

Pol Pot replaced by Khieu Samphan

Meeting inside the guerrilla zones of Kampuchea, leaders of that country's resistance government decided in mid-December to replace Pol Pot with Khieu Samphan as prime minister. Pol Pot was named as commander-in-chief of military operations, but will not actually hold a post in the reshuffled government.

Ieng Sary, the deputy prime minister in charge of foreign affairs under Pol Pot will continue in his post. A number of other changes were announced in the governmental structure by Radio Democratic Kampuchea, including the suspending of the 1976 constitution.

The changes, particularly the naming of Khieu Samphan as prime minister, are designed to widen the base of cooperation between the Democratic Kampuchean guerrillas and other patriotic forces resisting the Vietnamese. Prince Sihanouk and elements of the Khmer Serei had up to this point refused to make a common front with Democratic Kampuchean forces because of criticisms of what they perceived to be the excesses of Pol Pot's administration in the past.

Samphan is a French-educated intellectual with a long history of involvement in Kampuchean politics. In the 1960s, he published a newspaper in Phnom Penh



SAMPHAN (left) with Sihanouk in 1973.

called the Observer, which argued for national independence and economic self-sufficiency for Kampuchea. He served in parliament and as trade secretary in Sihanouk's mid-1960s government.

The ascendancy of the political right in Kampuchea forced Samphan underground in 1967, but he emerged after the U.S. invasion of Kampuchea in 1970 as the vice-premier in charge of national defense in Sihanouk's united front government. After the victory over the U.S. and Lon Nol forces in 1975, Samphan became president of the state council of the new Democratic Kampuchea.

In making the change of prime ministers, the Democratic Kampuchean forces were fulfilling a pledge made earlier this year not to allow past political differences be a barrier to Kampuchean unity, and to seek the broadest possible united front against the Vietnamese invaders.