with the Khmer Rouge, as they have had to deal with the Chinese. Our victory is inevitable by the end of this year, and the

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Americans must base their diplomacy on this reality. But if Congress votes the new funds -- actually the \$222 million doesn't represent a great sum ~~and~~ since they have already spent \$7 billion, but it is the gesture that counts -- then we will judge them by their intentions. That will show that they want to eliminate us at all costs and they will lose all opportunity to reach an understanding with Cambodians for a long time, possibly ten or twenty years, though they could immediately normalize the situation, to the applause of the entire world, which would rejoice to see one less thorn in the side of this planet, of which there are so many today."

The Prince ended the phrase with his hands joined before his chest as in the Khmer greeting, to beseech us to take careful note of his words ~~and~~ to underline their seriousness. He added: "They could invade us once again; we will oppose it. We are ready for all eventualities, even atomic bombs. But even so, I don't believe they will attempt a new adventure."

Isn't the goal of all the commotion about the difficulties of the Phnom Penh regime to exert a sort of blackmail on Congress to prevent it from approving the requested funds? "No, I don't think so," said the prince, "the current situation is very favorable. Lon Nol has no reserves available. By contrast, we have men, numerous cadres, elite troops of great strength. We can attack in great force, as we have done recently. Men are joining our side, women and children are leaving for Phnom Penh as ~~refugees~~ 'refugees.' We don't have as many deaths as the enemy says. Ieng Sary, who returned from the front, reaffirmed to me:

"We know better than before how to defend ourselves from air attacks, machine gunnings and shellings. As we fight at close quarters with the Lon Nol army, they can't shell us for fear of hitting their own side.' "In fact, if the United States stops its aid the final victory will come in a matter of days."

"Chief of State for Life"

"In my opinion ~~the~~ victory will come by the end of this year, ^{this is} very likely. A psychological turning point will be reached, and Cambodians will begin to call for Khieu Samphan."

What are your relations with the Khmer Rouge, which the Prince considers the leaders of the country, the only authorities?

"The tension which we have spoken of before," the Prince recalled, "has been greatly reduced. The longer the years of common resistance, the more their respect for me grows. Ieng Sary told me recently that I would be chief of state for life and that I should concern myself with domestic affairs, which I categorically refused. Once burned, twice shy! Realistically, I'm concerned with international affairs ~~and~~ and with press contacts. At 52 years of age I intend to pass the rest of my life pleasantly.

"Of course, I will visit my compatriots, but the rest of the time I'll travel around the world. As far as international relations, I have a tendency to be more reserved than the Khmer Rouge, who say they are ready to hold their hand out to everyone. It's necessary to be careful in one's embraces.

"Our aid, in peacetime, we expect above all from China, Korea, countries like Yugoslavia and Romania, certainly Arab governments such as Libya and Algeria, indeed France and Sweden, and also the Soviet bloc. But for the latter they must follow the Chinese model."

At the end of the meeting, the Prince affirmed his interest in questions of military strategy. Last year he strongly recommended to the Khmer Rouge that they concentrate their efforts on closing the supply line of the Mekong, and the idea has borne fruit today.

The Prince still devotes time in Peking to his traditional artistic pursuits. Closing the interview he gave us two records. The album title: "Music and Songs of Prince Norodom Sihanouk of Cambodia. New, 1975."

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