

ការបះបោរនិងការបង្ក្រាបនៅសំឡូត ឆ្នាំ១៩៦៧

Samlaut Uprising

The Samlaut Uprising, or Samlaut Rebellion, was an incident that took place in 1967 in Battambang Province in Cambodia, in which the rural peasantry revolted against the Sangkum regime of the then-Head of State, Prince Norodom Sihanouk.

The incident is seen by some academics as the starting point of the Cambodian Civil War, which ultimately led to the victory of the Communist forces of the Khmer Rouge and the establishment of **Democratic Kampuchea**.

Causes

It is thought that the revolt was, at least in part, caused by the heavy-handed conduct of government officials during the building of a sugar refinery at Kompong Kol, Banan District, in 1966. Land was expropriated without adequate compensation, aggravating a situation in which government troops had been deployed to assist in collecting taxes and rice from local farmers.

Resentment against the government had been building for some years in the province. After independence in 1953, King Sihanouk had selected Battambang as a suitable area to resettle farmers from the south-west of the country. The newcomers received a subsidy, and existing residents found themselves displaced from land or economically disadvantaged. The employment, in early 1967, of a new system of rice collection (known as *ramassage du paddy*), which essentially forced farmers to sell their rice to the government at gunpoint, caused further tensions.

Demonstrations in Battambang in February of that year were blamed by Sihanouk on the three Communist members of the Sangkum, Hu Nim, Hou Yuon and Khieu Samphan: although the latter had used the issue to call for the end of the *ramassage*, it is thought that the protests were in fact spontaneous. Protests quickly spread to Kampong Speu Province, Kampot and a number of other areas. Sihanouk was out of the country until March, but he authorised his security forces to respond aggressively.

Some historians, such as Ben Kiernan, have stated that evidence points to the fact that the clandestine Communist Party of Kampuchea was in fact planning an uprising across the country, citing the fact that the demonstrations rapidly spread to other, widely separated provinces. It is argued that some of the disturbances in 1967 were part of a coordinated effort by the leftists to destabilise Sihanouk's regime, though the official Khmer Rouge historiography given by Pol Pot later sought to deny this, stating its open rebellion only occurred in January 1968 and that the Samlaut incident was "premature". The ultimate failure of the 1967 revolt meant that the Party later attempted to disown it as a spontaneous, disorganized act.



The rebellion

By April, there was a sharp escalation of violence, initially in Battambang Province. On April 2, two soldiers from a detachment collecting rice were killed at Samlaut.

Protestors burned a 'model' agricultural facility set up by the Sangkum's youth movement at Kranhoung, and by the evening of that day two government outposts had been attacked.

The security forces of Prime Minister Lon Nol responded vigorously. Paratroopers and the national police were sent into the region, allegedly having been offered a bounty for each severed head of a rebel or leftist that they sent back to Phnom Penh. Acting under the orders of Lon Nol, the army and air force levelled several villages, massacring the inhabitants. It was reported that in one incident, lorries filled with only human heads were sent from Battambang

back to the capital, as the army sought to prove it was quelling resistance. On the eastern side of the country, seventy armed followers of Communist cadre So Phim infiltrated the town of Kandol Chrum, killed a former district chief, and wounded a government agent; Ieng Thirith, another prominent Communist, was seen in Samlaut itself. In several areas across the country, suspected Communists were arrested, driven underground, or in some cases shot.

On April 24, Sihanouk ordered the arrest of Nim, Yuon and Samphan; the two latter men fled to join the Communist *maquis* in the forests. (Hu Nim persisted in his attempts to maintain a public profile and to work alongside the government, but after repeated warnings from Sihanouk, he had also departed by the end of the year.) At the time, the three men were widely assumed to have been murdered by the security forces, leading to them being labelled as the "Three Ghosts" when they reappeared as part of the GRUNK government-in-exile three years later.

At the end of April, Lon Nol resigned, apparently to recuperate from injuries sustained a car crash eight weeks earlier: this signalled a relaxation of government moves against the unrest. By 18 June, by which time more than 4000 residents had fled Battambang Province, Sihanouk announced that the situation was now calm. In order to placate the right wing of the Sangkum, Sihanouk ordered the arrest of Chinese traders acting as middlemen in the

sale of rice to Viet Minh guerrillas; this diverted rice back through legal channels, where it earned the government increased tax revenue. He also named new leftist members of the government as a balance to the right wing.

Although the unrest appeared to have been stopped for the time being, there is evidence that the army and security forces used the period after June 18 to commence punitive operations against villages involved in the rebellion, burning houses and killing or driving away their inhabitants.

Sporadic and increasingly serious uprisings against the government were to continue throughout the following three years, especially in the north-east of the country, where the Khmer Loeu hill tribes began to rebel against government authority, with the likely encouragement of Khmer Rouge elements.

