

international

Conference discusses Viet invasion

KAMPUCHEA—WHO SHOULD WE SUPPORT?

New York City—“I had a deep love for the Vietnamese and I still do. Not in a romantic sense, but because they were the cutting edge of the struggle for liberation all over the world.... The cutting edge of the struggle for everything we fought for, however, has moved from Hanoi and Saigon to the maquis [jungles] in Kampuchea. The cutting edge is now

the Kampuchean people's struggle for the right to self-determination, self-definition, independence and freedom.”

With these words, McGill University professor Sam Noumoff kicked off an all-day conference on “The New War in Cambodia” here May 19. More than 200 people participated in the conference, which featured in-depth workshops and films as well as speeches analyzing the political situation in Southeast Asia since Vietnam's all-out invasion of Kampuchea last winter. The conference was sponsored by the Kampuchea Support Committee, and drew the endorsement of a wide range of progressive people and organizations.

Noumoff's remarks focused on the dilemma of those who had actively supported the Vietnamese liberation struggle in the past and must now confront the fact that Vietnam, once the victim of U.S. aggression, is now the perpetrator of aggression against Kampuchea. Noumoff himself, a professor of East Asian Studies in Montreal, was one of the foremost figures in the Canadian people's movement against the war in Vietnam, visiting both north Vietnam and the

KAMPUCHEA support meeting heard McGill University professor Sam Noumoff. (Call photo)



liberated areas of south Vietnam several times in the early '70s.

While affirming that the anti-war movement of those days was a correct struggle, Noumoff also pointed out some of its limitations: “We failed to distinguish between the just cause of the Vietnamese and the Vietnamese themselves. If the U.S. lied about Vietnam, then the Vietnamese never lied about anything.

This was our mythology at the time. As a result, we came to see the Khmer and the Lao through the Vietnamese eyes. We believed what we were told: that the Vietnamese struggle was the apex and the Khmer and the Lao struggles were subservient and dependent on it.”

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 16)



Kampuchea conference . . .

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 10)

Noumoff exposed the "client-master relationship" which Vietnam has developed with the Soviet Union, and showed how Vietnam's invasion of Kampuchea fits into an overall drive for power by the USSR in the Southeast Asian region. Quoting Ho Chi Minh's famous statement that "Nothing is more precious than independence and freedom," Noumoff asked, "is it not a profound desecration of that struggle led by Ho not to let this principle exist in a neighboring country?"

In the conference plenary, Noumoff was followed by author George Hildebrand, a Southeast Asian scholar who recently returned from visiting the border areas between Thailand and Kampuchea where some of the recent fighting in resistance to the Vietnamese invasion has been focused.

Hildebrand explained the history of the contradictions between Vietnam and Kampuchea, showing that the problem is not one of "border war," as Vietnamese and other sources have repeatedly termed it, but rather a dispute over whether the Kampuchean people or the leaders in Hanoi will control Kampuchea. In essence, Hildebrand said, the war amounts to a struggle over the very survival of the Kampu-

chean nation as an independent entity.

Speaking of the Soviet Union's behind-the-scenes role in Vietnam's aggression, Hildebrand noted that the difference between the invasion launched by Hanoi in 1977, which failed, and the current one, which has been at least temporarily successful, was the influx of military supplies from the USSR and the international backing provided by Moscow for Vietnam.

Hildebrand warned against the type of thinking that prevailed in Europe before World War II, when British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain dismissed the Czech people's resistance to Hitler by saying they were a "far-away people about whom we know nothing." Although the Kampuchean people's struggle is far away and not very well understood in this country, Hildebrand said that "in fighting for their own independence, Cambodia is fighting for the independence of everyone, and on that basis they deserve your support."

The conference plenary was also addressed by Kampuchea's ambassador to the United Nations, Thiounn Prasith, who delivered a message of greetings on behalf of the Kampuchean people and government. "Democratic Kampuchea and the United States are separated by the larg-

est ocean in the world," he said, "but we share the same love of independence and deep feelings for freedom." Praising the past efforts of the American people in support of Kampuchea, he appealed for similar support in today's struggle. Prasith also pointedly warned that if the Vietnamese and Soviet forces are not stopped in Kampuchea, the war will spread to all of Southeast Asia.

Following the plenary, workshops were held on the history of the Vietnam-Kampuchea conflict, the human rights issue in Kampuchea, the culture of Kampuchea, the anti-war movement's experiences in regard to Kampuchea, the global response to the invasion, and the present state of the resistance. In the latter workshop, Steven Heder, a former Phnom Penh correspondent, explained that in talks with State Department and other U.S. intelligence officials, many experts had indicated that while some Kampuchean resistance claims of success against the invaders might be exaggerated, the resistance is in fact quite active and widespread. The new pro-Vietnamese authorities in Phnom Penh, he said, are unable to establish a stable administration anywhere in the country. Heder predicted that the fighting would continue for a very long time to come.