

Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge

Pol Pot was a Cambodian revolutionary and politician who governed Cambodia between 1975 and 1979. Ideologically, he was a Marxist–Leninist and was a leading member of Cambodia's communist movement, the Khmer Rouge, from 1963 until 1997. Under his administration, Cambodia was converted into a one-party communist state, governed according to Pol Pot's interpretation of Marxism–Leninism.



While in Paris during the 1940s, Pol Pot joined the French Communist Party. Returning to Cambodia in 1953, he involved himself in a Marxist–Leninist organization and its guerrilla war against King Sihanouk's newly independent government. After Sihanouk was ousted in a coup in 1970, Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge forces (CPK) controlled all of Cambodia.

Pol Pot transformed Cambodia into a one-party state called Democratic Kampuchea. Seeking to create an agrarian socialist society that he believed would evolve into a communist society, Pol Pot's government forcibly relocated the urban population to the countryside to work on collective farms, where mass executions, forced labor, physical abuse, malnutrition, and disease were common.



Pursuing complete egalitarianism, money was abolished and all citizens were forced to wear the same black clothes. Pol Pot was a driving force behind the Cambodian genocide - the systematic persecution and killing of Cambodians by the Khmer Rouge. It resulted in the deaths of between 1.5 and 2 million people between 1975 and 1979, nearly a quarter of Cambodia's population.

Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge had long been supported by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and Chairman Mao Zedong; it is estimated that at least 90% of the foreign aid which the Khmer Rouge received came from China, and in 1975 alone, at least US\$1 billion in interest-free economic and military aid came from China.



The massacres ended when the Vietnamese military invaded Cambodia in 1978 and removed the Khmer Rouge regime. By January 1979, from 1.5 to 2 million people had died due to the Khmer Rouge's policies, including around 250,000 Chinese Cambodians, 90,000 Muslims, and 20,000 Vietnamese Cambodians. 20,000 people had passed through the Security Prison 21, one of the 196 prisons the Khmer Rouge operated, and only seven people survived.

The prisoners were taken to the "Killing Fields", where they were executed (often with pickaxes) and buried in mass graves. Abduction and indoctrination of children was widespread, and many were persuaded or forced to commit atrocities. As of 2009, the Documentation Center of Cambodia has mapped 23,745 mass graves containing approximately 1.3 million victims of execution. Direct execution is believed to account for up to 60% of the genocide's death toll, with other victims dying from starvation, exhaustion, or disease.

In January 2001, the Cambodian government established the Khmer Rouge Tribunal to try the members of the Khmer Rouge leadership responsible for the Cambodian genocide. Trials began in February 2009. In August 2014, two Khmer Rouge leaders were convicted and received life sentences for crimes against humanity. Pol Pot died from natural causes in 1998.

Recommended documentary: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KMLz0eIihcY>