

Genocide in Kampuchea

The depth of hell created in Kampuchea during the reign of terror of the Chinese-sponsored Pol Pot regime is still being uncovered. As the new government of President Heng Samrin struggles to rebuild life in that Southeast Asian country, it is also uncovering the full horror of what occurred—not only the millions who were killed but the systematic destruction of all signs of intellectual life, of literature and culture, of industry and science—at the hands of Pol Pot's Red Khmer forces.

The following article, written with great passion and skill by Polish journalist Wieslaw Gornicki following his recent visit to Kampuchea is, to date, the most powerful public account to have appeared on the reality of this genocidal regime. Appearing in truncated form in some U.S. newspapers, we reprint here the full text as it appeared in a publication of the World Peace Council and in the June 3 issue of the Indian weekly New Wave.

What happened in Pol Pot's Kampuchea is now taking place in Iran, in Nicaragua, in southern Africa—and with accelerating vengeance.

Those Anglo-American policymakers who disguise their continuing support for the remnant of Pol Pot's forces in terms of playing the geopolitical "China card" against the new Phnom Penh government and its Vietnamese allies are endorsing the Cambodia Dark Ages model for the entire Third World. One need only look at the events in Uganda, where the Tanzanian army, like the Vietnamese in Kampuchea, overthrew barbarian Idi Amin and installed a new Ugandan government to the cheers of the world. Perhaps, we ask, if China had supported Idi Amin would we have heard cries of "violation of international borders" from the United Nations and Washington.

For almost five weeks, between the end of January and early March 1979, I was in the Indochinese peninsula for over three weeks, in liberated Kampuchea and then twice on the Chinese-Vietnamese front-line. First in the vicinity of Lang Son. Then for several days in the province of Lao Cai.

Three times in my life I have been shot at. For the first time, by the Nazis during World War II in Warsaw. For the second time, by the British invasion forces, while I was covering the war in Egypt in 1956. For the third time by the Chinese artillery near Lao Cai. I brought with me a shrapnel from a Chinese howitzer,

caliber 130 mm, which was fired at us when we arrived at a Vietnamese outpost 2 kilometers north of a village called Phu Loi. I still hear the artillery barrage and the twittering of jungle birds, interrupted by explosions.

It is not my intention to report here the military side of the Chinese intrusion into Vietnam. It would require much more military knowledge than I have. Neither can I bring myself to describe the sufferings of the Vietnamese civilian population driven out by the Chinese artillery fire from the towns and localities along the border. What I have seen there may be compared only to the most dramatic scenes remembered from my childhood in Nazi-occupied Poland.

I have seen an old woman dying in the road in the dust, with relatives standing helplessly about her. I have seen another woman giving birth to a child in the middle of the crowded town of Dong Mo, some 40 kilometers south of the frontier. I have seen half-naked children running around to find some food for themselves and their parents. I have seen a family weeping loudly because they had to slaughter their only food supplier, a pig. The pig was no longer able to walk miles and miles. People must walk. Chinese artillery fire is quite precise and sometimes it reaches people who think they are safe. I am a professional and I know pretty well the standard vocabulary of war reporting. Yet this time it is extremely difficult for me to find the proper words to describe the valiant, persistent, intransigent, devoted Vietnamese soldiers defending their homeland.

All of them are young, or very young. They have got only one life, only one youth. Yet this is the second consecutive Vietnamese generation that has had to fight and to endure all the hardships of war. This is the 46th defensive war in the history of Vietnam. As of Feb. 17, 1979, Vietnam has entered its 36th year of incessant wars against foreign invaders. People who were born during the first armed struggles against the Japanese occupation forces in 1943, have grown-up children now, who now must do the fighting. How long will it last? How many times more must the Vietnamese nation resort to arms to defend its independence and sovereignty? Is there a limit to the sufferings and sacrifices of a single nation?

I have spoken to many Vietnamese soldiers along

the front line. There is no way of knowing how many of them are still alive. As a matter of fact I feel quite uneasy while talking about it.

After being in Indochina at the beginning of 1979, I have realized for the first time what the Chinese "emperors of ants" have actually in mind when they claim the concept of a "new society." For the first time I have realized the scope of meaningless words contradicted by the most atrocious practices. The so-called Chinese model of social life should now be seen in a new light—that of the Vietnamese frontier and that of Kampuchea. One cannot and should not separate the present Chinese aggression against Vietnam from what the Chinese puppet regime did in Kampuchea, with full Chinese acquiescence and approval.

I have seen many atrocities and much human suffering—probably too much of the ravages of war. Yet never before did I witness anything comparable to Kampuchea these days. I doubt whether I will see anything like that in the future—unless China unleashes another war of total annihilation.

Kampuchea is the only place in the whole world and a unique example in modern history where the madness of a doctrine has brought about almost total annihilation of a country and its people. No war destruction even approaches what the Pol Pot-Ieng Sary murderers have done to their own nation. After what I have seen in Kampuchea, I may definitely say that Maoism is not just one of the many political theories of the 20th century. It is not a proposal. It is not a revelation, as some young people thought a decade ago. It is nothing but an ideology of genocide—premeditated, comprehensive, ruthless genocide. All the rest is either naive platitudes or sophisticated word-gimmickry, to which many of us were attracted because of our yearnings for things pure and unequivocal.

This is not a sweeping statement. I happen to have known Southeast Asia for two decades. Ever since the mid-1950s I have been closely following the developments in that region. I am no stranger to Calcutta, Bangkok, or Jakarta. There is no other part of the world of which I am more fond. For many years I have been fascinated by the pattern of the Chinese revolution. I have never allowed myself to ridicule Chinese specifics or their strange way of doing things. The basis of my thinking about Southeast Asia has been laid by the books of Joseph Conrad and obviously by *La condition humaine* by André Malraux. All my life until recently I have been an admirer of the Chinese revolution, its faithful follower, its ally. Even in the first year of the "cultural revolution" I was desperately trying to find some justification for the barbarity and omnipresent madness. No more. Never more. The spell is gone. If I am saying all this today, it is not out of political expediency nor is it motivated by current political needs. It is the expression of the most bitter of all my disappointments. It is a painful and, yes, tragic revision of

my previous convictions. I don't think I am the only one forced to revise it all.

I have brought with me two pieces of Chinese-made machine gun ammunition.

at the front line near the Vietnamese town of Lao Cai, occupied by the Chinese. The other comes from a Kampuchean town of Prey Veng. All the inhabitants of this town were exterminated to the last person. At present, that town is nothing more than a spot on the map. Nobody will ever return here. Prey Veng is already partially invaded by the jungle. There are narrow paths instead of once busy streets. There is a place there where I have seen about 200 human skeletons, bones, and skulls. Some of the skulls still have corroded nails in the forehead or in the eyeholes or on the top of the head. Arm bones are still strongly tied by barbed wire. There is one skull that has three regular holes from bullets. Apparently, the dying man was struggling with his henchmen, and he had to be silenced by shooting. It is near his skull that I found the other bullet.

Two bullets. Same Chinese sources. Same political motivation. Same purpose. I have seen hundreds of ammunition cases marked with Chinese characters and the infamous number "800." They mean that the Pol Pot henchmen may count on 800 million Chinese siding with them. There were not 20,000 Chinese advisers, as previously reported, but well over 30,000. They heard the grass whisper; they kept a record of every single event there. The Chinese ambassador in Phnom Penh was actually commander-in-chief, main political commissary, the czar of economic life, chief ideologist, the master of life and death—general overlord. If Deng Xiaoping claims now that the Chinese leaders were "not informed" about the events in Kampuchea—he lies. Blatantly and shamelessly. One must rule out absolutely the possibility that the Peking leaders did not know about the extent of extermination and destruction in Kampuchea. Just the contrary. It is in Kampuchea that all the theoretical premises of the Chinese "cultural revolution" were put into practice. It is there that this criminal experiment has been carried out completely to its logical end.

That is why I feel the moral and intellectual obligation to tell the story of Kampuchea today. It is a story beyond mere journalistic reporting. It is a conversation with one's self about the limits of a utopia and about the lessons that we all have to draw from the history of those four horrible years. No matter which culture we belong to, Kampuchea has become a common cause for all humanity, irrespective of ideological commitments and divergent political views.

It may be said that Kampuchea in 1979 in a way reminds us of the "time machine" of H.G. Wells. From any given point in this unhappy country one may see simultaneously the most remote past of the human race—the stone age, that is. And at the same time one can have an idea what the world would look like if the

Maoist doctrine were ever to have its way on a global scale.

One day I will write a book on Kampuchea. A bitter, soul-searching essay on how one should keep away from glittering slogans. But right now I want to be as brief as possible and confine my observations to basic problems facing liberated Kampuchea today. Today—and, indeed, for many, many years to come.

The consequences of genocide

It is estimated that the Pol Pot regime, haunted by its own theory of “overpopulation,” has exterminated no less than 22, more probably 25 percent of the Kampuchean population. All figures are approximate, of course, for the latest census in Kampuchea was taken in 1962 and the current transmigration of population makes it the more difficult to establish correct and precise figures. However, I am inclined to believe rather the upper bracket of estimates. I have seen with my own eyes no fewer than 2,000, probably 3,000 human bodies, skulls, and skeletons brought together in one place. Mass graves are almost being discovered daily. Some localities are completely extinct. It suffices to walk for half an hour in any town to discover remnants of people, not known to the authorities.

When it comes to the people with any degree of education above the primary level, the extermination rate reaches approximately 80 percent. The Pol Pot murderers have achieved a unique record of the 20th century; they have reduced the population by one-fourth, while at the same time increasing the illiteracy rate from 60 to an estimated 93 percent. According to the Maoist doctrine, knowledge of reading and writing was inevitably a proof of “mental corruption.” Even basic knowledge of any foreign language was sufficient to cause one to be classified into lower categories, which meant, in practice, slow starvation. As a result, Kampuchea today, for all practical purposes, has no educated cadres. The new government estimates that there are six doctors, about 20 teachers, and not a single engineer. All others lie in mass graves.

I do not think anybody will ever be able to tell the whole truth about the Pol Pot atrocities. It needs the pen of a talented fiction writer to condense it all into meaningful and readable matter. I am helpless in that respect. In Prey Veng I have seen 14 concrete holes, 430 centimeters deep each, used probably as sewer entrances; 13 of them are filled to the brim with broken human bones and skulls. In a 14th hole of the same depth, which has a concrete bottom, one may see something that not even the Nazis invented: liquid man—human bodies dissolved under the tropical sun

into a dark, heavy liquid. The surface of it is covered by billions of black and yellow worms. Three skulls, lighter than the liquid, float freely in the liquid remnants of people, about whom we know nothing and will never know.

In the village of Phoum Ang in the province of Svay Rieng I was present during the unearthing of a woman, rather young and whose body was relatively well preserved. Her long dark hair could partly be seen inside her skull, for she had been killed with an iron bar that had cracked her head. In the town of Kompong Trabak I have seen the mutilated skeleton of a man. His skull lay about three meters from the rest of his bones. No one can tell whether he had been beheaded or whether hungry rats had been feeding themselves on his body.

I have seen a documentary film shot by the Vietnamese military film unit in December 1978 in the Vietnamese province of Tay Ninh, a few hours after the

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sudden intrusion of Pol Pot troops. This film is not for public showing; and no wonder! Few people may stand looking at about 20 little children, aged two to six, put on bamboo sticks like flies on a pin. Or watch dead women with sharpened bamboo sticks in their crotches. Or see men’s bellies ripped open. If it were not for what I have seen in Kampuchea with my own eyes, I could hardly believe the pictures I am talking about.

Destruction of the social structure

The consequences of genocide committed by Pol Pot murderers will have a lasting impact on Kampuchean people for several generations. There is not a single family in Kampuchea that survived “year zero” untouched. There is not a single village, not to mention the towns and cities, that may be repopulated to previous proportions. As for educated people, the losses cannot be compensated for till the end of this century.

The theory of “overpopulation” was not merely an intellectual utopia for the Pol Pot regime. There are grounds to believe that they had prepared, on the advice of the Chinese, a comprehensive plan for reducing the population of the country by half. Not only by sheer extermination, but by all conceivable means at their disposal. One of those means is annihilation of the family. There was not a single married couple that survived those four years in the same place; separation of husbands from their wives was an iron rule to which there were no exceptions. Marriages were abolished and forbidden. This is probably the reason why one sees in Kampuchea today very many children above the age of

six and very few below four years of age. It is safe to assume that the birth rate in Kampuchea between 1975 and 1978 dropped almost to zero. I did not find any evidence of collective marriages, reported earlier by the foreign press. However, it is evident from all the talks I had with the survivors that any approaches between a man and a woman were punishable, firstly by the reduction of the food ration and, if this does not work, by death.

I spoke with Mrs. Dom Phonh. She is 49 but looks like an octogenarian. She has no teeth and her deeply wrinkled face moves nervously while she talks. Mrs. Phonh was a midwife: for the Pol Pot regime this was a particularly undesirable profession; for the midwives help to increase the population instead of reducing it. Mrs. Phonh comes from the town of Kontua in the province of Kandal. Her husband was a bricklayer, her oldest son was a gas station attendant. I have used the past tense as virtually all her family has either been exterminated or died of starvation. She is all alone, has no home, no family, not a single document and actually no biography, for she refuses to think or to speak of her previous life.

I spoke to Mrs. Pen En, a teacher of mathematics in Siem Reap. She was separated from her husband only a few hours after the Red Khmer units entered the town. She knows nothing of her husband, but she has every reason to believe that he was subjected to particularly cruel treatment and executed. His "sins" were unforgivable: he was a college graduate, worked as headmaster of a school, spoke two foreign languages, and was active in the Soviet-Khmer and French-Khmer associations. As for Mrs. Pen En's children: two daughters, aged 12 and 15, died of starvation in a commune of Vanh Son, some 150 kilometers from the place where their mother was resettled. Another daughter did not survive a march of death from Siem Reap to the southeastern part of the country. She died in her mother's arms.

Stories like that may be told by hundreds or even thousands. The Pol Pot regime with its inhuman idea of "total transparency" and "boundless collectivism" managed to destroy the basic tissue of society. It will take years before new families are founded and old ones heal their wounds.

Starvation

It is true that by reducing the number of inhabitants in Kampuchea and by imposing slave labor, the Pol Pot regime accumulated in 1977 a certain surplus of rice. This was vociferously noised abroad by the Chinese press as "a victorious achievement." However, as of 1978 the shortage of food was already so acute that China had to feed the cadres of Angkor, for nobody was interested in the hunger down in the countryside. Starvation was one of the most desirable means to

reduce the population. I have spoken to about 20 people who were given, in the communes, Categories III and IV. I managed to meet only one single person with Category II. (Category I was reserved for the cadres of Angkor and illiterate peasants.) In Category III the daily allocation of rice never exceeded 130 grams per head. Category IV was still worse: 90 grams of rice, no fish, no fruits.

With this starting point one would hardly expect prosperity. It has to be added that the Red Khmers deliberately destroyed about 20 percent of arable land in southeast Kampuchea by draining water from the paddies. It will take at least one generation to reconstruct the intricate water supply system over there. Moreover, the fleeing Chinese advisers took with them a considerable amount of rice reserves.

I spoke with Mrs. Chan Kanh Nha, who is the only surviving woman doctor in all of Kampuchea. She had managed to take refuge in Vietnam. Her husband, who was a professor of medicine, was hanged without delay as soon as the henchman discovered that he had studied in Paris and Moscow. Her two daughters, aged four and six, disappeared forever in the havoc of evacuation from Phnom Penh. Mrs. Chan is now acting minister of health in the new government. According to her estimates, the daily consumption in Kampuchea today does not exceed 450 calories a day, while the lowest possible intake in that climate should not be lower than 1,100 calories. Along the main routes, I have seen thousands of peasants returning to their former home sites. These people have practically nothing to eat. They cook tiger grass, bamboo sprouts, or tiny fish caught by children in nearby swamps. The deficit of protein reaches monstrous proportions. It may well affect future generations. I really do not know how international assistance can be organized, but one thing is sure: the world must make every conceivable effort to help the Kampuchean people, unless we want to be guilty of the crime of indifference.

Health

Medicine, both Western and Oriental, was the public enemy No. 1 to the Pol Pot henchmen, for it prolongs human life while they wanted to get rid of as many people as possible. That is why they displayed so much blind fury in exterminating the doctors, nurses, and midwives. There is not a single hospital left in Kampuchea.

In Phnom Penh I have visited the Preah Ket Mealen hospital. I have seen there several people, victims of the most sophisticated tortures by Pol Pot henchmen, people who survived only by miracle. I have seen a young man whose leg bones are broken in 11 spots. The only help that he can get in the hospital is a bamboo stick, which is attached to his leg with a packing string. No pain-killing drugs whatsoever. No calcium to speed up

the recovery of his bones. Not even enough bandages to stop his wounds from bleeding.

In Svay Rieng I visited a provincial hospital which had been equipped with a very expensive X-ray scanner, donated by the French Red Cross. It has been deliberately broken to bits with a hammer and destroyed beyond reconstruction. The director of this hospital was forced by the Red Khmers to sweep the courtyard. The "commander" of this hospital, appointed by Angkor, was 13 years old. His only instruction was to get rid of the medical personnel and to destroy as much equipment as possible without the use of explosives.

In another Phnom Penh hospital built by the Soviet Union for 80 million rubles and equipped with the most modern medical equipment by the French, Swiss, Swedish, and West German Red Cross, I have seen virtually tons of expensive drugs, surgical instruments, and medical supplies—broken, trodden, stepped on, crushed by hammer blows. On the second floor of this hospital there is an empty room still covered with human blood, with scattered human hair. It is in this room that I found a peasant's knife used for cutting sugar cane. It is still covered with the blood of an unknown victim. Nobody knows who was executed in this room, or for what reason. This new "surgical instrument" was used everywhere to break human necks and skulls, because the Red Khmers were under strict Chinese orders to save munition and employ only traditional instruments of torture and killing: China is a poor country, mind you. In several villages I have seen the beginning of the beginnings: primitive medical stations with practically no medical equipment and obsolete foreign drugs of dubious utility. The lack of skilled medical personnel may be disastrous if the lack of food, giant migration, and the omnipresent decaying bodies bring about an epidemic.

Economy

Kampuchea is the only country in the world today where there is no money and no currency with any purchasing power whatsoever. On April 17, 1975 Pol Pot abolished all money "once and for ever," as he had put it. The National Bank in Phnom Penh was blown up 24 hours after the Red Khmers seized control of the capital. Until this day the streets around the National Bank are littered by millions and billions of riels. It is nothing but trash. No one may say when any currency will be reintroduced to Kampuchea and on what economic basis. Moreover, there is no barter trade of even the simplest sort. No shops, no street vendors, nothing to sell—what is lacking is a primary merchandise of all economies, food.

Actually, there is no economic life at all. All the

industry is totally destroyed. I visited a brewery in Phnom Penh, which for the last four years was taken over by the snakes and rats fighting constantly with each other. It is interesting to note that this brewery, which once employed 700 people, was the property of the second richest man in Kampuchea, after Lon Nol. He was a Chinese businessman, Tsien-tai. As such he deserved to be executed on the spot, with no delay. Apparently there were some notable exceptions to their doctrine. Tsien-tai has safely emigrated to China. Reportedly the Chinese government sent a special plane from Peking to bring their beloved son back home, together with his family and uncounted cases of gold and jewelry.

Even the smallest shops, repair stations, and artisan workshops are meticulously destroyed. All electrical cables are cut, plugs are broken, electric motors have their rotors unwound. The stockpiles and reserves are depleted. Agriculture for all practical purposes has come to a standstill. A transmigration of enormous magnitude is still going on and no one is in a position to tell when it may come to an end.

I do not want to tell here sensational stories; this is no occasion for making juicy headlines. Yet for the first time in my life I have been walking on silver. There is

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a street in downtown Phnom Penh—I do not know its name, for all street signs were destroyed—in which the silversmiths had their shops. All their products are torn to pieces, piled on the sidewalks and driven over by jeeps.

Communication

Total isolation of every individual and absolute control over minds and bodies are essential to the Maoist concept of "new social life." It has been applied practically during the "cultural revolution" in China, about which we seem to know very little. However, we may deduce what was taking place in China in the early 1960s just by comparing it with Kampuchea, where the Pol Pot people were somehow more efficient than their Chinese masters. Accordingly, railways in Kampuchea do not exist any more. In the central railway station in Phnom Penh I was walking along a train that for the last four years had been standing in the very same place. The rails are covered by grass and wild banana bush. Streets of all Kampuchean cities are littered with battered bicycles and broken motor-scooters, for private communication of any sort was a serious crime against the "supercollectivism" that Dr. Pol Pot had in mind. Highways were murdered in the same nefarious manner

as the people have been. Virtually thousands of little trenches have been dug across all main highways. One cannot travel in Kampuchea today, except by robust military vehicles. Even so, the average speed does not exceed eight kilometers per hour, as the driver has to apply brakes every 50 meters or so.

The destruction of all means of communication had an ideological background behind it. The Pol Pot people came to think that any form of uncontrolled exchange of views or even words between the people is potentially harmful to the "cause of revolution." I have spoken to many people, who for more than four years had not the slightest idea what actually happened in Kampuchea. Possession of a radio receiver was punishable by death. Same, for speaking in foreign languages. Same, for reading any scrap of printed paper. Even between neighboring communes there was no communication of any sort except by the commanding groups of Red Khmers.

It all makes Kampuchea even today an almost inaccessible country. There is no gasoline supply, no repair shops, no spare parts for any car, no way of moving around. The fury of the Pol Pot regime directed against modern civilization was almost completely successful in destroying even such means of communication as were known to the human race thousands of years ago.

Cultural heritage

I have said that there is not a single book left in all Kampuchea. There is an exception to this, though. I went completely alone into the compounds of La Bibliothèque Nationale situated next to the once famous hotel Le Royal. For the first time in my life I witnessed a deadly fight between a domestic pig and a black Asian rat. The fight took place in the main reading hall of the library, among priceless first printings of Theophile Gautier, early French geographical reports, complete editions of Shakespeare and volumes of American poetry, donated by the United States Information Agency. It may be safely assumed that the contents of the National Library have been saved from the fire services of special squads only because the Red Khmers were planning to sell those valuable treasures for hard currency. However, all the books there have been urinated upon, splattered with mud and excrement, and partially torn to pieces. I spent about two hours in the National Library walking among the shelves, all alone, brooding over rarest first editions and wondering whether there is any limit to barbarity.

On July 7, 1978 the Chinese ambassador to Phnom Penh at a reception given in honor of Chinese specialists had gone out of his way to acclaim "exemplary achievements of revolutionary forces of Democratic Kampuchea in the field of culture and education."

Some achievement, indeed.

Just opposite the National Library is the once

famous Lycée Français, thought five years ago to be the best secondary school in all of Southeast Asia. I walked through the corridors of what used to be a school and what amounts now to nothing more than a rubbish heap. Microscopes broken by hammers, books and maps burned out by the sulphuric acid from car batteries, school records thrown into the courtyard, movie projectors dismantled, with broken lenses and their little motors ripped out in the same manner as the murderers used to rip out human stomachs. In one classroom, I saw chalked on a blackboard an inscription that now appears quite cynically: "less vacances."

All towns and cities of Kampuchea are littered by miles and miles of film and recording tapes. The Red Khmers were under positive orders to destroy every image from the past and every single recording. I have brought with me about 40 centimeters of a movie of which I know nothing. There is a beautiful young woman holding a baby in her arms. It is really difficult to tell what harm such a movie could do to anyone.

The Pol Pot regime made it a severely punishable crime not only to talk about the past but even to possess anything that could remind one of the past. Buddhist and Catholic clergymen were executed within the first week after the seizure of power. Whoever had been engaged in teaching anything whatsoever was placed in the lowest category or assigned to work which was tantamount to slow death. The boundless fury with which the executioners attacked the past as such was probably much more efficient than the respective folly during the "cultural revolution" in China; yet its zeal was born of the same insane theory that the future must start at point zero. It is only now that I am able to grasp the abysmal cynicism of Mao Tse-tung when he was talking about the inevitability of World War III. It's not only several hundreds of millions of living people that he was ready to sacrifice. It was also our common past, our human history of many centuries, our supranational heritage.

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One cannot visit Kampuchea these days without one's reflections going far behind normal reporting of things seen. One has to get rid of professional habits. One has to ask one's self certain questions that the writers of yesteryear used to describe as the ultimate ones. What is it all about? What purpose had to be achieved? After all, Pol Pot was a graduate of one of the most renowned universities in the world; Ieng Sary was about to finish his doctoral thesis at the University of Paris. They were not trained henchmen. It was their Maoist utopia that led to genocide. It was an intellectual folly or mental blackout that spelled out untold sufferings and death for two million human beings. One cannot remain indifferent to the intellectual premises that logically lead to genocide.