

Tension is running high in the provinces, many of whose governments are close to bankruptcy and cannot pay workers' wages. The late-March rebellion of police in San Miguel de Tucumán over wage demands was only the tip of the iceberg; similar conflicts are simmering in the provinces of Santiago del Estero, Chaco, and Buenos Aires.

Menem talks tough

None of this has caused Menem to abandon the free-market economics demanded by the Bush administration. Far from it! He has stated that he intends to pursue his policy, and to punish anyone who doesn't go along with it. In an interview published in the April 1 edition of the Buenos Aires daily *Clarín*, he warned that he would consider jailing those who oppose him. "I consider that [the imposition of] a state of siege would be more feasible because of economic issues rather than political ones," he told *Clarín*. "State of siege, four or five [people] in the slammer and then you'll see how quickly things are put in order," he blustered.

Menem told *Clarín* that he was only talking about individuals "who haven't learned that they cannot continue to speculate in Argentina." However, the March 30 issue of the weekly *El Informador Público*, quoting a high-level Peronist source, reported that the President was studying such options as imposing a state of siege, jailing "corrupt" trade union leaders and businessmen, and ordering a federal takeover of provincial governments deemed unable to control social conflict, as a means of dealing with the crisis. During an April 3 press conference, President Menem also warned that he had devised his own battle plan, which included withdrawing the legal status of unions which strike, and discounting pay for every day that a worker goes out on strike.

As an additional measure, Menem has also authorized the Army to repress domestic social protest; but given the tense internal situation in that institution, this could backfire. There is real unrest over wages; according to one press report, payment of wages due at the end of the month had to be moved up to March 23, to avoid protest actions at many bases. Army nationalists, many of whom are loyal to Colonel Seineldín, have made known that they will not obey orders to repress poor and hungry citizens whose suffering has been caused by government policies.

Colonel Seineldín is currently serving a 20-day jail sentence for publicly calling on the Army high command to take steps to resolve its internal disputes and guarantee institutional unity in the face of the country's devastating crisis. The Army generals responded by naming Gen. Martín Bonnet as the replacement for Gen. Isidro Cáceres, who died suddenly on March 21. Bonnet, politically allied with the hated Raúl Alfonsín, not only has no support within the Army generally. He is hostile to the nationalist sector which supports Seineldín, and is expected to carry out a witchhunt against these officers. This will only exacerbate the Army's internal conflicts.

Cambodia: decision in the battlefield

by Linda de Hoyos

Speaking from Beijing, Cambodia's Prince Sihanouk declared that P.R.C. President Yang Shangkun had pledged support in a recent meeting that China would continue to supply weapons and ammunition to the Khmer Rouge and two other Cambodian guerrilla factions "until the day of our final victory." The prince's claims are most likely accurate, and to the point: The conflict in Cambodia will not stop until the People's Republic of China wants it to.

For the past two years, the world's attention has been focused on intricate diplomatic maneuverings among various factions in Cambodia and their key foreign sponsors in an apparent effort to end the Cambodian conflict. Hopes that the civil war in the country—now going into its 11th year since the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia—sprang anew with the meetings, arranged in Paris, between Prince Sihanouk, leader of one of the non-communist resistance factions, and Hun Sen, prime minister of the Vietnamese-backed government in Phnom Penh. Thousands of gallons of ink have been spilled across the pages of the world's newspapers on the various statements and positions taken by all factions, including the Khmer Rouge, still led by mass murderer Pol Pot, at the negotiating tables in Paris and Jakarta.

Within this context, in September 1989, the Vietnamese withdrew their remaining troops from Cambodia, ending the 10-year occupation of the country. Hanoi motivations were twofold. First, Vietnam could no longer afford to maintain troops in Cambodia, given a decrease in funds coming from Moscow. Second, Western nations, the U.S. most importantly, had made Vietnamese withdrawal the condition for reopening of diplomatic relations with Hanoi and ending the trade embargo against the country. Thirdly, it was hoped, the troop withdrawal would open the way for increasing the diplomatic pressure.

However, after September, the Western nations, with Washington in the lead, heaped more conditions on Hanoi, insisting that Vietnam assure a settlement to the Cambodian conflict. Although Vietnam had met financial requirements, it was denied reentry into the International Monetary Fund because of a U.S. veto. Within that context, no Western pressure was placed on Beijing to cease its arming of the Khmer Rouge, whose four-year rule 1975-79 resulted in the murder of upwards of 3 million Cambodians. Emphasizing its abject obeisance to the butchers of Beijing, Washington

has recently singled out the Phnom Penh government for attack on the issue of human rights violations.

Reliance on guns

The Khmer Rouge, however, has not relied upon the negotiating table. As soon as the Vietnamese had withdrawn, the Khmer Rouge with the other resistance fronts under Sihanouk and Son Sann, went on the offensive. Soon, the Khmer Rouge had captured the border town of Pailin, a gem-producing center and the gateway to the provincial capital of Battambang. By the beginning of February, the resistance forces had put a 250-mile swath of territory in northwestern Cambodia under its effective control. The rail bridges through Pursat to Sisophon had been cut. Reports from Bangkok indicated that the Khmer Rouge had overrun dozens of government positions, and were moving in thousands of civilians and soldiers from Thailand to the areas under their control.

Although the Khmer Rouge did not manage to capture Battambang—the keystone for their strategy—they carried out massive assaults on the city. By the end of February, the Khmer Rouge gains were such, that the Phnom Penh government proposed that a ceasefire be imposed and a dual interim administration be placed over the country—one from Phnom

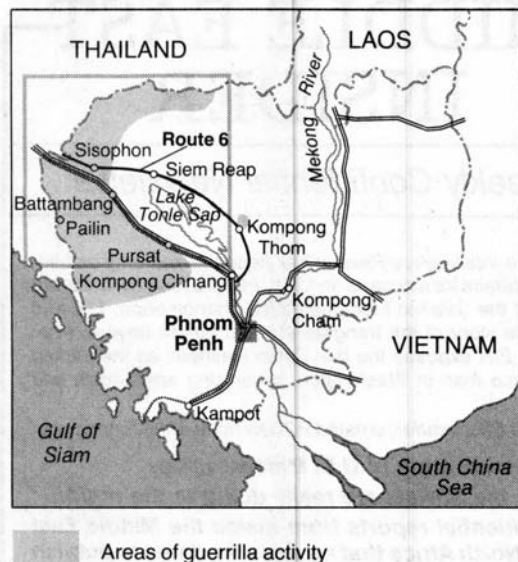
Penh and the other in the west controlled by the resistance, in de facto recognition of the partitioning of Cambodia.

Given this battleground map, the Khmer Rouge felt no compulsion to negotiate, and the February Jakarta II talks came to a dismal end.

Therefore, given the West's hands-off policy toward Beijing and its sponsorship of the Khmer Rouge, it is not surprising to hear reports that Vietnamese forces have returned to Cambodia, although this has been denied by Phnom Penh. According to Brig. Gen. Chay Saing Tun, a government counteroffensive launched in the beginning of March has succeeded in regaining control of northwestern Cambodia, except for strips along the border. In early March, government forces knocked the resistance out of Svay Chek and Sisophon and are now closing in on Pailin.

Believing that it now has the upper hand, Phnom Penh is pressing for a new round of talks. Thai Foreign Minister Siddhi Savestila arrived in Beijing March 27 with Cambodia the major topic on the agenda of meetings with Foreign Minister Qian Qichen and Premier Li Peng. According to the *Hsin Wan Pao* of Hong Kong, Hanoi had asked Siddhi to "convey to China its hope of holding Cambodia." But Beijing's response was "icy," reported the Hong Kong daily.

FIGURE 1
Cambodia battle zones



The Khmer Rouge forces of genocidalist Pol Pot, concentrated in the western part of Cambodia, are pressing eastward toward Battambang, while the Bush administration seeks to undermine those who are valiantly trying to resist.

FIGURE 2
Northwest Cambodian battle zones

