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Sihanouk who took refuge in Beijing since he was deposed by the Cambodian National Assembly on March 18, 1970, gave a reception to a group of French congressmen led by Mr. Alain Peyrefitte, minister of several French governments. The discussion was then reported to Maurice Schumann, French Minister for Foreign Affairs and French President Pompidou.

The talk with Prince Sihanouk took place during the visit to China of a French parliamentary delegation; probably the one of July-August 1971; and was published in the French magazine "Paris Match", No. 1353, dated May 3rd, 1975.

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"On September 1st, 1966, in Phnom Penh, the capital of a free and peaceful Cambodia, General de Gaulle publicly condemned (he did it confidentially since 1960 without anybody in the world ever heard about it) the US military intervention in Vietnam. He countered this US policy, which he claimed to be doomed with catastrophe, with the exemplary policy of neutrality maintained since 1954 by the young head of state who welcomed him: Prince Norodom Sihanouk.

The US underestimated Norodom Sihanouk's personality. After chasing him out, he was thrown into the hands of the Khmer Rouge who, up to then, fought against him. When things turn sour, the US tried to separate Norodom Sihanouk from the Khmer Rouge. It was a lost cause! The US have hooked him up with the Khmer Rouge "in life as well as in death (i.e. for eternity)", as he said it in his own words. I met the prince in Beijing where he took refuge after the coup d'état perpetrated against him while he was in Moscow.

Since 1971, the Chinese had magnificently installed him in the former French Embassy. He turned this sumptuous palace into the center of Cambodian resistance. He warmly received me, accompanied by Maurice Papon and Albert Marcenet. During two hours, he tirelessly showed us, with his expressive mimics, his outburst of voice, his picturesque verbal inventions, that nothing would cut into his determination.

"I am General de Gaulle," he declared to me, "the General de Gaulle in London". The contrast between this chubby small man and the memory of the thin giant brought smiles to our faces.

"But of course," he explained to us sharply, "like him, I have only one goal: to free my country, only one mean: to make war, to coordinate the resistance, to revive the courage by talking to the heart of my people. At the beginning, de Gaulle also was alone, nobody believed in him. Little by little, they joined him from all over the places. The Chinese welcome me just like the British welcomed him; I am their guest, I am not their man, no more than he was the host of the British."

- The Khmer Rouge are communists, I noted.
- That's true; but they have to go through me because I embody the legitimacy. They need me, and I know that Cambodia needs them. I will tell the Cambodian people and they will believe me.
- Are you becoming communist, Your Highness?
- No, I don't think so, in our Southeast Asia, communism has its good sides. You can see what is happening in China. Furthermore, there is no choice. After what the Americans did, I have only one choice, that one.
- Fidel Castro in Havana, told me more or less the same thing: "I was never a Marxist-Leninist, but the US embargo took away from me all other possibilities except this one."

Norodom Sihanouk invited us to pick up the ivory chopsticks to eat fried shrimps. Suddenly pensive, he started again: "After the victory, I will stay only maybe six months. It is not important. I will accomplish my duty. I will have led the resistance. I will have liberated my homeland. I will be able to leave. De Gaulle did not remain either. If the Khmer Rouge think they no longer need me when the enemy will be chased out, and the country pacified, I will not hold on. I will then ask France to welcome me in the Midi for the rest of my days."

He took his breath for a short while before continuing with rage, and this time, his rage had a self-criticism tone to it: "There was too much corruption. There has always been, but with the Americans, now, the corruption has triumphed, it has spread all over. They symbolize the corruption. Everybody think only about money. From the top to the bottom, it is embezzlement of public funds, breach of trust, corruption, servitude. They sell their souls for dollars. But every cloud has a silver lining. We were already corrupt and we did not know it. Now, we know and we find the strength to cleanse ourselves. The Americans create the hate of corruption because everything they symbolized is hated."

His chopsticks quickly dropped in my plate some pieces of roast duck: "Phnom Penh," he continued, "wallowed itself up in collaboration. It is an infected wound on the innocent face of Cambodia. **Queen-Mother who abandoned**

me when I had my back turned, I will humiliate her. The middle-class of Phnom Penh who had betrayed their leader and their homeland, I will humiliate them; to punish them, I will not enter the capital with the troop, I will have them chased out first. I do not want to re-establish there after the Liberation. Instead, I will have a wooden hut built for me in the forest of Angkor, and it will be there that people will come to visit me. Phnom Penh is Vichy. Lon Nol is Laval. I will have him shot, of course. But, since he is Khmer, and that all Khmer people are my children, I will have him shot with tenderness."

We have to recognize that the prophecy is realized in large part. Lon Nol escaped the firing squad but not his brother, it was said: Phnom Penh will be indeed humiliated, emptied of its inhabitants. And Sihanouk will put his legitimacy and his asset to the service of communism, maybe without too much illusions on the duration and the nature of his role.

He told me, with his flair for paradox which only serves to dress up his inner thoughts: "I do not hold a grudge against the Americans. They would have been the agents of the Providence. They will allow Cambodia to redeem itself. But I hold a grudge against France. Do you recall: de Gaulle held a grudge against the Americans for maintaining an embassy in Vichy? How can you maintain an embassy with the Phnom Penh puppets, and none with me?" I noted to the prince that we do not recognize regimes, but countries. The presence of an embassy in Phnom Penh simply meant that it is taking care on the spot of our citizens and our interests. "It's the same," he insisted, "I will see if France will have a friendly gesture towards me."

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LEVEMENT

«LE COMMUNISME ME DIT SIHANOUK, JE N'AI PAS LE CHOIX...»

Alain Peyrefitte examine la situation du Cambodge après l'effondrement de Lon Nol et raconte l'entretien qu'il a eu à Pékin avec Sihanouk, en exil là-bas comme de Gaulle à Londres.

Le 1^{er} septembre 1966, à Phnom Penh, capitale d'un Cambodge libre et en paix, le général de Gaulle condamnait publiquement après l'hoir fait confidentiellement depuis 1960 sans être de suite du monde entendu l'intervention militaire américaine au Vietnam. A cette politique, qu'il était venue à la catastrophe, il opposait l'exemplaire politique de neutralité maintenue depuis 1954 par le jeune chef d'Etat qui l'accueillait : le prince Norodom Sihanouk.

Aujourd'hui, la catastrophe annoncée est bien là. Elle a fondé sur le Sud-Vietnam. Elle englobe le Cambodge.

Les Américains avaient soutenu le personnage de Norodom Sihanouk. Après l'avoir chassé, et ainsi jeté dans les bras des Khmers rouges qui, jusqu'ici, le combattant, ils ont, les affaires tournant mal, cherché à le séparer d'eux. Peine perdue ! Ils avaient dit aux Khmers rouges « à la vie et à la mort », selon son expression.

J'ai rencontré le prince à Pékin, où il était réfugié après le coup d'Etat perpétré contre lui pendant qu'il était à Moscou. Les Chinois l'avaient magnifiquement installé dès 1971 dans l'ancien ambassade de France. Il avait fait de ce superbe palais le centre de la résistance cambodgienne. Il me reçut chaleureusement, en compagnie de Manette Pagos et d'Albert Marrou. Pendant deux heures, inlassablement, il nous montra, avec ses lunettes égarées, ses éclats de voix, ses pitoyables inventions verbales, que rien n'altérait sa détermination.

... mais n'ont accueilli comme les Anglais l'avaient accueilli ; je suis leur bête ; je ne suis pas une bonne, pas plus qu'il n'était celui des Anglais.

Les Khmers rouges sont commodes, ils je rassurent. C'est vrai ; mais ils sont obligés de passer par moi, parce que j'invoque la République. Ils ont besoin de moi et je sais que le Cambodge a besoin d'eux. Je le dis au peuple cambodgien, et il me croit.

— Que vous devint communiste, Monsieur ?

— Non, mais je pense que, dans notre Sud-Est asiatique, le communisme a du bon. Vous voyez bien ce qui se passe en Chine. Vous voyez bien que le communisme, ici, ça marche ! Pourquoi ça ne marcherait pas au Cambodge ? D'ailleurs, il n'y a pas le choix. Après ce qu'on fait les Américains, la seule possibilité, celle-là.

Fidel Castro, à La Havane, disait une fois à peu près le même langage : « Je n'avais jamais été marxiste-léniniste, mais le kidnapping des Américains m'a enlevé toute autre possibilité que celle-là. »

Norodom Sihanouk nous invitait à prendre nos bagages et d'aller pour assister des brigades de combattants. Il respect, soudain soulagé : « Après la victoire, je ne resterais peut-être que six mois. Ça n'a pas d'importance. J'aurai fait mon devoir. J'aurai dirigé la résistance. J'aurai libéré ma patrie. Je pourrai alors aller. De Gaulle non plus n'était pas resté. Si les Khmers rouges obtiennent pouvoir, le passer de moi au Sud-Vietnam.

... les Khmers sont mes enfants, je le fustigerai avec tendresse. »

La prophétie, étonnante, s'est réalisée en grande partie. Lon Nol a échappé au peloton d'exécution, mais son frère, dit-on, Phnom Penh sera lui et bien humiliée, vidée de ses habitants. Et Sihanouk va mettre au régime et ses crédits au service du communisme, peut-être sans illusions exarçives sur la durée et la nature de son rôle.

Il n'avait prévu, avec son goût du paradoxe qui ne faisait qu'habiller ses pensées profondes : « Je n'en veux même pas aux Américains. Ils avaient été les agents de la Providence. Ils auront permis au Cambodge de se régénérer. Mais j'en veux à la France. Notre pays... »



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