

May 11, 2014

Guy Rundle Writes: Silence of the Gerard. Some weeks ago we noted the enthusiasm with which Gerard Henderson was pursuing the shade of the late Tom Uren, who wrote a couple of positive things about the Cambodian revolution, at a time when reports on the horrors of the Khmer Rouge rule were few, and frequently disbelieved. The death of Malcolm Fraser had reminded many of the KR's other friends -- the Reagan, Thatcher and Fraser governments who had supported the KR in jungle exile, and at the UN, through the '80s, materially adding to Cambodian suffering by a decade. We expected a stinging response, but came there none. And thereby hangs a tale. For though Henderson was a staffer in the Fraser government, he was not there for long after the decision to recognise the KR as the Cambodian government-in-exile. Indeed, some have claimed for him that his resignation was in part prompted by the decision. Noble, if true, so why the silence? Because, of course, the leading surviving figure of that government is John Howard, and his metaphorical donning of the black pajamas is a very inconvenient fact. Alas for that reason Henderson's fatwa against Tom Uren had to be abandoned. We like this new silence thing, and expect it will continue when the Iraq War anniversary comes around -- *Guy Rundle*

May 13, 2014

Gerard Henderson writes: Re. *Where's Gerard?* (11 May). I note that Guy Rundle, my favourite Marxist comedian, claims that my (alleged) "fatwa against Tom Uren had to be abandoned". Rundle is referring to the documentation in my *Media Watch Dog* blog of Tom Uren's one-time support for Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge.

Rundle claims that "Uren wrote a couple of positive things about the Cambodian revolution, at a time when reports on the horrors of the Khmer Rouge rule were few, and frequently disbelieved". This is disingenuous. On Australia Day 1978, Tom Uren, along with 25 left-wing comrades (including Jim Cairns), sent a telegram addressed to "Prime Minister Pol Pot of Kampuchea" stating that he "supported the national liberation struggles of both Vietnam and Kampuchea". This was standard left-wing fare at the time. In September 1978 Gough Whitlam said that he did not believe the "stories that appear in the newspapers about the treatment of people in Cambodia". Yet by the end of 1977 the Cambodian killing fields were literally littered with corpses and Pol Pot was widely recognised as a mass murderer.

The fact is that the likes of Uren and Cairns – along with the collective at *Arena* magazine (which Rundle later came to edit) – supported Pol Pot's victory in 1975 and continued to support his regime up to the time when Vietnam invaded Cambodia in December 1978. As Milton Osborne documented in a recent speech to The Sydney Institute, the Khmer Rouge atrocities were known the West as early as July 1975. Uren, Cairns and Whitlam – among others – were in denial. Rundle is still in denial today.

It is true that, following Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia, the ASEAN nations – along with the governments in Washington DC, London and Canberra – continued to recognise the old regime. Malcolm Fraser's government was influenced in this matter by the strong stance taken by Lee Kuan Yew in Singapore, who was nervous about Vietnam's military intentions in the region.

For personal reasons, I ceased working for Kevin Newman (a junior minister in the Fraser government) in December 1979. When John Howard and I visited the Cambodian refugee camps on the Thai-Cambodian border in 1985, we took a conscious decision not to visit any of the camps controlled by the Khmer Rouge and went instead to those run by the non-communist opposition to the government in Phnom Penh – the Khmer People's National Liberation Front. These camps were supported financially by, among other nations, the United States.

In recent years, I have met in Australia with representatives of Hun Sen's government, which was effectively installed by Vietnam in early 1979. As Rundle should know, Hun Sen was once a Khmer Rouge commander before he split with the Pol Pot faction.

There were not easy choices for the West when the communist dictatorship in Vietnam conquered the communist dictatorship in Cambodia. All I know is that – unlike Tom Uren, Jim Cairns and the *Arena* collective – I never barracked for the Khmer Rouge. Nor did Malcolm Fraser or John Howard.

Sure in the knowledge that my favourite Marxist comedian is an avid *Media Watch Dog* reader, I will resume my so-called "fatwa" against the late Tom Uren next Friday.

Guy Rundle will reply tomorrow.

May 14, 2015

Guy Rundle writes: Re. "On Rundle and fatwas" (yesterday). Crime novels often begin with a petty misdemeanour that leads to a great unravelling. Readers will thus understand my joy at the response of Gerard Henderson to my update on Khmer Rouge-gate. Readers with no life will recall that Gerard, in his batshit mad *Media Watch Dog*, had been going the tonk on the late Tom Uren for saying some silly things -- as did many people at the time in praise of the Khmer Rouge -- who had swept to power in 1975 after five years of turmoil, following the US invasion of that neutral country.

Your correspondent pointed out that, whatever Tom Uren may have said, what matters was what was done – and that is that from 1979-80 onwards, the Reagan, Thatcher and Fraser governments had supported the Khmer Rouge following the invasion of Cambodia/Kampuchea by the Vietnamese. Thereby hangs a tale. The Vietnamese had invaded because of repeated Khmer Rouge incursions along their border. But in invading, it had also become clear to them that the Cambodian revolution had gone very wrong and that it had fused a Maoist idea of autonomy with a Khmer chauvinism (redolent of North Korea's position today). It was a murderous freak show, and Vietnam occupied, and became the only force post-Holocaust to stop a genocide -- auto-genocide in this case -- in its tracks.

For this, the Vietnamese were punished with a decade of sanctions by the West, who, in 1980, swung round to support the Khmer Rouge, now in jungle exile. Why? Because the Vietnamese were Soviet-aligned, and the Khmer Rouge Chinese aligned,

and the Chinese were our allies. The Khmer Rouge, in their jungle demesne, applied the same rules of forced labour and torture they had in the country as a whole for years, into the late 1980s, killing thousands. They could have been wound up years before they were. Why weren't they? Because the Reagan, Thatcher, Fraser governments gave the active support, UN recognition, funds, and as we now know, UK SAS training for Khmer Rouge forces in 1986. All parties knew that Pol Pot was alive and running the show and along with Chinese wishes, would have been willing to see him leader of Cambodia once more.

This was particularly nihilistic, because, by the mid-80s, it was clear that Soviet Communist states were normalising, while post-Maoist China was combining hypercapitalism with old-style Maoist punitiveness. Life in Moscow, Prague or Havana was a lot better than in the late hysteria rocking China, but who cares? They were our allies, and so we would support them come what may.

That's the context of Gerard's mewling puking comment on the matter. Some people latched on to the Khmer Rouge victory as the latest revolution against the world system. Some of them, like the late Christopher Pearson, ended up on the right. They would say that their move was related to discovering what the nature of the Khmer Rouge was. Bollocks. It was discovering that the left wasn't going to win, and requesting a transfer that pushed them rightwards. But it's all irrelevant, because what mattered was that Western governments, including the Fraser-Howard government, kept the Khmer Rouge alive for a decade beyond its use-by date, for its own ends.

Gerard doesn't deny this in his letter. He simply ignores it, ranking some expression of support by Uren and others as more significant than the material support Fraser/Howard, Reagan and Thatcher gave the Khmer Rouge. It fools no-one with a clear eye. That's why his defence is so pathetic. "Oh we didn't go to the actual Khmer Rouge-run camps, we went to the other ones." "I met Hun Sen." Hun Sen, the Keith Windschuttle of Cambodia, Khmer Rouge commander till it all started going to shit, jumped to the other side. Big deal. By the mid-80s, when Gerard and John Howard were touring refugee camps, and "avoiding the KR-run ones", Margaret Thatcher had authorised SAS special forces to train Khmer Rouge units in the dark arts of population control. The history of the right and the Khmer Rouge is a shameful one, and Henderson should stop pretending that people like Fraser and Howard didn't know what was going on.

Do what you like about Tom Uren, Gerard. Whatever he may have said, he never shipped the Khmer Rouge arms, which is more than can be said for the people who employed you for a number of years. A shameful record for all concerned. A crime indeed.