

Cambodia

SIR—Your review of "Peace with Horror" by John Barron and Anthony Paul (September 10th) claims that this is the best study so far of the Cambodian revolution. But Messrs Barron's and Paul's scholarship collapses under the barest scrutiny.

They write that among those evacuated from Phnom Penh "virtually everybody saw the consequences of summary executions in the form of corpses of men, women and children rapidly bloating and rotting in the sun", citing, among others, J.-J. Cazaux, who wrote, in fact, that "not a single corpse was seen along our evacuation route" and that early reports of massacres proved fallacious (the *Washington Post*, May 9, 1975).

They also state that the population of Phnom Penh was forced at gunpoint to walk into the countryside in tropical temperatures and monsoon rains without organised provision of food, water, shelter or medical care. However, this charge is not supported by the report of eye-witnesses in Phnom Penh and the immediate vicinity: Jerome and Jocelyne Steinbach, Chou Meng and Shane Tarr, Richard Boyle and Jacques Engelmann, among others, all agree that food was provided for everyone and that they did not witness any cruelties (see "Phnom Penh Libérée", Paris, 1976, pp 40-44; "News from Kampuchea", Waverley, June, 1977; *Colorado Daily*, July 7, 1975; and Engelmann quoted in Dreyfuss, ". . . et Saigon tomba", Paris, 1975, p 351).

Why, then, should we lend any credence to their claim that 1.2m people have died since the fall of Cambodia as a direct result of the excesses of the Angka Loeu? In fact, their calculations appear to be totally confused. At a recent congressional hearing on Cambodia, Mr Barron stated that he estimated that 1.2m of an estimated population of 7.9m have been executed since the revolutionary government took control (*The Australian*, May 5, 1977). Mr Barron is therefore saying that the population is now 6.7m. Yet, in the *Reader's Digest* of February, 1977, he particularly emphasised a statement supposedly made by the Cambodian president, Khieu Samphan, in August, 1976, that the population of Cambodia was only 5m (*The Economist*, February 26, 1977). Thus, for Mr Barron, the population is 5m in February, 1977, but has reached the figure of 6.7m at the hearings in May, 1977.

There is no doubt that many people have died in Cambodia since April, 1975. This is admitted by the foreign minister, Ieng Sary, in an interview with the West German magazine *Der Spiegel* (May 8, 1977) in which he says that 2,000 to 3,000 people died during the evacuation and a few thousands in the rice fields. But the victims should be counted in thousands rather than in hundreds of thousands.

Odense, Denmark

TORBEN RETBØLL

Cambodia

SIR—In a letter to *The Economist* (October 15th) Mr Torben Retbøll impugns the book "Peace with Horror" written by Mr Anthony Paul and me, and endeavours to efface the recent tragic history of Cambodia. His letter exemplifies the disingenuousness to which the world's few remaining apologists for the Cambodian communists now are compelled to resort.

No one disputes that the communists, beginning April 17, 1975, drove the entire urban population of Cambodia into the countryside. "Peace with Horror" identifies and details testimony of scores of Cambodian refugees who stated that both during and after this great exodus, they saw massacres or numerous summary executions or the resultant corpses. We possessed but were not at liberty to elaborate upon even harder data verifying the executions and massacres. The nature of these data may be inferred from a column by Washington Star diplomatic correspondent Mr Henry S. Bradsher, who on September 29, 1977, wrote: "... according to numerous refugee accounts, hundreds of thousands of persons died of starvation and disease. . . Intercepted radio messages and other sources here confirmed the slaughter". Today, the evidence that massacres and innumerable executions not only occurred but continue in Cambodia proliferates (as for example in the testimony of American state department representatives before the House Subcommittee on International Organisations, on July 26, 1977).

To create the impression that we erred in reporting executions and massacres, Mr Retbøll cites one lone source, a dispatch by French journalist Mr Jean-Jacques Cazaux, which he misrepresents and misquotes. He claims Mr Cazaux wrote that "not a single corpse was seen along our evacuation route" and that early reports of massacres proved false.

Along with hundreds of other foreigners who were in Phnom Penh when the capital fell, Mr Cazaux was interned in the French embassy compound. Locked in the compound, the foreigners could see the population, including non-ambulatory hospital patients, being ousted from the city. They could see little more. Their opportunities to observe also were limited when they were transported under guard by trucks to Thailand along a route chosen by the communists. However, Mr Cazaux did see and vividly report some of the physical desolation and destruction visited upon the emptied cities. We cited his dispatch as one of many sources of information about this destruction. We did not cite his story, as Mr Retbøll implies, as evidence of the killings.

Mr Cazaux did not write that reports of massacres proved fallacious. Rather, he wrote that the interned foreigners heard rumours of mass atrocities, "But latecomers to the embassy said that nothing of the kind had taken place". The fact that a few foreigners, who were not part of the mass exodus, witnessed no atrocities scarcely proves that atrocities were not committed.

In interviews spanning 13 months, we questioned over 180 Cambodian refugees, from different social status, different cities and of varying ages, who actually took part in the forced exodus. Regarding one issue, their testimony was unanimous: with a few desultory exceptions, the communists made no provision to provide the exiles with food, water, medical care or shelter during the march. The personal accounts of the consequent privation, anguish, disease and death compose one of the more terrible episodes of contemporary history.

Finally, Mr Retbøll completely mis-states my testimony before a congressional subcommittee. The distorted version of my testimony which he presents is at variance with what Mr Tony Paul and I wrote. Therefore, he accuses me of contradicting

myself and being "confused". I did not testify that 1.2m Cambodians have been "executed", nor did I place the population of Cambodia at 7.9m, as Mr Retbøll says. On the contrary, I stated that I knew of no responsible authority who has calculated the population of modern Cambodia as ever having been much more than 7m. I did tell the subcommittee that Tony Paul and I estimate 1.2m Cambodians "perished" between April 17, 1975, and January 1, 1977. But I emphasised that most deaths were caused by disease, hunger and privation which are the direct and inevitable consequence of the evacuation of the cities and the merciless regimen of life imposed by the communists. As we stressed in "Peace with Horror", no one can know precisely how many people have died. We attempted to arrive at an estimate through scholarly analysis following a methodology clearly outlined for all to judge. Considering the evidence seeping out of Cambodia since completion of our book, we both now fear that the toll is higher than the 1.2m we estimated.

Annandale, Virginia

JOHN BARRON