

# Cynthia bahorich

Politics, Communism



Cynthia Bahorich Extended Essay Introduction When Pol Pot took over Cambodia, it was one of the most horrible genocides next to the Holocaust, in the 1970's; this was a big part of history. In March 1970, Marshal Lon Nol, a Cambodian politician who had previously served as prime minister, and his pro-American associates staged a successful overthrow to depose Prince Sihanouk as head of state. At this time, the Khmer Rouge had gained members and was positioned to become a major player in the civil war due to its alliance with Sihanouk. The Communist Party of Kampuchea (CPK), otherwise known as the Khmer Rouge, took control of Cambodia on April 17, 1975. The CPK created the state of Democratic Kampuchea in 1976 and ruled the country until January 1979. The party's existence was kept secret until 1977, and no one outside the CPK knew who its leaders were (the leaders called themselves " Angkar Padevat"). While the Khmer Rouge was in power, they set up policies that disregarded human life and produced repression and massacres on a massive scale. They turned the country into a huge detention center, which later became a graveyard for nearly two million people, including their own members and even some senior leaders. Their army was led by Pol Pot, who was appointed CPK's party secretary and leader in 1963. Pol Pot, born in Cambodia as Solath Sar, spent time in France and became a member of the French Communist Party. His returning to Cambodia in 1953, he joined a secret communist movement and began his rise up the ranks to become one of the world's most infamous dictators. Aided by the Vietnamese, the Khmer Rouge began to defeat Lon Nol's forces on the battlefields. By the end of 1972, the Vietnamese withdrew from Cambodia and turned the major responsibilities for the war over to the CPK.

Pol Pot's way of thinking showed dictatorship to the extent that he thought it was okay to kill people to create a purified society. He wanted to lead Cambodia into a communist country, and force city dwellers to relocate to the countryside to work in collective farms, and forced labor projects. People were turned into beasts of burden. People were forced to repress their personalities entirely; their only duty was to blindly obey the authority of Pol Pot and Khmer Rouge. The Khmer Rouge also began to implement their radical Maoist and Marxist-Leninist transformation program at this time. They wanted to transform Cambodia into a rural, classless society in which there were no rich people, no poor people, and no exploitation. To accomplish this, they abolished money, free markets, normal schooling, private property, foreign clothing styles, religious practices, and traditional Khmer culture. Public schools, pagodas, mosques, churches, universities, shops and government buildings were shut or turned into prisons, stables, reeducation camps and granaries. There was no public or private transportation, no private property, and no non-revolutionary entertainment. Leisure activities were severely restricted. People throughout the country, including the leaders of the CPK, had to wear black costumes, which were their traditional revolutionary clothes. One of the signs that Pol Pot wanted as a communist country was, that he did not allow anyone to gather and hold discussions. If three people gathered and talked, they could be accused of being enemies and arrested or executed. People were forbidden to show even the slightest affection, humor or pity. The Khmer Rouge asked all Cambodians to believe, obey and respect only Angkar Padevat, which was to be everyone's "mother and father." The Khmer Rouge claimed that only pure people were qualified

to build the revolution. Soon after seizing power, they arrested and killed thousands of soldiers, military officers and civil servants from the Khmer Republic regime led by Marshal Lon Nol, whom they did not regard as "pure." Over the next three years, they executed hundreds of thousands of intellectuals; city residents; minority people such as the Cham, Vietnamese and Chinese; and many of their own soldiers and party members, who were accused of being traitors. Many were held in prisons, where they were detained, interrogated, tortured and executed. The most important prison in Cambodia, known as S-21, held approximately 14, 000 prisoners while in operation. Only about 12 survived. The Khmer Rouge persecuted the educated people such as doctors, lawyers, and current or former military and police. Christian, Buddhist and Muslim citizens also were specifically targeted. In an effort to create a society without competition, where people worked for the common good, the Khmer Rouge placed people in collective living arrangements or communes and passed "re-education" programs to encourage the commune lifestyle. People were divided into categories that reflected the trust that the Khmer Rouge had for them; the most trustworthy were called "old citizens." The pro-West and city dwellers began as "new citizens" and could move up to "deportees," then "candidates" and finally "full rights citizens"; however, most citizens never moved up. Those who refused re-education were killed in the fields surrounding the commune or at the infamous prison camp Tuol Sleng Centre, known as S-21. Over four years, the Khmer Rouge killed more than 1.7 million people through work, starvation and torture. This subject was worth researching because it's a huge part of Cambodian history. It was very overwhelming to me that a man

could influence an army to change society, and devastate a whole country that became sealed off from the outside world. Millions of citizens from Cambodia, suffered and lived in terror of communist rules for over 3 years. The people of Cambodia felt that they had no choice but to cooperate with the Khmer Rouge or the consequences would be life threatening. Pol Pot and his Khmer Rouge leaders spoke passionately of the blissful future that lay ahead for Cambodia's people. His 4 year plan was to dramatically increase agricultural production and thereby raise capital, through exports, for the further cultivation of his dream, the short term goal was the industrialization of agriculture and development of heavy industry, all this would be accomplished by Pol Pot's slaves. Giving motivational talks to the people he had turned into destitute, dispirited creatures. " Because we are the race that built Angkor we can do anything. "