

Interview: Heng Cheng



'The people of Cambodia hate and mistrust all Communists'

Heng Cheng, former President of Cambodia, entered national politics in 1958. He served in several capacities in the cabinet, including Secretary of Agriculture from 1960 to 1962. He was elected President of the National Assembly for two one-year terms, serving from 1968 to 1970. In 1970, he was elected President of the Republic of Cambodia, serving until 1972. He left Cambodia in 1975, shortly before the takeover by Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge. He presently lives in Houston, Texas, and is president of Khmer Unity for Peace and Freedom. This interview was conducted by Harley Schlander on Oct. 31.

EIR: Would you comment on the situation facing Cambodia following the breakdown of the Paris Conference?

Heng Cheng: The world now realizes that the Cambodian peace conference collapsed because of the Communist government of Hun Sen, backed by Vietnam and Russia, and the Khmer Rouge backed by the Chinese. These communists have already caused the Cambodian people to suffer one of the worst tragedies in the history of the world. The Khmer Rouge killed over 1 million in their insane attempt to return Cambodia to an agrarian society. It is believed that they planned to kill as many as 5 million more, if necessary, to consolidate their plans.

The only thing that prevented further massacres was a purge within the Khmer Rouge that forced Heng Samrin to separate from Pol Pot and ask the Vietnamese Communists for their support. The Vietnamese responded by ousting Pol Pot in December 1978. Before Pol Pot's ouster, he and Heng Samrin not only savagely massacred Cambodians who resisted them, but they also destroyed the social, political and cultural framework of the nation. This may have been the worst holocaust in the history of man.

These events led the people of Cambodia to hate and mistrust all Communists regardless of their origin. The people strongly oppose the continuation of Communists in power.

We appeal to the United Nations and particularly to the American people for help.

EIR: What would happen if elections were held now?

Heng Cheng: The Vietnamese Communists tried to exploit

the Paris Conference to consolidate and legitimize the position of Heng Semrin. If elections are held in the next six months, Heng Semrin will win. After the Vietnamese troop withdrawal, they will still keep 2,500 military in each province in Cambodia. There are more than 1 million Vietnamese civilians in Cambodia who will stay, so we could not win an election.

EIR: We have seen in China recently, that even after 40 years of Communist rule, millions of people demonstrated against the Deng Xiaoping government. Do you see the same in Cambodia, that, given the chance, people would vote against the Communists?

Heng Cheng: Most of the Cambodian people don't like the Communists, they have been the victim of the Communists, they know the Communists killed their families, they emptied our cities and ruined our agriculture, creating food shortages. Many people were worked to death and many starved. There are people starving today.

EIR: You must be very disappointed with the U.S. role at the Paris Conference, since the Bush administration has been more interested in promoting good relations with the Soviet Union, which is backing Vietnam, and China, which supports the Sihanouk-Pol Pot coalition, than in helping the Cambodian people.

Heng Cheng: Yes, this is true, because they don't know very well the real situation. As I told President Bush, the Communists exploit indirectly, and the U.S. and our other friends from the free world, they don't know the ploys of the Communists.

EIR: What about the role of private individuals, such as Henry Kissinger and others, who are using their influence to shape U.S. policy?

Heng Cheng: He is not popular, but he has his connection with Chase Manhattan Bank. They can do this because the American people do not know the real situation. The Communists are smart in making propaganda. That is what happened in the Vietnam war, they exploited the opposition of some Americans [to the war], we didn't lose the war, we

abandoned it, when the Congress stopped military aid to Cambodia, Vietnam, and Laos and these countries fell down. The Communists had no support, they have no support now, but they spend money to make propaganda.

EIR: What do you think the U.S. should do to help the people of Cambodia?

Heng Cheng: In my opinion, the U.S. has to support the wishes of the majority of the Cambodians to apply democracy. U.S. policy must not continue to be dependent on agreements made with Moscow and Beijing, but must respect the wishes of the Cambodian people for national sovereignty.

The American people have a long and rich tradition of human rights, freedom, and respect for other people. We plead for support of our cause, which, simply stated, is to let non-communist Cambodians participate in the next peace meeting. We represent the majority of the Cambodian people and we do not owe allegiance to any country.

We have to prepare for Cambodian reconstruction, to attract help from other countries and loans from international banks. For this, we need first, security. Secondly, we need democracy, real democracy. Third, we need a constitution, to form a basis for good government.

Then, we must rebuild infrastructure. This means roads, streets, telephones, all communications, electricity. We can export agricultural provisions which are frozen, like fish and fruit, but if we do not have enough electricity, we cannot do this. We need big electrical generators, so we can have a low price for the people. Now, we have generators from Communist countries, they are small and expensive, so we cannot compete with other countries. We have to build a modern port for trade.

EIR: One of the most serious problems facing the region is that of starvation. Cambodia was once a food-exporting nation. What policies did you promote as secretary of agriculture which enabled Cambodia to produce a food surplus?

Heng Cheng: When I was secretary of agriculture, I encouraged expansion of agriculture through new technologies, such as selection of seed, use of tractors to replace oxen, use of fertilizer and insecticides, and also, a policy to protect the price paid to the producers. I was the first secretary of agriculture to explain to the government that, for example, to have rice, you have to spend 160 days from planting to harvest. You must know each day what you have to pay to produce the crop, so you must know if you will have the price.

EIR: In other words, what we used to have in the United States, a parity price, to cover the cost of production?

Heng Cheng: Yes, that's right. In industry and commerce, when you buy something from another country, you have insurance, so when you have problems, if the ship sinks, when you lose the product, you have insurance pay . . . in agriculture, in five years, you may have only two or three

good years. Meantime, you may have flooding, drought, insects. How much does the farmer get then?

Then, when you have a good crop, the price drops. So you must impose a price that protects the agricultural producer.

EIR: What results did you achieve as secretary of agriculture?

Heng Cheng: When I first became secretary we had no tractors. We soon had more than 4,000 tractors. In a new area, the land is overgrown; to plow, to exploit by oxen, it takes five years to exploit one hectare, to clear the land and make it productive. This problem restricted land use to areas previously exploited. With the tractor, it takes one day to prepare a hectare. This meant we could increase land use. To help people buy tractors, we protected the price [of the tractors], with an exemption tax, and we gave an exemption from tax for buying fertilizer.

With these policies, we had a such a large increase in food production, that I had to go to other countries to look for markets to export food.

EIR: So you provided incentives for them to modernize?

Heng Cheng: Yes. We also introduced diversification, which lowered the risk we faced from being too dependent on only one or two crops, and to grow some crops that we previously had to import. We developed cotton and rubber. We encouraged and supported increased production of existing crops, such as fruit trees, citrus trees (limes, lemons, grapefruit, and oranges) and corn. We started producing coffee for export. I encouraged people to grow jute to make bags for rice, so that we did not have to import bags from India. Then we built a factory to produce the bags. Productive agriculture allows a transformation of an economy to develop small and medium industry.

We encouraged the production of beef cattle. I asked Americans to send us the Brahma bull, because the cow in my country is very small. When I bred it with the Brahma, it became big.

EIR: Since your reforms showed that Cambodia could be a food exporter, what could we do today with the correct government policies?

Heng Cheng: We could be a major food exporter. We know how to produce the food. We must have good relations with other countries to have markets. We must have money to exploit these potentials. For example, the situation we have with fresh fish is special, we used to export a lot, but now we don't have enough money to exploit this resource.

From the Great Lake to the south, all along the Mekong Delta, there is very rich land, it is easy to earn money here, this is the area the Vietnamese occupy. The Mekong flows from Tibet, and flows for 4,000 kilometers. The land around this river is very fertile. In my opinion, if we have real security and some aid, we could rebuild very fast.