

YEAR ZERO

AN EXCERPT FROM

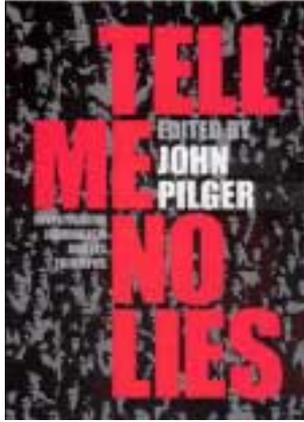
TELL ME NO LIES

INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM & ITS TRIUMPHS

JOHN PILGER

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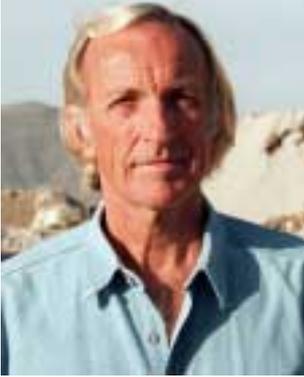
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THE AUTHOR

Born in Australia, John Pilger is one of one of the world's most distinguished investigative journalists and documentary film-makers. Twice a winner of Britain's highest honour, Journalist of the Year, he became chief foreign correspondent for the London Daily Mirror in 1963, later being fired when the paper was taken over by Robert Maxwell, who later defrauded the company staff and pensioners of many millions of pounds.

His books include *The Last Day* (1975), *Aftermath: The Struggles of Cambodia and Vietnam* (1981), *The Outsiders* (1984), *Heroes* (1986), *A Secret Country* (1989), *Distant Voices* (1992), *Hidden Agendas* (1998), *Reporting The World* (2001) and *The New Rulers of the World* (2002).

Pilger's documentaries have won him a George Foster Peabody Award, American Television Academy Award ('Emmy'), the Richard Dimbleby Award from the British Academy of Film and Television Arts, France's Reporters San Frontiers Award, and the International de Television Geneve Award.

His latest documentary, *Breaking the Silence: Truth and Lies in the War on Terror*, won the gold award in the political category at the prestigious 2004 WorldMedia Festival, the only global competition for all media. Founded in 2000, the WorldMedia Festival, which is based in Hamburg, attracted over 300 entries from 23 nations.

INTRODUCTION

*Disobedience, in the eyes of anyone who has read history,
is man's original virtue. – Oscar Wilde*

Printed on the back of this book is a favourite quotation of mine by the American journalist T. D. Allman: ‘Genuinely objective journalism’, he wrote, is journalism that ‘not only gets the facts right, it gets the meaning of events right. It is compelling not only today, but stands the test of time. It is validated not only by “reliable sources”, but by the unfolding of history. It is journalism that ten, twenty, fifty years after the fact still holds up a true and intelligent mirror to events.’

Allman wrote that as a tribute to Wilfred Burchett, whose extraordinary and often embattled career included what has been described as ‘the scoop of the century’. While hundreds of journalists ‘embedded’ with the Allied occupation forces in Japan in 1945 were shepherded to the largely theatrical surrender ceremony, Burchett ‘slipped the leash’, as he put it, and set out on a perilous journey to a place now engraved in the human consciousness: Hiroshima. He was the first Western journalist to enter Hiroshima after the atomic bombing, and his front-page report in the London *Daily Express* carried the prophetic headline, ‘I write this as a warning to the world’.

The warning was about radiation poisoning, whose existence was denied by the occupation authorities. Burchett was denounced, with other journalists joining in the orchestrated propaganda and attacks on him. Independently and courageously, he had exposed the full horror of

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nuclear warfare; and his facts were validated, as T. D. Allman wrote when Burchett died in 1983, 'by the unfolding of history'. His dispatch is reprinted on page 10.

Allman's tribute can be applied to all those whose work is collected in these pages. Selecting them has been an immense privilege for me. The opportunity to honour the 'forgotten' work of journalists of the calibre of Wilfred Burchett, Martha Gellhorn, James Cameron and Edward R. Murrow is also a reminder that one of the noblest human struggles is against power and its grip on historical memory. Burchett on the meaning of Hiroshima, Gellhorn on genocide, Cameron on resistance: each work, together with that of contemporaries such as Paul Foot, Robert Fisk, Linda Melvern and Seumas Milne, not only keeps the record straight but holds those in power to account. This is journalism's paramount role.

The reference to investigative journalism in the title needs explaining, even redefining. T. D. Allman's description is a sure starting point, rescuing 'objectivity' from its common abuse as a cover for official lies. The term, investigative journalism, did not exist when I began my career; it became fashionable in the 1960s and 1970s and especially when Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein exposed the Watergate scandal. In making my selection, I have applied a broader definition than detective work and included journalism that bears witness and investigates ideas. Thus, Phillip Knightley's account of the London *Sunday Times*'s tortuous disclosure of the scandal of the drug thalidomide, which caused terrible foetal malformations in the 1950s and 1960s, sits easily alongside historian, poet and satirist Eduardo Galeano's exposé of the propaganda of war, consumerism and mass impoverishment.

I have preferred the great mavericks, whose work continues to inspire, over those perhaps more celebrated and whose inclusion would merely

commemorate their fame. Although Seymour Hersh's exposé of the My Lai massacre in Vietnam helped make his name, it is his consistent work over forty years, calling power to account, that has earned his place in these pages.

I hasten to say that, in making this selection (with 1945 as an arbitrary starting year), I have had to leave out some remarkable work rather than further reduce the length of each essay. I apologise to those who could rightly expect to see their names included here. In my original list was I. F. Stone's investigation into the 'hidden history' of the Korean War (1952), which demonstrates that the fraudulent reasons for the Anglo-American attack on Iraq in 2003 were not the first of their kind. Inexplicably, Jeremy Stone refused to allow the inclusion of this landmark work of his father 'Izzy', who fought censorship all his life.

The best investigations are not always the work of journalists. In the section on Iraq, Joy Gordon, an academic, contributes an essay (see page 541) that draws on her study of a tragedy many journalists avoided and still suppress: the effects of the United Nations sanctions imposed on Iraq between 1990 and 2003. This medieval-style siege cost the lives of up to a million people, many of them young children. Compared with the misdeeds of Saddam Hussein, whose devilry was, for a time, a headline a day, this epic crime of 'our' side is little known.

My other favourite quotation belongs to the great Irish muckraker Claud Cockburn. 'Never believe anything,' he wrote, 'until it is officially denied.' That the state lies routinely is not what the media courses teach. If they did – and the evidence has never been in greater abundance – the cynicism that many young journalists believe ordains them as journalists would not be directed at their readers, viewers and listeners, but at those in false authority.

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Secretive power loathes journalists who do their job: who push back screens, peer behind façades, lift rocks. Opprobrium from on high is their badge of honour. When the BBC refused to show James Cameron's filmed report from wartime North Vietnam, Cameron said, 'They whispered that I was a dupe, but what really upset them was that I was not their dupe.' In these days of corporate 'multimedia' run by a powerful few in thrall to profit, many journalists are part of a propaganda apparatus without even consciously realising it. Power rewards their collusion with faint recognition: a place at the table, perhaps even a Companion of the British Empire. At their most supine, they are spokesmen of the spokesmen, debriefers of the briefers, what the French call *fonctionnaires*. It is the honourable exceptions who are celebrated here, men and women whose disrespect for authoritarianism has allowed them to alert their readers to vital, hidden truths.

In his superb exposé of the secret government and media role in the attack on Arthur Scargill and the National Union of Mineworkers (page 284), Seumas Milne identifies the subtle collaboration of journalism with power in the 'dogmatic insistence' of many mainstream journalists

that events are largely the product of an arbitrary and contingent muddle . . . a chronic refusal by the mainstream media in Britain – and most opposition politicians – to probe or question the hidden agendas and unaccountable, secret power structures at the heart of government . . . The result is that an entire dimension of politics and the exercise of power in Britain is habitually left out of standard reporting and analysis. And by refusing to acknowledge this dimension, it is often impossible to make proper sense of what is actually going on. Worse, it lets off the hook those whose abuse of state authority is most flagrant . . .

The Indian writer Vandana Shiva had this in mind when she celebrated 'the insurrection of subjugated knowledge' against the 'dominant knowledge' of power. For me, that describes the work in this collection. Each piece stands outside the mainstream; and the common element is the journalist's 'insurrection' against the 'rules of the game': Burchett in Japan, Cameron in Vietnam, Melvern in Rwanda, Max du Preez and Jacques Pauw in apartheid South Africa, Greg Palast and David Armstrong in the United States, Günter Wallraff in Germany, Amira Hass in Gaza, Anna Politkovskaya in Chechnya, Robert Fisk in Lebanon and Iraq.

Thus, Paul Foot's eleven-year investigation of the sabotage of Pan Am 101 over the Scottish town of Lockerbie in 1989 and the injustice of the subsequent trial and judgement concludes with these words of outrage:

The judgement and the verdict against Megrahi [one of two Libyans accused] were perverse. The judges brought shame and disgrace, it is fair to say, to all those who believed in Scottish justice, and have added to Scottish law an injustice of the type which has often defaced the law in England. Their verdict was a triumph for the CIA, but it did nothing at all to satisfy the demands of the families of those who died at Lockerbie – who still want to know how and why their loved ones were murdered.

Why is journalism like this so important? Without it, our sense of injustice would lose its vocabulary and people would not be armed with the information they need to fight it. Orwell's truth that 'to be corrupted by totalitarianism, one does not have to live in a totalitarian country' would

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then apply. Consider the hundreds of journalists who have been persecuted and murdered in Guatemala, Nigeria, the Philippines, Algeria, Russia and many other oppressive states because their independence and courage are feared. When the Turkish parliament responded to the overwhelming public opposition to Turkey joining the invasion of Iraq in 2003 and voted against the demands of Washington and the Turkish generals, this unprecedented show of real democracy in a country of murderous shadows was due, in no small part, to those journalists who have often led the way in exposing the criminality of the state, particularly the repression of the Kurds. Ocar Isik Yurtcu, the editor of *Ozgur Gundem* (Free Agenda), is currently serving fifteen years for breaking a law which classifies all reporting of the oppression and rebellion in Turkey as either propaganda or ‘incitement to racial hatred’. His case is emblematic of laws used against those who challenge the state and the military; and he and dozens of other independent journalists are an inspiration. In Europe, the United States, Canada and Australia, journalists generally do not have to risk their lives. The writer Simon Louvish recounts the story of a group of Russians touring the United States at the height of the Cold War. They were astonished to find, after reading the newspapers and watching television, that all the opinions on the vital issues were more or less the same. ‘In our country,’ they said, ‘to get that result we have a dictatorship, we imprison people, we tear out their fingernails. Here you have none of that. So what’s your secret? How do you do it?’

In his unpublished introduction to *Animal Farm*, Orwell described how censorship in free societies was infinitely more sophisticated and thorough than in dictatorships because ‘unpopular ideas can be silenced and inconvenient facts kept dark, without any need for an official ban’. It is more than half a century since he wrote that, and the essential message

remains the same. None of this is to suggest a 'conspiracy', which in any case is unnecessary. Journalists and broadcasters are no different from historians and teachers in internalising the priorities and fashions and propriety of established power. Like others with important establishment responsibilities, they are trained, or groomed, to set aside serious doubts. If scepticism is encouraged, it is directed not at the system but at the competence of its managers, or at popular attitudes as journalists perceive them.

From the Murdoch press to the BBC, the undeclared rules of the modern media club vary not a great deal. The invisible boundaries of 'news' allow false premises to become received wisdom and official deceptions to be channelled and amplified. The fate of whole societies is reported according to their usefulness to 'us', the term frequently used for Western power, with its narcissism, dissembling language and public omissions: its good and bad terrorists, worthy and unworthy victims. This orthodoxy, wrote Richard Falk, professor of international relations at Princeton University, is conveyed 'through a self-righteous, one-way moral/legal screen [with] positive images of Western values and innocence portrayed as threatened, validating a campaign of unrestricted political violence'. This is so 'widely accepted' that 'law and morality [are] irrelevant to the identification of rational policy.'

It seems exquisitely ironic that as media technology advances almost beyond our imagination, it is not just the traditional means of journalism that are becoming obsolete, but its honourable traditions. What of Edmund Burke's concept of the press as a 'fourth estate', as a counter to the state and its 'interests'? The question is perhaps answered in the country where I was apprenticed, Australia, which has a rich history of fierce, independent journalism, yet today offers a microcosm of the

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demise of a free media in a relatively free society. In its 2003 index of press freedom, the press monitoring organisation Reporters Without Borders listed Australia in 50th place, ahead of only autocracies and dictatorships. How did this come about? And what does it tell us?

To most Australians, the name Edward Smith Hall will mean nothing; yet this one journalist did more than any individual to plant three basic liberties in his country: freedom of the press, representative government and trial by jury. In 1826, he launched his weekly, eight-page, eight-penny *Sydney Monitor* by giving prominence to a letter from a reader who described the function of the journalist as ‘an inveterate opposer [rather] than a staunch parasite of government’.

The measure of Hall’s principled audacity can be judged by the times. He started his newspaper not in some new Britannia flowering with Georgian liberalism, but in a brutal military dictatorship run with convict slave labour. The strong man was General Ralph Darling; and Hall’s defiance of Darling’s authority in the pages of his newspaper, his ‘insurrection’, brought down great wrath and suffering on him. His campaigns for the rights of convicts and freed prisoners and his exposure of the corruption of officials, magistrates and the Governor’s hangers-on made him a target of the draconian laws of criminal libel. He was routinely convicted by military juries, whose members were selected personally by General Darling. He spent more than a year in prison, where, from a small cell lit through a single grate and beset by mosquitoes, he continued to edit the *Monitor* and to campaign against official venality. When Darling was recalled to London and free speech took root in Australia, it was the achievement of Edward Smith Hall and independent journalists like him.

When Hall died in 1861, there were some fifty independent newspapers in New South Wales alone. Within twenty years this had risen to 143

titles, many of which had a campaigning style and editors who regarded their newspapers as, in Hall's words, 'the voice of the people . . . not the trade of authority'. The Australian press then, wrote Robert Pullan, was 'a medley of competing voices'. Today, the medley is an echo chamber. Of twelve principal newspapers in the capital cities, Rupert Murdoch controls seven. Of the ten Sunday newspapers, Murdoch has seven. In Adelaide, he has a complete monopoly; he owns everything, including all the printing presses. He controls almost 70 per cent of principal newspaper circulation, giving Australia the distinction of the most concentrated press ownership in the Western world.

In the 1970s and 1980s, one remarkable newspaper, the *National Times*, bore Edward Smith Hall's legacy. The editor, Brian Toohey, refused to subvert his paper's journalism to the intimidation and manipulations of politicians and their corporate 'mates'. Toohey had suitcases of leaked documents hidden all over Sydney (see some of them in 'The Timor Papers' on page 174). His small editorial team, in exposing a catalogue of Australia's darkest secrets, posed a real threat to political corruption and organised crime. Although owned by the establishment Fairfax family, which then controlled a newspaper, radio and television empire, the *National Times* had limited resources and was vulnerable to libel actions, and political intimidation.

In the mid-1980s, the Labor Party Prime Minister Bob Hawke and his Treasurer Paul Keating openly campaigned for the paper's demise, accusing its journalists of distortion. Finally removed from the editorship, Toohey wrote a seminal piece that described 'a new Australia forged by a new type of entrepreneur [whose] fortunes are built on deals where nobbling official watchdogs or bribing union bosses eliminates much of the risk . . . [where] tax cheats become nation builders'. Hawke and Keating,

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he wrote, 'do more than enjoy the company of the new tycoons: they share their values while the sacrifices are being made by the battlers for whom they once fought.' The article was never published.

As a small media pond inhabited by large sharks, Australia today is a breeding ground for censorship by omission, the most virulent form. Like all his newspapers throughout the world, Murdoch's harnessed team in Australia follows the path paved with his 'interests' and his world view (which is crystallised in the pages of his *Weekly Standard* in Washington, the voice of America's 'neo-conservatives').

They echo his description of George W. Bush and Tony Blair as 'heroes' of the Iraq invasion and his dismissal of the 'necessary' blood they spilt, and they consign to oblivion the truths told by history, such as the support Saddam Hussein received from the Murdoch press in the 1980s. One of his tabloids invented an al-Qaida training camp near Melbourne; all of them promote the Australian élite's obsequiousness to American power, just as they laud Prime Minister John Howard's vicious campaign against a few thousand asylum-seekers, who are locked away in camps described by a United Nations inspector as among the worst violations of human rights he had seen.

The Australian experience is what the British can expect if the media monopolies continue to grow in Britain and broadcasting is completely deregulated in the name of international 'competitiveness' (profit). The Blair government's assault on the BBC is part of this. The BBC's power lies in its dual role as a publicly-owned broadcaster and a multinational business, with revenues of more than \$5 billion. More Americans watch BBC World than Britons watch the main BBC channel at home. What Murdoch and the other ascendant, mostly American, media barons have long wanted is the BBC broken up and privatised and its vast 'market

share' handed over to them. Like godfathers dividing turf, they are impatient.

In 2003, Blair's ministers began to issue veiled threats of 'reviewing' the whole basis of licence fee funding of the BBC which, with this source taken away, would soon diminish to a version of its progeny, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, which relies on direct government grants and is frequently intimidated. Indeed, privatisation was almost certainly on the hidden agenda behind Blair's spin master's attack on the BBC over one radio report by the journalist Andrew Gilligan, who exposed the government's manipulation of the evidence and intelligence reports in a dossier that sought to give credence to the 'threat' posed by Saddam Hussein's non-existent weapons of mass destruction.

The genesis for this is not hard to trace. In 1995, Rupert Murdoch flew Tony and Cherie Blair first class to Hayman Island, off the Queensland coast. In the tropical sunshine and standing at the blue News Corp. lectern, the future British prime minister effused about his 'new moral purpose in politics' and pledged safe passage of the media from 'heavy-handed regulation' to the 'enterprise' of those like his host, who applauded and shook his hand warmly. The next day, in London, satire died once again when Murdoch's *Sun* commented: 'Mr Blair has vision, he has purpose and he speaks our language on morality and family life.'

Until recently, these matters were rarely discussed in the media pages of British newspapers, which preferred the arcane manoeuvres of media executives and their cleverness in securing generous rewards for themselves. There was the usual hypocritical tut-tutting over tabloid intrusions into the lives of the rich and famous. Critical ideas about journalism were mentioned in passing, or defensively, if at all. The publication of Lord Hutton's now notorious report in January 2004, attacking the BBC and

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absolving the government in the Gilligan affair, has broken the silence, though for how long, we shall have to see.

Certainly, his lordship's service to establishment cover-up presents one of the clearest threats to free journalism in my memory.

With the exception of Edward R. Murrow's radio broadcasts, the journalism in this book was published, not broadcast. It is only thirty years since newspapers relinquished their mantle to television as the main source of public information. The power of broadcast journalism's immediacy brought a form of censorship that the press had never known: insidious and subtle, dressed in terms that were often euphemisms, such as 'impartiality', 'balance' and 'objectivity'.

A pioneer of a very different kind of visual journalism was Peter Watkins, whose astonishing work *The War Game* created on film the effects of a nuclear attack on Britain: the celluloid equivalent of Wilfred Burchett's 'warning to the world'. Commissioned in 1965 by the BBC, it was immediately banned. The BBC's director-general, Sir Ian Trethowan, said it would disturb those of 'limited mental capacity and the elderly living alone'. What the public were not told was that the then chairman of the BBC Board of Governors, Lord Normanbrook, formerly Secretary to the Cabinet, had already written to his successor in Whitehall, Sir Burke Trend, inviting the government to censor the film. *The War Game*, he wrote,

is not designed as propaganda: it is intended as a purely factual statement, and is based on careful research into official material. I have seen the film and I can say that it has been produced with considerable restraint. But the subject is, necessarily, alarming; and the showing of

the film on television might have a significant effect on public attitudes towards the policy of the nuclear deterrent. In these, I doubt whether the BBC ought alone to take the responsibility of deciding whether this film ought to be shown.

So they agreed, and *The War Game* was suppressed for twenty-one years, and when it was finally shown, the studio presenter, Ludovic Kennedy, merely said it had been 'too shocking and too disturbing' to show when it was made, and the deception remained. What Watkins's film showed was the danger to the population of a country which had more nuclear bases per head of population and per square mile than anywhere on earth. So complete was the suppression of this that between 1965 and 1980 Parliament did not once debate the nuclear arms race, arguably the most urgent and dangerous issue facing humanity. A parallel silence existed in the media, buttressed by the 'lobby system'. Journalists were either put off the scent or given briefings that were exercises in outright lying. There were twelve bases, said the Ministry of Defence, 'and no more'. This was not challenged until 1980 when Duncan Campbell, a *New Statesman* journalist, revealed that Britain was host to 135 bases, each presumably targeted by the Soviet Union.

The Falklands War in 1982 gave the game away. Journalists who had defended their objectivity as 'a matter of record' were, on their return from the South Atlantic, outspoken in their praise of their own subjectivity in the cause of Queen and Country, as if the war had been a national emergency, which it was not. If they had any complaint it was that they had not been allowed to be sufficiently 'on side' with the British military so they could win 'the propaganda war'. (The same complaints were heard following the 1991 Gulf War and the 1999 NATO attack on

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Yugoslavia.)

During the Falklands conflict, the minutes of the BBC's Weekly Review Board showed that the coverage was to be shaped to suit 'the emotional sensibilities of the public' and that the weight of the BBC's coverage would be concerned with government statements of policy and that an impartial style was felt to be 'an unnecessary irritation'. This was not unusual. Lord John Reith, the BBC's founder, established 'impartiality' as a principle to be suspended whenever the establishment was threatened. He demonstrated this, soon after the BBC began broadcasting in the 1920s, by secretly writing propaganda for the Baldwin Tory government during the General Strike.

Some eighty years later, in 2003, the traditional right-wing press renewed its refrain, together with the Blair government, that the BBC's journalism was 'anti-war'. Such irony, for the opposite was true. In its analysis of the coverage of the invasion and occupation of Iraq by some of the world's leading broadcasters, the Bonn-based media institute Media Tenor found that the BBC had permitted less coverage of dissent than all of them, including the US networks. News of anti-war demonstrations, which reflected views held by the majority of the British public, accounted for merely two per cent of the BBC's reporting.

The honourable exceptions stand out. The often inspired *Independent*, the intermittent *Guardian* and a reborn *Daily Mirror* exposed the unprovoked and bloody nature of Bush's and Blair's attack. The *Mirror's* support for the two million who filled London in protest, the largest demonstration in British history, was a phenomenon, as was its bold, informed and thoughtful coverage. The very notion of the tabloid as a real newspaper was reclaimed from the Murdoch *Sun*, which looked feeble and out of step by comparison. However, when Baghdad fell, the *Mirror* stumbled

too. 'Patriotic' readers had raised objections, it was said, the circulation had faltered, and a new corporate management ordered the paper's return to the realm of faithless butlers and witless celebrities, with its refound glory revisited only now and then.

During the invasion of Iraq, a new euphemism appeared: 'embedding', invented by the heirs of the Pentagon's language assassins who had dreamt up 'collateral damage'. 'Embedding' was not just true of journalists in the field. Standing outside 10 Downing Street, the BBC's political editor reported the fall of Baghdad as a kind of victory speech, broadcast on the evening news. Tony Blair, he told viewers, 'said they would be able to take Baghdad without a bloodbath, and in the end the Iraqis would be celebrating. And on both these points he has been proved conclusively right.' Studies now put the death toll as high as 55,000, including almost 10,000 civilians, a conservative estimate. One of Robert Fisk's pieces in this collection is his investigation in September 2003 that showed that at least 500 Iraqis die or are killed every week as a result of the Anglo-American occupation (page 566). And this apparently does not constitute a 'bloodbath'. Would the same have been said about the massacre of 3,000 people in New York on September 11, 2001? What distinguishes the honourable exceptions from other journalists is, above all, the equal value they place on life, wherever it is. Their 'we' is humanity.

In the United States, which has constitutionally the freest media in the world, the suppression of the very idea of universal humanity has become standard practice. Like the Vietnamese and others who have defended their homelands, the Iraqis are unpeople: at worst, tainted; to be abused, tortured, hunted. 'For every GI killed,' said a letter given prominence in the *New York Daily News*, '20 Iraqis must be executed.' The *New York Times* and *Washington Post* might not publish that, but each played a sig-

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nificant role in promoting the fiction of the threat of Saddam Hussein's weapons arsenal.

Long before the invasion, both newspapers cried wolf for the White House. The *New York Times* published front-page headlines such as '[Iraq's] SECRET ARSENAL: THE HUNT FOR GERMS OF WAR', 'DEFECTOR DESCRIBES IRAQ'S ATOM BOMB PUSH', 'IRAQI TELLS OF RENOVATIONS AT SITES FOR CHEMICAL AND NUCLEAR ARMS' and 'DEFECTORS BOLSTER US CASE AGAINST IRAQ, OFFICIALS SAY'. All these stories turned out to be crude propaganda. In an internal email (published in the *Washington Post*), the *New York Times*' reporter Judith Miller revealed her principal source as Ahmed Chalabi, an Iraqi exile and convicted embezzler who ran the Washington-based and CIA-funded Iraqi National Congress (INC). A Congressional inquiry concluded that almost all the 'information' provided by Chalabi and other INC exiles was worthless.

In July 2003, as the occupation was unravelling, both the *Times* and the *Post* gave front-page prominence to the administration's carefully manipulated 'homecoming' of twenty-year-old Private Jessica Lynch, who was injured in a traffic accident during the invasion and captured. She was cared for by Iraqi doctors, who probably saved her life and risked their own lives in trying to return her to American forces. The official version, that she bravely fought off Iraqi attackers, is a pack of lies, like her 'rescue' from an almost deserted hospital, which was filmed with night-vision cameras by a Hollywood director. All this was known in Washington, and some of it was reported. This did not deter the best of American journalism from uniting to help stage-manage Private Lynch's beatific return to Elizabeth, West Virginia, with home-town imagery and locals saying how proud they were. The *Post* lamented that the whole affair had been 'mud-

died by conflicting media accounts', which brought to mind Orwell's description of 'words falling upon the facts like soft snow, blurring their outlines and covering up all the details'.

In Washington, I asked Charles Lewis, the former CBS *60 Minutes* star, about this. Lewis, who now runs an investigative unit called the Center for Public Integrity, said, 'You know, under Bush, the compliance and silence among journalists is worse than in the 1950s. Rupert Murdoch is the most influential media mogul in America; he sets the standard, and there is no public discussion about it. Why do the majority of the American public still believe Saddam Hussein was behind the attacks of 9/11? Because the media's constant echoing of the government guarantees it.' I asked him, 'What if the freest media in the world had seriously challenged Bush and Rumsfeld and investigated their claims, instead of channelling what turned out to be crude propaganda?' He replied, 'If the media had been more aggressive and more tenacious towards getting the truth, there is a very, very good chance we would not have gone to war in Iraq.'

It is hardly surprising that outstanding foreign reporting from Iraq, such as Fisk's, is eagerly read on internet websites. Jane Harman, a rare dissenting voice in the US Congress, said of the invasion: 'We have been the victims of the biggest cover-up manoeuvre of all time.'

But that, too, is an illusion. What is almost never reported in the United States is the pattern of American colonial interventions. Only 'anti-Americans', it seems, refer to the hundreds of illegal 'covert operations', many of them bloody, that have denied political and economic self-determination to much of the world.

This has been suppressed by a voluntary system of state-sponsored lies that began with the genocidal campaigns against Native Americans and

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the accompanying frontier myths; and the Spanish-American War, which broke out after Spain was falsely accused of sinking an American warship, the *Maine*, and war fever was whipped up by the newspapers of Randolph Hearst, the Murdoch of his day; it lived on in the 1960s, in the non-existent North Vietnamese attack on two American destroyers in the Gulf of Tonkin for which the media demanded reprisals, giving President Johnson the pretext he wanted to bomb North Vietnam.

In the late 1970s, a free, silent media allowed President Carter to arm the Indonesian dictatorship as it slaughtered the East Timorese, and to begin secret support for the mujaheddin in Afghanistan, from which came the Taliban and al-Qaida. In the 1980s, an absurdity, the 'threat' to the United States from popular movements in Central America, notably the Sandinistas in tiny Nicaragua, allowed President Reagan to arm and support the bloodthirsty terrorists known as the *Contra*, leaving an estimated 70,000 dead. That George W. Bush's administration gives refuge to hundreds of Latin American torturers, favoured murderous dictators and anti-Castro hijackers, terrorists by any definition, is almost never reported in the mainstream media. Neither is the work of a 'training school' at Fort Benning, Georgia, the School of the Americas, where manuals teach methods of intimidation and torture and the alumni include Latin America's most notorious oppressors.

'There never has been a time,' said Tony Blair in his address to Congress in 2003, 'when the power of America was so necessary or so misunderstood or when, except in the most general sense, a study of history provides so little instruction for our present day.' He was warning us off the study of imperialism, for fear that we might reject the 'manifest destiny' of the United States and his embrace of an enduring, if subordinate, imperial role for Britain.

Of course, he cannot warn off anybody without the front pages and television and radio broadcasts that echo and amplify his words. By discarding its role as history's 'first draft', journalism promotes, directly and by default, an imperialism whose true intentions are rarely expressed. Instead, noble words and concepts like 'democracy' and 'freedom' and 'liberation' are emptied of their true meaning and pressed into the service of conquest. When journalists allow this corruption of language and ideas, they disorientate, not inform; or, as Edward S. Herman put it, they 'normalise the unthinkable for the general public'. In June 2002, before an audience of robotically cheering West Point military cadets, George W. Bush repudiated the Cold War policy of 'deterrence' and said that the United States would take 'pre-emptive action' against potential enemies. A few months earlier, a leaked copy of the Pentagon's Nuclear Posture Review had revealed that the administration had contingency plans to use nuclear weapons against Iran, North Korea, Syria and China. Following suit, Britain has announced for the first time that it will 'if necessary' attack non-nuclear states with nuclear weapons. There has been almost no reporting of this, and no public discussion. This is as it was fifty years ago when British intelligence warned the government that the United States was ready to wage a 'preventative' atomic war against the Soviet Union, and the public knew nothing about it.

Neither did the public know, according to declassified official files from 1968, that Britain's most senior Cold War planners were convinced the Russians had no intention of attacking the West. 'The Soviet Union will not deliberately start general war or even limited war in Europe,' advised the British chiefs of staff, who described Soviet policy as 'cautious and realistic'. This private truth was in stark contrast to what the press and the public were told.

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‘When truth is replaced by silence,’ the Soviet dissident Yevgeni Yevtushenko said, ‘the silence is a lie.’ There is a surreal silence today, full of the noise of ‘sound-bites’ and ‘grabs’ of those with power justifying their deception and violence. This is presented as news, though it is really a parody in which journalists, variously embedded, gesture cryptically at the obvious but rarely make sense of it, lest they shatter the ‘one-way moral screen’, described by Richard Falk, between ‘us’ and the consequences of political actions taken in our name. Never has there been such a volume of repetitive ‘news’ or such an exclusiveness in those controlling it.

In 1983, the principal media were owned by fifty corporations. In 2002, this had fallen to nine transnational companies. Rampant de-regulation has ended even a semblance of diversity. In February 2004, Rupert Murdoch predicted that, within three years, there would be just three global media corporations and his company would be one of them. On the internet, the leading twenty websites are now owned by the likes of Fox, Disney, AOL Time Warner, Viacom and a clutch of other giants; just fourteen companies attract 60 per cent of all the time Americans spend online. Theirs is a global ambition: to produce not informed, free-thinking citizens, but obedient customers. It is fitting that *Tell Me No Lies* ends with a selection of the work of Edward Said. Prophetically, he wrote in *Culture and Imperialism*, ‘We are beginning to learn that de-colonisation was not the termination of imperial relationships but merely the extending of a geo-political web which has been spinning since the Renaissance. The new media have the power to penetrate more deeply into a “receiving” culture than any previous manifestation of Western technology.’ Compared with a century ago, when ‘European culture was associated with a white man’s presence, we now have in addition an international media presence that insinuates itself over a fantastically wide range.’

Recent events in Venezuela illustrate this. Since he swept to power with a popular vote, the reformist President Hugo Chavez has had to defend himself and his government in an all-out war waged by the huge corporations that control the country's media. 'While Chavez respected the rules of democracy,' wrote Ignacio Ramonet, the director of *Le Monde Diplomatique*, 'the media, in the hands of a few magnates, used manipulation, lies and brainwashing [and] abandoned any role as a fourth estate. Their function is to contain demands from the grass roots and, where possible, also to seize political power.' This is how the Chilean press helped ignite events that led to a coup against Salvador Allende in 1973. Should the governments of Ecuador, Brazil and Argentina attempt to make genuine popular reforms, they, too, are ripe for a media 'dirty war'.

It is more than 400 years since the first great battle for the freedom of the press was fought by dissenters, dreamers and visionaries, who begged to differ from the established guardians of society. They suffered terrible penalties. Thomas Hytton was executed for selling books by William Tyndale, who translated the Bible into English. Richard Bayfield, John Tewsbury and other booksellers were burned at the stake. For the crime of printing Puritan books in Holland, John Lilburne, the *Leveller*, was given 500 lashes in the streets of London, pilloried and fined the fortune of £500.

'What is deeply ironic,' wrote David Bowman in *The Captive Press*, is that, having thrown off one yoke, the press should now be falling under another, in the form of a tiny and ever-contracting band of businessmen-proprietors. Instead of developing as a diverse social institution, serving the needs of a democratic society, the press, and now the media, have become or are becoming the property of a few, governed

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by whatever social, political and cultural values the few think tolerable . . . you could say that what we are facing now is the second great battle of the freedom of the press.

Never has free journalism been as vulnerable to subversion on a grand, often unrecognisable scale. Giant public relations companies, employed by the state and other powerful vested interests, now account for much of the editorial content of the media, however insidious their methods and indirect their message. Their range is ideological: from corporatism to war. This is another kind of 'embedding', known in military circles as 'information dominance', which in turn is part of 'full spectrum dominance': the global control of land, sea, air, space and information, the stated policy of the United States. The aim, as the media analyst David Miller has pointed out, is that eventually 'there is no distinction between information control and the media'.

'How do we react to all of this? How can we defend ourselves?' asks Ignacio Ramonet. 'The answer is simple. We have to create a new estate, a fifth estate, that will let us pit a civic force against this new coalition of [media] rulers.' He proposes an international association of journalists, academics, newspaper readers, radio listeners and television viewers that operates as a 'counterweight' to the great corporations, monitoring, analysing and denouncing them. In other words, the media, like governments and rapacious corporations and the international financial institutions, itself becomes an issue for popular action.

My own view is that the immediate future lies with the emerging *samidzat*, the word for the 'unofficial' media during the late Soviet period. Given the current technology, the potential is huge. On the worldwide web, the best 'alternative' websites are already read by an audience of

millions. The courageous reporting of Jo Wilding from besieged Iraq is a striking example (page 573). She is not an accredited journalist, but one of a new breed of 'citizen reporters'. In the United States, independent newspapers, like the *Toledo Blade*, to name just one, flourish alongside popular independent community-based radio stations, such as Pacifica Radio and Democracy Now.

It is this network that has helped raise the consciousness of millions; never in my lifetime have people all over the world demonstrated greater awareness of the political forces ranged against them and the possibilities for countering them. 'The most spectacular display of public morality the world has ever seen,' was how the writer Arundhati Roy described the outpouring of anti-war anger across the world in February 2003. That was just a beginning and the cause for optimism. For the world has two super-powers now: the power of the military plutocracy in Washington and the power of public opinion. The latter ought to be the constituency of true journalists. This is not rhetorical; human renewal is not a phenomenon; a movement has arisen that is more diverse, more enterprising, more internationalist and more tolerant of difference than ever and growing faster than ever. I dedicate this collection to the best of my fellow journalists, who are needed now more than ever.

John Pilger

June 2004

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JOHN PILGER | LOOKING BACK

Year Zero (1979)

'It is my duty,' wrote the correspondent of *The Times* at the liberation of Belsen, 'to describe something beyond the imagination of mankind.'

That was how I felt in Cambodia in the summer of 1979. The ghostliness of Phnom Penh, the deserted houses, the flitting figures of skeletal orphaned children, like tiny phantoms, the millions of dollars in Cambodian banknotes washing through the empty streets in the monsoon downpour, the stench of death from wells jammed with bodies and the nightly chorus of distress: these are indelible.

The following piece is drawn from many dispatches and chapters in my books, *Heroes* and *Distant Voices*. It covers more than twenty years: from the American bombing of the early 1970s, to 'Year Zero' in 1975, to the overthrow of Pol Pot in 1979 and the United Nations sponsored 'peace' in 1992. Cambodia consumed much of my life. Apart from written work, I made four documentary films, beginning with *Year Zero: The Silent Death of Cambodia*

(1979), which told of a dark age in South-East Asia, in which Pol Pot's infamy was shared with 'our' governments.

My reports first appeared in the *Daily Mirror* on 12 and 13 September 1979. The 12 September issue was devoted almost entirely to Cambodia: thousands of words and eleven pages of Eric Piper's historic photographs; a feat of tabloid design. It was one of the few *Mirrors* ever to sell out completely. Within twenty-four hours of publication, more than £50,000 arrived at the *Mirror* offices, a vast sum then and most of it in small amounts. I calculated that this was more than enough to pay for two fully-laden relief aircraft, but no insurance company would underwrite a flight to Cambodia. A Miami charter company with one old propeller-driven Convair agreed to fly, then the owner rang back to say the pilot had suffered a heart attack. British Midland Airways was considering the lease of a Boeing 707 when an executive phoned me to say the company had been 'warned off' by the Foreign Office, which had claimed that relief aircraft might face a hostile reception by Vietnamese troops'. This was disinformation; the Vietnamese had been asking for international help. Finally, an Icelandic company, Cargolux ('Fly anything anywhere'), had a DC-8 available. On 28 September, filled with enough penicillin, vitamins and milk to restore an estimated 69,000 children, the aircraft took off from Luxembourg, all of it paid for by *Mirror* readers.

My documentary *Year Zero* was shown on television soon afterwards. Forty sacks of post arrived at Associated Television (ATV): 26,000 first-class letters in the first twenty-four hours. A million pounds was reached quickly and, once again, most of it came from those who could ill afford to give. 'This is for Cambodia,' wrote an anonymous bus driver, enclosing his week's wage. An eighty-year-old woman sent her pension for two months. A single parent sent her entire savings of £50. People stopped me in the street to write cheques and came to my home with toys and letters, and petitions for

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Thatcher and poems of indignation for Pol Pot, Nixon and Kissinger. The BBC children's series *Blue Peter* announced an appeal to help the children of Cambodia, the first time the BBC had responded to a programme broadcast by its commercial rival. Within two months, children throughout Britain had raised an astonishing £3,500,000.

Following *Year Zero's* showing around the world, more than \$45 million was raised for Cambodia. This paid for medicines, the rebuilding of schools and clinics and the restoration of water supply. I was in Phnom Penh when the first textile factory making brightly coloured clothing was re-opened; under the Khmer Rouge, everybody had to wear black. Under the weight of letters, telegrams, phone calls and petitions, the British Government became the first Western government to 'de-recognise' the Pol Pot regime, although Britain continued to vote for the seating of Pol Pot's man at the United Nations (who was eventually given asylum in the United States, where he now lives in luxurious retirement).

For many people, as disturbing as the harrowing images in *Year Zero* was the revelation that, for Cold War geo-political reasons, the American and British governments were sending humanitarian aid only to Cambodian refugees in Thailand while denying it to the majority in Cambodia itself. Eleven months after the overthrow of Pol Pot, the total Western aid sent to Cambodia through the Red Cross and the United Nations Children's Fund amounted to 1,300 tons of food: effectively nothing.

Moreover, both governments had secretly joined with Pol Pot's principal backer, China, in punishing both the Cambodian people and their liberators, the Vietnamese. An embargo, reminiscent of the economic siege that was to devastate Iraq in the 1990s, was imposed on both countries, whose governments were declared Cold War enemies.

Two subsequent films of mine, *Year One* and *Year Ten*, disclosed that the

Reagan administration was secretly restoring the Khmer Rouge as a military and political force in exile in Thailand, to be used as a weapon against Vietnam, and that British SAS troops were training them in bases along the border. 'You must understand/ Margaret Thatcher had said, 'there are reasonable Khmer Rouge.'

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The aircraft flew low, following the unravelling of the Mekong River west from Vietnam. Once over Cambodia, what we saw silenced all of us on board. There appeared to be nobody, no movement, not even an animal, as if the great population of Asia had stopped at the border. Whole towns and villages on the riverbanks were empty, it seemed, the doors of houses open, chairs and beds, pots and mats in the street, a car on its side, a mangled bicycle. Beside fallen power lines was a human shadow, lying or sitting; it had the shape of a child, though we could not be sure, for it did not move.

Beyond, the familiar landscape of South-East Asia, the patchwork of rice paddies and fields, was barely discernible; nothing seemed to have been planted or be growing, except the forest and mangrove and lines of tall wild grass. On the edge of towns this grass would follow straight lines, as though planned. Fertilised by human compost, by the remains of thousands upon thousands of men, women and children, these lines marked common graves in a nation where perhaps as many as two million people, or between one-third and a quarter of the population, were 'missing'.

Our plane made its approach into what had been the international airport at Phnom Penh, towards a beaconless runway and a deserted control tower. At the edge of the forest there appeared a pyramid of rusting cars, the first of many such sights, like objects in a mirage. The cars were piled one on top of the other; some of the cars had been brand new when their owners were forced to throw away the ignition keys and push them to the pile, which also included ambulances, a fire engine, police cars, refrigerators, washing machines, hairdriers, generators, television sets,

telephones and typewriters, as if a huge Luddite broom had swept them there. 'Here lies the consumer society,' a headstone might have read, 'Abandoned 17 April, Year Zero'.

From that date, anybody who had owned cars and such 'luxuries', anybody who had lived in a city or town, anybody with more than a basic education 'or who had acquired a modern skill, such as doctors, nurses, teachers, engineers, tradespeople and students, anybody who knew or worked for foreigners, such as travel agents, clerks, journalists and artists, was in danger; some were under sentence of death. To give just one example, out of a royal ballet company of 500 dancers, a few dozen survived; of the others, some escaped abroad, some starved to death or succumbed to illness related to extreme deprivation, and some were murdered.

My previous trip to Cambodia had been twelve years earlier. I had flown across from wartime Saigon, exchanging venality and neurosis for what Western visitors invariably saw as the innocence of a 'gentle land' whose capital, Phnom Penh, had a beauty only the French could contrive. On Sundays the parade down Monivong Avenue was a joy: the parasols, the beautiful young women on their Hondas, the saffron robes, the platoons of well-fed families, the ice-cream barrows, the weddings, the hustlers. You awoke at the cavernous Hotel Royale, switched on your radio and, in all probability, heard the squeaky voice of Prince Norodom Sihanouk berating you or another foreign journalist for writing about the financial excesses of the royal family. This might be followed by a summons to the royal palace and an instruction to listen to the Prince's collection of jazz recordings, usually Oscar Peterson. Sihanouk, 'God-king' and a relic of the French empire, was his country's most celebrated jazz musician, film director, football coach, and juggler of apparently impossible options in IndoChina's cockpit of war. Such was his kingdom: feudal,

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unpredictable, preposterous and, in relation to events in the region, at peace.

The Cambodia which foreigners romanticised (myself included) belied a recent history of savagery between warring groups, such as those loyal to Sihanouk and the 'Issaraks', who were anti-French and anti-royalty but sometimes no more than murderous bandits. The atrocities which emerged from some of their skirmishes from the 1940s to the 1960s were of a ritual nature later associated with the Pol Pot period, but were probably common enough in a peasant world that few foreigners saw and understood. Sihanouk himself was a capricious autocrat whose thugs dispensed arbitrary terror when Westerners were not looking, or did not wish to look; and his authoritarianism undoubtedly contributed to the growth of an extreme Communist party, or Khmer Rouge. Certainly his 'Popular Socialist Community', which he set up in the 1950s, had little to do with Socialism and everything to do with creating suitably benign conditions for the spread and enrichment of a powerful mandarin class in the towns and ethnic Chinese usurers in the rural areas. However, hunger was rare; indeed, so bountiful seemed the Khmers' lush, under-populated land that the Chinese coined a superlative: 'As rich as Cambodia!'

In 1959, a United States Defense Department report described the Khmers as a nation of people who could not be easily panicked, whose horizons were limited to village, pagoda and forest, who knew of no other countries, who respected their government, and feared ghosts, and 'cannot be counted upon to act in any positive way for the benefit of US aims and policies'.

Cambodia then was regarded as 'neutral'; that is, it was allied to no bloc. However, Sihanouk later allowed Ho Chi Minh's Vietnamese to run their supply routes through his territory, which gave a general called Lon

Nol a pretext to stage a coup in 1970. The CIA denied having anything to do with it; but 1970 was the year Richard Nixon and his national security adviser, Henry Kissinger, were conducting their 'secret bombing' of Cambodia, aimed at Vietnamese 'sanctuaries'. US Air Force pilots were sworn to secrecy and their operational logs were falsified or destroyed. During 1969-70 the American public and Congress knew nothing about it. During one six-month period in 1973, B-52s dropped more bombs in 3,695 raids on the populated heartland of Cambodia than were dropped on Japan during all of the Second World War: the equivalent, in tons of bombs, of five Hiroshimas.

In 1977, a former member of Kissinger's staff, Roger Morris, described the way in which the President's foreign-policy advisers, known as 'the Wise Men', prepared the ground for the final destruction of Indo-China:

Though they spoke of terrible human suffering, reality was sealed off by their trite, lifeless vernacular: 'capabilities', 'objectives', 'our chips', 'giveaway'. It was a matter, too, of culture and style. They spoke with the cool, deliberate detachment of men who believe the banishment of feeling renders them wise and, more important, credible to other men ... [Of Kissinger and Nixon] They neither understood the foreign policy they were dealing with, nor were deeply moved by the bloodshed and suffering they administered to their stereotypes.

On the eve of an American land invasion of 'neutral' Cambodia in April 1970, according to Morris, Nixon said to Kissinger, 'If this doesn't work, it'll be your ass, Henry.'

It worked, in a fashion. The bombing and invasion provided a small group of fanatical Maoists, the Khmer Rouge, with a catalyst for a revo-

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lution which had no popular base among the Khmer people. What is striking about the rise of Pol Pot, Khieu Samphan and other principals in the Khmer Rouge is their medievalism, which their ideological pretensions barely concealed. Pol Pot and Khieu Samphan were both left-wing students in Paris in the 1950s, when and where other colonial revolutions were reputedly conceived; but neither admitted the existence of a Marxist-Leninist or Communist organisation until 1977, by which time they were prime minister and head of state respectively of 'Democratic Kampuchea'. Indeed, in the movement they led, all ideology, authority and 'justice' flowed from 'Angkar Loeu', literally the 'Organisation on High', which 'has the eyes of a pineapple; it sees everything'.

Angkor was the capital of a Khmer empire at its zenith between the tenth and the thirteenth centuries. It reached from Burma to the South China Sea and was interrupted only by what is now central Vietnam; the equally nationalist Vietnamese had not long freed themselves from a thousand years of Chinese rule. Angkor, the place, was a tribute to the riches, energy and chauvinism of the dynasty, with its series of temples conceived as a symbolic universe according to traditional Indian cosmology, and built by slaves. There was an absolute monarch, a pharaoh-style figure, a bureaucracy organised by Brahmins, and a military leadership; and, like Egypt and Rome, the empire duly collapsed under the weight of its monuments and megalomaniacs, as well as its changing patterns of trade. The celebrated temples of Angkor Wat are all that remain of its glory.

'if our people can build Angkor Wat,' said Pol Pot in 1977, 'they can do anything!' This was the year Pol Pot probably killed more of his people than during all of his reign. Xenophobic in the extreme, he might have modelled himself on a despotic king of Angkor, which would explain his

ambition to reclaim that part of the Mekong Delta, now southern Vietnam and known as Kampuchea Krom, over which the Khmer kings had once ruled. He was also an admirer of Mao Tse-tung and the Gang of Four; and it is not improbable that just as Mao had seen himself as the greatest emperor of China, so Pol Pot saw himself as another Mao, directing his own red guards to purify all elites, subversives and revisionists and to create a totally self-reliant state and one sealed off from the 'virus' of the modern world.

Cambodia is 90 per cent villages and the worsening imbalance in the relationship between peasant and town-dweller was one which Pol Pot and his 'men in black' were able to exploit almost with impunity. The French had created Phnom Penh in their own remote image and had brought in Chinese and Vietnamese bureaucrats and traders. Those in power in the capital took from and taxed the peasants as if by divine right; and when three years of American bombing killed or wounded or dislocated hundreds of thousands of Khmer peasants and created many more as refugees, the Khmer Rouge, now operating from enclaves, swept into a power vacuum in the bloodied countryside.

To understand the opportunities which the American bombing gave to the Khmer Rouge, one need not look beyond the story of Neak Long, a Mekong River town thirty miles from Phnom Penh. In August 1973, a B-52 unloaded its bombs on Neak Long and more than a hundred villagers were killed and several hundred wounded. The fate of the village was promoted in Washington as a 'lesson learned'. Ostentatiously, the bombing was described as a 'mistake' and a crew member was fined \$700. The American ambassador to Cambodia, Emory Swank, went to the village and handed \$100 bills to each grieving family as 'compensation'. Throughout Cambodia, hundreds of villages suffered terribly without

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Ambassador Swank's largesse.

At 7.30 on the morning of 17 April 1975, the Khmer Rouge entered Phnom Penh. They marched in Indian file along the boulevards, through the still traffic. They wore black and were mostly teenagers, and people cheered them nervously, naively, as people do when war seems to be over. Phnom Penh then had a swollen population of about two million. At one o'clock the 'men in black' decreed that the city was to be abandoned by all except for a few thousand who would maintain its skeleton. The sick and wounded were ordered and dragged at gunpoint from their hospital beds; surgeons were forced to leave patients in mid-operation. On the road out through the suburbs a procession of mobile beds could be seen, with their drip-bottles swinging at the bedpost; a man whose throat and mouth had been torn away by a rocket explosion was pushed along by his aged father. The old and crippled fell beside the road and their families were forced to move on. Crippled and dying children were carried in plastic bags. Women barely out of childbirth staggered forward, supported by parents. orphaned babies, forty-one by one estimate, were left in their cradles at the Phnom Penh paediatric centre without anybody to care for them. 'Don't take anything with you,' broadcast the young troops through loudspeakers. 'The Angkar is saying that you must leave the city for just three hours so that we can prepare to defend you against bombing by American aircraft.'

For once, there was no bombing, and even among those on the road who knew it to be a lie, defeatism, fear and exhaustion seemed to make them powerless. The haemorrhage lasted two days and two nights, then Cambodia fell into shadow. When, on 7 January 1979, the Vietnamese Army came up the Mekong and drove into Phnom Penh, they found the city virtually as it had been left on the first day of 'Year Zero'.

This was how I found it when I arrived with photographer Eric Piper, film director David Munro, cameraman Gerry Pinches and sound recordist Steve Phillips of Associated Television (ATV). In the silent, oppressive humidity it was like entering a city the size of Manchester or Brussels in the wake of a nuclear cataclysm which had spared only the buildings. Houses, flats, office blocks, schools, hotels stood empty and open, as if vacated by their occupants that day. Personal possessions lay trampled on a front path, a tricycle crushed and rusted in the gutter, the traffic lights jammed on red. There was electricity in the centre of the city; elsewhere there was neither power nor a working sewer, nor water to drink. At the railway station trains stood empty at various stages of interrupted departure. Pieces of burned cloth fluttered on the platform, and when we enquired about this it was explained that on the day they fled before the Vietnamese Army the Khmer Rouge had set fire to carriages in which wounded people lay.

When the afternoon monsoon broke, the gutters of the city were suddenly awash with what looked like paper, but it was money. The streets ran with money, much of it new and unused banknotes whose source was not far away. The modern concrete building of the National Bank of Cambodia looked as if it had sustained one mighty punch. As if to show their contempt for the order they replaced, the Khmer Rouge had blown it up and now with every downpour a worthless fortune sluiced from it into the streets. Inside, chequebooks lay open on the counter, one with a cheque partly filled out and the date 17 April 1975. A pair of broken spectacles rested on an open ledger; money seemed to be everywhere; I slipped and fell hard on a floor brittle with coins; boxes of new notes were stacked where they had been received from the supplier in London.

In our first hours in Phnom Penh we shot no film and took no photo-

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graphs; incredulity saw to that. I had no sense of people, of even the remnants of a population; the few human shapes I glimpsed seemed incoherent images, detached from the city itself. On catching sight of us, they would flit into the refuge of a courtyard or a cinema or a filling station. Only when I pursued several, and watched them forage, did I see that they were children. One child about ten years old – although age was difficult to judge – ran into a wardrobe lying on its side which was his or her refuge. In an Esso station, an old woman and three emaciated children squatted around a pot containing a mixture of roots and leaves, which bubbled over a fire fuelled with paper money: thousands of snapping, crackling brand-new riel: such a morbid irony, for money could no longer buy everything these people needed.

The first person we stopped and spoke to was a man balancing a load on his head and an arm on his son's shoulder. He was blind and his face was pitted from what might have been smallpox. His son was fifteen years old, but so thin that he might have been nine. The man spoke some French and said his name was Khim Kon and his son was Van Sok and that 'before Pol Pot' he had been a carpenter. 'This boy', he said, touching his son with affection, 'is my only child left. Because we came from the city, we were classified "new people". We had to work from three in the morning until eleven at night; the children, too. My wife and three others are all dead now.' I asked him how he had lost his sight. 'I was always blind in one eye,' he said. 'When my family started to die I cried, so they took out my other eye with a whip.' Of all the survivors I would talk to in the coming weeks, that man and his son, who had lost four members of their immediate family, were the least damaged.

My memory of Phnom Penh from twelve years before, now told me where I was; I was in the middle of Monivong Avenue, facing the Roman

Catholic cathedral. But there was no cathedral. In the constitution of Pol Pot's 'Democratic Kampuchea', article twenty stated that all Khmers had 'the right to worship according to any religion and the right not to worship according to any religion', but religion that was 'wrong' and 'reactionary' and 'detrimental' was prohibited. So the Gothic cathedral of Phnom Penh, a modest version of the cathedral at Rheims, a place where the 'wrong' religion was practised, was dismantled, stone by stone. Only wasteland was left.

I walked across Monivong Avenue to the National Library which the 'men in black' had converted into a pigsty, apparently as a symbol, since all books published prior to Year Zero were also 'detrimental'. The library's books and documents had been burned, looted by the returning city dwellers, discarded as rubbish, or thrown into the street. Next door stood the Hotel Royale, whose stuffed crocodiles offered a kind of greeting; they at least had not been considered detrimental, although the garden aviary was empty and overgrown and the swimming-pool was festering and stagnant. I had swum in it long ago; now it was a cesspit.

Our billet was in the former Air France residence, a functional white building which a family of banana palms seemed to be reclaiming by the hour. Beneath many of these palms had been discovered human remains which, it was claimed, were used as human fertiliser. Like almost everywhere else in Phnom Penh, to enter this house was to intrude upon ghosts; an initialled pen, an opened packet of tobacco, a used air ticket lay in a drawer. David Munro unknowingly bedded down beside a nest of rats which gnawed through our supply of candles in the night. The water in the shower ran yellow and the drains smelt rotten; corpses had been found wedged in wells. Whatever we touched, it seemed, had been polluted by the past. We heated our cans and boiled our water on a Primus

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stove in what had been somebody's sitting room. We ate little and spoke rarely and I found myself gulping neat whisky, without effect. On 15 August David Munro wrote in his diary: 'I don't know what to do to film what we're seeing, because all we're seeing is silence ... and this smell. No one is going to believe us.'

For a fleeting moment, the normal and mundane would seem to return. One morning our interpreter, Sophak, was laughing with Eric Piper when she suddenly stopped and spoke, as if to no one, this horrific non sequitur: 'Can you imagine they take away friendship?' she said, still smiling. 'A young boy who used to be a student was taken away and beaten to death because he smiled at me while we husked the rice. He smiled at me, that's all.'

Sophak had been forced to live in a communal camp where people were fed according to how 'productive' they were. Those who fell sick were left where they lay in the fields or were attended, she said, by bogus 'doctors', usually teenage boys who would dispense tablets made from roots or give injections with filthy syringes. The 'serum' would leave their patients writhing in pain and often would kill them. Sophak said these 'doctors' would also perform 'operations' during which incisions were made with unsterilised instruments and without anaesthetic of any kind. Sometimes an organ would be removed and 'examined' on the grass while the victim screamed. These young 'doctors' earned food, which was also the reward for boys recruited as spies. The boys, said Sophak, would listen at night for 'detrimental' laughter or sorrow, and would report those falling asleep during a midnight 'ideological study'. Even the word 'sleep' itself was banned; from Year Zero there would be 'rest'. Only the camp controller could sanction marriage and people were married in large groups, having been directed to whom they might 'choose' as a partner;

husbands and wives were allowed to sleep together only once a month. At the age of seven, children were put to work; at twelve, they were 'sent away'. There were, said Sophak, 'no families, no sentiment, no love or grief, no holidays, no music, no song'.

On another day, when we were filming several hundred Khmer Rouge prisoners at a barracks outside the city, I said to Sophak, 'Ask him how many people he killed.' In front of us was a man in his thirties who had an almost casual air. She put the question, he answered it briskly and she turned to me and said, 'In his group they kill two hundred and fifty.'

'How many were in his group?' I asked.

'Eight persons in each group,' she said.

'So eight of them killed two hundred and fifty people,' I said.

'Yes,' she said, 'but this man over here says he killed fifty people on his own.'

We moved across to the second man, and when I asked Sophak to ask him who were the fifty people he had killed, she gave as his answer, 'Most of them were men, women and children from the city class, the middle class.'

'Has he children of his own?' I asked.

'He has one child,' she said, 'and that child is very well.' She walked away and, out of sight, she vomited.

Two months earlier Eric Piper and I had followed Pope John Paul on his return to Poland, where we had seen Auschwitz for the first time. Now, in South-East Asia, we glimpsed it again. On a clear, sunny day with flocks of tiny swifts, the bravest of birds, rising and falling almost to the ground, we drove along a narrow dirt road at the end of which was a former primary school, called Tuol Sleng. During the Pol Pot years this school was run by a Khmer gestapo, 'S-21', which divided the classrooms

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into an 'interrogation unit' and a 'torture massacre unit'. People were mutilated on iron beds and we found their blood and tufts of their hair still on the floor. Between December 1975 and June 1978 at least 12,000 people died slow deaths here. a fact not difficult to confirm because the killers, like the Nazis, were pedantic in their sadism. They photographed their victims before and after they tortured and killed them and horrific images now looked at us from walls; some had tried to smile for the photographer, as if he might take pity on them and save them. Names and ages, even height and weight, were recorded. We found, as at Auschwitz, one room filled to the ceiling with victims' clothes and shoes, including those of many children.

However, unlike Auschwitz, Tuol Sleng was primarily a political death centre. Leading members of the Khmer Rouge Army, including those who formed an early resistance to Pol Pot, were murdered here, usually after 'confessing' that they had worked for the CIA, the KGB or Hanoi. Whatever its historical model, if any, the demonic nature of Tuol Sleng was its devotion to human suffering. Whole families were confined in small cells, fettered to a single iron bar. They were kept naked and slept on the stone floor, without blanket or mat, and on the wall was a school blackboard, on which was written:

1. Speaking is absolutely forbidden
2. Before doing something, the authorisation of the warden must be obtained.

'Doing something' might mean only changing position in the cell, but without authorisation the prisoner would receive twenty to thirty strokes with a whip. Latrines were small ammunition boxes left over from Lon

Nol's army, labelled 'Made in USA'. For upsetting a box of excrement the punishment was licking the floor with your tongue, torture or death.

When the Vietnamese discovered Tuol Sleng they found nineteen mass graves within the vicinity of the prison and eight survivors, including four children and a month-old baby. Tem Chan was one of them. He told me, 'For a whole week I was filled with water, then given electric currents. Finally, I admitted anything they wanted. I said I worked for the KGB. It was so ridiculous. When they found out I was a sculptor the torture stopped and I was put to work making busts of Pol Pot. That saved my life.'

Another survivor was Ung Pech, an engineer, whose fingers had been crushed in a vice. He wept as he told me, 'My wife, my sons, my daughter ... all are gone. I have only one child left. Five children dead. They gave them nothing to eat.'

The days now passed for the five of us as if in slow motion. Anxiety and a certain menace did not leave us. At Siem Reap, in the north-west, after trudging through a nightmarish mass grave filled with skulls, many of which had been smashed, Eric and Steve fell ill and worked most of the time in agony from dysentery. David's exceptional organising skills were much in evidence; he established a routine and saw everybody gently through it.

Two concerns preoccupied us. Was it possible, we asked ourselves, to convey the evidence of what we had seen, which was barely credible to us, in such a way that the enormity of the crime committed in Cambodia might be recognised internationally and the survivors helped? And, on a personal level, how could we keep moving away from the sounds which pursued us? The initial silence had broken and now the cries of fleshless children tormented us almost everywhere.

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This was especially so when we reached the town of Kompong Speu where 150,000 people were said to be 'missing'. Where there had been markets, houses and schools, there was bare land. Substantial buildings had been demolished, erased like the cathedral. The town's hospital had disappeared; Vietnamese engineers had erected a temporary one and supplied a doctor and some drugs. But there were few beds and no blankets and antiseptic was splashed urgently on our hands every few yards we walked; many of the people lying on the stone floor were dying from plague and anthrax, which is passed through the meat of diseased cattle and takes about a month to kill.

It can be cured by penicillin, but there was no penicillin, except that brought by two French doctors, Jean Yves Follezou and Jean Michel Vinot, who had travelled down from Phnom Penh with us. The human sounds here, I recall vividly, had a syncopation, a terrible prosody: high and shrill, then deep and unrelenting, the rhythm of approaching death. In the 'orphan's war', the children sat and leaned and lay on mats, impassive, looking directly at us and at the camera lens. When a young girl died after begging us for help, I felt the depths of shame and rage.

Similarly, in the 'hospital' of an orphanage in Phnom Penh, laid out like a First World War field station in the Gothic shell of an abandoned chapel, there were children who had been found wandering in the forest, living off treebark, grass and poisonous plants. Their appearance denied their humanity; rows of opaque eyes set in cloth-like skin. Here Gerry put his camera on the ground, walked away and cried.

One of several adults in charge at the orphanage was Prak Sarinn, a former teacher, who had survived the Pol Pot years by disguising himself as a peasant. 'It was the only acceptable class,' he said. 'I changed my personality, and I shall not be the same again. I can no longer teach; my head

is filled with death and worry.' I asked him what had happened on 17 April 1975. He said, 'I was in my classroom when they burst in. They looked like boys, not even thirteen. They put their guns on us and told us all to march north into the countryside. The children were crying. I asked if we could first go home to join our families. They said no. So we just walked away, and most of the little ones died from exhaustion and hunger. I never saw my family again.'

With Mr Sarinn interpreting I spoke to one of the children lying still on a mat in the chapel and asked him his age.

'I remember,' said the child. 'I am twelve years old.'

'What is your name?' I asked.

'I forget,' he replied.

'Where are your parents?'

'I forget ... I think they died.'

In the main hospital of Phnom Penh, where modern equipment had been vandalised and destroyed and the dispensary was bare, 'No. 23' on a bare iron bed was Kuon, a ten-year-old who seemed to diminish by the hour; he was too ill to eat the crude rice for which the ration was then four pounds per person per month. On the day we were there he might have been saved; antibiotics and milk were all he needed, but there was not an aspirin. When we returned the next morning, his name, along with the names of five other dead children, was chalked on a blackboard in the hospital yard, beside a poster which read, 'The United Nations wishes to remind you that 1979 is the International Year of the Child'. The poster was put there by Dr Follezou 'much more in anger than in sorrow', he said. The United Nations recognised the ousted Pol Pot regime and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) had sent no relief.

My favourite symbol of international inaction was a large red cross on

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the roof of the hospital, remaining from the days when ladders of bombs from B-52s fell not far away. The red cross is, of course, the universal mark of humanitarianism and is said to transcend politics and frontiers. At this hospital it might have served to ward off evil spirits; no doctors or nurses of the International Red Cross (ICRC) had come, and the dribbles of Red Cross-supplied medicines had evaporated.

Shortly after our arrival in Phnom Penh, two men representing ICRC and UNICEF were preparing to leave. The UNICEF man, Jacques Beaumont, suitcase in hand, was in an emotional state and my interview with him was interrupted several times while he composed himself. I asked him how many people were threatened by famine.

He replied, 'The government [in Phnom Penh] has requested help for 2,250,000 people . . . this is the dimension of the problem ... you see, eighty-five per cent of the women have stopped menstruating. Where is the next generation coming from? In Kompong Speu, in one of the very poor barracks with practically nothing, there were fifty-four children dying. I will always remember that I did not do anything for these children, because we had nothing.'

During the interview I asked Beaumont why UNICEF and ICRC had done so little. At this, he walked away from the camera, took David and me by the arm and led us to a Red Cross man sitting alone in the foyer of the Hotel Royale. 'He will explain,' he said. 'Tell them what the truth is, Francois.'

Francois Bugnion, of ICRC in Geneva, was clearly distraught. He asked, 'What nationality are you? What government are you?' I told him I was an Australian national and a journalist.

'So you must have contacts in the Australian Government,' he said. 'So you must go to them now please, and get them to send one C130 Hercules

aircraft here. The Hercules is important because all the forklifts at the airport have been destroyed. This plane can unload itself and one consignment of a truck, food and drugs will save thousands ... The Australians have done this thing before. They paint out the military markings, and there is no problem. But you must not say this request has come from me ... Geneva must not find out I have asked you to do this.'

I asked him why the Red Cross itself did not approach the Australian Government; why was there this need for subterfuge?

'I am desperate,' he replied. 'In Geneva they are still studying the framework of a plan of relief for Cambodia, but the situation cannot wait. People are dying around us. They can't wait for the politics to be ironed out and for Geneva to say go.'

Bugnion tore a page from a yellow legal pad and laboriously wrote the names of those in the ICRC hierarchy responsible for 'Asia and Oceania'. 'Here', he said, 'are the people you will need to persuade.'

These raw interviews, conducted in Phnom Penh at a time of historic emergency for the Khmer people, are a guide to why this stricken society had to wait so long for Western relief to arrive. There were subsequent attempts, in Bangkok, Geneva and New York, to damage the credibility of both Beaumont and Bugnion; they were variously described as 'unreliable' and drunks. These were among the first of many smears mounted against those who told a truth unpalatable to some Western governments, to sections of the Western media and to the secular missionaries of the established aid industry.

To understand this peculiar bigotry, which persists today, it is necessary to go back to the early spring of 1979 when the first refugees fleeing in advance of the Khmer Rouge crossed the border into Thailand. The Thai regime's immediate response was to describe the refugees as 'illegal immi-

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grants' and to repatriate them forcibly into enclaves held by the Khmer Rouge. In one night in June 1979, the Thais 'pushed back' between 35,000 and 40,000 Cambodian refugees, many of them hungry and sick. They forced them down a hill and across a minefield. Some were killed or injured by the mines, although most were rescued by Vietnamese troops. Many of those who tried to cross the border again were beaten and shot by Thai soldiers.

The reason for this stemmed from the fact that Cambodia's liberators had come from the wrong side of the Cold War. The Vietnamese, who had driven the Americans from their homeland, were not to be acknowledged in any way as liberators, and they and the Khmer people would suffer accordingly. This charade was played out in the United Nations, where the British Government voted to legitimise the defunct regime of Pol Pot. A majority of the UN credentials committee, including almost all the Western democracies, supported a Chinese motion that Pol Pot's 'Democratic Kampuchea' continue to be recognised as the government of Cambodia. As the American representative, Robert Rosenstock, rose from his seat after voting for Pol Pot, somebody grabbed his hand and congratulated him. 'I looked up and saw it was Ieng Sary [Pol Pot's foreign minister],' he recalled. 'I felt like washing my hands.'

International 'legitimacy' would thus be denied to the new government in Cambodia which the Vietnamese had brought to power, regardless of the fact that it had freed the Khmers from their charnel house and governed 90 per cent of the country. By contrast, the pro-Washington Lon Noll government, which the Americans had sustained from 1970 to 1975, controlled only the towns and main roads, yet had received full international recognition. The cynicism was such that had the Thais, the right

people on the right side, liberated their Khmer neighbours under the auspices of the Americans, the sky over Phnom Penh would have been crowded with American relief aircraft and Pol Pot's man would not have taken Cambodia's seat in the world assembly.

The UN vote for Pol Pot meant that stricken Cambodia was denied almost the entire international machinery of recovery and assistance: the United Nations Development Programme, the Asian Development Bank and the World Bank could not legally help. At the World Health Assembly in Geneva, the British delegate, Sir Henry Yellowlees, voted for Pol Pot's man to take Cambodia's seat. This meant that the resources of WHO, the World Health Organisation, were now denied to Cambodia. Shortly after the Geneva meeting, a WHO official telephoned me. 'That picture with your Cambodia story of the pockmarked man,' he said, 'can you tell us if that was caused by smallpox?' I said I did not know, but if smallpox had reappeared during Pol Pot's time, surely a WHO investigator should go to Cambodia to find out. 'We can't do that,' he said. 'They're not recognised.'

By January 1980, the game had become grotesque. The United States had begun secretly funding Pol Pot. The extent of this support – \$85 million from 1980 to 1986 – was revealed six years later in correspondence between congressional lawyer Jonathan Winer, counsel to a member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, and the Vietnam Veterans of America Foundation. Winer said the information had come from the Congressional Research Service. When copies of his letter were circulated, the Reagan administration was furious. Then, without adequately explaining why, Winer repudiated the statistics, while not disputing that they had come from the Congressional Research Service. However, in a

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second letter to Noam Chomsky, Winer repeated the original charge, which, he told me, was 'absolutely correct'.

As a cover for its secret war against Cambodia and its liberator, Vietnam, Washington set up the Kampuchean Emergency Group, known as KEG, in the American embassy in Bangkok and on the border. KEGs job was to 'monitor' the distribution of Western humanitarian supplies sent to the refugee camps in Thailand and to ensure that Khmer Rouge bases were fed. Although ostensibly a State Department operation, its principals were intelligence officers with long experience in Indo-China.

Two American relief aid workers, Linda Mason and Roger Brown, later wrote, 'The US Government insisted that the Khmer Rouge be fed ... the US preferred that the Khmer Rouge operation benefit from the credibility of an internationally known relief operation.' Under American pressure, the World Food Programme handed over \$12 million worth of food to the Thai Army to pass on to the Khmer Rouge. '20,000 to 40,000 Pol Pot guerrillas benefited,' according to former Assistant Secretary of State Richard Holbrooke.

I witnessed this. In 1980, a film crew and I travelled in a UN convoy of forty trucks, seventeen loaded with food, seventeen with seed and the rest with 'goodies', which was the term UN people used for their assorted largesse. We headed for Phnom Chat, a Khmer Rouge operations base set in forest just inside Cambodia and bunkered with land-mines. The UN official leading the convoy, Phyllis Gestrin, a University of Texas psychology professor, was worried and clearly disliked what she was doing. 'I don't want to think what this aid is doing,' she said. 'I don't trust these blackshirts.' She could barely suppress her fear and demonstrated it by driving her Land Rover across a suspected minefield and into a tree. 'Oh man,' she said, 'this place gives me the creeps. Let's get it over with.' At

that, she turned the Land Rover around and pointed it back along the track. 'We always position it so we can get out fast,' she said.

After the trucks had dropped their 'goodies' in a clearing, Phyllis solicited the signature of a man who had watched in bemused silence from a thatched shelter. 'Well, I guess what I've got here is a receipt,' she said, with a nervous laugh. 'Not bad, from a butcher like him . . .' The 'butcher' was the base commander, who demanded that the foreign aid people address him as 'Monsieur le President'. In 1979, I had seen in Siem Reap province the mass grave of several thousand people shortly after it was unearthed. Many of the corpses had been beaten to death, as their splintered skulls clearly showed. Now, smiling before me was Pol Pot's governor of the province at the time of that mass murder. His name, he told me, was Nam Phann, which was a military alias. He was eager to confirm that Western aid had nourished and restored the Khmer Rouge. 'Thank you very much,' he said, 'and we wish for more.' I asked him whom he regarded as his allies in the world. 'Oh,' he replied, 'China, the ASEAN' nations ... and the United States.'

Working through 'Task Force 80' of the Thai Army, which had liaison officers with the Khmer Rouge, the Americans ensured a constant flow of UN supplies to bases like Phnom Chat. The Kampuchean Emergency Group (KEG) was run by Michael Eiland, whose career underscored the continuity of American intervention in Indo-China. In 1969-70, he was operations officer of a clandestine Special Forces group code-named 'Daniel Boone', which was responsible for the reconnaissance of the American bombing of Cambodia. By 1980, Colonel Eiland was running KEG from the American embassy in Bangkok, where it was described as a 'humanitarian' organisation. He was also responsible for interpreting satellite surveillance pictures of Cambodia and in that capacity was a val-

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ued informant of a number of resident members of Bangkok's Western press corps, who referred to him in their reports as a Western analyst'. Eiland's 'humanitarian' duties subsequently led to his appointment as Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) chief in charge of the South-East Asia Region, one of the most important positions in American espionage.

In November 1980, direct contact was made between the Reagan White House and the Khmer Rouge when Dr Ray Cline, a former deputy director of the CIA, made a secret visit to a Khmer Rouge operational headquarters inside Cambodia, Cline was then a foreign policy adviser on President-elect Reagan's transitional team. Within a year, fifty CIA agents were running America's Cambodia operation from Thailand.

The dividing line between the international relief operation and the American war became more and more confused. A Defense Intelligence Agency colonel was appointed 'security liaison officer' between the United Nations Border Relief Operation (UNBRO) and the Displaced Persons Protection Unit (DPPU). In Washington, he was revealed as a link between the US Government and the Khmer Rouge.

By 1981, a number of governments had become decidedly uneasy about the United Nations' continued recognition of Pot Pot. This was dramatically demonstrated when a colleague of mine, Nicholas Claxton, entered a bar at the United Nations in New York with Thaoun Prasith, Pot Pot's representative, whom he was hoping to interview. 'Within minutes,' said Claxton, 'the bar had emptied.'

Clearly, a new mask was required. In 1982, the United States and China, supported by Singapore, invented the Coalition of the Democratic Government of Kampuchea, which was, as Ben Kiernan pointed out, neither a coalition, nor democratic, nor a government, nor in Kampuchea. It was what the CIA calls 'a master illusion'. Prince Norodom Sihanouk was

appointed its head; otherwise little had changed. The two 'non-Communist' members, the Sihanoukists and the Khmer People's National Liberation Front (KPRLF), were dominated by the Khmer Rouge. The urbane Thaoun Prasith – a personal friend of Pol Pot, who had called on Khmer expatriates to return home in 1975, whereupon many of them 'disappeared' – continued to speak for Cambodia.

The United Nations was now the instrument of Cambodia's punishment. Not only was the new government in Phnom Penh denied the UN seat, but Cambodia was barred from all international agreements on trade and communications, even from the World Health Organisation. In all its history, the United Nations had withheld development aid from only one Third World country: Cambodia. In the United States, church groups were refused export licences for books and toys for orphans. A law dating from the First World War, the Trading with the Enemy Act, was applied to Cambodia and Vietnam. Not even Cuba and the Soviet Union were treated in this way.

By 1987, KEG had been reincarnated as the Kampuchea Working Group, run by the same Colonel Eiland of the Defense Intelligence Agency. The Working Group's brief was to provide battle plans, war material and satellite intelligence to the so-called 'non-Communist' members of the 'resistance forces'. The non-Communist fig leaf allowed Congress, spurred on by an anti-Vietnamese zealot, Stephen Solarz, to approve both 'overt' and 'covert' aid estimated at \$24 million to the 'resistance'. Until 1990, Congress accepted Solarz's specious argument that US aid did not end up with or even help Pol Pot and that the mass murderer's American-supplied allies 'are not even in close proximity with them [the Khmer Rouge]'.

While Washington paid the bills and the Thai Army provided logistics

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support, Singapore, as middle man, became the main 'conduit' for Western arms. Former Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew was a major backer of American and Chinese insistence that the Khmer Rouge be part of a settlement in Cambodia. 'It is journalists', he said, 'who have made them into demons.'

Weapons from Germany, the United States and Sweden were passed on directly by Singapore or made under licence by Chartered Industries, owned by the Singapore Government; the same weapons have been captured from the Khmer Rouge. The Singapore connection allowed the administration of George Bush Senior to continue its secret aid to the 'resistance', even though this flouted a law passed by Congress in 1989 banning even indirect 'lethal aid' to Pol Pot. In August 1990, a former member of the US Special Forces disclosed that he had been ordered to destroy records that showed American munitions in Thailand ending up with the Khmer Rouge. The records, he said, implicated the National Security Council, which advised the president.

Until 1989, the British role in Cambodia had remained secret. The first reports appeared in the *Sunday Telegraph*, written by the paper's diplomatic and defence correspondent, Simon O'Dwyer-Russell, who had close professional and family contacts with the highly secretive Special Air Services, the SAS. O'Dwyer-Russell disclosed that the SAS were training Cambodian guerrillas allied to Pol Pot. Oddly, for such a major story, it was buried in the paper. 'I could never understand why,' O'Dwyer-Russell told me. 'When I filed the copy, I had the clear impression I had a page one lead. I never received an adequate explanation.' Shortly afterwards, *Jane's Defence Weekly* published a long article alleging that Britain had been training Cambodian guerrillas at secret bases in Thailand for more than four years'. The instructors were from the SAS, '... all serving mili-

tary personnel, all veterans of the Falklands conflict, led by a captain’.

One result of the British training, reported *Jane’s*, was ‘the creation of a 250-man KPNLF sabotage battalion [whose] members were taught how to attack installations such as bridges, railway lines, power lines and sub-stations. Their first operations were conducted in Cambodia’s Siem Reap province in August 1986.’

Other diplomatic correspondents were able to confirm the *Jane’s* report; but little appeared in print. In November 1989, after evidence of British involvement was revealed in my film *Cambodia Year Ten*, Britain’s complicity in Cambodia’s international isolation and civil war became an urgent public issue. Some 16,000 people wrote to Prime Minister Thatcher, seeking an explanation.

Cambodia Year Ten showed an interview the Prime Minister had given shortly before Christmas 1988 to the BBC children’s programme, *Blue Peter* (which had raised large sums for Cambodia). The interview had slipped past public attention. Thatcher was asked what her government could do to help stop Pol Pot coming back to power. ‘Most people agree’, she said, ‘that Pol Pot himself could not go back, nor some of his supporters, who were very active in some of the terrible things that happened.’ She then said, ‘Some of the Khmer Rouge of course are very different. I think there are probably two parts to the Khmer Rouge: those who supported Pol Pot and then there is a much, much more reasonable group within the Khmer Rouge.’

At this, the interviewer was taken aback. ‘Do you really think so?’ she asked, to which Thatcher replied, ‘Well, that is what I am assured by people who know ... so that you will find that the more *reasonable* ones in the Khmer Rouge will have to play some part in a future government . . .’

This suggested a kind of de-nazification and raised questions, which I

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put to a Foreign Office minister, Lord Brabazon of Tara, in a filmed interview for *Cambodia Year Ten*, I asked him to explain Thatcher's statement that there were 'reasonable' Khmer Rouge. Who were they? I asked. 'Um,' he replied, 'the ones that Prince Sihanouk can work with. 'When I asked for their names, a Foreign Office minder stepped in front of the camera and said, 'Stop this *now*. This is not the way that we were led to believe the line of questioning would go.'

The minder, Ian Whitehead, had earlier taken me aside and urged me to 'go easy on him'. Now he refused to allow the interview to proceed until he had approved the questions. As for the minister, he had fled the interviewing chair and could not be persuaded to return. The head of the Foreign Office News Department later claimed that my director, David Munro, had given an 'assurance' that Whitehead's intervention would not be shown. No such assurance had been given. This was a taste of the kind of Foreign Office disinformation of which a great deal more was to come. What the episode demonstrated was that the government was keenly aware that its policy on Cambodia was indefensible.

British special military forces have been in South-East Asia since the Second World War. Britain has supplied advisers to the Royal Thai Army since the 1970s, along with the Americans, in what is known as Operation Badge Torch. In 1982, when the American, Chinese and ASEAN governments contrived the 'coalition' that enabled Pol Pot to retain Cambodia's UN seat, the United States set about training and equipping the 'non-Communist' factions in the 'resistance' army. These were the followers of Prince Sihanouk and his former minister, Son -Sann, the leader of the KPNLF, mostly irregulars and bandits. The resistance was nothing without Pol Pot's 25,000 well-trained, armed and motivated guerrillas, whose leadership was acknowledged by Prince Sihanouk's military com-

mander, his son, Norodom Ranariddh. 'The Khmer Rouge', he said, are the 'major attacking forces' whose victories were 'celebrated as our own'.

The guerrillas' tactic, like the Contra in Nicaragua, was to terrorise the countryside with ambushes and the seeding of minefields. In this way, the government in Phnom Penh would be destabilised and the Vietnamese trapped in an untenable war: their own 'Vietnam'. For the Americans, in Bangkok and Washington, the fate of Cambodia was tied to a war they had technically lost seven years earlier. 'Bleeding the Vietnamese white on the battlefields of Cambodia' was an expression popular with the US policy-making establishment. Overturning the government in Hanoi was the ultimate goal: 'winning' the war they had lost.

The British provided jungle training camps in Malaysia and in Thailand; one of them, in Phitsanulok province, is known as 'Falklands camp'. In 1991, I filmed an interview with a Cambodian guerrilla who had been trained by the British in Malaysia. Although a member of the KPRLF, he had worked under cover as a Khmer Rouge. He described a journey by train and covered truck from Thailand to an unknown destination. He was one among troops from all three Cambodian groups, including the Khmer Rouge. 'The Khmer Rouge were much more experienced and older' he said. 'We eventually arrived in a camp in Malaysia, run by the Malaysian Army, where the instructors were British and Americans in uniform. Although we slept and ate separately from the Khmer Rouge, we wore the same uniforms and trained together with the same equipment as one army. We were all taught exactly the same. The British taught us about laying mines and setting booby traps.'

The Cambodian training became an exclusively British operation after the 'Irangate' arms-for-hostages scandal broke in Washington in 1986 and threatened the political life of the Reagan administration. 'If Congress had

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found out that Americans were mixed up in clandestine training in Indo-China, let alone with Pol Pot,' a Whitehall source told Simon O'Dwyer-Russell, 'the balloon would have gone right up. It was one of those classic Thatcher-Reagan arrangements. It was put to her that the SAS should take over the Cambodia show, and she agreed.'

In high secrecy, seven-man SAS teams arrived from Hong Kong and the SAS base in Hereford. Did Western correspondents based in Bangkok know? Several did, but nothing was reported for at least four years. That British soldiers were training Cambodians to kill and maim each other was not a 'story'. Neither was Operation Badge Torch considered newsworthy, nor Pol Pot himself, who could commute from his headquarters at Trat to his beach house at Bang Saen without hindrance from curious journalists, let alone the Thai authorities. The military hospital in Bangkok where he was treated regularly for haemorrhoids was but a few minutes from the bar of the Foreign Correspondents Club. When Pol Pot slipped into the beach resort of Partaya in June 1991, his presence was not reported.

The revelation of Britain's training of Pol Pot's allies caused an uproar in Parliament; the government's embarrassment was acute. Copies of a parliamentary statement by Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd were sent to people who wrote to the prime minister or to their MP. 'We have never given', it said, 'and will never give support of any kind to the Khmer Rouge.' This was false. From 1979 to 1982, the British Government voted in the United Nations for Pol Pot's defunct regime to occupy Cambodia's seat. Moreover, Britain voted with the Khmer Rouge in the agencies of the UN, and not once did it challenge the credentials of Pol Pot's representative.

The Hurd statement caused one of those curious disturbances in the House of Commons when government MPs have to deal with postbags overflowing with letters on a subject they wish would go away. Minister after minister denied that Britain was indirectly backing the Khmer Rouge - until William Waldegrave, then a junior Foreign Office minister, made a slip and gave what the opposition interpreted as a 'tacit admission' that the SAS were indeed in Cambodia.

A group of Labour MPs now demanded the government withdraw the SAS, and threatened to identify the Secret Intelligence Service (M16) official who ran the British operation from the embassy in Bangkok. As a result, the SAS operation was hurriedly invested with greater secrecy or, as they say in Whitehall, given 'total deniability'. The official at the embassy was withdrawn and the training was 'privatised'; that is, the instructors were no longer to be serving personnel. In operational terms that made no difference whatsoever, as SAS personnel normally 'disappear' from army records whenever they go on secret missions. What was important was that the government could now deny that British servicemen were involved. 'Britain', announced Foreign Office minister Tim Sainsbury, 'does not give military aid in any form to the Cambodian factions.' 'I confirm', Margaret Thatcher wrote to Neil Kinnock, 'that there is no British Government involvement of any kind in training, equipping or co-operating with Khmer Rouge forces *or those allied to them.*' (My italics.) The deception was breathtaking.

For most of 1990 David Munro and I – together with Simon O'Dwyer-Russell of the *Sunday Telegraph* – pursued an investigation into Western support for the Khmer Rouge in Europe, the United States and South-East Asia. Our sources were in the Ministry of Defence and in 'R'

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(reserve) Squadron of the SAS. One of them, himself a former SAS trainer in Thailand, told us,

We first went to Thailand in 1984. Since then we have worked in teams of four and eight and have been attached to the Thai Army. The Yanks [Special Forces] and us worked together; we're close like brothers. We trained the Khmer Rouge in a lot of technical stuff - a lot about mines. We used mines that came originally from Royal Ordnance in Britain, which we got by way of Egypt, with markings changed. They are the latest; one type goes up in a rocket and comes down on a parachute and hangs in the bushes until someone brushes it. Then it can blow their head off, or an arm. We trained them in Mark 5 rocket launchers and all sorts of weapons. We even gave them psychological training. At first they wanted to go into the villages and just chop people up. We told them how to go easy ...

Some of us went up to 100 miles inside Cambodia with them on missions. There are about 250 of us on the border at any one time and a lot of those would change sides given half the chance. That's how pissed off we are. We hate being mixed up with Pol Pot. I tell you: we are soldiers, not child murderers. It costs half a million quid to train one of us. Putting us in the service of a lunatic like Pol Pot makes no sense. There is no insurgency in Cambodia that threatens us.

O'Dwyer-Russell interviewed two SAS trainers whose military background he knew well. They described in detail how they had taught Khmer Rouge troops mine-laying and mines technology. One man told how he had laid anti-personnel and off-route mines, 'which were detonated automatically by the sound of people moving along the track'. The

mines, although not necessarily British-made, were supplied by Britain and fired 'thousands of pellets into the air and once they bed themselves in people's bodies are incredibly difficult to find . . .'

The British Government's response was swift. In the *Independent* of 12 October, a front-page headline said, 'Hurd rejects Pilger's Cambodia allegations'. Inside, half a page was devoted to a long riposte under Hurd's name, an unusual step for a foreign secretary. 'The brutality and murder of the Pol Pot regime shocked the world,' wrote Hurd. 'The British Government took the lead in denouncing it at the UN.' This, of course, was false. The government to which Hurd belonged had taken the lead in *supporting* Pol Pot's claim on Cambodia's seat at the United Nations.

In 1991, Pol Pot was given, in effect, an assurance he would not be brought to justice by the 'international community'. This was clear in the decision by the UN Human Rights Sub-commission to reject a draft resolution on Cambodia that referred to 'the atrocities reaching the level of genocide committed in particular during the period of Khmer Rouge rule'. No more, the UN body decided, should member governments seek to 'detect, arrest, extradite or bring to trial those who have been responsible for crimes against humanity in Cambodia'. No more are governments called upon to 'prevent the return to government positions of those who were responsible for genocidal actions during the period 1975 to 1978'.

This 'deal' was part of the UN 'peace plan' which was drafted by the permanent members of the Security Council: that is, by the United States. So as not to offend Pol Pot's principal backers, the Chinese, the plan dropped all mention of 'genocide', replacing it with the euphemism: 'policies and practices of the recent past'. On this, Henry Kissinger, who played a leading part in the mass bombing of Cambodia in the early 1970s, was

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an important influence; it was Kissinger who, in July 1989, urged Bush Senior to give the Beijing regime 'most favoured nation' trading status in spite of the bloody events in Tiananmen Square only weeks earlier. Kissinger regarded the Chinese leadership as a 'moderating influence' in South-East Asia.

At the first Cambodian 'peace conference' in Paris in August 1989, American delegates demonstrated their desire to rehabilitate China and, if necessary, its Khmer Rouge client. American and other Western diplomats entertained Chinese and Khmer Rouge representatives in private; and it was in this atmosphere that the word 'genocide' was quietly declared 'impolitic'. In a briefing document bearing the handwriting of the Australian minister for foreign affairs, Gareth Evans, a 'Specific stumbling block' was 'identified' as 'whether it is appropriate or not to refer specifically to the non-return of the "genocidal" practices of the past'.

De-nazification was almost complete.

On 28 February 1991, the White House issued a statement on Cambodia which it clearly hoped would be ignored or lost by a media overwhelmed by the day's other news: 'victory' in the Gulf War. President Bush, it said, had admitted to Congress that there had been 'tactical military cooperation' between the American-supported 'nonCommunist' Cambodian forces and Pot Pot's Khmer Rouge.

On 25 June 1991, the British Government admitted that which the Foreign Secretary had vehemently denied eight months earlier and which my films had disclosed: that the SAS had been secretly training the allies of Pot Pot since 1983, in collusion with mass murderers.

The eradication of public memory was now crucial. 'Public opinion' had proven a potent force in the defence of Cambodia's human rights, as

thousands of letters to Downing Street had demonstrated. The three stages of Cambodia's holocaust were all within memory – the American bombing, the Pot Pot period and the American-led blockade against the survivors of stages one and two, and which had maintained Cambodia in a state of physical ruin, disease and trauma. That the holocaust had begun not with the Khmer Rouge but with the American bombing, and that the Khmer Rouge was now being rehabilitated – diplomatically, politically and militarily – was kept from the public. (In their pioneering work on the media, *Manufacturing Consent*, Noam Chomsky and Edward S. Herman provide an insight into this contrived 'silence').

Diminishing Western culpability is, of course, standard media practice in most global matters. However, support for those who put to death a fifth of the Cambodian population presented a challenge. In this, Pol Pot himself provided a lead. 'We must', he said in 1988, 'focus attention on the Vietnamese aggression and divert attention from our past mistakes.' Discrediting Cambodia's liberators was an essential first step. This began with propaganda likening an act of self-defence (Pol Pot's forces had attacked Vietnam for almost two years) to an 'invasion', and with unsubstantiated accusations of Vietnamese 'atrocities' and 'subtle genocide', the latter a claim by William Shawcross in Washington and discredited by journalists in Cambodia. However, the Carter and Reagan administrations took their cue. Once Pol Pot's Communists could be equated with Vietnam's Communists, regardless of the fact that one group was guilty of genocide and the other was not, in propaganda terms almost anything was possible.

Numerous initiatives by the Vietnamese to extricate themselves from Cambodia were dismissed or went unreported, and the attempts by others to broker their withdrawal were derided. When the Australian foreign

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affairs minister, Bill Hayden, tried in 1983, he was vilified in the press as a 'Communist dupe' and his efforts dismissed as 'stupid' by the US secretary of state, George Schultz.

By 1985, Vietnam's only condition for the withdrawal of its troops was that the Khmer Rouge be prevented from returning to power. This was welcomed by several South-East Asian governments, and rejected by the United States. On 13 July 1985, the Bangkok Post reported, 'A senior US official said that [Secretary of State] Schultz cautioned ASEAN to be extremely careful in formulating peace proposals for Kampuchea because Vietnam might one day accept them.' When the Vietnamese withdrew unconditionally from Cambodia in 1989, Western support for the Khmer Rouge – justified as necessary *realpolitik* as long as Vietnamese troops remained in Cambodia – actually increased.

While the Vietnamese were fulfilling their 'aggressor' function in Western eyes, the Khmer Rouge were being regarded very differently. From 1979, the American far right began to rehabilitate Pol Pot. Douglas Pike, a prominent Indo-China specialist, described Pol Pot as a 'charismatic' and 'popular' leader under whom 'most' Cambodian peasants 'did not experience much in the way of brutality'. Pike argued that the Khmer Rouge should share political power in Cambodia; this was the essence of the UN 'peace plan'.

In 1980, the CIA had produced a 'demographic report' on Cambodia, which softened Pot Pot's reputation by denying that he had carried out any executions during the last two years of his regime. In fact, in 1977-9, more than half a million people were executed. During congressional hearings in November 1989, Assistant Secretary of State Richard Solomon repeatedly refused to describe Pot Pot's crimes as genocidal – thus denying his own department's earlier unequivocal position, journalists whose

reporting reflected the US administration line received the highest commendation. Nate Thayer, an Associated Press reporter, was described as 'brilliant' by Congressman Stephen Solarz, one of the architects of US policy. Richard Solomon called the following Thayer commentary 'the most sober-minded and well-informed assessment of that issue I've seen'.

In Thayer's view the 'good news' in Cambodia struggled to be heard above the din of the 'tales of terror'. Writing in the *Washington Quarterly*, he described the one-and-a-half million people who died during the Khmer Rouge years as 'displaced'. Using the official euphemism, Thayer distinguished 'the policies and practices of the Khmer Rouge' from what he called the 'violence and misery that preceded and succeeded them'. He wrote that, while Pot Pot did implement some 'objectionable policies' these were 'largely perpetrated only on a certain section of the population ... to which journalists, scholars and other foreign observers have had access'. Thayer claimed that 'perhaps 20 per cent of Cambodians support the Khmer Rouge'. The source for this? Why, Pot Pot himself! The author made no further mention of the IS per cent Pot Pot had already 'displaced'.

In Britain, the rehabilitation was similar. In June 1990, the *Independent* published a major report by its South-East Asia correspondent, Terry McCarthy, headlined: 'Whatever the crimes committed by Pot Pot's men, they are on the road to power. The West must stop moralising and learn to deal with them.' McCarthy called on the West to 'reach out' to the Khmer Rouge. The 'genocide issue', as he put it, had been 'explored to the full'. The point was, the Khmer Rouge had changed. They were now 'respected' for their 'discipline' and 'honesty' and 'admired' for having 'qualities that most spheres of Cambodian society lack'. Moreover, they

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had ‘considerable support’ in the countryside because ‘many’ peasants ‘do not have particularly bad memories’ of Pol Pot. He offered no real evidence of this ‘support’ among a rural population of which 15 per cent had perished during the Pol Pot years. He advocated increased aid to the Khmer Rouge to ‘entice them back into the real world of human politics’. It is time, he wrote, ‘to face up to the fact that the Khmer Rouge embodies some deeply entrenched traits of the Cambodian people . . .’

These ‘traits’ became a popular theme in the revised explanation for Cambodia’s suffering. Forget the actions of Pol Pot, Washington and Beijing; the ordinary people of Cambodia had allowed these horrors to happen because that was the way they were, genetically. According to Michael Fathers in the *Independent*, ‘Cambodians are a neurotic people with an intense persecution complex . . .’

Meanwhile, reported *The Times*, Pol Pot had ordered the Khmer Rouge ‘to protect the country’s wildlife’. Cambodians were ‘not to poach birds and animals, and to refrain from killing them for any reason’ because they were ‘an important part of Cambodia’s heritage’. And the source for this nonsense? ‘Western intelligence sources’ no less, inviting us to believe that Pol Pot had ordered his most trusted general to ‘sentence’ anyone found poaching rare birds. This general, according to the same disinformation, was himself ‘hot on ecology issues and protection of endangered species’. And who might this ‘green’ Khmer Rouge general be? None other than the notorious Mok, who between 1975 and 1979 was credited with the deaths of thousands of members of the human species. In Cambodia today, he is still known as ‘The Butcher’, though Western journalists prefer to call him ‘Ta Mok’. Ta gives him the affectionate sobriquet of ‘Grandfather’.

In the same spirit, *The Times* announced that another leading hench-

man of Pol Pot had asked for 'another chance'. The redemption seeker in this case was Mok's boss, Son Sen, Pol Pot's defence minister. He explained to *The Times* that he 'did not deny the past [but] we have to think about the present and the future'. Son Sen stands accused of the murder of 30,000 Vietnamese villagers in 1977. Under his authority, Tuol Sleng extermination centre in Phnom Penh tortured and murdered some 20,000 people.

On 28 November 1991, the leader writer of the *Independent* proffered the following memorable advice to the people of Cambodia: 'The promise of a return to respectability of the Khmer Rouge is the wormwood baked into the cake. It makes it hard to swallow for those who will always be haunted by the horrors of that regime. If Cambodia is to find peace, then swallowed it must be, *and in its entirety.*' (My italics.)

Few dissenting voices were heard above this. In Britain, one of the most informed and courageous belonged to Oxfam, which in, 1979 had defied government pressure and gone to help stricken Cambodia. In 1988, Oxfam published *Punishing the Poor. The International Isolation of Kampuchea*, by Eva Mysliwicz, Oxfam's senior representative in Phnom Penh and the doyenne of voluntary aid workers in Cambodia. Marshalling her facts, most of them gained at first hand, she presented a picture of a people who had suffered more than most and were now being punished by so-called civilised governments for being on the 'wrong side'; she identified the roots of their suffering in the American invasion of Indo-China.

In 1990 an American-funded extreme right-wing lobby group, the International Freedom Foundation, presented an 'Oxfam file' to the Charity Commission in London. Its author was a young Tory activist, Marc Gordon, who had made his name a few years earlier by 'joining' the Nicaraguan Contra. His complaint of 'political bias' was supported by

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several backbench Conservative MPs. Gordon told me, 'All the incidents we cited in our submission to the inquiry were upheld.' I asked an official at the Commission if this were true and he would neither confirm nor deny it. 'A fact is a fact,' he said boldly. Oxfam was never told officially who its accusers were, or the precise nature of the evidence that would prove so damaging.

In 1991, the Charity Commission publicly censured Oxfam for having 'prosecuted with too much vigour' its campaign against Pol Pot's return. Threatened with a loss of its charity status, Oxfam soon fell quiet and withdrew from sale *Punishing the Poor*. Its boldest Cambodia 'firemen' were sidelined or left. As Yun Yat, Pol Pot's minister of information, said, in boasting that Buddhism had been virtually eradicated from Cambodia and that the monks had 'stopped believing' (most of them had been murdered): 'The problem becomes extinguished. Hence there is no problem.'

As each of the principal speakers rose from his chair in the ornate Quai d'Orsay, a silver-headed man a dozen feet away watched them carefully. His face remained unchanged; he wore a fixed, almost petrified smile. When Secretary of State James Baker declared that Cambodia should never again return to 'the policies and practices of the past', the silver head nodded. When Prince Sihanouk acknowledged the role of Western governments in the 'accords', the silver head nodded. Khieu Samphan, Pol Pot's face to the world, was being anointed a statesman, a peacemaker; and this was as much his moment as Sihanouk's; for without his agreement – that is, Pol Pot's agreement – there would be no 'accords'. A French official offered his hand, and Pol Pot's man stood, respectful, fluent in diplomatic smalltalk and effusive in his gratitude – the same gratitude he had expressed in the two letters he had written to Douglas Hurd

congratulating the British Government on its policy on Cambodia.

It was Khieu Samphan who, at one of Pol Pot's briefing sessions for his military commanders in Thailand, described his diplomatic role as 'buying time in order to give you comrades the opportunity to carry out all your [military] tasks'. In Paris, on 23 October 1991, he had the look of a man who could not believe his luck.

Some 6,000 miles away, on the Thai side of the border with Cambodia, the Khmer people of Site 8 had a different view of the world being shaped for them. Although supplied by the United Nations Border Relief Operation, this camp had long been a Khmer Rouge operations base and, since 1988, had been made into a showcase by Pol Pot. Its leadership was elected; the Red Cross and selected journalists were allowed in. Whisky was produced. Faces smiled, much as Khieu Samphan smiled. The object of this image-building exercise was clear: to persuade Western governments that the Khmer Rouge have 'changed', are now following a 'liberal capitalist line' and could be legitimised as part of a 'comprehensive settlement'.

As Khieu Samphan raised his glass in Paris, a nightmare began for the people of Site 8. The gates were closed, and foreigners told to stay away. A few days earlier the camp's leaders had been called to a 'meeting' with senior Khmer Rouge officials and were not seen again. The camp library, central to the showpiece, was closed and people were told they must no longer be 'poisoned by foreign ideas' as they prepared to return to the 'zones'. From here and in the 'closed camps' run by the Khmer Rouge along the border, the forcible, secret repatriation of hundreds, perhaps thousands of refugees had begun.

They crossed minefields at night and were herded into 'zones of free Kampuchea' in malarial jungles without UN protection, food or medicine.

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Even as the UN High Commission for Refugees announced that an orderly return of all 370,000 refugees was under way, there were as many as 100,000 refugees in Khmer Rouge border camps and more were trapped in the 'zones', to which UN inspectors had only limited access or none at all.

If the 'peace process' was proving a theatre of the macabre, Prince Sihanouk provided his own theatre of the absurd. As decided in Paris, he returned to Phnom Penh in November 1991 to head the transitional Supreme National Council, made up of representatives of his followers, the KPRLF, the Hun Sen Government and the Khmer Rouge. 'I am returning to protect my children,' he said. 'There is joie de vivre again. Nightclubs have reopened with taxi dancers. I am sure soon there will be massage parlours. It is our way of life: it is a good life.' He brought with him four chefs, supplies of pate de foie gras hurriedly acquired from Fauchon, one of Paris's most famous gourmet shops, a caravan of bodyguards and hangers-on, including two sons with dynastic ambitions.

Many Cambodians were pleased to see the 'god-king', and the elderly struggled to kiss his hand. It seemed the world had again located Cambodia on the map. The cry 'Sihanouk is back' seemed to signal a return to the days before the inferno of the American bombing and the rise of the Khmer Rouge. Sihanouk's presence even suggested to some that the Khmer Rouge had surrendered. For them the Paris 'accords' meant that the United Nations would protect them. They could be pardoned for failing to comprehend the perversity of an agreement which empowered the United Nations to protect the right of the genocidists to roam the cities and countryside free from harm and retribution, and which had appointed two of Pol Pot's henchmen to a body, the Supreme National Council, on which they could not be outvoted. This was

described by Congressman Chet Atkins, one of the few American politicians to speak up for the Cambodian people, as 'the consequence of a Faustian pact' with Pol Pot.

At one of his many press conferences, Sihanouk was asked about the Khmer Rouge. 'In their hearts', he said, 'they remain very cruel, very Maoist, very Cultural Revolution, very Robespierre, very French Revolution, very *bloody* revolution. They are monsters, it is true ... but since they decided to behave as normal human beings, we have to accept them ... naughty dogs and naughty Khmer Rouge, they need to be caressed.' At this, he laughed, and most of the foreign press laughed with him. His most important statement, however, caused hardly a ripple. 'Cambodians', he said, 'were forced by the five permanent members of the UN Security Council ... to accept the return of the Khmer Rouge.'

The following day, Khieu Samphan arrived to join the prince on the Supreme National Council. Suddenly, the gap between private pain and public fury closed. Within a few hours of landing at Pochentong Airport, Pol Pot's emissary was besieged on the top floor of his villa. Crouched in a cupboard, with blood streaming from a head wound, he listened to hundreds of people shouting, 'Kill him, kill him, kill him.' They smashed down the doors and advanced up the stairs, armed with hatchets. Many of them had lost members of their families during the years that he was in power, at Pol Pot's side. One woman called out the names of her dead children, her dead sister, her dead mother – all of them murdered by the Khmer Rouge. The mob may have been encouraged by the caretaker government of Hun Sen, but its actions were heartfelt. Khieu Samphan and Son Sen (who had escaped the attack) were bundled into an armoured personnel carrier and taken to the airport, and flown back to Bangkok.

What happened to Khieu Samphan, in the streets he helped to terrorise

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and empty, was a catharsis, and only the beginning. Now, when he and Son Sen were in Phnom Penh, their stays were brief and secret, and they were guarded behind the walls of a UN compound, the protected wards of the international community, the esteemed enemies of Vietnam, the humiliator of America.

The punishment of the Cambodian people for their 'wrong' liberation mocked the Charter of the United Nations. A prime example was the denial of all development aid by the UN Development Programme (UNDP) between the critical years of 1979 and 1992 as a direct result of pressure from the United States, China, Britain and Singapore. No single decision, better ensured that Cambodia would remain broken and impoverished, at best a service economy for foreigners.

Development aid provides the tools of reconstruction: resources, materials and expertise, with which poor countries can make a start at developing themselves and thereby strengthening their sovereignty and independence. It should provide such essentials as a clean water supply and decent sanitation. Ten years after liberation, less than 5 per cent of Cambodia's drinking water was uncontaminated. In 1988, the British company Thames Water sent a team to Phnom Penh and reported that when the level of water in the city's pipes rose and fell, it spilled into the streets and drew in drainage and raw sewage. The company's engineers recommended that an entirely new system be installed immediately; their study, submitted to the British Government, was never heard of again. In a poignant passage, they noted that 'most of Cambodia's engineers were killed or still missing'. In any other Third World country, the UNDP would have given priority to funding such a need. When I put this to a UNDP official in Phnom Penh – whose immediate concern was for the state of

his air conditioning – he said: ‘It’s embarrassing, isn’t it?’

In 1988, a senior diplomat at the British embassy in Bangkok told Oxfam’s Eva Mysliwicz: ‘Cambodia is a country of about seven million people. It’s of no real strategic value. As far as Britain is concerned, it’s expendable.’ Cambodia’s expendability, and punishment, are exemplified by its children. Whenever I returned, I visited the National Paediatric Hospital in Phnom Penh, the most modern hospital in the country; I invariably found seriously ill children lying on the floors of corridors so narrow there was barely room to step over them. A relative would hold a drip; if the child was lucky, he or she would have a straw mat. Most of them suffered from, and many would die from, common diarrhoea and other intestinal ailments carried by parasites in the water supply. In hospital after hospital children died like that, needlessly and for political reasons.

The international embargo ensured that hospital drug cupboards were depleted or bare; there were no vaccines; sterilisation equipment was broken, X-ray film unobtainable. At Battambang Hospital in the north-west I watched the death of an eleven-month-old baby, while her mother looked on. ‘Her name is Ratanak,’ she cried. Had there been a respirator and plasma, the child would have lived. A light was kept shining on her face to keep her temperature up. Then the hospital’s power went down and she died.

Today, in the north-west, most of the children still fall prey to epidemics of mosquito-carried diseases – cerebral malaria, Japanese encephalitis and dengue fever. ‘Our particular tragedy’, Dr Choun Nouthorl, director of Battambang Hospital, told me, ‘is that we had malaria beaten here before 1975. In the 1970s the World Health Organisation assisted us with training, medicines and funding. I remember the statistics for April 1975;

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we had only a handful of malaria cases; it was a triumph.’

In April 1975, when Pol Pot came to power, Battambang Hospital was abandoned, its equipment and research files destroyed and most of its staff murdered. When the Vietnamese drove out the Khmer Rouge, the World Health Organisation refused to return to Cambodia. Malaria and dengue fever did return, along with new strains which the few surviving Cambodian doctors were unable to identify because they no longer had laboratories. In 1992, two-and-a-half million people, or a quarter of the population, were believed to have malaria. The same was true of tuberculosis, which was also beaten in 1975. Most of them were children.

All this was preventable, beginning with the American bombing of Cambodia that killed an estimated 600,000 people and led to the rise of the Khmer Rouge. Had America, China and Britain kept their distance following the defeat of Pol Pot in 1978, there is little doubt that a solution could have been found in the region. In 1980, the Indonesian and Malaysian Governments – fearful of Pol Pot’s chief backer, China – acknowledged that the Vietnamese had ‘legitimate concerns’ about the return of Pol Pot and the threat from China. In 1985, Australian Foreign Affairs Minister Bill Hayden was told by Cambodian premier Hun Sen, ‘We are ready to make concessions to Prince Sihanouk and other people if they agree to join with us to eliminate Pol Pot.’ Four years later, reported *The Economist* from Paris, a Sihanouk-Hun Sen alliance against the Khmer Rouge was ‘torpedoed’ by the US State Department.

Perhaps the most alluring promise of peace came when Thailand’s elected prime minister, Chatichai Choonhaven, invited Hun Sen to Bangkok, and Thai officials secretly visited Phnom Penh with offers of development aid and trade. Defying their own generals, the reformist

Thais proposed a regional conference that would exclude the great powers. Prime Minister Chatichai's son and chief policy adviser, Kraisak Choonhavan, told me in 1990, 'We want to see the Khmer Rouge kicked out of their bases on Thai soil.' He called on 'all Western powers and China to stop arming the Cambodian guerrillas'.

This represented an extraordinary about-turn for America's most reliable client in South-East Asia. In response, Washington warned the Chatichai government that if it persisted with its new policy it would 'have to pay a price' and threatened to withdraw Thailand's trade privileges under the Generalised Special Preferences. The regional conference never took place. In March 1991, the Chatichai government was overthrown and the new military strongman in Bangkok, Suchinda Krapayoon, described Pol Pot as a 'nice guy', who should be treated 'fairly'. (It was Suchinda who turned the army on prodemocracy demonstrators in Bangkok, killing hundreds.)

At the same time, in a rare initiative, the Japanese government proposed the establishment of a special commission to investigate the crimes of the Khmer Rouge. US Assistant Secretary of State Richard Solomon rejected this out of hand, describing it as 'likely to introduce confusion in international peace efforts'.

When I drove into Phnom Penh in June 1980, the year after the end of the Pot Pot stage of the holocaust, the tinkling of bells I heard on hundreds of pony traps carrying people and food and goods was a new sound. Compared with the emptiness of the year before, Phnom Penh was a city transformed. There were two bus routes, restaurants, raucous markets, re-opened pagodas, telephones, a jazz band, a football team and currency. And there were freedoms, uncoerced labour, freedom of movement

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and freedom of worship. I had never seen so many weddings, neither had I ever received as many wedding invitations – four in one day. Marriage had become a mark of resilience, of freedom restored, and was celebrated with as much extravagance as was possible in the circumstances, with long skirts and brocade tops and hair piled high with flowers, and the men bearing gifts of precious food arranged on leaves, their necks craning from unaccustomed collars and ties. There were electricity and re-opened factories – some of them paid for by the British viewers of *Year Zero*. An estimated 900,000 children had been enrolled in rudimentary schools and 19,000 new teachers given a two-month crash course, replacing an entire professional class who were ‘missing’.

The tenuous nature of this ‘normality’ was demonstrated to me during a ‘disco night’ I attended one Saturday at the Monorom Hotel. The women and children sat on one side of the room, palais-style, the men on the other. It was a lot of fun, especially when a competing jazz band next door struck up with ‘Stompin’ at the Savoy’. But when a cassette of the much-loved Khmer singer, Sin Sisamouth, was played, people stopped dancing and walked to the windows and wept. He had been forced to dig his own grave and to sing the Khmer Rouge anthem, which is about blood and death. After that, he was beaten to death. It brought home to me that the efforts of the Cambodian people to recover from their nightmare of bombs and genocide and blockade ought to be the object of our lasting admiration: at the very least the willingness of our representatives to help them, not hurt them.

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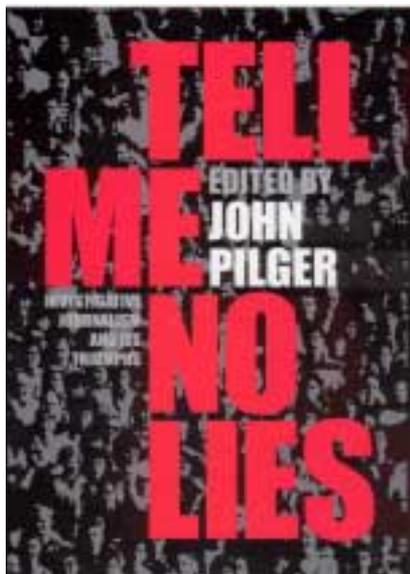
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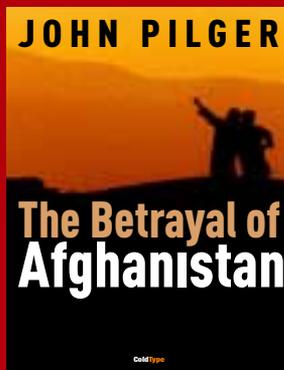
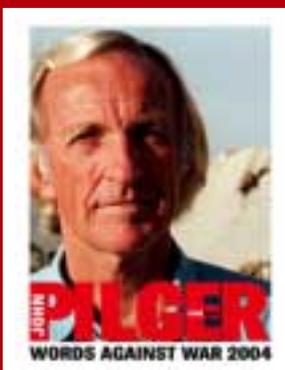
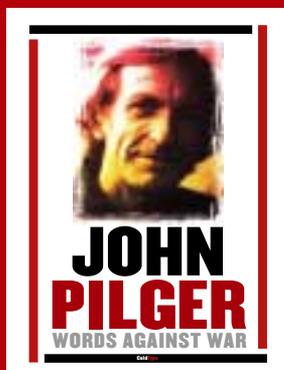
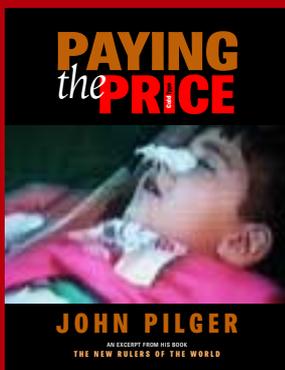
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