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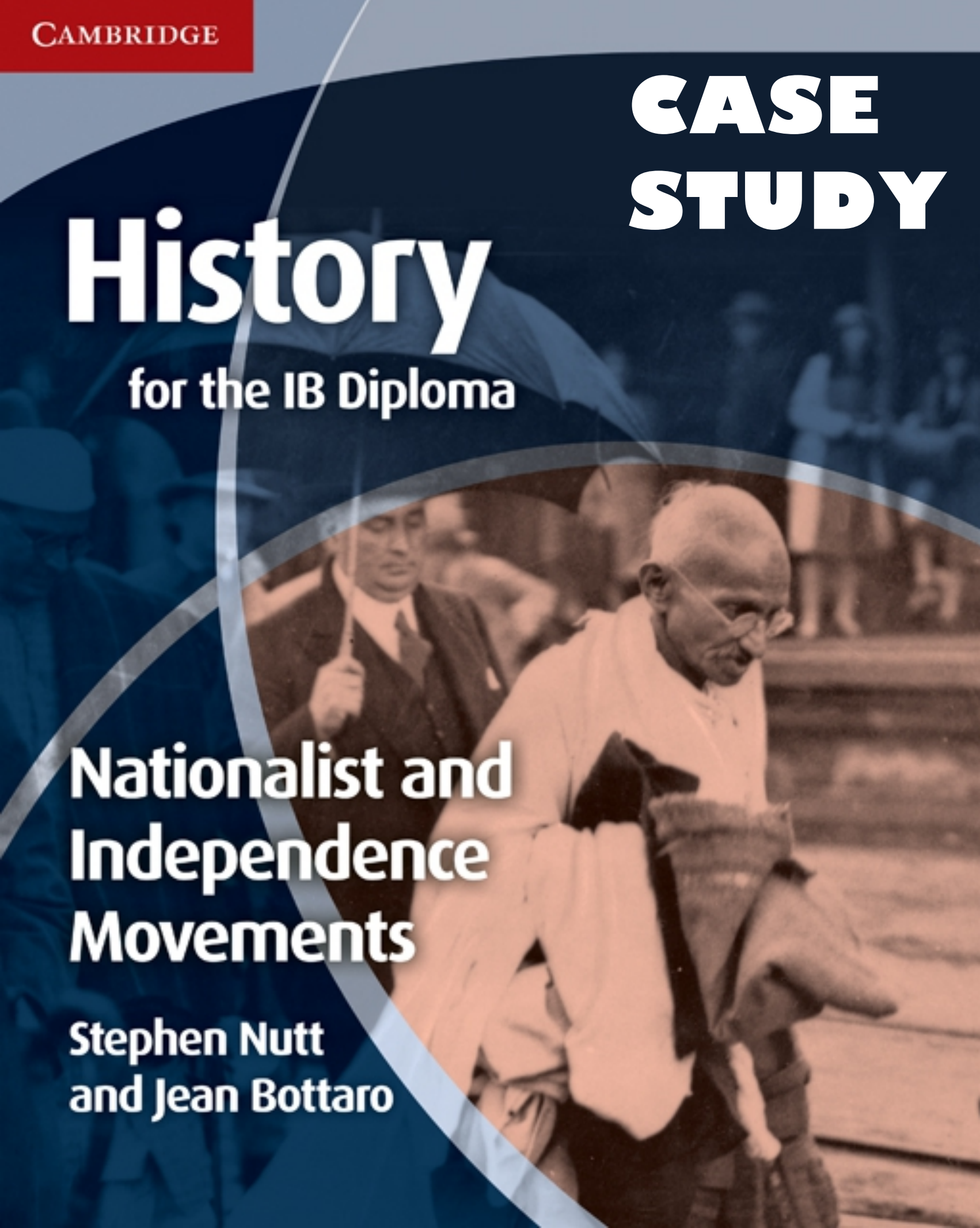

## Nationalist and Independence Movements

Stephen Nutt
and Jean Bottaro

# History

## for the IB Diploma

# Cambodia and Laos

## Additional case study for Nationalist and Independence Movements


## Author and series editor: Allan Todd


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# Cambodia and Laos

## Introduction

Cambodia and Laos were two of five French possessions in Indochina. The other three were Cochinchina, Annam and Tonkin, which later became known as Vietnam. In 1893, all these regions became part of the Indochina Union, whose overall administration lay in the hands of a French governor-general based in Saigon.

At this time, the populations of Cambodia and Laos were ethnically mixed. In Cambodia, the majority were Khmers, but there were also large numbers of Vietnamese and Chinese, especially in the cities and towns. In Laos, the Lao people comprised only half the population. The rest were either from several small ethnic groups or, as in Cambodia, were Vietnamese and Chinese.

**Siam** This was the name by which Thailand was known in the 19th and early 20th centuries. The kingdom of Siam became Thailand in 1939.

The early histories of Cambodia and Laos, before they became French protectorates, led to nationalist concerns relating to the neighbouring states of **Siam** and Vietnam. Yet significant nationalist movements were slower to develop in Cambodia and Laos than in Vietnam.

*A map of the situation in Indochina, 1954–75, showing some of the regions of Cambodia and Laos; the inset map shows the countries as they are today*

# 1 The origins and rise of nationalist and independence movements in Cambodia and Laos, 1900–45

## Key questions

- How did Cambodia and Laos develop as French colonies before 1940?
- What factors influenced the rise of nationalist and independence movements from 1940 to 1945?

## Overview

- The defeat of Russia in the Russo–Japanese War (1904–05), and then Sun Yat-Sen's nationalist victory in China in 1911, began to stir nationalist sentiments in parts of Indochina.
- Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, there were signs of limited nationalism in both Cambodia and Laos, but French control seemed secure.
- The Second World War destroyed the foundations of French Indochina. In September 1940, the Pétainists (see page 14) signed an agreement with the Japanese, entrusting to them the defence of French Indochina.
- In collaboration with the Japanese, Thailand (formerly Siam) laid claim to territory in Cambodia and Laos, which it had been forced to cede to France in the early 20th century. The French formally accepted this in May 1941.
- While some nationalists in Cambodia and Laos took to the hills to fight the Japanese, others regarded the Japanese as liberators rather than invaders.
- Underground resistance – which eventually became increasingly anti-Japanese as well as anti-French – was much less active in Cambodia and Laos than it was in Vietnam.
- On 9 March 1945, after the liberation of France, the Japanese authorities took direct control and pressured Cambodia and Laos into declaring independence from France.
- Although Japan's occupation of Indochina did not last long (the Japanese were defeated in August 1945), it proved a turning point in the rise of nationalism in the region.
- Charles de Gaulle's provisional government made it clear that France had no intention of granting independence. Instead, the French attempted to re-establish colonial rule over all parts of Indochina.

## Timeline

**1863** **Aug** France gains protectorate of Cambodia

**1893** **Oct** Franco–Siamese Treaty cedes Lao territories to France

**1896** treaty with Britain confirms French control of Laos

**1901** start of 'Holy Man's Revolt', Laos

**1904** Sisowath becomes king of Cambodia; treaty with Siam cedes Cambodian territories to France

**1907** Franco–Siamese treaty establishes borders of French Laos

**1914** Xam Neua revolt, Laos

**1916** '1916 Affair', Cambodia

**1918** start of 'Madman's Revolt', Laos

**1923** Consultative Assembly set up, Laos

**1925** **Apr** Bardez Affair, Cambodia

**1936** *Nagara Vatta* begins publication, Cambodia

**1939** **Sep** Second World War begins

**1940** **Jun** Germany defeats France in Europe; Franco–Thai War begins

**1941** **Jan** MNR formed, Laos; Norodom Sihanouk crowned king of Cambodia

**Dec** Japan enters Second World War and occupies Indochina

**1942** **Jul** Monks' Demonstration, Cambodia

**1945** **Mar** Japanese *coup de force*; Cambodia declares independence

**Apr** Laos declares independence

**Aug** Second World War ends; Japanese defeat in Indochina

**Sep** France regains control in Indochina; Phetxarat declares Lao independence

**Oct** Lao Issara provisional government formed

# How did Cambodia and Laos develop as French colonies before 1940?

## Establishment of French control before 1900

### Cambodia

**protectorate** This is a state that is 'protected' – and in practice controlled – by another, stronger, state. It is a form of rule commonly associated with imperialism.

Before French rule in the later 19th century, Cambodia was under the joint control of Vietnam and Siam. A series of unsuccessful uprisings eventually led the Cambodian king to seek French protection, and Cambodia became a French **protectorate** in 1863.

Siamese influence in Cambodia began to decrease and, by the terms of a treaty in 1867, Siam recognised the French protectorate in return for the Cambodian provinces of Battambang and Siem Reap. Between 1885 and 1886, there was a nationwide rebellion against growing French influence in Cambodia. The uprising was suppressed, but with difficulty. In 1893, Cambodia became part of the French Indochina Union.

### Laos

French involvement in Laos in the 19th century stemmed from French interests in Vietnam. In 1883 and 1884, following unrest in parts of Vietnam, the French established a protectorate over central and northern Vietnam and promised to protect all Vietnamese territories, including parts of Laos. As in Cambodia, both Vietnam and Siam had exercised influence over Laos and the French believed they had 'rescued' Laos from Siam, with which France was in conflict. However, France did not regard Laos as a viable political entity. French treaties with Siam (1893) and Britain (1896) resulted in an extension of French territory and influence in Laos. In return, France acknowledged Siam's neutrality and independence.

## French rule in Cambodia before 1940

Until the early 1940s, no leading Cambodians questioned the effectiveness of either Cambodia's traditional institutions or French rule, which steadily increased from 1893.

**SOURCE A**

In contrast to Vietnam … there was no concerted nationwide opposition to colonial rule in British Malaya or the French protectorates of Kampuchea [Cambodia] and Laos. In all three areas, the colonial authorities had preserved the traditional monarchy … Except for a few members of the royal family and the nobility who went abroad, there was no opportunity for higher education. There were no institutions of higher learning in any of the three countries until well after World War II, and there was little national consciousness or awareness of individual rights.

*SarDesai, D. R. 1997. South East Asia: Past and Present. Boulder, USA. Westview Press. p. 186.*

## Sisowath's rule

In 1897, the French promised that on the death of the reigning Cambodian king, Norodom, the throne would pass to his half-brother Sisowath. In 1904, when Norodom died, the French honoured this promise. This marked a turning point in French power in Cambodia, as the French chose the next three kings. Until 1953, with the exception of a few months in the summer of 1945 (see pages 16–17), Cambodian officials played a limited and subordinate role in the administration of their own country. However, in the ***sruk***, older systems of patronage, dependence and corruption continued much as before.

***sruk*** These were the administrative 'districts' into which Cambodia had been divided since the 15th century.

There were frequent famines and epidemics, and the contrast between life in the Cambodian capital, Phnom Penh, and the countryside sharpened in the early 1900s. Discontent grew slowly among the peasants who, through their labour and rice, paid for improvements in the city and for the high salaries of French officials. This fuelled the nationalist resentment felt by anti-French guerrillas in the early 1950s and, still later, the communist forces.

At first, King Sisowath performed a mainly ceremonial role. For example, in 1907 the French sent him on a state visit to France while they negotiated an agreement with Siam for the return of the provinces of Battambang and Siem Reap to Cambodia. By the terms of the resulting treaty, these areas were actually ceded to French control.

In the early years of the 20th century, French officials in Cambodia had little contact with the people they were supposed to administer. In addition, many of the lower-level officials – with whom ordinary Cambodians had most contact – were Vietnamese, who had been appointed because they could prepare reports in French. This had important consequences for the development of Cambodian nationalism, especially after the Second World War.



**SOURCE B**

But until the late 1940s, I suspect, few Cambodians would have considered … the French presence as a whole, as having a deleterious effect on their lives or on their durable institutions of subsistence farming, family life, Buddhism, and kingship. The political stability that characterized most of the colonial era can be traced in part to French patronage of the king and the king's patronage of the ***sangha***, which tended to keep these two institutions aligned (politically at least) with French objectives – partly because kings, monks, and officials had no tradition of innovative behavior and partly because heresy and rebellion, the popular methods of questioning their authority, had been effectively smothered by the French since the 1880s.

*Chandler, D. 2008.* A History of Cambodia. *Boulder, USA. Westview Press. p. 168.*

***sangha*** The official leadership, or assembly of leaders, of the Buddhist monastic order.

## Nationalism and French rule

Although there was not always unanimous acceptance of foreign rule in Cambodia (whether European or by other Asian states), neither was there a concerted movement against colonial rule until the rise of nationalism in the 20th century.

**Fact**
Like the Russo–Japanese War, the 1911 revolution in China appealed to many colonial subjects. One of the main features of the revolution was the overthrow of the emperor, whom many blamed for allowing European powers to rob China of its wealth and independence.

**Question**
Why did the events of 1904–05 and 1911 affect the growth of nationalism in Asia?

**Fact**
The local population in Cambodia (and Laos) were forced to pay for the development of their country in the interests of the colonial power. In particular, taxes had to be paid in hard currency, which placed a great strain on subsistence farmers. Peasants were forced to work on French-owned plantations and in French mines in order to meet these tax demands. The French also imposed a monopoly on the sale of salt, opium and alcohol, for which they then demanded high prices.

***wat* education** Education provided by the Buddhist temple (*wat*) schools.

***corvée*** Forced labour used by the French throughout Indochina. This was compulsory for every male between the ages of 18 and 45, and was initially set at ten days a year. The Lao, in particular, considered forced labour to be demeaning. In addition, officials sometimes insisted on *corvée* at harvest time. Consequently, those who could afford it tried to pay an extra cash tax instead.

**SOURCE C**

By 1900, the Dutch, British and French colonies and protectorates in Southeast Asia were practically at their maximum extent, consolidated and secure. Except possibly during the 1914–18 war, and then only with the fluctuations of the remote campaigns, the hold of the Colonial Powers on their possessions was never challenged.

*Purcell, V. 1962.* The Revolution in Southeast Asia. *London, UK. Thames and Hudson. p. 50.*

By the 1920s, the French were treating Cambodia as little more than a rice-producing machine, which provided valuable revenues in return for political, social and economic 'guidance'. Despite an economic boom during this period, though, there was a growing desire for independence in Cambodia.

In fact, the first impulse towards nationalism came earlier, with Japan's victory over Russia in the Russo–Japanese War of 1904–05. The defeat of a European power by an Asian one was unexpected, and caused excitement amongst those unhappy with the extent of European control. Nationalist and independence sentiments in both Cambodia and Laos were further stirred by the Chinese revolution of 1911.

### French administration after the First World War

During the First World War, the French tightened their control over Cambodia, especially over tax collection and provincial administration.

In 1923, the French began to supervise local justice and in 1924, they expanded ***wat* education**. At the same time, forced labour (known as ***corvée***) was used for public works, including road construction.

Ordinary Cambodians received very little in return for these services, apart from being 'protected' from coming under the control of any other country, and from the 'difficulties' of independence. For example, the French did little to stamp out banditry, which did not threaten French control but which made life very difficult for the Cambodian people. Before the 1930s, the French spent very little on education, and medical services were limited. It became increasingly clear to Cambodians that they were paying taxes to finance French officials and projects that simply strengthened French rule.

## French rule in Laos before 1940

While French influence in Laos slowly increased throughout the final decade of the 19th century, by the early 20th century the French government was beginning to lose interest in Laos.

SOURCE D

We would have been able, purely and simply, with the necessary military effort, to annex to Cambodia the provinces seized by Siam, and to reunite to our Laos all the country comprising the basin of the right [west] bank of the Mekong. Our situation in Indochina would then have been consolidated and our colony formed within its natural limits.

*Reinach, L. Quoted in Stuart-Fox, M. 1997. A History of Laos. Cambridge, UK. Cambridge University Press. p. 26. Lucien de Reinach was a French official in Indochina.*

**Fact**
There was no *lycée* (high school) in Cambodia until 1936, and the French did little beyond sponsoring the 5000 existing *wat* (temple or pagoda) schools. Primary education was mostly in the hands of the Buddhist *sangha*.

## Nationalism and French rule in Laos

In February 1904, France gained further territory in Indochina, and the borders of French Laos were slightly altered and confirmed by a treaty with Siam in 1907. Subsequent changes within French Indochina resulted in the ethnic Lao being divided into two unequal populations, when France decided that the Mekong River should be the frontier of French Laos. France was prepared to leave the majority of the Lao people to Siam. The French considered both Laos and Cambodia to be merely extensions of French Vietnam.

**Fact**
The view that Cambodia and Laos were extensions of French Vietnam was based on the belief that the Vietnamese were an active and expansionist people, with the right to assert their control over the 'weaker' and less 'fit' Khmer (Cambodian) and Lao people. To the French, these two old kingdoms were in decline, and few people thought either of them could form a viable modern state.

As far as the French were concerned, Indochina was a single region made up of five parts (see the map on page 2). Over the next 50 years, the French never regarded Laos as a separate political entity that could be led towards independence. French Laos was ethnically mixed, sparsely populated and mostly inhabited by illiterate subsistence farmers. The plan, therefore, was to develop the Lao economy using French capital and Vietnamese labour.

In April 1917, the kingdom of Luang Phrabang in northern Laos was confirmed as a French protectorate; the rest of the country was subject to direct French rule. A new capital was established at Viang Chan. Then, in 1930, the French government declared that all of Laos was a French colony. The king of Luang Phrabang, Sisavangvong, protested and the kingdom's protectorate status was restored in early 1932. However, the French were determined not to allow the king to become a symbol of unity for the whole of Laos.

**Fact**
The unity of Laos was not proclaimed until the Second World War – not by the French, but by the Lao Issara, the Free Lao movement. In August 1946, the French agreed to the king of Luang Phrabang becoming the king of Laos.

As in Cambodia, the administration at upper and middle levels was mainly staffed by Vietnamese officials. The Lao tended to work at lower levels, as translators, junior clerks or cleaners. Law and order was maintained by the Garde Indigène, under a French officer in each provincial capital. At first, the troops were mainly Vietnamese, although later there were more Lao recruits. The French often played on ethnic differences in the execution of local administration (for example, for the collection of taxes and the organisation of the much-despised *corvée*), in order to deflect discontent from themselves. This eventually led to ethnic tensions in post-independence Laos.

### Education and health

The small educated élite in Laos was persuaded by the French that their country needed modernisation under French direction rather than political representation. Modernisation was slow, however, in part because of the inadequate educational system, a result of French reluctance to spend money on social welfare. Educational provision in Laos was always weak, even in comparison with the rest of Indochina. In 1935, education received only 8.5% of total public expenditure, while in Cambodia it was 11.6%. There was no formal secondary education in Laos. Instead, the French left much to the traditional *wat* (temple or pagoda schools). These were supposed to teach literacy at primary level, but often just taught Buddhist doctrine and morality. Compared to the Cambodian *wat* schools, those in Laos had poor attendance and low standards. This lack of educational opportunities meant there was little chance for the Lao to increase their representation in the administration.

**Great Depression** Following the 1929 Wall Street Crash, the entire world entered a prolonged economic downturn that resulted in a contraction of economic activity and mass unemployment. This became known as the Great Depression. All major countries – with the exception of the USSR – were badly affected during the 1930s.

The French record in health provision in Laos was mixed. At first, health care was only available to Europeans, and by 1910 there were only five French doctors in Laos. Expenditure on health increased slowly after this, and by 1930 there were six hospitals and 55 dispensaries across Laos. However, partly as a result of the financial crisis caused by the **Great Depression** of the 1930s, health provision began to decline. Once again, efforts were concentrated in urban centres, where the Lao were usually a minority.

### Economic development

Reports from 19th-century explorers had suggested that Laos was a treasure house, ripe for exploitation. The French had counted on the fact that they could exploit the country economically in order to fund its administration. They were disappointed to discover that this was not the case. Most trade was in the hands of Chinese merchants, who preferred to deal with Bangkok (in Siam) rather than with Saigon (in Vietnam). Laos also turned out to be a poor market for French products, as the Chinese merchants preferred to import British and German manufactured goods. To help overcome this, the French tried to increase Laos's population and to improve access to Vietnam. They felt that the Lao were not an industrious people and that much of the country was unsuitable for European settlement, so they decided to bring in large numbers of Vietnamese workers.

Under the French, therefore, the vast majority of Lao remained as subsistence farmers, growing just enough to survive and to pay their taxes. Agricultural production was often limited – and dependent on climate – so most farmers produced no rice for export. In fact, in 1936, production was so low that the export of Lao rice was banned.

## Early nationalism in Cambodia

Before 1940, two important events linked to the rise of nationalism took place in Cambodia. These were the '1916 Affair' and the murder of a senior French official in 1925.

### The 1916 Affair

During the First World War, the French increased taxes throughout Indochina. In November 1915, 300 peasants from the area north-east of Phnom Penh petitioned King Sisowath to reduce taxes. News spread of Sisowath's vague promises to take action, and by the start of 1916, larger contingents from other areas had come to present their grievances. The speed of these developments and the numbers of people involved (estimates vary from 40,000 to 100,000) took the French by surprise. There were some violent outbreaks in the *sruk*, in which about six people were killed.

In fact, these delegations were not protesting against the French protectorate, merely against the level of taxes. Some protestors also seemed to be anti-monarchy. However, the demonstrations showed the level of support that local provincial leaders could rally at short notice, overturning French assumptions about Cambodians being lazy and individualistic.

*King Sisowath of Cambodia in his study at the royal palace in Phnom Penh, 1920*

## The Bardez Affair, 1925

In late 1923, a senior French official, Félix Louis Bardez, began to increase tax revenues. In early 1925, a tax official trying to collect revenue was attacked and beaten. On 18 April, Bardez went in person to the village of Krang Laav, and ordered the arrest of anyone refusing to pay. Bardez, his interpreter and the Cambodia militia men who had accompanied him were beaten to death by about 30 villagers. Local leaders then led a march of over 700 people to the city of Kampong Chhnang to demand the cancellation of taxes. They were dispersed by armed militia before reaching their destination.

The Bardez Affair was arguably the first significant political act by Cambodian peasants, and was the first time a high-ranking French official was murdered while trying to collect taxes. The French authorities claimed that the deaths were the work of bandits rather than a political protest against taxes, and 18 men were arrested and put on trial in December 1925. By this time, Cambodian peasants were paying the highest taxes per capita in Indochina.

## From boom to bust

Rising tax revenues and increased rubber and rice production contributed to an economic boom in Indochina in the 1920s. However, the Depression of the 1930s suspended or reversed this growth and led to a collapse in rice prices. The Khmer peasants grew 30% less rice from 1928 to 1933 than they had in the early 1920s. They also campaigned for the postponement or even the cancellation of taxes. Non-payment of taxes in rural areas reached 45% in 1931, and rose to 60% the following year. The authorities then granted tax remissions.

### Cambodian nationalism in the 1930s

While there were uprisings against the French in parts of Vietnam in response to the worsening economic situation in Indochina, Cambodia remained fairly quiet. Instead, there was what the French called an 'awakening', which involved economic advances and increased Khmer participation in administration. Despite this, there was no increase in autonomy, nor was there evidence of heightened nationalism resulting from Cambodians' increased awareness of their colonial status.

**Fact**

*Nagara Vatta* was founded by Pach Chhoeun and Sim Var, soon joined by Son Ngoc Thanh (see page 15). They were closely associated with the Institut Boudhhique, which brought them into contact with the leaders of the Buddhist *sangha* and Cambodian intellectuals. After demonstrations against the French in 1945, Son Ngoc Thanh was exiled to Vietnam and then France. He returned to Cambodia in 1951 and later set up another nationalist newspaper, *Khmer Krok* ('Cambodians Awake').

However, the roots of the post-Second World War nationalism in Cambodia can be found in the 1930s, mostly amongst the Cambodian élite in Phnom Penh. Of particular importance were those educated in Cambodia's first high school, the Collège Sisowath (after 1936, the Lycée Sisowath), where the curriculum was taught entirely in French. In the early 1930s, students appealed to the king against the favouritism shown towards Vietnamese students. By 1937, an association of graduates had formed and had more than 500 members. This group was the first of its kind in Cambodia, as the French discouraged voluntary organisations in case they gave rise to national awareness and solidarity. Students from this school were also linked to the Institut Boudhhique (Buddhist Institute) which, in turn, was closely connected to the first Khmer-language newspaper.

#### *Nagara Vatta*

Unlike in the Vietnamese areas of Indochina, there were no native-language newspapers or journals in Cambodia. An important step towards Cambodian nationalism was taken with the publication of a Khmer-language newspaper, *Nagara Vatta* ('Angkor Wat') in 1936.

**Question**

Why was the publication of *Nagara Vatta* an important factor in the growth of nationalist sentiments in Cambodia?

Although *Nagara Vatta* was pro-Cambodian, it was not overtly anti-French. However, it did object to Vietnamese domination of the civil service, Chinese domination of commerce and the lack of suitable employment for educated Cambodians. It criticised the French for their slowness to develop the education system, among other things. It also highlighted past Vietnamese aggression – the first real signs of anti-Vietnamese nationalism, which remained strong throughout Cambodian independence. By 1937, *Nagara Vatta* had a circulation of 5000 and a readership of many more.

## Early nationalism in Laos

While many Lao at first welcomed the French as liberators from Siamese demands, others were more suspicious of French motives. Soon, the French administrative changes began to affect traditional Lao society. Some social groups were advantaged over others, ethnic groups were set against one another, and traditional economic relationships were weakened. In particular, the influence of local leaders was undermined as they came to depend on the French for their positions. These changes, and the increased tax burdens, led to passive resistance and then to open revolt. Passive resistance took various forms, including refusing to accept French regulations or to co-operate with officials, tax avoidance by deliberately understating populations (sometimes by as much as 35%), and even migration.

### The Holy Man's Revolt, 1901–10

In 1901, a French commissioner ordered the burning of a pagoda that had been built to honour a local self-proclaimed 'holy man' (*phu mi bun*), whose growing influence had come to the attention of French officials. This

ignited the 'Holy Man's Revolt'. In April 1901, armed tribesmen attacked the commissioner and his guards. This rebellion sparked a general rising, led by **Ong Kaeo**.

The revolt quickly spread west of the Mekong, with actions against both the French and Siamese. The Siamese moved swiftly to suppress the rebellion, but the French had more difficulty containing it and within six months some regions were almost entirely in rebel hands. By early 1902, the revolt was at its peak, and after an attack involving a force of 2000 rebels, the French took harsh repressive measures. All those implicated as leaders of the rebellion were shot and villages were burned.

A further revolt broke out in 1905, led by a supporter of Ong Kaeo, **Ong Kommadam**, but in 1907 Ong Kaeo and most of his forces surrendered. Nonetheless, Ong Kaeo maintained his reputation as a *phu mi bun*. He was arrested on 11 November 1910 and was bayoneted while 'attempting to escape' the following day. By this time, French control was restored in all the main areas of Laos.

### Xam Neua revolt, 1914–16

Instability in southern China after the 1911 revolution led to unrest and another anti-French uprising in Xam Neua, in the north-east of Laos. By 1915, most of this region was in rebel hands. After some setbacks, however, a large French force succeeded in pushing the rebels back over the Chinese border.

### The 'Madman's Revolt', 1918–21

In 1918, a rebellion broke out in Vietnam and soon spread across the border into north-eastern Laos. It was spearheaded by a religious leader known as Pa Chai Vu (or Bachai). Between 1919 and 1920, the French mounted vigorous military campaigns to crush the revolt and eventually succeeded in 1921. The ringleaders were executed without trial, and reparations were demanded to cover the damage caused. A commissioned report put the revolt down to inter-ethnic tensions resulting from the structure of colonial administration, the disruption of traditional relationships and interests, and taxation policies.

**SOURCE E**

These rebellions have also been seen, however, in another light – as heroic resistance to French colonialism and as forerunners to the later radical nationalist movements of the Lao Issara and Pathet Lao. From a Western perspective, to interpret them as 'proto-nationalist' forms of political struggle, let alone to discover in these revolts the origins of modern Lao revolutionary nationalism, can only be condemned as anachronistic. Even after 1945 little sense of 'nation' or 'nationalism' existed in Laos inclusive of the minority groups who principally rose in rebellion.

*Stuart-Fox, M.1997. A History of Laos. Cambridge, UK. Cambridge University Press. p. 40.*

**Ong Kaeo (d. 1910)** The real name of the leader of the Holy Man's Revolt was Bak Mi, but he was known to his followers as Ong Kaeo. He proclaimed himself *Chau Sadet* ('Great King'). Other leaders who acted as his lieutenants were Ong Man (who operated on the Siamese side of the Mekong) and Ong Kommadam (see below).

**Ong Kommadam (d. 1936)** Ong Kommadam was Ong Kaeo's right-hand man. He united the highland minorities of southern Laos, and his group held out in the mountains until he was killed in 1936. Three prominent leaders of Ong Kommadam's revolt were guillotined, and others were sent to serve long sentences on the prison island of Poulo Condore, off the Vietnamese coast.



**Historical debate**

There has been some debate about the extent to which the various uprisings in Laos (and those in Cambodia, such as the 1885–86 rebellion) can be seen as anti-colonial struggles. The French dismissed the rebellions as primitive outbursts and many Cambodians and Lao preferred the French to the Siamese or the Vietnamese. The rebel leaders do not seem to have had any systematic ideas about Cambodian or Lao nationalism, while the élites – most of whom collaborated with the French – tended to ignore the revolts altogether. Yet later nationalist politicians and writers have regarded these uprisings as early signs of anti-colonial nationalism. Many of the rebellions showed that well-organised guerrilla forces, fighting on their own territory and supported by the local population, were able to resist large colonial armies.

**SOURCE F**

For want of a correct revolutionary line, for want of coordination on a national scale and notably for want of an authentic revolutionary party, the movements for the most part failed.

*Extract from an official Lao history of the ethnic minority rebellions during the colonial period, by Phoumi Vongvichit, in 1968. Quoted in Gunn, G. C. 1990.* Rebellion in Laos – Peasant and Politics in a Colonial Backwater. *Boulder, USA. Westview Press. p. 48.*

**Activity**

Carry out further research on the effects of the French policy of encouraging Vietnamese and Chinese immigration in Cambodia and Laos.

***Résident Supérieur*** This was the senior French official who oversaw the administration in each of the various parts of French Indochina.

**Prince Phetxarat Rattanavongsa (1890–1959)**
Phetxarat studied at the élite École Coloniale in Paris and then spent a year at Oxford, before joining the administrative office of the *Résident Supérieur* in Viang Chan. In 1923, he became indigenous inspector of political and administrative affairs. In this post, he attempted to increase the number of Lao administrators – at the expense of Vietnamese civil servants – by improving opportunities for training and promotion.

**Question**

Why was 'cultural nationalism' an important factor in the growth of a Lao independence movement?

## Political reforms

As in Cambodia, the French encouraged Chinese and Vietnamese traders and artisans to settle in the urban centres of Laos, where they soon outnumbered the Lao themselves. However, by 1920 – after almost 20 years of unrest – the country was largely at peace. Some basic services for education and health care were developed as communications improved, and the administrative system was functioning reasonably well.

In October 1920, the French felt secure enough to introduce the first political reforms. Provincial advisory councils were established, but members were appointed rather than elected, their deliberations were not made public and their recommendations were not binding. In April 1923, an Indigenous Consultative Assembly was established to advise the ***Résident Supérieur***, Jules Bosc.

Laos was the last of the territories of French Indochina to have such an assembly. Members were elected on a limited franchise, and had to be either appointees of the provincial advisory councils, higher-grade civil servants or possess the requisite level of education. The opening session of the Indigenous Consultative Assembly took place on 30 August 1923. However, the assembly's dependence on France was made clear to the Lao élite, and there were no further political reforms. During the 1930s, the French carefully avoided introducing into Indochina forms of representative government that had encouraged nationalism in Burma and the Philippines.

## Cultural nationalism

Two aspects of French policy in Laos began to sow the seeds of Lao nationalism: the preservation and restoration of ancient monuments, and research into Lao history, literature, art and architecture. These developments, led by **Prince Phetxarat Rattanavongsa**, resulted in a renewed interest in the classical history and culture of the region.

One of the prince's main aims was to retain a separate Lao identity within French Indochina. He also encouraged his private secretary, Sila Viravong, to collect old Lao texts and manuscripts and to carry out literary and historical research. These studies – and the discussions that took place around them – gave an early stimulus to Lao nationalism. Although this was largely confined to the élites, it laid the foundations for more overt Lao nationalism in the 1940s.

### The Depression of the 1930s

The Depression led to falling prices and budget constraints: tax receipts fell and at the same time the payments from the general budget of Indochina were cut. The French administration in Laos responded by improving tax collection, increasing the tax demanded to avoid doing the *corvée*, and cutting back on expenditure. However, by 1937, the crisis was over and both tax revenues and the general grant began to grow once more.

One effect of the more vigorous collection of taxes was increased unrest. Ong Kommadam (see page 11) encouraged villagers not to pay their taxes. The French responded by launching a new military offensive against him in September 1936. Kommadam was killed and two of his sons were captured. This finally ended Kommadam's revolt, but a second tax revolt, led by a 'sorcerer' known as Sambran ('White Python'), spread to Laos from southern Vietnam and was not fully quelled until 1939. Once again, though, these were uprisings against tax and the *corvée* rather than true nationalist movements. This new wave of social unrest eventually led to a reform of the taxation system in 1940.

### Education and nationalism

There was little education available to the Lao during the 1930s. Only 52 Lao graduated from the Collège Pavie (middle school), and even fewer completed their secondary education at high schools in Vietnam. Those who did, or who went on to university in France, were a small minority who owed their position to the presence of the French. The majority of Lao were subsistence farmers, so there was no real working class in the towns. Despite the best efforts of Prince Phetxarat, by 1937 only 54% of the 286 positions in the middle and higher levels of the French administration in Laos were held by Lao. There was therefore only a very limited basis for the development of any political consciousness, nationalist or otherwise.

Although a Lao cultural nationalism began to emerge in the 1930s, this was restricted to the élite and did not develop into a mass movement. Most of the élite believed that continued co-operation with the French was necessary in order to modernise their country and to protect it from domination by its neighbours. This attitude was strengthened after December 1938, when a military government took power in Siam. In 1939, Siam became Thailand. This name change implied an ambition to include all Tai-speaking people – including those living in Laos.

## What factors influenced the rise of nationalist and independence movements from 1940 to 1945?

The five-year period that followed the fall of France in June 1940 was a turning point in the history of Indochina in general, and for the development of nationalism in Cambodia and Laos in particular. There had been no real growth in nationalist sentiment during and after the First World War. However, nationalism began to increase in Indochina during the Second World War, when Japan exerted more influence over the region. The impact of the Second World War is significant in the development of nationalist and independence movements in Cambodia and Laos.

**Vichy France** This is the name given to the part of France that was not directly ruled by Nazi Germany after its defeat of France in June 1940. Vichy France was ruled by Marshal Pétain and his right-wing government. At the request of the Japanese, the Germans persuaded the Vichy government to sign an accord with Japan for the 'common defence' of Indochina against the British and the Free French (a group that rejected Vichy control and formed a government in exile).

**Axis** The Axis Powers were the countries in the Second World War that signed the Rome–Berlin–Tokyo Axis treaties: Italy, Germany (in 1936) and Japan (in 1937). They fought against the Allies (Britain, the USSR and the USA).



**Norodom Sihanouk (b. 1922)**
Sihanouk became king of Cambodia in April 1941, and was crowned in October. He had previously studied in France, and had led a privileged life. Back in Cambodia, he became active in Vichy-oriented youth groups. However, Sihanouk became more nationalistic after 1945 and came to dominate Cambodian politics, as king and then prime minister, for over 60 years. He became king again in 1993, and ruled until his abdication in 2004.

## Developments during the Second World War

### Cambodia, 1940–45

Before France fell to the Germans in June 1940, no official in Indochina had openly voiced doubts about the permanence of French control in Asia. However, although the change in attitude was not as significant as it was in Vietnam, Cambodian responses to French policies in the country were markedly different after 1940. By the end of 1945, Cambodian independence – which had not been considered seriously before 1940 – was in sight. Due to its collaboration with Germany and Japan, **Vichy France** was the only European colonial power to retain control of its empire for most of the Second World War.

The French tried to defuse nationalist thinking and activity in Cambodia via their secret police. They also opened up administrative positions to locals and introduced some liberalisation. Before March 1945, Cambodia was ruled by the governor-general of French Indochina, Vice-Admiral Jean Decoux, who adopted an anti-British and pro-**Axis** policy. This was partly to please the Japanese, but the approach also reflected Decoux's own political inclinations.

The long-term plan of the Vichy leaders was to survive the war and re-emerge with most of the French empire still intact. In May 1941, Decoux signed an agreement with Japan for full economic co-operation, partly because he had insufficient military forces to retain direct control. The French administration increased the salaries of Cambodian officials and broadened their responsibilities. These moves, along with several other developments after 1940, led to an increased sense of Cambodian national identity and began to encourage the Cambodian nationalist movement.

#### The Franco–Thai War, 1940–41

The Franco–Thai War broke out because the pro-Japanese government in Thailand attempted to regain the territory in Cambodia (and Laos) that Siam had ceded to the French in the early 20th century. The Japanese forced the French to negotiate with Thailand and as a consequence, Battambang, most of Siem Reap and parts of Laos – totalling some 65,000 square km (25,000 square miles) – ended up under Thailand's control. This outcome was greatly resented by Lao nationalists.

#### Succession of Norodom Sihanouk

In Cambodia, the Vichy French maintained control through the monarchy. As a result, Cambodian nationalists became increasingly anti-monarchist and pro-republican. The French, seeking to avoid dynastic struggles after the death of the reigning king, Monivong, chose his grandson, **Norodom Sihanouk**, as his successor. Decoux believed Sihanouk to be sympathetic to France.

Sihanouk became king in April 1941, and immediately began introducing moderate reforms. However, the king's real power was limited by his French advisers – and, later, by the fact that the French were forced to allow Japanese troops to be stationed in Indochina. By August 1941, there were 8000 Japanese troops in Cambodia.

Sihanouk's inability to carry through any significant reforms disappointed several Cambodian intellectuals, who noted both French military weakness and Japanese sympathy for certain anti-colonial movements in Southeast Asia. Many of these intellectuals were members of the *sangha* (the Buddhist leadership), and were associated with *Nagara Vatta* and the Institut Boudhhique (see page 10). Between 1940 and 1942, *Nagara Vatta* took an increasingly pro-

Japanese and anti-colonial line; this led the French to censor many issues. There is some evidence of Japanese financial support for the newspaper, and certainly this was actively sought by **Son Ngoc Thanh** and his associates at *Nagara Vatta*.

**The Monks' Demonstration, July 1942**

The growing confrontation between the Cambodian nationalists and the French came to a head in an event known as the Monks' Demonstration in July 1942. The French had become suspicious of the Buddhist *sangha* in both Cambodia and Laos, as it offered the Khmer and the Lao an alternative value system to the French colonial one.

In Cambodia, the *sangha* was made up of two sects, the larger of which was the Mahanikay – a group with republican and anti-monarchist tendencies. One of the Mahanikay monks, **Hem Chieu**, was implicated in a vague anti-French plot and was arrested, along with another monk, on 17 July 1942. The arrests were covered in the nationalist paper *Nagara Vatta*, and the nationalists negotiated with the Japanese to gain their support for an anti-French demonstration in support of the arrested monks on 20 July. Over 1000 people – about half of them monks – participated in the march, demanding the release of Hem Chieu.

The march was led by Pach Chhoeun, the editor of *Nagara Vatta*. He was arrested and sentenced to death, but this was commuted to life imprisonment. *Nagara Vatta* stopped publishing, and over 30 Cambodians were imprisoned for long terms. Son Ngoc Thanh went into hiding and later escaped to the Thai-controlled city of Battambang. In early 1943, he was offered asylum in Tokyo, where he remained for two years. From there, Thanh remained in contact with his nationalist colleagues in Battambang, urging them to keep the flame of nationalism alive, and assuring them of discreet Japanese support. These actions had a significant impact on those who led the Cambodian nationalist movement in the 1940s and 1950s (although little effect was seen in rural areas).

The Monks' Demonstration was not large and achieved nothing in the short term, but it became part of Cambodian nationalist anti-colonial folklore.

**The 'Romanisation crisis', 1943**

In 1943, the new French *Résident*, Georges Gautier, decided to replace the 47-letter Cambodian alphabet with the European Roman (Latin) alphabet. Many Cambodians – especially those in the *sangha* – objected to this move, wanting to maintain the traditional alphabet and protect a cultural aspect of nationalism. The king, Sihanouk, later claimed that he had considered abdicating over the issue. Despite opposition throughout 1944–45, the French pushed through the reform, especially in government publications and in schools. However, the Romanisation of the alphabet did not extend to religious texts.

## Laos, 1940–45

In Laos, as in Cambodia, the beginnings of a clearly nationalist and independence movement emerged during the Second World War. Before 1939, the French had been relaxed about Siam's influence over Laos, but the new military government of Thailand, and the outbreak of war in Europe, changed the situation.

**The Franco–Thai War, 1940–41**

In June 1940, the French pressed for a non-aggression pact with Thailand, in which each country would promise not to fight each other. However, after the collapse of France the government in the Thai capital, Bangkok, took advantage of the situation to reclaim the territories it had been forced to cede to Laos in 1904 and 1907. Propaganda was spread in Laos, promising Thai help in expelling the French

### Son Ngoc Thanh (1908–77)

Son Ngoc Thanh was educated in Saigon and France. He wanted to modernise Cambodia, and this brought him into conflict with Sihanouk. Thanh was a right-wing republican, and was sympathetic to Japanese fascism. He briefly became prime minister of Cambodia in August 1945, but was exiled when the French regained control later that year. Thanh later returned to Cambodia and became a key leader of the resistance movement against colonial control, working with Khmer militia from a base in Siem Reap. As the Cambodian nationalist movement moved to the left, however, Thanh's influence began to decline.

### Hem Chieu (1898–1943)

Hem Chieu was a monk and a teacher in the advanced Pali school in Phnom Penh. He was a severe critic of the French administration and began an association with the nationalist *Nagara Vatta*. After his arrest and the ensuing demonstration, Hem Chieu was sentenced to life imprisonment and died on the French penal island of Poulo Condore in 1943. In 1979, following the Vietnamese invasion, a street in Phnom Penh was named in his honour.

### Fact

The Cambodian alphabet was based on medieval Indian models, and the French believed that replacing it was an important step towards 'modernisation'. Similar measures were carried out in Vietnam. One of the first acts of the new 'independent' Cambodian government in March 1945 was to stop this 'Romanisation', and there has been no further attempt to Romanise the language.

colonialists, and in December 1940, Thailand launched an attack on Lao territory. A larger force was sent to Cambodia, where the Thai also had ambitions.

The Japanese intervened to impose a ceasefire, and in the Treaty of Tokyo, signed on 9 May 1941, France surrendered territory in both Laos and Cambodia. This sign of French weakness – and France's consequent inability to defend Laos from outside aggression – was compounded by growing French subservience to Japan after the Second World War spread to the Pacific region in December 1941. Not surprisingly, Lao cultural nationalists began to reconsider their attitudes towards, and relationship with, France.

The loss of Lao territory particularly affected the province of Luang Phrabang. In August 1941, to compensate the king of Luang Phrabang, Sisavangvong, the French extended his rule to include all of northern Laos south to Viang Chan. They also formalised his kingdom as a French protectorate. However, Laos still lacked a single national identity. There were tensions between north and south, Viang Chan was essentially a French and Vietnamese city, and Thailand continued to pose a serious military threat.

**The Movement for National Renovation (MNR)**

These factors contributed to the formation of the first overtly nationalist movement in Laos in January 1941. The Movement for National Renovation (MNR) had the principal aim of opposing Thai expansionism, and the movement therefore received official French support. The MNR, essentially a cultural movement with a loyalty to France, was led by Prince Phetxarat (see page 12) with a small group of young, educated Lao. The most significant achievement of the MNR was *Lao Nyai* ('Great Laos'), a journal that was published between 1941 and 1945, along with the *Pathet Lao* ('Free Lao'), a Lao-language supplement.

**Fact**
Despite its supposed loyalty towards France, some members of the MNR attempted a coup against the French in July 1940. This failed, but the ringleaders managed to flee into Thailand, where they formed the semi-secret Lao Pen Lao (Laos for the Lao) movement.



Signs of increasing independence within the MNR leadership came in 1944, after Charles Rochet (the French director of public education) tried to enforce the 'Romanisation' of the Lao alphabet. This was vigorously opposed by Prince Phetxarat, who believed it would undermine the historical identity of Laos and the Buddhist roots of Lao civilisation. Rochet was forced to abandon the project.

The influence of the MNR led to reforms designed to speed up the replacement of Vietnamese with Lao in public administration, and education also received extra funds. More new schools were built between 1940 and 1945 than had been constructed between 1893 and 1940. Gradually there developed amongst the younger members of the MNR a desire to move beyond anti-Thai and anti-Vietnamese nationalism – which relied on French support – towards genuine national independence.

***coup de force*** The term means 'takeover'. The Japanese takeover was known as Operation Meigo Sakusan and was launched across the whole of French Indochina in March 1945. Although the number of Japanese troops had increased throughout Indochina since the liberation of France in 1944, the Japanese action took the French authorities by surprise.

## The Japanese *coup de force*, March 1945

On 9 March 1945, the Japanese overthrew the French throughout Indochina. The Japanese disarmed French forces and removed French officials from their posts. This ***coup de force*** proved to be an even more important factor in the emergence of nationalist movements in both Cambodia and Laos than the fall of France in 1940.

### Effects in Cambodia

On 13 March, following a formal request from Japan, King Sihanouk declared Cambodia independent; Laos followed a month later. Sihanouk then cancelled all Franco–Cambodian agreements and pledged co-operation with the Japanese. Cambodia's name was changed to **Kampuchea**.

**Kampuchea** This was the Khmer pronunciation of *Cambodge*, the French version of the country's name.

In April 1945, Sihanouk urged Cambodians to 'awaken', condemning French policies (probably on advice from his Japanese political adviser). The Buddhist lunar calendar was reintroduced to replace the European one, and government ministries were given Khmer names instead of French ones. In the summer of 1945, Cambodian nationalist ideas and aspirations were openly aired, and for the first time Cambodians were encouraged to form political groups.

Despite outward support, the Japanese were suspicious of Sihanouk, believing he retained pro-French sentiments. They were more supportive of the **Khmer Issarak ('Free Khmer') movement**, led by Son Ngoc Thanh, who had returned to Cambodia from Tokyo. The Khmer Issarak had 2000 armed volunteers and worked, with the Viet Minh, to oppose the return of the French.

**Khmer Issarak ('Free Khmer') movement** This resulted from the 1945 merger of various anti-Japanese and then (after the Japanese *coup de force* in March 1945) anti-French groups, financed by Thailand. The Khmer Issarak formed a government in exile in Bangkok.

On 20 July 1945, a rally was held to commemorate the Monks' Demonstration of 1942. It was presided over by Sihanouk; also present were Pach Chhoeun, who had been released from prison, and Son Ngoc Thanh. In addition to the Monks' Demonstration, the speeches at the rally recalled the Lao rebellions of 1860, the 1884–86 revolt, the 1916 Affair and the Bardez Affair.

Apart from signing a formal treaty with Vietnam, Sihanouk did little to develop a joint strategy to resist the return of the French, and he became increasingly hostile towards such nationalists as Pach Chhoeun and Son Ngoc Thanh.

In August 1945, following the Japanese surrender and the end of the Second World War, over 30,000 Cambodians demonstrated in a nationalist march. In an attempt to strengthen the nationalist hand against the French, Son Ngoc Thanh organised a referendum in which he claimed that over 500,000 Cambodians had voted in favour of independence. This semi-coup forced Sihanouk to appoint Son Ngoc Thanh as prime minister.

With the Japanese defeated in the war, though, the French – with British support – began to reassert control over southern Indochina. Throughout September, Son Ngoc Thanh urged his colleagues to join him in an alliance with the Vietnamese to resist the French. However, historical animosity towards the Vietnamese prevented many people from supporting this alliance. Some even favoured the return of the French over the continuation of Thanh's government. Consequently, when Thanh was arrested by the French on 12 October 1945, no one objected.

## Effects in Laos

Lao independence sentiments were greatly enhanced by the Japanese *coup de force* of March 1945. Among other things, it destroyed any remaining notions of French power, even though genuine anti-French sentiment was not widespread. It was not long before claims for full independence were being heard.

Until February 1945, the Japanese presence in Laos had been limited. Following the liberation of France in 1944, however, the Japanese began to increase their military presence in Laos, as in the two other areas of French Indochina. There was only limited resistance from French forces in Laos. The prime minister, Crown Prince Savangvatthana, called on the Lao to oppose the Japanese and to help the French. Many Lao responded to this call, even though membership of an 'Indochina Federation' within a 'French Union', offered by Charles de Gaulle's provisional government, did not constitute a fully independent Laos.

### Theory of knowledge

**History and language**

When talking about independence movements, those fighting for independence are often described as either 'freedom fighters' or 'terrorists', depending on the political standpoint of the person describing them. In the situations existing in Cambodia and Laos between 1940 and 1945, is it fair to describe those who worked with the Japanese as 'collaborators'? Is it even a valid term, considering that the Khmer and the Lao were not free citizens of the French republic?

### Discussion point

Working in pairs, develop an argument to present to the class that supports the idea that the Japanese presence in Cambodia and Laos was the most important factor in the development of nationalism in these two countries before 1946.

**Office of Strategic Services (OSS)** This was the forerunner of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). The OSS wanted the Lao Seri to be in a position to seize power in Laos once the Japanese had been defeated.

As in the rest of Southeast Asia, some nationalist leaders regarded co-operation with the Japanese as a means to an end – a way of gaining independence from European colonial control. Some Lao also saw co-operation with Japan as a way to ward off Vietnamese influence. One leader who resented Savangvatthana's call to support the new French government was Prince Phetxarat. When Sisavangvong, the king of Luang Phrabang (see page 7) declared Lao independence from France, Prince Phetxarat became prime minister. However, the Japanese refused his request for unification of all parts of Laos into one nation.

Phetxarat set about reducing Vietnamese influence in both administration and the economy. However, in many towns, the Vietnamese resisted attempts to force them to leave; some even formed armed units. As the Vietnamese were strongly anti-French, they received support from the Japanese.

**Lao nationalist movements**

Unlike in Vietnam, where the Indochina Communist Party (ICP, see page 21) was able to develop a strong nationalist movement, it took longer to develop such movements in Laos and Cambodia. In fact, the nationalist movements in both these countries owed little or nothing to Marxism, and they were almost as much opposed to the Vietnamese as they were to the French. In Laos, the two main nationalist movements were the Lao Seri (Free Laos) and the Lao Pen Lao. In addition, there was the Lao Issara.

The Lao Seri, formed in 1944, grew out of, and was directed by, a Thai-based group. As well as being an anti-Japanese underground resistance, the Lao Seri were also dedicated to getting rid of the French. They were led by Un Xananikon, who came from an influential family in Viang Chan, and received assistance from the USA's **Office of Strategic Services (OSS)**.

Following the Japanese surrender in 1945, several Lao leaders formed the secret Lao Pen Lao, and made plans to join other nationalist groups in order to prevent the return of the French.

The Lao Issara, or Free Lao, traced its origins to the beginnings of Lao nationalism in the 1930s, and included not only those who had collaborated with the Japanese, but also those who had worked with the Thai, and those younger Lao who were excited by the examples of both Vietnamese and Japanese nationalism.

## End of unit activities

1 Create a spider diagram to show the main signs of early nationalism in either Cambodia or Laos in the period 1900–40.

2 Carry out further research on the early life of Norodom Sihanouk. What evidence is there that he was a supporter of Cambodian independence before 1945?

3 Divide into two groups to consider the following statement:

'The Second World War was the main turning point in the development of of nationalist movements in Cambodia and Laos.'

One group should argue that the Second World War was the key event influencing the rise of nationalism in Cambodia and Laos. The other group should argue that other issues – such as the Japanese presence – were key contributing factors.

# 2 Methods of achieving independence in Cambodia and Laos, 1946–75

## Key questions

- How was independence achieved in Cambodia and Laos by 1954?
- What factors affected the consolidation of nationalist independence, 1955–75?
- What parts did Sihanouk and Souphanouvong play in the struggles for independence and neutrality?

## Overview

- After the surrender of Japan in August 1945, the French began their campaign to regain control of Indochina. There were varying degrees of nationalist resistance to this in both Cambodia and Laos but, by the end of 1946, the French had succeeded in re-establishing control.
- In Cambodia, the main resistance came from the Khmer Issarak; in Laos, it was the Lao Issara. Both received varying degrees of help from the Viet Minh.
- The French reached interim agreements with both countries, giving up some powers of supervision. Then, in 1949, more powers were devolved.
- From 1949 to 1954, both negotiation and armed struggle were used in the campaign for full independence. In 1954, following the Geneva Conference, full independence was internationally recognised.
- As the Cold War and the Second Indochina War developed, both Cambodia and Laos were dragged into the conflicts. The US tried to secure anti-communist governments, while North Vietnam helped the respective guerrilla movements.
- From 1955 to 1975, both countries experienced political turmoil and guerrilla warfare, along with invasions and heavy US bombing. The armed struggle in both countries was increasingly dominated by their communist movements – the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia and the Pathet Lao in Laos.
- As the war in Vietnam drew to a close, these guerrilla movements increased their control, and in 1975, both took power.

## How was independence achieved in Cambodia and Laos by 1954?

While Vietnam was fighting for its independence and unification in the period after 1945, nationalist struggles also took place in Cambodia and Laos, first against the French and, later, against the US and its allies. As in Vietnam, the methods used were a combination of diplomatic efforts and armed struggle. At the same time, both countries were affected by the developing Cold War.

## Timeline

**1946** *modus vivendi* between France and Cambodia and France and Laos

**Dec** First Indochina War breaks out

**1949** **Jul** Laos and Cambodia become 'independent' within French Union

**1950** **May** US aid to Cambodia and Laos begins

**1952** **Jun** Sihanouk launches his 'crusade for independence' in Cambodia

**1953** **Apr** Viet Minh army enters Laos; Souphanouvong proclaims Pathet Lao administration

**Oct** France recognises Laotian sovereignty

**Nov** France transfers military powers to Cambodia

**1954** **Apr–Jul** Geneva Conference takes place

**1955** **Mar** Sihanouk forms Sangkum Party

**1957** **Nov** First Coalition between Laotian government and Pathet Lao

**1958** **Jan** Second Indochina War begins

**1960** Cambodian Communist Party formed

**Aug** Konglae seizes power in Laos; Suvanna forms neutralist government in Laos

**Dec** Suvanna replaced by rightists

**1961** **May** international conference on Laos opens in Geneva

**1962** Suvanna forms Second Coalition government in Laos; Geneva Agreements

**1967** **Aug** start of Khmer Rouge armed struggle

**1970** **Mar** Lon Nol's coup in Cambodia; Sihanouk forms GRUNK government in exile

**1973** **Feb** Vientiane Treaty signed

**Sep** Third Coalition in Laos

**1975** **Apr** Khmer Rouge take power in Cambodia

**Dec** Pathet Lao take power in Laos

## Cambodia

After Japan's surrender in August 1945, Son Ngoc Thanh tried to persuade Cambodians to support the Vietnamese in resisting the return of the French. However, many remained suspicious of Vietnam and so ignored his call. In October, French officials arrested Son Ngoc Thanh for treason and collaboration with the Japanese, leaving the way clear for Sihanouk to open negotiations with the French. At first, the French considered Sihanouk to be a valuable ally in the campaign to restore French control of Indochina, and permitted him to remain as king of Cambodia.

***modus vivendi*** A Latin phrase meaning 'way of living'. A *modus vivendi* is a temporary working compromise agreement, by which disputing parties 'agree to disagree'. It is made in advance of further negotiations intended to result in the final settlement of a dispute, such as a treaty.

Although the French wanted to recover their empire in Indochina, in October 1945 they were forced to make concessions to the élites to retain their co-operation in the administration of local affairs. These élites comprised people who had been 'awakened' to cultural nationalism in the 1930s and who, after 1940, had become patriots wanting to regain the independence they had briefly enjoyed under the Japanese. Although he kept quiet about it at first, Sihanouk also began to work for Cambodian independence. In January 1946, France signed a ***modus vivendi*** with the king. This gave him only limited autonomy, but it did bring more Cambodians into certain areas of administration.

### Political developments

An important step in developing the Cambodian nationalist and independence movement was taken in the summer of 1946, when Cambodians were permitted to form political parties for the first time. The two most important were the Krom Pracheathipodei (KP, or Democratic Party) and the Kanaq Sereipheap (KS, or Freedom Group). Both were led by princes of the royal family.

The KP gained support from those younger Cambodians who, in the 1940s, had supported *Nagara Vatta* and the ideas of Pach Chhoeun and Son Ngoc Thanh (see page 15). Some sections of the KP believed armed struggle was the only way to achieve full independence.

**Fact**
After the end of the Second World War, US president Harry S. Truman decided that the US would support the return of the French to Indochina. Since October 1949, there had been a communist government in China, which began sending supplies to the Viet Minh (see page 21), and offering their forces safe havens across the border. The French had already asked the US for military and financial help, and this communist victory in China meant the US could portray their involvement in Indochina as an anti-communist crusade rather than as merely helping a colonial power regain its overseas possessions.

By contrast, members of the KS were more conservative and wanted to maintain close links with France (a view shared by most of the royal family). The party's main supporters comprised more elderly members of the government, landowners and the Sino–Cambodian commercial élite. These groups were not in favour of the disruption that they believed a serious independence struggle would involve.

In September 1946, elections were held for a Consultative Assembly that would draw up a new constitution. The KP won 50 of the 67 seats and the KS won 14. The 1947 constitution reduced the powers of the king and gave real control to the Assembly, in which the KP held a majority. However, the decision by KP leaders to negotiate with France – rather than simply declaring independence – led to splits in the party.

#### The 1949 settlement

In November 1949, the French signed an agreement with Cambodia that gave the country what Sihanouk called '50 per cent independence'. Control of finance, defence and internal security remained in French hands, but Cambodians would have some say in foreign affairs. The KP opposed the treaty as inadequate, but Sihanouk believed it to be the beginning of a process which, once begun, would be difficult to reverse.

## Influence of the Cold War, 1950–54

One reason for Cambodia's slow move towards independence was the growing impact of the Cold War.

The French avoided negotiations with the KP, and the king only rarely called the National Assembly. Some KP members began to shift to a pro-royalist position, while Sihanouk turned to more right-wing political groupings and to anti-communist military figures. At the same time, forces on the political left also began to grow and consolidate.

In 1951, Sihanouk agreed to call new elections. The KP won 55 of the 78 seats, but they gained less than 50% of the vote. Sihanouk then persuaded the French to let Son Ngoc Thanh return from exile, in an effort to split the KP and unify the right. However, Thanh refused to join the government and, in early 1952, he toured the country making speeches criticising Sihanouk's actions. Thanh founded a newspaper called *Khmer Krok* ('Cambodians Awake').

SOURCE A

We know that the Cambodian people, who have been anaesthetized for a long time, are now awake … No obstacle can now stop this awakening from moving ahead.

*Extract from the first issue of Thanh's newspaper, explaining its title. Quoted in Chandler, D. 2008. A History of Cambodia. Boulder, USA. Westview Press. p. 220.*

## Communist resistance

On 17 April 1950, the first National Congress of the Khmer Resistance was held, which formed a Unified Issarak Front. It was dominated by around 40 Cambodian members of the **Indochinese Communist Party (ICP)**.

In 1951, the ICP was officially dissolved and separate communist parties were formed in Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos. In Cambodia, the communist party was the Khmer People's Revolutionary Party (KPRP), which was established in September 1951 with around 1000 members. By the following year, there were more than 5000 guerrillas under the control of the KPRP who, with the help of the **Viet Minh**, controlled about one-sixth of Cambodia. Within two years, this had extended to more than half the country. As French rule continued, more and more Cambodians joined the ranks of the guerrillas and membership of the KPRP swelled to 2000 by July 1954. Increasingly, Vietnamese leaders of the guerrilla units were replaced by Khmers, who were more firmly under the control of the KPRP.

The aims of the KPRP went beyond those of others in the anti-French independence movements in Cambodia. Its members wanted to transform Cambodia socially and economically after independence, and to overcome the hostility that existed between Cambodians and Vietnamese. Although they accepted Vietnam's leading role (given its greater strength) in the wider struggle to liberate Indochina from French rule, the KPRP was not a Vietnamese puppet organisation.

**Indochinese Communist Party (ICP)** The ICP was founded in Hong Kong on 3 February 1930, by Nguyen Ai Quoc (better known by his later pseudonym, Ho Chi Minh). Although its early membership was entirely Vietnamese, the ICP was intended to include Cambodians and Lao, too. In 1930, however, there was not a single Cambodian member and, even by the end of the Second World War, only a small number of Khmers had joined. During 1945–47, as the French attempted to regain control of Indochina, the ICP tried hard to establish and support 'liberation struggles' in both Cambodia and Laos.

**Viet Minh** The Viet Minh was a Vietnamese nationalist movement and army that fought for independence against both the French and the Japanese before 1945. It was dominated by communists and led by Ho Chi Minh. After 1945, the Viet Minh fought against the return of the French in what became known as the First Indochina War (1946–54). This was because although most of the fighting was in Vietnam, there were also military struggles against the French in both Cambodia and Laos.

**Fact**
Both Sihanouk and the French tried to portray the KPRP – and all anti-French resistance groups – as pro-communist and pro-Vietnamese traitors to Cambodia. In fact, during the late 1960s, Sihanouk proclaimed Cambodian greatness and often made racist comments about the Vietnamese as part of a non-communist Cambodian nationalism.

## Independence, November 1953

By early 1952, Sihanouk and the KP-dominated National Assembly were in conflict. Sihanouk and his conservative advisers realised that they would need to do more than continue polite independence negotiations with France if they wished to remain in power. So in June 1952 – with French support – Sihanouk carried out a non-violent coup against his own government. Sihanouk made himself prime minister, appointed a new government and ignored the National Assembly. He made a public promise to achieve independence by June 1955, and officially launched what he called his 'crusade for independence'.

However, the coup led to demonstrations against Sihanouk's actions and calls for him to abdicate. The French, meanwhile, offered no real concessions, and many did not believe Sihanouk's independence rhetoric. In January 1953, the National Assembly, still dominated by the KP, refused to approve his budget. Sihanouk responded by disbanding the Assembly, declaring martial law and arresting several leading KP members. Sihanouk's suppression of the KP caused many younger Cambodians to turn to the KPRP. These included future leaders such as Saloth Sar (better known as Pol Pot), Ieng Sary, Son Sen and Khieu Samphan.

In February 1953, Sihanouk travelled to France in the hope of gaining some concessions. The French made none, and even hinted that Sihanouk might be replaced as king. In June, as the French continued to delay, Sihanouk went into exile. By this time, France was losing the war in Vietnam and decided that it did not want to fight a fully developed nationalist uprising in Cambodia at the same time.

In October 1953, therefore, the French granted Sihanouk authority over the Cambodian armed forces, the judicial system and foreign affairs. However, they insisted on retaining French economic interests (mainly plantations, minerals, and imports and exports). Sihanouk had won a personal victory, and ordered local officials to organise demonstrations in his honour. In November 1953, Cambodia was granted full independence, though Sihanouk remained allied to France via the **French Union** until France withdrew from Indochina in 1954, after which he became head of state.

**French Union** The French Union was created by the French government in 1946, to replace its pre-war colonial system in the hope of reducing opposition to retention of its empire. In theory, its overseas 'dependencies' – such as Cambodia and Laos – were equal partners, and its citizens had full civic rights. Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam all left the French Union in 1954.



*Norodom Sihanouk greeting his subjects; Sihanouk was an immensely popular ruler*

### The Geneva Conference, 1954

The Geneva Conference took place between April and July 1954, and its primary concern was to end the First Indochina War. The main countries attending the conference were the USA, the USSR, France, Britain and Nationalist China. Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos were also represented. From November 1953, there had been a reduction in the fighting in Cambodia, and Sihanouk was able to exclude the Cambodian communists from the conference.

The conference agreed terms for the ending of hostilities, the withdrawal of foreign troops, and for elections to be held in Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos. In particular, all three countries were internationally recognised as independent, and all three ended their membership of the French Union. Many Cambodian communists, as well as the Viet Minh troops currently operating in Cambodia, went into exile in North Vietnam. However, some decided to remain in Cambodia, in part to avoid Vietnamese influence.

**Question**

Why did France finally decide to grant independence to Cambodia in the period 1953–54?

In the wake of Sihanouk's success, the KP and Son Ngoc Thanh, who had failed to deliver independence, lost support. Those on the right, who had remained loyal to Sihanouk, were promoted. Despite this, the communist-led independence movement retained control of about half of Cambodia.

## Laos

After the Japanese surrender in August 1945, Lao nationalists put up serious resistance in central Laos to the return of the French. However, in the immediate post-war period, there was still no real sense of nationalism uniting the people of Laos.

**Lao Issara** This nationalist movement, whose name means 'Free Lao', was a loose coalition between those who had co-operated with the Japanese and all those excited by the example of the Viet Minh in Vietnam. The aim of the Lao Issara was full independence from France.



### Phetxarat's provisional government

Phetxarat – prime minister of Luang Phrabang and a man distrusted by both the French and the various royalist and aristocratic élites in Laos – took control of Viang Chan from the Japanese, and the **Lao Issara** was formed.

**SOURCE B**

In consequence of the failure of the French rulers, the kingdom had to proclaim itself independent.

The juridical bonds tying us to France by treaties and agreements have been broken off in fact, because France has not met her engagement to defend us against external forces.

*Phetxarat's proclamation of 1 September 1945. Quoted in Hammer, E. J. 1955.* The Struggle for Indochina. *Stanford, USA. Stanford University Press. p. 134*

On 1 September 1945, Phetxarat declared an independent and unified Lao republic, and formed a provisional government. These moves were supported by the strongly anti-French Vietnamese living in the main cities in Laos. However, unlike France's other two possessions in Indochina, Laos had seen some joint French–Lao resistance to the Japanese *coup de force*.

After August, these forces began to take control of areas in readiness for the return of the French. At first, the Lao Issara were assisted by nationalist Chinese forces in northern Laos, who had been sent there to accept the formal Japanese surrender.

In October, Phetxarat appealed to the Allies to recognise a united and independent Laos, but they refused. Instead, the British began to help the French re-establish control of their Indochinese colonies. By early December, the Lao Issara seemed to be in control of northern and central Laos, but their position was by no means secure. They relied on support from both the Chinese army of occupation and Vietnamese forces, and the provisional government lacked finances and any significant international support.

In January 1946, the French made it clear that they would not negotiate an independent Laos with the Lao Issara, and the king of Luang Phrabang declared his acceptance of the return of the French. Although Lao Issara forces were lightly armed compared to French forces, it still took the French until 25 March 1946 to re-establish control in Laos. The Lao Issara government fled to Thailand.

## The kingdom of Laos

After its victory, France made some concessions to Lao self-government. Agreement was reached on a *modus vivendi* on 27 August 1946, and a united Laos was established as a constitutional monarchy within the French Union. However, there was only limited devolution of power. France retained control not only of defence and foreign affairs, but also of such areas as customs, postal services and mining. In addition, a French commissioner was appointed, who had the power to veto royal decrees. Not surprisingly, this arrangement was condemned by the Lao Issara.

Elections to a Constituent Assembly were held in December, and a new constitution was drawn up. A National Assembly was elected and, in November 1947, the first Royal Lao government was approved.

The new government was drawn from a small élite of the 20 most powerful families in Laos, who were allied to the French. For the next 30 years, these élites – especially those on the political right – struggled against one another to secure the top political jobs and financial privileges. As the Cold War developed, and Laos was drawn into it, this included struggles over the distribution of US aid. Little was done to solve national problems, especially if solutions might affect the vested political or economic interests of the élites. The little state money that was spent tended to be in the major cities and towns; problems in rural areas were rarely addressed.

By mid 1949, France's hold over Indochina had been significantly weakened by events in Vietnam. In July 1949, a General Convention gave Laos greater independence within the French Union, but France retained control of finance and customs, and sovereignty over defence and foreign affairs was still limited. This was enough for moderate members of the Lao Issara to return from exile and resume a role in Lao politics.

## Exile and resistance

The Lao Issara government in exile, which fled to Thailand in April 1946, was headed by Phetxarat. His deputy was **Suvanna Phuma**, while **Souphanouvong** was commander-in-chief of the Army for the Defence and Liberation of Laos, as well as being minister for foreign affairs.

### Suvanna Phuma (1901–84)

Suvanna was Phetxarat's younger brother, and a nephew of King Sisavangvong. Suvanna studied architecture in France, and then returned to Laos. Like Phetxarat and Souphanouvong, he became a nationalist and opposed French rule. He tried to bring about political reconciliation in Laos, and acted as prime minister of three coalition governments before 1975.

### Souphanouvong (1909–95)

Souphanouvong was Phetxarat's youngest half-brother, and was married to a Vietnamese woman who was a firm supporter of the Viet Minh. He was strongly opposed to the French and advocated a radical nationalism. At the time of the Japanese surrender he had been in Vietnam, and had assured Ho Chi Minh of Lao support for the Vietnamese independence struggle against the French. Souphanouvong was often known as the 'Red Prince'.

The government in exile had initially received official support from the Thai authorities. At first this had included allowing cross-border raids by both joint Lao Issara–Viet Minh and separate Viet Minh forces. When Thai support ended, the more radical Lao Issara became convinced that the only path left to them was to form an alliance with the Viet Minh, the only force capable of fighting the French. Consequently, in July 1946, Souphanouvong went to Hanoi to negotiate support. In September that year, several Lao resistance leaders – advised by the Viet Minh – joined to form the Committee for Lao Resistance in the East.

## Splits in the Lao Issara

As finances and military supplies were limited, Souphanouvong gave approval to the formation of joint Lao Issara–Viet Minh guerrilla units, believing this was the only way to continue resistance to the French. In January 1949, the first of these units, which eventually became the Lao People's Liberation Army (LPRP), was formed. Its commander was **Kaison Phomvihan**.

Those on the right of the Lao Issara were suspicious of the communists, while many moderates disliked the growing Vietnamese influence in Laos. In March 1949, the Lao Issara leadership sharply criticised Souphanouvong for his actions. This led to a split. Souphanouvong resigned from Phetxarat's government in exile, which disbanded in October 1949. Lao nationalists were thus faced with two choices: return to Laos or join Souphanouvong and continue the struggle for complete independence.

## A form of independence, 1950

On 6 February 1950, Lao Issara political leaders returning from Thailand formally transferred powers to the Royal Lao government. As in Cambodia, developments in the Cold War played a part in France's willingness to compromise. However, the new political system was badly affected by divisions, not just among members of the royal family but also between Lao who had supported the French and those in the Lao Issara who had opposed them. A new government was formed in February 1950, but Laos was still not truly independent.

## Impact of the Cold War

When the Korean War broke out in June 1950, the US agreed with France that Indochina was part of the anti-communist 'crusade'. US president Harry Truman granted military aid to France, and France later agreed that US economic aid could be distributed to the three Indochina states.

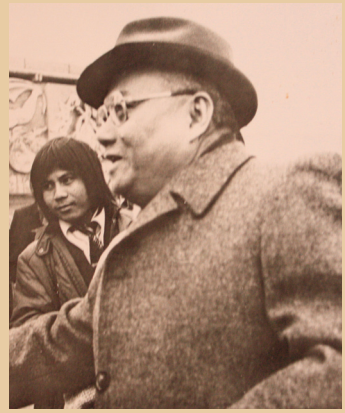
After elections in August 1951, Suvanna Phuma became prime minister and immediately began focusing on transferring remaining areas from France to Laos to complete the independence process. By 1952, police, customs and the national budget were all under the jurisdiction of the Laos government. Attempts were also made to improve health and education services. However, the rural population was still largely unaffected by these developments.

## The Pathet Lao

When the Lao Issara disbanded in October 1949, Souphanouvong – acting on advice from the Viet Minh leadership – convened a Congress of People's Representatives. This met in August 1950 to establish a new Lao revolutionary movement, along similar lines to those in Cambodia and Vietnam. The Naeo Lao Issara (Free Laos Front) was formed, with a provisional 'resistance government' known as the Pathet Lao, in opposition to the Royal Lao government. Souphanouvong was its president and minister for foreign affairs.

### Kaison Phomvihan (1920–92)

Kaison's real name was Nguyen Cai Song. His father was Vietnamese and his mother Lao. He studied law at Hanoi University, but left to fight the French during the 1940s. In 1955, he set up the LPRP and then became secretary-general of the Pathet Lao (see below left). Kaison Phomvihan led communist forces against both the Royal Lao and US troops. He was later prime minister of the Lao People's Democratic Republic from 1975 to 1991, and president from 1991 until his death.



### Fact

The split in the Lao Issara over the best way to achieve independence was personified by the three brothers: Phetxarat sought no compromise with the French, but also rejected reliance on the Vietnamese. Suvanna Phuma believed that negotiations with France could achieve independence. Souphanouvong believed that the French could only be forced out with the help of the Viet Minh.

The Pathet Lao issued a 12-point political programme, calling for an 'entirely independent and unified Laos' and the formation of a new coalition government. It also pledged itself to establishing equality between the different national and ethnic groups in Laos, and to unity with the peoples of Cambodia and Vietnam in their fight against the French.

By the time the Pathet Lao was formed, the Royal Lao government was well-established in the main lowland areas. The Pathet Lao was therefore forced to rely on the ethnic minorities and external support. This forced it to develop a radical national and ethnic minorities policy, which emphasised equality. Thus – uniquely in Lao politics – leaders of ethnic minorities were given prominent positions in a national organisation. However, many Lao were suspicious of the Pathet Lao's links with the Viet Minh, fearing Vietnamese domination.

**Question**

How did the Pathet Lao treat the ethnic minorities in Laos?

Recruitment into the Lao People's Liberation Army (see page 25) continued during 1951–53. Through the introduction of self-help schemes and improvements to health and education provisions, remote villages were slowly won over, allowing the LPRP to extend its guerrilla bases and deprive the Royal Lao government and the French of more and more of the country. By late 1952, much of north-eastern Laos was in the hands of the Pathet Lao, and during 1953 they were able to consolidate their hold on large parts of Laos.

### Independence, October 1953

By mid 1953, the French realised their position in Indochina was in serious trouble, and after the end of the Korean War in July 1953 pressure for a settlement increased. While Sihanouk launched his one-man 'crusade for independence' in Cambodia, a new French government decided to 'perfect the independence' of the three Indochinese countries by transferring all remaining responsibilities to their respective governments.

**Fact**

During 1949–51, several of the leading Pathet Lao activists joined the ICP (see page 21). When the ICP was disbanded in February 1951, three separate communist parties were formed instead, although the Vietnamese party reserved the right to supervise the activities of the other two. The ICP also provided for the formation of a federation of the three Indochina states, if all were in agreement. While separate communist parties for Vietnam and Cambodia were formed in March and April 1951 respectively, the Phak Paxaxon Lao (Lao People's Party) was not formed until March 1955, well after Laos had achieved full independence.

In Laos, negotiations with the king led to a Treaty of Friendship and Association with France on 22 October 1953 which, in return for independence, affirmed Lao membership of the French Union. French officials were replaced by Lao civil servants, although the former continued as 'advisers'. The Royal Lao government also accepted that French troops could move freely within Lao territory. Before a ceasefire was eventually reached in August 1954, Pathet Lao forces – often reinforced by Viet Minh troops – kept up attacks on French and Royal Lao units.

### Geneva Conference, 1954

The Royal Lao delegation attended the Geneva Conference but the Lao and Khmer 'resistance governments' were not represented, despite attempts by both the Viet Minh and the USSR to have them included. Eventually, the Pathet Lao received *de facto* recognition as a guerrilla movement that needed to be demobilised. On 20 July 1954, the Agreement on the Cessation of Hostilities in Laos was signed. The Viet Minh representative signed on behalf of the Pathet Lao.

## What factors affected the consolidation of nationalist independence, 1955–75?

## Cambodia

### Impact of independence

For most Cambodians in rural areas, the departure of the French had little impact; they still had to pay taxes to a government that did little on their behalf. As part of the Geneva settlement in 1954, elections were planned in Cambodia


*The states of Indochina sign treaties with France, 1954*



for the following year. Although weakened, the KP (see page 20) was still the best-organised party. Its younger members were increasingly anti-monarchist and, during 1954, had succeeded in moving the party to the political left. There was also a newly established, pro-communist organisation called the Krom Pracheachon (People's Group). The KPRP remained underground.

Many expected the two left-wing parties to do well in the 1955 elections, a prospect which naturally concerned the right. In March 1955, Sihanouk abdicated and founded a new national political movement – the Sangkum Reastr Niyum (People's Socialist Community). Membership was dependent on not belonging to any other political party; in this way Sihanouk hoped to diminish the influence of other parties. Several parties did indeed fold during 1955, and those that eventually stood against Sihanouk's Sangkum in the elections were the KP, the KS and the Pracheachon.

Civil servants were bullied into joining Sangkum, depriving the KP of many members. From May to September 1955, several opposition newspapers were shut down and their editors imprisoned without trial. KP and Pracheachon candidates were harassed and some campaign workers killed. There was intimidation on polling day, and several ballot boxes disappeared (in which it was assumed that the KP had the majority of the votes). Not surprisingly, Sangkum candidates won all the Assembly seats, and over 75% of the vote.

## Sihanouk's rule, 1955–70

Between 1955 and 1970, Sihanouk monopolised political power, but he was widely popular and Cambodia experienced real prosperity for most of this period. After the 1955 elections, Sihanouk continued to harass the KP and it disbanded in 1957.

## Historical debate

There is some debate about the extent to which Sihanouk was a positive force in the struggle for Cambodian independence. In particular, was his authoritarian style the main reason that Cambodia was plunged into civil war and experienced the atrocities under Pol Pot in the period after 1970? Or should Sihanouk be seen as a strong leader who achieved independence through negotiation in 1953, and then managed to keep Cambodia out of the Cold War and the Second Indochina War for several years?

**Fact**

The war in Vietnam became known as the Second Indochina War, and lasted from 1958 to 1975. The Geneva Conference of 1954 had temporarily split Vietnam into North (communist-controlled) and South (an anti-communist dictatorship backed by the US), pending reunification elections to be held in 1956. However, the South refused to hold the elections, fearing a communist victory. Fighting broke out in Vietnam again in 1958. Initially, this was between guerrillas (known as the Viet Cong) and the government in the South, but the US and North Vietnam were soon drawn into the conflict.

**Ho Chi Minh Trail** This was a series of communication and supply routes through Laos and Cambodia, which connected the Viet Cong in South Vietnam to their allies in the North. Consequently, the Second Indochina War eventually spilled over into both Cambodia and Laos, as the US decided to bomb these supply routes.

In the 1958 election, the only opposition to the Sangkum was the Pracheachon (in 1955, it had won over 20,000 votes). Despite nominating several candidates, police repression resulted in all but one withdrawing their candidacy. The 1958 election marked the end of multi-party politics in Cambodia. Sihanouk's constant repression of left-wing parties led the communists to believe that the only remaining option was armed struggle.

Despite his repression of the left, Sihanouk was seen by the US as pro-communist. Consequently, several US-approved plots against him were hatched in Thailand and South Vietnam. In response, Sihanouk began to build a tactical alliance with sections of the Cambodian left and with Communist China, which he hoped would restrain any attempts by Vietnam to alter boundaries. A more left-leaning media was allowed during the early 1960s. As a result, in the 1962 election, several leftists – who concealed their communist sympathies and joined the Sangkum – were elected to the National Assembly. In 1963, Sihanouk ended US economic and military assistance, and nationalised the banks and the export–import trade. He later called this 'Buddhist socialism'.

### Impact of the Second Indochina War

Sihanouk tried hard to keep Cambodia out of the developing war in Vietnam, but the war destabilised the Cambodian economy. A turning point came in 1965, when the US sent large numbers of troops into South Vietnam. As the war intensified, it began to spill over into Cambodia. Sihanouk broke off diplomatic relations with the US and maintained Cambodian neutrality throughout 1965.

During 1965–66, Sihanouk allied secretly with China and North Vietnam. He believed that North Vietnam would win the war, and wanted to ensure that Cambodian independence would not be undermined by an expansionist post-war Vietnam. Sihanouk allowed North Vietnam to station troops in Cambodian territory and to send materials and troops into South Vietnam via the **Ho Chi Minh Trail**, on the condition that Cambodia's borders were recognised and that Vietnamese troops left Cambodian civilians and troops alone.

There was less interference from Sihanouk in the 1966 elections, and many of those elected had little loyalty to him. Most were conservatives, but the new prime minister, an army commander called General **Lon Nol** (see page 29), was known to be a loyal supporter of Sihanouk. However, Lon Nol also had the support of conservatives and the economic élite, who disliked Sihanouk's economic policies. Most of the military had opposed the ending of US military aid and intensely disliked Sihanouk's connections with China and North Vietnam, yet Lon Nol believed these policies to be the best way to preserve Cambodian independence (during the 1950s, the US had made it clear that it would always favour Thailand and South Vietnam over Cambodian interests).

By 1966, Sihanouk had come to believe he had no serious opposition in Cambodia: the KP had dissolved, and neither the Pracheachon nor the KS were significant forces. The communist KPRP was an underground organisation and so members did not publicly reveal their party allegiance. In 1962, the KPRP leader Tou Samouth was assassinated by Sihanouk's police. His replacement, **Pol Pot** (see page 29), was popular with intellectuals, students and some monks in the cities, but had little support in rural areas.

Sihanouk launched another anti-left campaign and purge, although most of those who swore loyalty to him were allowed to resume their positions.

However, the clandestine leadership of the KPRP fled to the Vietnamese border to seek protection from North Vietnamese troops. Consequently, left-wing opposition to Sihanouk was limited. Another reason for this was that the North Vietnamese, keen to maintain the alliance with Sihanouk, did not support the idea of Cambodian communists waging a campaign against him. This attitude caused growing resentment, which came to the fore after 1975. Despite this, in 1967, the Cambodian-based communists decided it was time to begin the armed struggle against Sihanouk.

One result of Sihanouk's nationalisation of foreign trade was that rice was smuggled out to North Vietnam (by 1967, this was as much as 25% of the rice harvest). As well as losing revenue, this created rice shortages in Cambodia. By 1967–68, Cambodia's economy was in decline. Sihanouk's response was to turn more political power over to Lon Nol.

**SOURCE C**

Economic aid from the United States is a snare and a delusion, because on close examination there is not a country in the world whose true national interests are really benefited by American assistance. If in effect the United States with one hand offers bread and sugar, with the other it stabs your sovereignty and independence and bleeds your economy white. This says nothing about creating disorder, war and an endless cortege of misery in your own midst.

*Comments made by Sihanouk, 16 November 1966. Quoted in Buss, C. A. 1970.* Contemporary Southeast Asia. *New York, USA. Van Nostrand Reinhold. p. 252.*

## Cambodian communist developments

The influence of Cambodian communists on events in Cambodia was limited before 1970, mainly because from 1963 to 1966 communist leadership was under Vietnamese protection. In 1965, the North Vietnamese instructed Pol Pot to subordinate Cambodia's interests in order to help Vietnam win the war against the US. This meant that only *political* opposition to Sihanouk was permissible at present – the armed struggle needed to be postponed. Although Pol Pot said nothing in opposition to this, he was angered by it.

Soon after, Pol Pot visited Communist China and looked to Mao Zedong for support in order to escape Vietnamese direction. He then returned to a remote part of Cambodia and, over the next four years, established a headquarters where he began to plan for complete independence for Cambodia.

In 1967, in Vietnam, the newly reconstituted Communist Party of Kampuchea (CPK) began its armed struggle against Sihanouk. By early 1970, the guerrilla forces of its armed wing, known as the Khmer Rouge, had captured almost 20% of the country. At the same time, increasing numbers of young Cambodian students and teachers, alienated by Sihanouk's style of rule and the continuing corruption and conservatism of Cambodian politics, turned to the communists.

**Lon Nol (1913–85)** Lon Nol rose through the army and served under Sihanouk as both defence minister and prime minister. He was pressured into joining a coup that overthrew Sihanouk in 1970 and proclaimed the formation of the Khmer Republic – which is how Cambodia was known until 1975.

**Pol Pot (1925–98)** Pol Pot (real name Saloth Sar) is the best known of the notorious Khmer Rouge leaders responsible for the deaths of possibly 2 million Cambodians in the years 1975–79. Pol Pot completed a technical course in France, where he joined the French Communist Party, before returning to Cambodia. Following Sihanouk's repression of the left and the murder of Tou Samouth in 1962, Pol Pot became the leader of the KPRP. From 1976 to 1979, he was prime minister of Democratic Kampuchea (see page 44). He died while under house arrest imposed by a Khmer Rouge faction. There is some suggestion that he might have been poisoned.

**Sisowath Sirik Matak (1914–75)** Matak was very much opposed to the leftist policies Sihanouk adopted in the 1960s. He became increasingly important after Lon Nol appointed him as his deputy prime minister in 1969. Matak was the main force behind the right-wing coup of 1970 and had wanted Sihanouk assassinated, but Lon Nol opposed this. Matak refused offers of asylum from the US when the Khmer Rouge were about to take control of Cambodia, and was later executed.

## The coup of 1970

By late 1969, high-ranking conservative officials were plotting Sihanouk's overthrow. The main leader was his cousin, **Sisowath Sirik Matak**, deputy prime minister under Lon Nol. Matak was pro-Western, and strongly objected to the presence of Vietnamese troops in Cambodian territory. Lon Nol had not really opposed Sihanouk's previous policies – in fact, many of his fellow officers had grown rich by selling arms and supplies to the Vietnamese. However, after 1969, when Cambodian troops came increasingly under attack from the CPK, Lon Nol's attitude began to change. This was accompanied by increasing pressure from other officers, who believed that renewed links with the US would increase their opportunities for personal enrichment.

When Sihanouk went abroad for his annual holiday in January 1970, those opposed to him began to reverse some of his policies, such as re-privatising the banks and trying to persuade North Vietnam to withdraw its troops. On 17 March 1970, with Sihanouk's return imminent, Matak and three army officers forced Lon Nol to support a vote of no confidence against Sihanouk in the National Assembly; this passed by 86 to 3 votes. Lon Nol stayed on as prime minister, with Matak as deputy.

In part, this coup was engineered by the CIA, and Lon Nol was immediately recognised by the US as the head of a legitimate government. While the business élites and many educated people in the Cambodian capital were in favour of the coup, there was little support in rural areas.

After talks with China and North Vietnam, Sihanouk agreed to head a united front government in exile, known as the Royal Government of the National Union of Kampuchea (its French acronym was GRUNK). This was allied to North Vietnam, with Pol Pot's communist guerrillas, the Khmer Rouge, as its main fighting force. Sihanouk issued an appeal for Cambodians to fight against Lon Nol's new government. Thus began a civil war – and a war – which resulted in great devastation and, eventually, in revolution.



**Theory of knowledge**

**History and 'evidence'**
When trying to understand the actions and motives of people involved in recent history, one source of historical evidence is provided by the diaries and memoirs written by these people. On one hand, such documents can be useful sources; but on the other, their usefulness can be limited by inaccuracies and even deliberate distortion. Try to read about one specific event or action described by Sihanouk in *My War with the CIA*. How reliable do you think his account of it is?

**SOURCE D**

Our armed forces are an integral part of the resistance forces of Indo-China as a whole. The Americans have long used Indo-China as a single battlefield … We, the peoples of Indo-China, must also consider the whole area a single battle field and coordinate our activities. This was the central idea of the Summit Conference of the Peoples of Indo-China on 24–25 April 1970, just five weeks after I was deposed.

*Sihanouk's comments on the struggle for Cambodian independence following the coup that overthrew him. Quoted in Sihanouk, N. and Burchett W. 1973. My War with the CIA. London, UK. Penguin. pp. 184–85.*

## The victory of the Khmer Rouge

Many Cambodians supported the coup because they simply wanted foreign troops off Cambodian soil. Although Lon Nol gave the North Vietnamese 48 hours to leave, they did not. In the two offensives he launched against them in 1970 and 1971 – with US encouragement – government troops were badly defeated.

In May 1970, a combined US–South Vietnamese force invaded the east of the country, but this only succeeded in driving the North Vietnamese into western parts of Cambodia.

After 1971, Lon Nol launched no more offensives, but his weak and increasingly corrupt government survived until 1975 with the help of US economic and military aid, and especially heavy US bombing in areas of Cambodia held by CPK forces.

In rural areas, Lon Nol's officers often falsified troop numbers in order to pocket the pay of fictitious soldiers. Many were reluctant to fight, and some even sold US military equipment to the communists. By the end of 1972, Lon Nol's Khmer Republic only controlled the capital and a few other provincial capitals, along with Battambang in the north-west. Many Cambodians who supported the Khmer Rouge, however, believed they were fighting to restore Sihanouk, rather than to implement the radical communism advocated by the Khmer Rouge leader, Pol Pot.

While waiting to complete their victory, the Khmer Rouge began to try out various forms of collectivisation and co-operatives in the areas they controlled, in an attempt to develop a form of agrarian socialism. Rumours began to spread about how the Khmer Rouge were taking harsh measures against their opponents. In early 1975, the Khmer Rouge cut off approaches to Phnom Penh. Despite airlifts by the US, insufficient rice was flown in to feed the inhabitants and ammunition also began to run out. Matters were made worse by the 2 million refugees who fled into Phnom Penh to escape the effects of US bombing. In March 1975, Lon Nol also fled while the US tried – unsuccessfully – to reach an agreement with Sihanouk.

Without waiting for the approval of his Vietnamese allies, Pol Pot ordered the Khmer Rouge to take the capital. This was achieved on 17 April 1975, two weeks before the final communist victory in Vietnam.

**Fact**
US bombing became particularly intense during 1973. It was designed to delay the inevitable communist victory, and is said to have 'bombed Cambodia back into the stone age'. Over 100,000 tonnes of bombs fell on the Cambodian countryside, destroying or seriously disrupting agricultural production, as well as killing or wounding an incalculable number of civilians. While this delayed the capture of Phnom Penh for another 18 months, it also hardened the attitude of many of the Khmer Rouge.

**Fact**
As well as hoping to bring about a new revolutionary Cambodia, the Khmer Rouge wanted to be completely independent of their former Vietnamese allies.



*Khmer Rouge fighters celebrate on the streets of the Cambodian capital, Phnom Penh, on 17 April 1975*

# Laos

## Establishing national unity

As part of the Geneva Agreements made in 1954, free elections were to be held by secret ballot in Laos during 1955. However, political divisions in the governing élite in Laos emerged over what line to take with the Pathet Lao. The right was against offering the Pathet Lao any recognition or role, while the left argued that they could not be excluded from any political settlement. During this period of uncertainty, Suvanna Phuma's government fell; Katay Don Sasorith, the new prime minister, increasingly looked to Thailand and the US for help in overcoming the influence of the Pathet Lao. Meanwhile, the Pathet Lao gained 15,000 new recruits and the Viet Minh continued to offer advice, training and equipment.

Disagreements over how much territory should remain temporarily in Pathet Lao hands – and the holding of elections – led to a stalemate in April 1955. The Royal Lao government went ahead with the elections, with the result that a new government was formed by Suvanna Phuma. This pledged to make agreement with the Pathet Lao its top priority in order to achieve political reconciliation.

## The role of the USA

The US was unhappy about the Geneva Agreements, believing them to be insufficient to stop the spread of communism. The US therefore refused to sign the Final Declaration, and President Dwight D. Eisenhower warned that his country was not bound by any of the agreements reached at Geneva. Instead, the US intended to prop up the anti-communist governments in Laos, Cambodia and South Vietnam. It also set up **SEATO**.

Essentially, SEATO would allow the US to help Laos should its government come under threat from 'foreign communist aggression'. The US then pressured the Royal Lao government to take action against the Pathet Lao. Soon, US 'civilians' (actually seconded or officially retired servicemen) were taking over the French role of training the Royal Lao armed forces. The US also established a large CIA presence in the country.

By 1955, with the US funding the entire Royal Lao Army, and North Vietnam the only source of military aid for the Pathet Lao, Laos was the only country where both sides in a civil war were entirely financed by outside powers. However, the massive scale of US aid in Laos led to even greater corruption. As in Cambodia, the stated number of troops was larger than the reality, with officers and civil servants pocketing the extra wages.

By strengthening the Royal Lao Army, the US altered the balance of political forces in Laos and made it increasingly likely that the army would intervene in Lao politics. Many Lao came to see this as undermining Lao independence, and wanted their country to remain neutral in the Cold War. Developments in Vietnam made this increasingly unlikely.

## The First Coalition

Suvanna Phuma believed that the only security for Laos lay in a flexible neutrality, based on establishing good relations with neighbouring states, and coming to an agreement with the Pathet Lao (which was led by his half-brother, Souphanouvong). Under Kaison Phomvihan (see page 25), the Pathet Lao's military strength had reached 15 battalions, and military supplies continued to arrive from China and North Vietnam.

**SEATO** This was the South-East Asia Treaty Organisation, formed in Manila in September 1954. It was designed to 'protect' the whole of Southeast Asia from what the US claimed was 'communist aggression'. Laos could not join, as it was neutral according to the Geneva Agreements, so it was made a 'protocol state'. This meant that, for example, if Thailand was 'under threat from communism' as it was developing in Laos, SEATO could take military action to 'protect' one of its members.

**Fact**
Between 1955 and 1963, each Lao in theory received $192.30 – even more than the US funds spent in South Vietnam. Yet, although 90% of the population were peasant farmers, only 7% of project aid ($1.3 million) between 1953–59 actually went to agriculture; $184 million went to the military. This did not include the military aid given secretly by the CIA and the US Department of Defense.

**Fact**
When it became clear that South Vietnam would not hold the elections due in 1956 according to the Geneva Agreements (it was expected that most would vote for reunification under the popular Ho Chi Minh), North Vietnam decided to pursue unity and full independence by other means. This meant that it would try to persuade the governments of both Laos and Cambodia to support its aims, while the US was determined to prevent this. The possibility of a neutral Laos was therefore most unlikely.

In March 1955, a broad national front, the Naeo Lao Hak Xat (Lao Patriotic Front, or LPF) was set up. In January 1956, Souphanouvong was elected its president, and the LPF adopted a 12-point political programme. At a meeting between Suvanna Phuma and Souphanouvong in Viang Chan in August 1956, it was agreed that the Pathet Lao provinces and armed forces would be reintegrated into the Royal Lao state, in return for further elections, guarantees of the rights and freedoms of individuals, and the formation of a Government of National Union.

Although Suvanna believed this would neutralise the Pathet Lao and bring about real reconciliation and unity, the US regarded the move as an advance for communism. Open and covert pressure was put on Suvanna to break the agreement, but he held further talks with Souphanouvong in December 1956, which resulted in an agreement to form a coalition government before the elections and to legalise the LPF. In March 1957, Phetxarat, who supported the reconciliation, returned from exile in Thailand.

Suvanna's deal was initially blocked by the National Assembly. However, he pressed ahead and, in November 1957, the Pathet Lao gave up their provinces and accepted two seats in the First Coalition government. At long last, Laos was reunited and independent of France.

## Developments, 1958–64

Elections took place in May 1958. They were free and fair, and the LPF took nine out of the 21 seats contested. Souphanouvong won the highest popular vote of any candidate and was elected president of the National Assembly. Overall, however, left-wing candidates won only about 30% of the popular vote.

**Fact**
In large part, the elections in May 1958 focused on US aid – how it led to corruption and inflation, and undermined Lao independence. These elections were also the first in which women were allowed to vote.



The success of the LPF caused concern in the right wing and, in June, the US sponsored the formation of the Committee for the Defence of the National Interest (CDNI). This unelected group was critical of Suvanna and wanted to be included in the new coalition government. When the government refused, the US began efforts to replace Suvanna's government, which was eventually achieved by engineering a financial crisis.

Suvanna's First Coalition was replaced by a more right-wing government, whose primary aim was to oppose communism to prevent the Pathet Lao gaining any seats. This was a defeat for Suvanna's attempts at national unity and reconciliation – and a blow to Lao independence and neutrality.

Pathet Lao leaders remained in the capital, but were later arrested. Civil war resumed, with the US building up the Royal Lao Army while Pathet Lao forces – aided by North Vietnam – launched a renewed guerrilla insurgency and began to take control of large areas of Laos.

In December 1958, clashes between North Vietnamese and Royal Lao forces led the government to take emergency powers. Some civilians were removed from the government and replaced by CDNI members of the armed forces, including Colonel **Phumi Nosavan**.

**Phumi Nosavan (1920–85)**
Nosavan was backed by the CIA, became a minister in the right-wing government in February 1959, and was soon made a general. When the US decided to back a coalition government in 1960, Nosavan refused to join and aid from the US was stopped. He then turned to trafficking opium to raise money; he also made money from vice and gambling rackets. In 1965, Nosavan went into exile in Thailand. After 1975, he was involved in activities against the Pathet Lao.

The Lao police and army, as well as 'advisors' from the USA, began a series of repressive anti-communist measures, including assassinations. Consequently, large numbers of Pathet Lao fled into North Vietnam. In March, the LPF's newspaper (*Lao Hak Xat*) was banned, although it still tried to operate as a legal political party.

Meanwhile, the military gained control of the Ministry of Defence, and began to act independently of the government. By this point, the US was backing Phumi Nosavan as their preferred 'strongman'. Yet army actions against the LPF in rural areas were increasingly alienating local populations. In May 1959, the government began to move against Pathet Lao sympathisers in the Buddhist *sangha*.

Civil war was inevitable, and began officially in July 1959. The opposing forces were the Royal Lao Army, numbering about 30,000, and the Pathet Lao forces, numbering only about 8000. Despite their numerical inferiority, the Pathet Lao enjoyed some early successes. When the government arrested Souphanouvong and other leading LPF members, leadership officially passed to the more radical Kaison Phomvihan (see page 25).

In October 1959, both Phetxarat and the king, Sisavangvong, died. In December, Nosavan began the first stages of a short-lived military coup and forced the prime minister to resign. When the new king, the right-wing Savang Vatthana, began to have doubts about an openly military government, Nosavan backed down and new elections were called. Restrictions were placed on left-wing parties, while both the US and Thailand gave significant amounts of money to the CDNI.

The elections of April 1960 were clearly rigged. CDNI candidates 'won' 34 of the 59 seats (in fact, they received more votes than there were electors). This reinforced the Pathet Lao's determination to fight, and by early 1960 they controlled about 20% of the population. The growing political and military crisis led to another coup in August 1960, by junior army officers headed by Captain Konglae.



**SOURCE E**

What leads us to carry out this revolution is our desire to stop the bloody civil war; eliminate grasping public servants, carry out enquiries on military commanders and officials whose property amounts to much more than their monthly salaries can afford, and chase away foreign armed forces as soon as possible.

*Declaration made by Captain Konglae, leader of the August 1960 coup. Quoted in Stuart-Fox, M. 1997. A History of Laos. Cambridge, UK. Cambridge University Press. p. 112.*

**neutralism** This refers to the desire to stay out of Cold War alliances, and especially the destructive war taking place in Vietnam. The 'neutralists' wanted to remain independent of both the US and communist groups, preferring a 'middle course'. Many, however, were prepared to work with the Pathet Lao in order to establish reconciliation and peace in Laos.

These officers wanted Suvanna reinstated as prime minister, and believed that the main obstacle to Lao **neutralism** and independence was US policy. However, Nosavan was determined to crush the coup. With US backing, he declared martial law and began to organise a counter-coup.

The king accepted Suvanna as prime minister, and Konglae and his officers handed over power to him. Suvanna began discussions with Nosavan for the creation of a coalition government, but Nosavan went ahead with his counter-coup and called for the overthrow of Suvanna's new legal government.

While the CIA flew in supplies for Nosavan, the Pathet Lao announced their readiness to call off the conflict and to join a coalition government. This caused a split amongst army officers, many of whom were unhappy at increasing US influence; some of these neutralists began to support Suvanna's efforts. Suvanna opened formal negotiations with the Pathet Lao.

Alarmed, the US decided that Nosavan must overthrow Suvanna as soon as possible. By mid November, massive US military and technical aid had shifted the balance of forces in Nosavan's favour. In December, after fierce fighting, Nosavan's rebel army was poised to capture the capital, and Suvanna and most of his ministers fled to Cambodia, where he still claimed to be the legal prime minister of Laos. A new provisional government, headed by Nosavan, was immediately recognised by the US and Thailand. As well as conventional military aid, the CIA organised a 'Secret Army' amongst Hmong villagers who were opposed to the Pathet Lao.

Konglae and his neutralist forces then joined the Pathet Lao. Together, they consolidated their hold on most of northern and eastern Laos, and military campaigns against these groups in early 1961 met with little success. Konglae – nominally in charge of the legal government's Supreme Military Council – requested military aid from the USSR and North Vietnam, both of which co-operated.

**Activity**

Carry out further research into the reasons why Lao neutralists decided to work with the Pathet Lao in the years after 1954.

## The Second Coalition

While the alliance between the Pathet Lao and the neutralists continued to produce military success, the new US administration under John F. Kennedy began to consider accepting Lao neutrality. In May 1961, an international conference took place in Geneva, at which both the US and the USSR supported a neutral and independent Laos. In part as the result of Sihanouk's diplomacy, agreement was reached on a ceasefire and, in principle, on the formation of a tripartite Provisional Government of National Union. The US even accepted the idea of Suvanna as prime minister.

This Second Coalition government was sworn in on 23 June 1962, and new elections were announced. However, the Pathet Lao were in a much stronger position this time. The neutralists were also divided over whether or not to accept US aid. By March 1963, the divisions had cemented and different groups allied with either the Pathet Lao or the right. By the end of 1963, the Second Coalition government had effectively collapsed.

In the capital, where corruption, gambling, opium dens and prostitution flourished, power was now clearly with Nosavan. Yet the impact of US aid was to sour relations between the central government and rural areas. By contrast, in areas controlled by the Pathet Lao, links between local and central commands were strong, and local people felt they were part of a national struggle.

Divisions between rightists and neutralists in early 1964 led to another coup in April, which ended in the arrest of all neutralists, including Suvanna. The effects of the coup were short-lived, but Suvannas's influence, and that of the neutralists as a whole, was significantly reduced.

The Pathet Lao regarded all these developments as proof that a fully developed revolutionary struggle was required. In October 1964, a National Political Conference resulted in a formal alliance between the Pathet Lao and a group of 'Patriotic Neutralists'. This turning point marked the formal end of the Second Coalition government.

## War and revolution, 1964–75

From 1964 until the ceasefire in 1973, Laos experienced the most savage fighting in its history. Instead of building the economy of a newly independent state, its energies and resources were spent on destruction.

In May 1964, the US air war in Laos began, as part of the conflict in Vietnam. This time, US military action was carried out with the approval of Suvanna, who had become disillusioned by the growing reliance of the Pathet Lao on North Vietnam. Despite this, the ongoing ground war saw the Pathet Lao and their allies gradually increase the areas under their control. While the US increased its bombing of Laos, the number of North Vietnamese forces assisting the Pathet Lao rose to about 40,000, allowing the communist forces to maintain their grip.

*Pathet Lao troops with an anti-aircraft gun in 1967, during the US bombing raids*

**Fact**

The US air war was kept secret from the US public and Congress until 1969, despite being reported by both the Pathet Lao and the North Vietnamese. These covert operations involved US planes with Lao markings flown by US and Thai pilots. In December 1964, the US began regular bombing raids on the Ho Chi Minh Trail in northern and eastern Laos, known as Operation Barrel Roll. By 1970, B-52s were being regularly used. By the end of the conflict in 1973, the people of Laos had been subjected to some of the heaviest bombing in the history of aerial warfare: the US dropped more bombs on Laos than were dropped in the whole of the Second World War.



## The ceasefire

In 1968, the LPF issued a call for the formation of a Government of National Union, a general election, and respect for the monarchy and Buddhism. Suvanna was willing, but the Pathet Lao insisted that the US must leave Laos before any new government could be formed.

In July 1972, Suvanna agreed to new talks with Kaison, now secretary-general of the Lao People's Revolutionary Party (formerly the LPF, which had changed its name in February 1972). Progress was slow, as all sides awaited the outcome of the negotiations taking place to end the Second Indochina War. Once this was achieved on 23 January 1973, the way was open for a resolution to the war in Laos.

Finally, in February 1973, the Vientiane Treaty agreed a ceasefire and the formation of a new Provisional Government of National Union in Laos. By this time, over 2 million tonnes of bombs had been dropped on Pathet Lao-controlled areas – 2 tonnes for every inhabitant. Conservative estimates put the casualty figures at 200,000 dead and twice that number wounded. In addition, as many as 750,000 Lao had become refugees.

## The Third Coalition

Agreement on the formation of a new coalition government was reached in September 1973. This time – with the US wanting to withdraw from Indochina and with North Vietnamese units still in parts of Laos – the Pathet Lao were in a position of strength. By the terms of the agreement, Suvanna remained as prime minister and government posts were split equally between both sides. A National Political Consultative Council was formed, also equally representing the two sides and given equal standing to the government. With Suvanna as their only representative, the neutralists were squeezed out of any position of influence.

Souphanouvong made a welcome return to the capital for the swearing-in of the new government. He became the head of the Consultative Council, thus gaining equal status with Suvanna. While the government began to work smoothly, the Pathet Lao consolidated their support in the Consultative Council. In May, they drew up a moderate set of proposals along democratic lines, highlighting the need for development in agriculture and forestry using mixed-economy methods.

**Question**

Why was control of the Consultative Council an important factor in the growing power of the Pathet Lao?

Despite a promising start under the Third Coalition, the Lao economy went into crisis. Inflation was high and the desperate need for post-war reconstruction coincided with a decline in revenue. Throughout late 1974 and early 1975, there were demonstrations and strikes against corruption and poor working conditions. Suvanna tried to curb this by banning all public meetings and demonstrations, but the 1973 agreement began to disintegrate.

The communist victories in Cambodia and South Vietnam in April and May 1975 led the Lao People's Liberation Army to step up its political activities. At the same time, Pathet Lao forces began to move into Royal Lao Army areas. Hoping to avoid further armed conflict, Suvanna accepted this situation and by the end of May, almost every town in southern Laos had come under Pathet Lao control without opposition.

The Pathet Lao's next step was to move against corrupt officials and to deal with the financial crisis by means of People's Revolutionary Committees. Many Lao saw the Pathet Lao as less corrupt than the government, and believed they would bring about national reconciliation and unity, so most army and police units co-operated with growing Pathet Lao influence.

New elections were scheduled for 1 April 1976, after which, Suvanna announced, he would retire from politics. In November 1975, a meeting took place between the government and the Consultative Council, which coincided with large demonstrations and calls for the abolition of the monarchy. Suvanna and the king conceded, and this move was formally accepted by an unofficial National Congress of People's Representatives in December 1975. The Lao People's Democratic Republic was proclaimed.

# What parts did Sihanouk and Souphanouvong play in the struggles for independence and neutrality?

Several people played important roles in the achievement of national unity and independence in the two regions under discussion. However, the parts played by Sihanouk in Cambodia and by Souphanouvong in Laos deserve special review, in part because both men held influential positions over a long period.

## Sihanouk

After Japan's conquest of Indochina during the Second World War, Prince Norodom Sihanouk kept his collaboration with the Japanese to a minimum. From 1946 to 1949, he acted in the belief that the only way to obtain independence for Cambodia was to negotiate peacefully and diplomatically with France.

Sihanouk's 'campaign for independence' appealed to many Khmer, and it was mainly his peaceful approach – rather than the path of armed struggle suggested by other Cambodian nationalists – that seemed to have won the day by 1954. Between 1955 and 1970, Sihanouk's shifting diplomacy prevented Cambodia from being dragged into the war in Vietnam. However, this approach often made relations with the US and its client regimes in Thailand and South Vietnam difficult.



Sihanouk gained an early reputation as a 'playboy prince', but he worked hard on political and administrative issues, and his frequent tours of the countryside brought ordinary people some contact with the national government. However, Sihanouk's domestic record has caused debate among historians. During his 'Buddhist socialist' period (1963–69), he spent a lot of money on improving education – in some years, more than 20% of the national budget. An unforeseen result of this expenditure was that in the late 1960s, many high-school and university graduates became discontented because there were not enough jobs for them, causing them to drift towards the communists.

Sihanouk's appeals to Cambodia's poor also had an unforeseen effect: their expectations and self-worth were raised, but they grew discontented when there was no dramatic improvement in their situation. In addition, some of Sihanouk's economic policies – and his efforts to stay out of the war raging in Vietnam – weakened the Cambodian economy.

Yet, according to some historians, Sihanouk was largely responsible for what happened after 1970, as his very personal style of rule prevented the development of a multi-party democracy. They claim that his paternalism (he tended to treat the people as his 'children') and his readiness to brand all opponents as traitors, set the scene for what happened later: the warfare and chaos of the Khmer Republic under Lon Nol, the horrors of Democratic Kampuchea under Pol Pot, and the single-party politics that followed.

## Souphanouvong

Educated in France and Vietnam, Souphanouvong eventually became a supporter of Ho Chi Minh and joined the Indochinese communist movement. His importance in the struggle for Lao independence is based on his leading role in the formation of the Naeo Lao Issara (Free Laos Front). Eventually known as

the Pathet Lao, it was this movement that ultimately led to both independence and a sort of national unity. Souphanouvong also recognised that in order to be successful in the struggle for independence – especially as the Cold War developed – Laos would need to seek help from the communists in Vietnam.

Souphanouvong played an important part in the negotiations with neutralist Lao politicians that led to the formation of three coalition governments, allowing the Pathet Lao to strengthen their position. He also played a significant role in ensuring that people recognised the communists as nationalists who would defend Lao independence and move against the corruption associated with US influence. Under Souphanouvong, the communists made real efforts to incorporate the various ethnic groups into their organisations. Certainly, this communist victory was not down to Marxist policies such as land distribution (which was not a problem in most of Laos).

As leader of the Lao People's Revolutionary Party, which finally seized power in 1975, Souphanouvong was president of the Lao People's Democratic Republic from 1975 to 1986. However, while this victory established territorial unity, by ending the Third Coalition government the LPRP opened up new political divisions in Laos.

## End of unit activities

1 Write a report about the involvement of the Viet Minh and the US in the independence struggles in *either* Cambodia *or* Laos during the period 1946–75.

2 Draw up a table to show the differences and the similarities between the neutralists and the Pathet Lao during the nationalist and independence struggle in Laos.

3 Draw a spider diagram to show the factors that finally led to the achievement of national unity and independence in both Cambodia and Laos between 1946–75. Some of the relevant factors are given below, but try to identify and make notes on others as well:

- role of individuals
- involvement of other countries
- impact of the Cold War
- determination of the guerrilla groups
- significance of ethnic/national groups
- Marxist ideology
- lack of democracy.

**Discussion point**

Working in pairs, carry out further research, and then conduct a class debate on the following question: 'To what extent can the policies and actions of the US in both Cambodia and Laos in the period 1945–75 be seen as making communist victories *more* rather than *less* likely?'

# 3 The formation of and challenges to the post-colonial states of Cambodia and Laos since 1975

## Timeline

**1975** **Apr** Khmer Rouge take power in Cambodia; Cambodia renamed Democratic Kampuchea (DK)

**Dec** LPRP takes power in Laos

**1976** **Jan** new constitution and Four-Year Plan, Cambodia

**Sep** start of co-operativisation, Laos

**1977** **Mar** Hmong revolt

**Apr** Khmer Rouge troops cross into Vietnam

**Jul** Laos signs treaty with Vietnam

**Nov** Hmong revolt suppressed

**1978** **Mar** Interim Three-Year Plan, Laos

**Dec** Vietnam invades Cambodia

**1979** **Jan** fall of Pol Pot in Cambodia

**Mar** Treaty between Laos and Cambodia

**Jul** suspension of co-operativisation, Laos

**1981** **Mar** start of Five-Year Plan, Laos

**1986** **Mar** start of Second Five-Year Plan, Laos

**1988** **Nov** last Vietnamese troops leave Laos

**1989** **Sep** last Vietnamese troops leave Cambodia

**1991** **Aug** new constitution, Laos

**Nov** Sihanouk returns to Cambodia from exile

**1993** **Oct** end of UNTAC supervision of Cambodia

**1997** **Jul** coup in Cambodia



## Key question

- What challenges did the new states of Cambodia and Laos face after 1975?

## Overview

- After 1975, both Cambodia and Laos attempted to reconstruct their economies, which had been badly damaged by civil war and the Second Indochina War.
- In Cambodia, the Khmer Rouge immediately launched their 'Year One'. In Laos, the first moves were made towards building a socialist economy.
- In Cambodia (re-named Democratic Kampuchea, or DK, under Pol Pot), the notorious 'killing fields' period (1975–79) resulted in the deaths of up to 2 million people. Pol Pot's regime was eventually overthrown by a Vietnamese invasion at the end of 1978.
- In Laos, the first steps towards agricultural co-operativisation were taken in 1976; in 1977, Laos signed a treaty with Vietnam.
- In both countries, attempts to increase production using 'socialist' methods had limited success during the 1980s.
- Consequently, both countries experienced various forms of economic liberalisation. Slowly, production and standards of living began to improve during the 1990s.
- During the same period, both countries also became more integrated into the regional economy.

# What challenges did the new states of Cambodia and Laos face after 1975?

## Cambodia

### 'Year One'

The new Communist Party of Kampuchea (CPK)–Khmer Rouge government, which took over in April 1975, was headed by Pol Pot. Although Sihanouk remained officially head of state for a time, Pol Pot and his team regarded their victory as an opportunity to start Cambodia on a new revolutionary path, with 1975 as 'Year One'. They tried to change all aspects of life in Cambodia but, because of their brutality, the period 1975–79 – when Cambodia was known as Democratic Kampuchea (DK) – was extremely traumatic.

The leaders of the CPK were mainly unknown, and called themselves the *Angkar Padevat* ('revolutionary organisation'), or simply the *Angkar*. They wanted both national autonomy and social justice, and they intended to make the rural poor masters of the country. Individualism, family life and private ownership of property were seen as obstacles to the revolution.

### 'New people'

One week after taking power in April 1975, the *Angkar* ordered over 2 million Cambodians out of the towns and cities and into the countryside. They became known as 'new people' or 'April 17 people'.

**Fact**
When Zhou Enlai, Sihanouk's main supporter in China, died in January 1976, the CPK pushed Sihanouk aside, and in March 'Comrade Pol' was named as prime minister.

**Fact**
Towns were believed to be 'infected' by Western influences and vices – centres for élite privileges and home of individualistic 'intellectuals' and counter-revolutionaries. They were also perceived as having benefited from government initiatives while rural areas had been neglected.

*Cambodians being driven out of Phnom Penh after the Khmer Rouge seized power in April 1975*

## Theory of knowledge

### History and sources

Source A opposite was written 15 years after the experiences the author describes; she was five years old when the CPK (Khmer Rouge) took power and began to force families like hers into the countryside. How might emotion, prejudice and memory have affected the choices she made about what to write down and what to leave out, and what language to use to describe what she and her family experienced? Does this mean that primary sources like this have no value to historians?

## Historical debate

There is some debate about the reasons underlying the CPK's decision in April 1975 to order everyone out of the towns and cities. Chandler, for instance, argues that this has never been thoroughly explained. According to one viewpoint, it was a longstanding plan – possibly conceived as early as 1971 – to control 'bourgeois elements' after the overthrow of Lon Nol's government. An alternative argument relates to the important factor of dwindling rice supplies following many years of conflict.

## Activity

Watch the film *The Killing Fields*. Make notes as you watch it and then check the information given in the film against the evidence provided by history books or websites.

## SOURCE A

When I ask Kim what a capitalist is, he tells me it is someone who is from the city … the Khmer Rouge government views science, technology, and anything mechanical as evil and therefore must be destroyed. The *Angkar* says the ownership of cars and electronics … created a big class division between the rich and the poor. This allowed the urban rich to flaunt their wealth while the rural poor struggled … [these foreign] imports are defined as evil because they allowed foreign countries a way to invade Cambodia, not just physically but also culturally.

*Ung, L. 2000.* First They Killed My Father: A Daughter of Cambodia Remembers. *New York, USA. HarperCollins. pp. 57–58. In November 1975, the author and her family ended up in a labour camp in Ro Leap, in north-west Cambodia.*

This evacuation of the cities was carried out for both ideological and practical reasons. US bombing had seriously disrupted agriculture, and forced tens of thousands of Cambodians to flee to the relative safety of urban areas. Now facing starvation, these people were forced back to work in the fields. But it was also a political move – Pol Pot and his co-leaders made the decision to evacuate the towns just before they seized the capital, Phnom Penh, from Lon Nol's government.

The CPK believed that Kampuchea's future depended on improving agriculture and increasing the production of rice, so that a surplus could be exported to pay for imports and provide funds for industrial expansion. A large increase in agricultural workers was therefore needed.

Conditions in the countryside were harsh, especially for those unused to physical labour. The soldiers and CPK officials supervising the work – particularly the younger ones, who had spent years fighting – became increasingly brutal. This was especially true in northern and north-western areas such as Battambang, which had been one of the most productive agricultural areas before 1975. In early 1976, thousands were sent to these regions and given quotas much higher than in other areas.

### The 'killing fields'

Waves of 'new people' from the relatively unproductive centre and south-west of Kampuchea were sent to the north-west. However, production began to decline in 1977–78 and famine took hold in some areas. When news of this reached the government, local officials were blamed and executed. Those who survived this purge worked the 'new people' even harder to avoid a similar fate.

Estimates of the numbers who died as a result of these actions in the notorious 'killing fields' are as high as 2 million – one in four of the population in 1975. About 400,000 were executed as 'enemies of the revolution', but the rest died from starvation, lack of effective health care, and brutal treatment.

## SOURCE B

On a per capita basis, and considering the short life span of DK, the number of regime-related deaths in Cambodia is one of the highest in recorded history. Whether or not the death toll fits the terms of the UN genocide convention has been vigorously debated … Those arguing against the term suggest that racist motives were much lower on DK's agenda (except for the systematic execution of Vietnamese residents in 1978 and, in some case, Muslim Cham) than was destroying the regime's political enemies … For these critics the term 'crimes against humanity' fits what happened in DK better than the highly charged and perhaps misleading 'genocide'.

*Chandler, D. 2008.* A History of Cambodia. *Boulder, USA. Westview Press. pp. 259–60*

*Cambodian civilians and Vietnamese soldiers stand by a mass grave in the killing fields, 1979*

## New constitution

In January 1976, a new constitution was proclaimed. That March, elections to the National Assembly resulted in CPK candidates being returned unopposed, including older members of the ICP (see page 21) and members of the CPK Central Committee such as Pol Pot, Ieng Sary, Ieng's wife Ieng Thirith, Khieu Samphan and Thiounn Thioenn. 'New people' were not allowed to stand or vote.

**Question**

Why did the Khmer Rouge have such a hostile attitude to urban dwellers?

**Fact**

The new constitution gave no guaranteed human rights, defined very few of the structures of government, and abolished private property, family-based agriculture and organised religion. It made no mention of the CPK or Marxist/Marxist–Leninist ideology. The National Assembly only met once.

**collectivisation** This meant that all private ownership of land – by wealthy landowners and small farmers alike – ended. Instead, the land would belong to village collectives in which everyone would be equal and all would have to work. This form of 'agrarian socialism' was similar to the policies implemented by Mao Zedong in Communist China after 1949, and also reflected the Khmer Rouge's mistrust of towns and cities as places of privilege, corruption and vice.

**Fact**
The target was for production to reach 3 tonnes per hectare. Before this time – and before the damage done by civil war and US bombing – the average had been less than 1 tonne per hectare.



**Fact**
The 1976 split was initially between those who regarded 1951 (when Vietnam was still exerting significant influence on Cambodian communists, see page 21) as the foundation date of their party, and those who placed it in 1960, when Pol Pot and Ieng Sary were made members of the Central Committee. During the purges, at least 14,000 men and women were tortured to extract 'confessions' and executed between 1975–79.

## Four-Year Plan

The new government launched a Four-Year Plan, calling for the **collectivisation** of all property and for an increase in rice production. The cultivation of other crops for export, such as cotton, jute and sugar, was also to be increased to help fund industrialisation. These increases were to be achieved by longer working hours (10–12 hours a day) all year round, without any monetary incentives.

The government also planned to overcome illiteracy, but little was done to provide new schools, and 'new people' and their children were not included in any educational initiatives until 1977–78. Prior to this, there was no education beyond primary level. In part, this was because most educated people were seen as intellectuals and thus hostile to the new regime.

In September 1976, divisions emerged in the CPK, and Pol Pot launched a purge of the party (which he later claimed was to prevent a possible coup). The purges intensified in December, and Pol Pot presided over a 'study session' for high-ranking members of the party. In his speech about the progress of the Cambodian revolution, Pol Pot talked about a 'sickness' that had developed in the party.

**SOURCE C**

We cannot locate it precisely. The illness must emerge to be examined. Because the heat of [previous stages of the revolution] was insufficient at the level of people's struggle and class struggle … we searched for the microbes within the party without success. They are buried. As our socialist revolution advances, however … we can locate the evil microbes.

*Extract from Pol Pot's speech in December 1976. Quoted in Chandler, D. 2008.* A History of Cambodia. *Boulder, USA. Westview Press. p. 267.*

Pol Pot believed these 'evil microbes' included several different groups: people with middle-class backgrounds, soldiers who had fought for Lon Nol, those who been 'exposed' to foreign countries, and communists who had joined the CPK when Vietnamese communists were influential. The purges continued throughout 1976–78; nearly all those arrested were assumed to be guilty and were executed.

## Conflict with Vietnam

Pol Pot blamed many of Kampuchea's problems – including the split in his party – on Vietnam. He had never forgotten the patronising way Vietnamese communists had treated the early independence struggle in Cambodia. When Vietnam signed a treaty of co-operation with Laos in July 1977, Pol Pot took this as an attempt to surround Kampuchea with possible hostile states and to reconstitute French Indochina under Vietnamese control.

In 1975–76, the Vietnamese tried to open discussions about disputed territory along the border between Vietnam and Kampuchea. However, DK insisted that Vietnam honour the pledges made to Sihanouk in the 1960s and award parts of the Gulf of Thailand (important for offshore oil deposits) to Kampuchea. Vietnam refused and in 1976, border skirmishes broke out.

Pol Pot and his colleagues believed that the Khmer minorities in southern Vietnam wanted to be incorporated into Kampuchea, and expected them to revolt against the Vietnamese. However, no such uprisings took place and in April 1977 the DK army conducted vicious raids across the border, killing many Vietnamese Khmer as punishment. During this period DK was assisted by arms from China, which felt threatened by Vietnam's alliance with the Soviet Union.

For all this time, the CPK had remained a secret. However, in September 1977 Pol Pot publicly announced its existence and flew to Beijing, where he was promised further military help and diplomatic support in his struggle with Vietnam. In mid December 1977, worried by the newly strengthened DK–China alliance, Vietnam launched a brief military offensive against DK. Early in 1978, Pol Pot broke off diplomatic relations with Vietnam, but most Vietnamese troops withdrew.

Pol Pot initiated mass executions of DK officials, officers and ordinary troops in the areas where the Vietnamese incursions had been deepest. Many people fled to Vietnam, where they formed an alternative Cambodian political and military leadership. These exiles formed the People's Revolutionary Party of Kampuchea (PRPK) and included **Hun Sen** and Heng Samarin, who later became chief of state of the People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK), the name given to Cambodia after Pol Pot's downfall.

**Hun Sen (b. 1952)** Hun Sen was a former DK regimental commander. In 1985, he became premier of the People's Republic of Kampuchea and retained that post until 1990. Following the period of UN rule (1992–93), he became second prime minister of the PRK from 1993 to 1998 – though real power rested with him. Hun Sen carried out a coup in 1997 and, from 1998, has been the sole prime minister.

Discussions with Vietnam came to nothing and in April 1978, almost 100,000 Vietnamese troops were sent to the border in preparation for an invasion. The Vietnamese also announced the formation of Khmer exiles into an organisation called the Kampuchean Front for National Salvation in 'liberated areas' of Kampuchea, to overthrow Pol Pot's regime. Meanwhile, as the Cold War escalated, the US began to see the value of Pol Pot's regime as an ally in its contest with the Soviet Union.

On Christmas Day 1978, Vietnam began its invasion. Pol Pot and his closest advisers escaped from the capital on 7 January 1979, just before Vietnamese troops arrived. The government of the People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK) was rapidly established.

Pol Pot fled to the Thai border after the Vietnamese invasion, and eventually established bases in remote parts of Kampuchea to fight against the new PRK government. Pol Pot claimed that his 'government in exile' was the true government of Kampuchea.

## 'Independence' in 1979

While most Cambodians welcomed the Vietnamese invaders, in reality their country was once again controlled by a foreign power. The PRK government promised to respect civil and human rights, including freedom of opinion and association, but it cracked down hard on opponents. No elections were held until 1981 and no political parties were allowed to contest the ruling PRPK party.

The PRK quickly signed a treaty of friendship and co-operation with Vietnam. However, China (with the tacit support of the US) invaded northern Vietnam in February 1979, as it was concerned about Vietnam's victory and its alliance with the USSR. Although Chinese forces eventually withdrew, they left behind thousands of dead and great economic destruction. Relations between Kampuchea and Vietnam did not alter.

The US encouraged Thailand to form an alliance with China, and military supplies from Thailand were sent to Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge remnants. While Vietnamese troops fought Khmer Rouge armed groups in the north-west, thousands of civilians tried to leave the country. Although markets began to reappear in Kampuchea, and Buddhist institutions and *wat* schools were revived, the PRPK remained dominant.

## Developments since 1979

Because of the great disorder in Kampuchea, the 1979 rice crop went largely unharvested, and famine broke out in mid 1979. The following year, a drought caused the situation to worsen. However, things improved after 1980. Although private property was not reintroduced, the PRK tried to overcome labour shortages by setting up 'solidarity groups' (*krom sammaki*), in which several families came together to share the work. Schools reopened throughout Kampuchea in 1979, and a currency was reintroduced in 1980.

Many PRK leaders were former members of the CPK, and the government did not abandon its commitment to Marxism–Leninism or one-party rule. It put all the problems of 1975–79 down to the 'genocidal Pol Pot–Ieng Sary clique'. In August 1979, these two were tried in their absence and condemned to death.

## Opposition to the PRK

Most of Kampuchea's educated élite disliked the continuing influence of Vietnam and the PRK's dependence on it. Thousands fled to Thailand during 1979–80. Pol Pot's regime had killed so many that these additional losses were a serious blow to hopes of reviving the Kampuchean economy. By the end of 1979, several refugee camps across the Thai border became bases for anti-Vietnamese resistance groups. However, the US, China and Thailand still backed Pol Pot, so they ensured that most international aid and supplies went to his forces.

**Fact**

For the US, supporting Pol Pot was a way of punishing Vietnam for its invasion of Kampuchea and its alliance with the USSR – and for having defeated the US in the Second Indochina War. Thus Pol Pot's DK government in exile retained its membership of the United Nations, and its dependents were treated as political refugees with the right to UN aid. The PRK had no seat at the UN, so no UN agencies could operate there.



With US and Chinese help, Thailand armed and fed thousands of DK guerrillas, and by 1982, DK forces had become an effective military threat to the PRK. This state of affairs continued through 1980–81, even though rumours of the horrors of Pol Pot's regime were becoming more widespread. Eventually forced to respond to such rumours, the US and China put pressure on Sihanouk to return to political life. From 1981–82, attempts were made to bring about a common front between Sihanouk and Pol Pot. In Kampuchea, a new constitution – similar to the Vietnamese constitution – was established in 1981. Elections to a National Assembly took place, which duly approved the constitution. Increasingly, non-socialists began to fill administrative posts. Still, over 100,000 Vietnamese troops remained in Kampuchea.

## The Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea (CGDK)

These developments, and the increasing revelations about DK brutality, led the US and China to push forward the formation of an anti-PRK coalition. Pol Pot's CPK disbanded, and a Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea (CGDK) was officially launched in 1982. This coalition – still in exile – could claim to have no relation to the dreadful events of 1975–79, distancing the US and China from the atrocities. Yet Pol Pot, Ieng Sary and other former CPK leaders remained in leading positions.

Soon, some military units – mostly under the control of the former-DK faction – moved into parts of Kampuchea. During 1983–85, PRK and Vietnamese troops forced them back into Thailand. By this time, the Vietnamese had helped train a PRK army of 30,000, which was strong enough to resist the attacks of the CGDK.

## State of Cambodia (SOC)

In 1989, the PRK changed its name to the State of Cambodia (SOC), and seemed increasingly able to stand alone. The government announced some popular reforms: Buddhism became the official state religion; fathers were allowed to pass land to their children; and the death penalty was abolished. However, although free and black markets flourished, Hun Sen (see page 45) and the PRPK continued to exercise political control.

But when Vietnamese troops withdrew in September 1989, CGDK forces based in Thailand crossed the border and began to capture parts of Cambodia. Though they did not really break out from these few areas, the CGDK forces were still a threat. With the end of aid from the Soviet bloc, the SOC government found it increasingly difficult to deal with CGDK incursions.

**Fact**

One additional reason for the withdrawal of Vietnamese troops was that, because of the deepening crisis of communism in the USSR and Eastern Europe – and Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev's changed foreign policy – Soviet and Eastern bloc aid to Vietnam was sharply reduced.

**Question**

How did the period 1978–89, when Vietnamese troops were in Cambodia, differ from the period of French rule?

## The UNTAC period

In July 1990 – with the Cold War all but over – the US suddenly announced that it would no longer back the CGDK. The USA hoped UN involvement would ensure a 'sympathetic' regime in advance of new elections in Cambodia for a constituent assembly. A conference began in Paris in October 1991, at which it was agreed that a temporary government would take over, comprising representatives of the SOC and three factions of the CGDK. This Supreme National Council (SNC) was to be presided over by Sihanouk, who returned briefly to Cambodia in November 1991 after 12 years in exile. All SNC decisions would be monitored by a UN agency established in Cambodia, which would also oversee the disarmament of all factions and the return of refugees. The UN's Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) – comprising over 20,000 soldiers and police – was slow to act. The Khmer Rouge extended its control of Cambodian territory in May 1992 and refused to disarm; in reaction, the SOC also refused to disarm.

The UN mission ended in October 1993, but during its presence in Cambodia civil rights flourished and over 300,000 refugees from Thailand were peacefully repatriated. The elections held in July 1993 (boycotted by the Khmer Rouge) were peaceful. More than 90% of registered voters took part in what were Cambodia's fairest and freest elections. A royalist party, FUNCINPEC – led by Sihanouk's eldest son, Norodom Rannaridh – won seven more seats than the KPRP's new Cambodian People's Party (CPP), while an anti-communist, anti-Vietnamese party won ten of the remaining 11 seats. However, Hun Sen and the CPP refused to accept defeat and by the end of 1993, an agreement had been reached to form a coalition government between the CPP and FUNCINPEC, with both Hun Sen and Norodom Rannaridh acting as prime ministers. The CPP retained control of the provinces as well as the police and the civil service. The monarchy was restored, and Sihanouk became king again.

*UN troops talk with Khmer Rouge soldiers and Cambodian villagers, 1993*

## The end of the Khmer Rouge

In 1994, the Khmer Rouge was formally outlawed, and in August 1996, Ieng Sary defected to the Cambodian government. Over the next few months, hundreds of Khmer Rouge troops also defected and were absorbed into the national army. However, efforts to put the Khmer Rouge leaders on trial at first came to nothing.

**Fact**

Partly because of foreign pressure, efforts to bring Khmer Rouge leaders to trial were blocked. Finally, in 2006, an international tribunal was set up in Phnom Penh after almost ten years of negotiations with the UN. The cost of the three-year trial was estimated at $60 million – mostly met by foreign countries. The first trials took place in 2007. In 2010, a UN-backed War Crimes Tribunal sentenced Kaing Guek Eav (also known as Comrade Duch), the chief jailer of the Khmer Rouge regime, to 35 years in prison for his role in the torture and death of thousands of prisoners. Other senior officials still await trial.

**Discussion point**

Politicians in Cambodia fear that further investigations into the past will divide the nation and provoke civil war. This raises an important moral question: should politicians and others be held accountable for their actions, however long ago they occurred?



For a time, Pol Pot was sidelined in what remained of the Khmer Rouge, but when he tried to regain power by ordering the assassination of an opponent and his entire family, many middle-ranking Khmer Rouge were shocked. He was arrested, put on trial and sentenced to life imprisonment.

### The 1997 coup

Meanwhile, in Phnom Penh, tensions rose between the CCP and FUNCINPEC over the number of Khmer Rouge defectors being accepted into the army. In July 1997, Hun Sen launched a pre-emptive coup. Although the elections planned for July 1998 were held, the CCP used control of the media and harassment, and even prevented opposition parties from campaigning in the countryside, to ensure their success. In March 1999, new elections, which were mainly free and fair, resulted in anti-CCP parties gaining 60% of the vote. However, as they could not agree on policy, the CCP and FUNCINPEC formed another coalition.

Although Hun Sen ruled in an authoritarian way, the media and human-rights organisations were still able to operate. Support for the CCP remained strong in rural areas. Despite this, in the 2003 elections to the National Assembly, the CCP was unable to secure the required two-thirds majority. As a result, another CCP–FUNCINPEC coalition was formed, in which CCP control increased. In October 2004, Sihanouk abdicated as king and was succeeded by his youngest son, Norodom Sihamoni.

### Social and economic affairs

By 1998, social and economic conditions in Cambodia were poor. The country had the highest infant mortality rate in Southeast Asia and less than a third of the population had access to clean water. This was largely due to the constant fighting: the government spent 40% of the budget on defence and only 5% on health. Illiteracy was over 50% – higher than it had been in the 1960s. But Cambodia was at peace and, for the first time in decades, it was not dependent on any foreign state. There was a boom in the clothing industry and in tourism. From 1998 to 2006, Cambodia's GDP grew by an average of 6% a year, although agriculture did less well.

Since 2004, large oil deposits have been found in Cambodia's territorial waters in the Gulf of Thailand. These should provide revenues of $1 billion a year, starting in 2009 or 2010, for at least ten years. This was twice Cambodia's budget for 2006 – and twice what it receives as foreign aid.

## Laos

In December 1975, the National Congress of People's Representatives met in Viang Chan and declared Laos to be a People's Republic, set on a 'communist' course of social and economic development. The Lao People's Revolutionary Party (LPRP) hoped to 'build socialism' without having to go through a capitalist phase. However, despite its attempts to bring about national reconciliation, the LPRP government's economic policies – to nationalise industry and commerce, and to co-operativise agriculture – caused about 10% of the population to seek asylum abroad.

### LPRP aims

Kaison Phomvihan, secretary-general of the LPRP, believed it was necessary to push ahead on three revolutionary fronts: socialisation of the economy; science and technology; and an ideological and cultural campaign. The new Politburo of the LPRP consisted of seven members. Kaison was the most important, but Souphanouvong was also a member of the Politburo.

Although a Supreme People's Assembly was in theory the law-making body, it was dominated by a small group of LPRP leaders, who had emerged during the guerrilla war and the rise of the party, and with whom real power rested. They tended to be from lower social backgrounds, with less formal education than the other main group, which included Souphanouvong and others from élite families. Despite this, there was remarkable unity within the party.

**Question**

What were the three main issues in Laos that the LPRP wanted to address after 1975?

The Council of Ministers, with Kaison as prime minister, was also dominated by the LPRP's Politburo. However, in order to bring about some national reconciliation various members of the old regime were co-opted onto certain bodies – for example, Souphanuvong, a former prince, was made president of the new republic.

## Early social and economic policies

Kaison announced an Action Programme, intended to achieve national unity and mobilise the whole country in building a new future. However, the speed of change, combined with the inexperience of many party administrators, resulted in chaos. At the same time, attempts to control inflation failed, as did efforts to set prices in order to control hoarding and the black market.

The new government placed restrictions on free movement, and business premises were searched. Most of the Chinese and Vietnamese communities closed their shops and businesses. All independent publications were shut down, and citizens were urged to take part in ideologically 'progressive' public meetings (known as *samana*), and in various mass campaigns, which included helping to clean up the cities and growing vegetables in order to overcome food shortages.



At first, the LPRP worked with younger Buddhist monks, emphasising the similarities between socialism and Buddhist compassion for the poor, but attendance at religious meetings was soon discouraged.

The party's illiteracy campaigns were more popular: those who were literate were sent to teach those who were not. The government also built schools and health centres, fulfilling its earlier promises to the ethnic minorities who had supported them in the '30-year struggle'. According to the government, these efforts reduced illiteracy levels from 60% to 40% of the population.

## Ideology and culture

A massive anti-US campaign was launched in Laos after independence, designed to rid the country of all US literature and signs of Western 'decadence'. Most nightclubs and bars were closed down, and almost 2000 drug addicts and prostitutes were sent for rehabilitation. Christianity was denounced as a vehicle for Western influence. Instead, Lao 'socialist culture' was promoted.

## Opposition and emigration

These changes, along with shortages of food and resentment of residual Vietnamese influence in Laos, led to some armed opposition. In February 1976, the **'Lao National Revolutionary Front 21/18'** was established.

**'Lao National Revolutionary Front 21/18'** This was so named because the group called for the Vientiane Treaty of 21 February 1973 (see page 37), and the 18-Point Programme agreed by the Third Coalition, to be adhered to.

The government responded by tightening security and sending troops into the affected areas. By the end of the year, the rebellion seemed to have been dealt with, but a plot to assassinate Kaison was then discovered. Thereafter, LPRP leaders moved to secluded housing, where they became increasingly cut off from ordinary people.

Farmers responded to tax demands, and price and marketing controls, by reducing their production. Soon, subsidised food in state shops was in short supply and the LPRP relaxed some of the controls. Agricultural co-operativisation, which had been introduced in September 1976 to increase production by making better use of time and equipment, was unpopular with ordinary peasants as well as richer farmers. By the end of 1976, only a few thousand families in nine of the 13 provinces had agreed to the scheme.

Despite these problems, in early 1977 the LPRP Central Committee decided to increase the pace of 'socialist transformation' in Laos. Security remained a problem, and attacks were made by armed groups crossing over from Thailand, but in this the government received help from Vietnamese troops. By 1978, most resistance groups were either defeated or their activity had decreased, and the security situation improved.

**Fact**
In July 1977, a 25-year treaty of Friendship and Co-operation was signed between Laos and Vietnam. This included helping each other in defence and security matters. It also included the provision of Vietnamese economic aid from 1978 to 1980, and the supply of Vietnamese technical advisers.

## The economy

Despite financial aid from the Soviet bloc, the economic situation in Laos continued to decline. As a result, in March 1978, Kaison announced an interim three-year economic development plan. This would run until 1981, when a five-year plan would begin that coincided with plans being initiated in the USSR and Vietnam. The interim plan was based on agriculture and forestry, which would provide the funds for industrial development. To increase food production, Kaison decided to begin a gradual move to a voluntary – but still full – collectivisation. This co-operativisation programme was launched in June 1978.

**Fact**
The economic situation was made worse when the government in Thailand imposed trade restrictions on certain goods, including cement, aviation fuel and medicines. In addition, a second year of drought led to further food shortages in Laos.



Co-operativisation proved unpopular, and the state was unable to provide all the technical and financial assistance it had promised. Peasants reacted by destroying crops and livestock; many migrated to Thailand. Severe floods in 1978 heightened the problem.

**Fact**
While land and basic machinery were to become the property of the co-operative, household goods remained the property of the families. However, local party officials often put pressure on families to join co-operatives: by October 1978, the LPRP claimed over 800 co-operatives were in existence; by December 1978, it was over 1600; and a year later, it was 2800.

## Relations with Vietnam and China

In July 1978, Laos openly sided with Vietnam in the growing dispute over developments in Cambodia. Soon, rumours circulated that China was aiding Lao resistance groups. When Vietnam invaded Cambodia in December 1978 to overthrow the Khmer Rouge, Laos was the first country to back the new Cambodian government, signing a treaty with it in March 1979.

China's invasion of Vietnam in February 1979 did not spill over into Laos, but relations with China worsened. China responded by funding a 'Lao Socialist Party' to oppose Vietnamese domination of Laos, and seemed to be assisting in the formation of a new resistance group by offering to accept 10,000 Lao refugees from Thailand. In this atmosphere, the LPRP leadership carried out a purge of those suspected of having links with China.

## Reconsiderations

In February 1979, the LPRP launched a new Lao Front for National Construction to replace the LPF. This was to unify all patriotic forces and create 'national solidarity', as well as overseeing various economic and cultural policies. However, by mid 1979 it was clear that the government's aims of improving the security of the regime and increasing food production had both failed. So, in July 1979, the co-operativisation policy was suspended, and those who had been forced to join were permitted to leave.

SOURCE D

The people, including the peasants, have become discouraged and unhappy. Some people have abandoned their farms, turned to other occupations, sold or secretly slaughtered their animals or fled to other countries. This has now become an urgent problem which will create an immediate and long-term danger … It will become not only an economic danger affecting production and the people's living conditions but also a political danger.

*Lao government comments. Quoted in Stuart-Fox, M. 1997.* A History of Laos. *Cambridge, UK. Cambridge University Press. p. 182.*

## The Five-Year Plan

In December 1979, it was announced that in order to improve production and so achieve socialism, it would be necessary after all for the state to use capitalists. Private investors would be welcomed in joint ventures with the state, and there would be a free market in agricultural products. The state also increased the price it paid for rice procurements; as a consequence, rice production rose by 16.5% in 1980.

Economic decision-making was decentralised. Managers were given more autonomy while the arbitrary powers of local party officials were reduced. In March 1981, the Five-Year Plan was launched, even though most of the targets of the Interim Three-Year Plan had still not been met. In fact, the targets for the new plan were not overly ambitious, but in addition to poor administrative structures, Laos still lacked enough skilled workers and managers to make a success of it.



## Party reforms

In April 1982, the LPRP held its 3rd Congress. This endorsed the new economic policies, and also took steps to weed out corruption amongst some party members. Membership stood at 35,000 – well up on the 21,000 in 1972, but still only 1% of the population.

During 1983, there was a campaign to increase party membership and 'Marxism–Leninism' courses were held for teachers, women and other groups. There were also, for the first time, national congresses for the Union of Lao Women (ULW) and the Lao People's Revolutionary Youth Movement. Khamphaeng Bubpha was elected president of the ULW, and Kaison made an important speech calling for further emancipation of women, which was as significant for individual women as it was for the construction of socialism.

**Fact**

Kaison's speech would have been better addressed to Lao men, as Laos was still a highly patriarchal and male-dominated society, despite almost ten years of being a revolutionary republic. However, the ULW went on to endorse the 'three goods' – the idea that women should be good wives, good mothers and good citizens.

## Review

In March 1985, the LPRP celebrated 30 years of 'correct leadership'. In December that year, it celebrated its first ten years in power, and the completion of the first Five-Year Plan (although it was clear that production targets had not been fully achieved). Party membership was claimed to be 43,000. Corruption and nepotism were widespread, and many people were concerned about the motives of those now joining the party, but the LPRP's monopoly of political power remained largely intact.

To increase support for the party, the army – renamed the Lao People's Army – was sent into rural areas to work at grass-roots level. This growing political role of the army was accompanied by an increasing role in economic development. The army managed farms, forests and factories, and was involved in construction projects.

Although the government claimed in December 1985 that GDP had almost doubled, with production per head of the population increasing by 60%, the reality was less impressive. According to a UN Development Programme, GDP had risen only a little from 1980 to 1983, with a slightly better performance in 1984. Average per capita income was put at $98, making Laos one of the poorest countries in the world.

Self-sufficiency in rice had been achieved, but production was still subject to variations and yields remained among the lowest in the world. Kaison claimed that more than 50% of farming families were now in co-operatives, but this was less than the aim of 60–70% set by the Five-Year Plan and the reality was considerably less than 50%. According to the UNDP, 90% of farmers still owned their own land.

Industrial development was even less successful. With production levels falling in 1982–83, industry accounted for only 5% of GDP – well below the average for even 'least-developed countries'.



Although there were now more schools and students, standards were not high and there was a shortage both of qualified teachers and of textbooks. Around 80% of children failed to complete the full five years of primary education, and illiteracy began to rise again. Secondary education was also failing to produce enough students able to follow higher-education courses. In health, numbers of health-care personnel had increased, but there were still shortages of both trained workers and of medicines. In addition, even according to government statistics, only 18% of Lao had access to clean water, and malaria and other diseases were increasing.

## The 'two-line struggle' and socialism abandoned

In January 1985, Kaison warned the Supreme People's Assembly that, because of the limited progress towards socialism that had been achieved since 1975, the struggle between the 'two lines' of socialism and capitalism had become more severe. Rather than limit moves towards economic liberalisation, Kaison wanted to go further along the road to capitalism, putting an end to dreams of a socialist economy – at least for the time being. In this, he was supported by the army.

SOURCE E

[Mistakes were] in early activism and haste, in over inclination to abolish the non-socialist economic sectors promptly. In industry, we rashly nationalised many factories, while the state still lacked sufficient management capacity, resulting in production decrease. Regarding trade, there have been rather widespread cases of hindering the free flow of commodities among localities, thus adversely affecting production and people's lives.

*Kaison speaking on economic problems at the 4th Party Congress, November 1986. Quoted in Stuart-Fox, M. 1997.* A History of Laos. *Cambridge, UK. Cambridge University Press. p. 196.*

## Opposition to Kaison

Those who opposed Kaison claimed they were acting to keep the socialist dream alive. However, they were often people who benefited from the situation in Laos, and who feared that a reduction in state control would also reduce their chances to profit from corruption. When the 4th Party Congress met, from

April to November 1986, Kaison made it clear that socialism would come second to policies that increased production. The lack of progress was blamed on the original attempt to bypass a capitalist phase.

## The 'New Economic Mechanism'

The second Five-Year Plan, to run from 1986 to 1990, had similar aims to the first: the focus was still on agriculture, but now emphasis was placed on cash crops to be sold abroad. Spending on health and education would increase, taking precedence over industrialisation.

A new initiative, announced earlier in 1986, was also approved by the 4th Congress – this was the New Economic Mechanism. It was designed to increase the efficiency of management and thus productivity, by allowing greater self-financing and autonomy to managers in place of what was now condemned as 'bureaucratic centralism'. In effect, market forces would be allowed to operate, and it was made clear that state subsidies to inefficient firms would be greatly reduced. The pressure for such changes came from both the USSR and Vietnam, which were heading in a similar direction.

**Fact**
In fact, as early as 1983, successful state firms had been allowed to keep up to 40% of their 'profits' for further reinvestment and worker bonuses.

Opposition showed itself either overtly or, more often, in bureaucratic inertia, and there were still inadequate numbers of trained personnel. To these problems were added government policies such as reducing state-sector employment and food subsidies, and increasing commodity prices.

**Question**
What were the main economic changes introduced by the New Economic Mechanism?

At first, there was an economic downturn brought on by a drought and a drop in the production of electricity. In addition, the massive balance of payments deficit led to a devaluation of the currency. With aid from the Soviet bloc beginning to decline, the government listened to advice from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to further reform the state sector and accept foreign investment. All this strengthened the hands of those advocating accelerated economic reform – but prices rose and salaries failed to keep up.



## Political developments

In November 1988, the first elections for 13 years took place in Laos for municipal, district and provincial representatives. In March 1989, there were elections for the Supreme People's Assembly. The Assembly's tasks were to draw up a new constitution, endorse state plans and budgets, name the prime minister and scrutinise the government. A Constitution Drafting Committee was set up, and codes for criminal law and procedures were passed in November, along with reforms of the judiciary.

In April 1990, a draft of the new constitution was presented to the Politburo and in June it was published for general discussion. Leaders planned to incorporate any necessary changes and have the constitution ready in time for the 15th anniversary celebrations of the LPDR. However, delays arose – partly because a group within the party had been arrested for advocating a multi-party system.

The new constitution kept the LPRP's monopoly hold on politics virtually intact, and spoke of the party's role in advancing to socialism 'step by step'. It also increased the role of the army, and strengthened the liberalised economic policies. The Supreme People's Assembly became the National Assembly, and Kaison became **state president**. When Souphanouvong resigned, Kaison also became president of the party.

**state president** This post was given extra powers, such as command of the armed forces and the appointment of provincial governors.

In this role Kaison gained extra powers: the Party Secretariat was abolished, leaving the daily administration of the party to him. In August 1991, the new constitution was accepted. When Kaison died in November 1992, his posts were shared between Nuhak Phumsavan (state president) and Khamtai Siphandon (who moved from prime minister to party president).

### Regional integration

By 1994, increasing Thai investment in Laos was leading towards greater regional integration. At the same time, there were prospects of greater trade and tourism from Western and other Asian states. Laos also had the potential to become the main supplier of energy in the region because of its massive hydro-electric projects. However, some were concerned about the impact Western tourists might have on Lao culture and life, especially the establishment of nightclubs and the prevalence of prostitution and drug addiction. There were also growing concerns about deforestation, soil erosion, ecological damage and water pollution as a result of rapid economic development. For all these concerns, though, the increase in foreign investment promised improvements in standards of living for the Lao people.

At the LPRP's 6th Congress, held in March 1996, those wanting to control the pace of reform gained the upper hand, with army leaders earning greater representation within the party. The Congress also resulted in a larger role being awarded to ethnic minorities and different regions of Laos. The army in particular wanted the benefits of economic development to be more evenly distributed throughout the country.



These were small steps, but there were still no signs of greater democracy. The LPRP intended to remain ruling through an authoritarian single-party state. Because the proportion of educated people was lower than in other states in Indochina, there was less room for checks and balances on this power, and the media was kept under strict control. While the LPRP had made some progress in creating a stronger sense of national unity and identity, it was undermined by regionalism and the slowness of benefits to spread to the ethnic minorities.

## End of unit activities

1 Find out what you can about the Cambodian 'killing fields', and make notes on the treatment of 'new people', the numbers killed, and the different explanations for what happened. You might find the following websites useful starting points:

http://www.edwebproject.org/sideshow/khmeryears/index.html
http://www.ppu.org.uk/genocide/g_cambodia.html

2 'The violence and bloodshed in Cambodia during the Khmer Rouge period was largely the result of US interference and heavy bombing during the Second Indochina War.'

Divide the class into two groups. One group should draw up arguments to support the statement, the other should present arguments against it.

3 Make some notes on how the communist-led independence movement in Laos was able to consolidate its power after 1975.

4 Draw up two tables to summarise the challenges faced by, and the successes and failures of, the various policies of governments in both Cambodia and Laos since 1975.

# Paper 1 exam practice

## Question

According to Source A below, what was life like for many Cambodians in the period 1975–79?
[2 marks]

## Skill

Comprehension of a source

SOURCE A

There are nonetheless three levels of citizenship in the village. The first-class citizenry comprises the chief … his aides, and the Khmer Rouge soldiers … Then there are the base people. If the first-class citizens are the all-powerful brutal teachers, the base people are the bullies who work closely with them …

The new people are considered the lowest in the village structure. They have no freedom of speech, and must obey the other classes …

To instil a sense of loyalty to the *Angkar* and break what the Khmer Rouge views as an inadequate urban work ethic, the new people are given the hardest work and the longest hours.

*Ung, L. 2000.* First They Killed My Father: A Daughter of Cambodia Remembers. *New York, USA. HarperCollins. pp. 61–62. Loung Ung had been a young child when she and her family were sent to work in the countryside.*

## Examiner's tips

Comprehension questions are the most straightforward questions you will face in Paper 1. They simply require you to understand a source and extract two or three relevant points that relate to the question.

As only 2 marks are available for this question, make sure you do not waste valuable exam time that should be spent on the higher-scoring questions by writing a long answer here. A couple of brief sentences are all that is needed, giving the necessary information to show that you have understood the message of the source. Try to give one piece of information for each of the marks available for the question.

## Common mistakes

When asked to show your comprehension/understanding of a particular source, make sure you don't comment on the *wrong* source! Mistakes like this are made every year. Remember – every mark is important for your final grade.

## Simplified markscheme

For **each item of relevant/correct information** identified, award 1 mark – up to a **maximum of 2 marks**.

## Student answer

*According to Source A, there was a sort of class structure in the villages, with new people at the bottom.*

## Examiner's comments

The candidate has selected **one** relevant and explicit piece of information from the source that clearly identifies that there were different classes of citizens in the villages. This is enough to gain 1 mark. However, as no other point/role has been identified, this candidate fails to get the other mark available.

## Activity

Look again at the source and the student answer above. Now try to identify **one** other piece of information from the source, and try to make an overall comment about the source's message, to allow you to obtain the other mark available for this question.

**1 The rise of nationalism, 1900–45**
- Opposition to French rule
- Impact of the First World War and the Depression
- The Second World War and the Japanese occupation
- Different nationalist groups

**2 Gaining independence, 1946–75**
- Return of the French
- Impact of the Cold War and Indochina Wars
- Significance of communism
- Negotiations
- Armed struggles
- Significant individuals

**3 Independence since 1975**
- Challenges and problems
- Policies and achievements

**Achieving independence**

Make two copies of the spider diagram, one for Cambodia and one for Laos. Using the information from this chapter and any other material available, make brief notes under each heading. Where there are differences of opinion between historians concerning these various aspects, make a note of their names and a brief summary of their arguments.

# Paper 2 practice questions

1 What were the main aspects of French rule in *either* Cambodia *or* Laos that contributed to the emergence of nationalist movements?

2 'Armed struggle was the most effective way to gain independence'. With reference to *either* Cambodia *or* Laos, explain to what extent you agree with this assertion.

3 Analyse the successes and failures of *either* Sihanouk *or* Souphanouvong.

4 Compare and contrast the independence movements in Cambodia and Laos.

5 To what extent did ethnic differences play a part in the nationalist movements in *either* Cambodia *or* Laos?

6 For what reasons and with what results, was *either* Cambodia *or* Laos able to achieve independence?

# Paper 1 exam practice

## Introduction

You have now completed your study of the main developments and events in Cambodia and Laos after 1900. In Unit 3, you gained practice at answering a Paper 1 source-based comprehension question. In this section, you will gain experience of dealing with:

- the longer Paper 1 question, which requires you to use both sources and your own knowledge to write a mini-essay
- the essay questions you will meet in Paper 2.

Before working through the questions that follow, refer to pages 216–18 of the course book to refresh your understanding of the different skills required.

## Paper 1 judgement question

Using Sources A, B, C, D and E, *and* your own knowledge, explain the reasons why so many people died in Cambodia between 1975 and 1979. [8 marks]

### SOURCE A

*Residents of Phnom Penh being driven out of the city in 1975*

### SOURCE B

When I ask Kim what a capitalist is, he tells me it is someone who is from the city … the Khmer Rouge government views science, technology, and anything mechanical as evil and therefore must be destroyed. The *Angkar* says the ownership of cars and electronics … created a big class division between the rich and the poor. This allowed the urban rich to flaunt their wealth while the rural poor struggled … [these foreign] imports are defined as evil because they allowed foreign countries a way to invade Cambodia, not just physically but also culturally.

*Ung, L. 2000.* First They Killed My Father: A Daughter of Cambodia Remembers. *New York, USA. HarperCollins. pp. 57–58. In November 1975, the author and her family ended up in a labour camp in Ro Leap, in north-west Cambodia.*

## SOURCE C

On a per capita basis, and considering the short life span of DK, the number of regime-related deaths in Cambodia is one of the highest in recorded history. Whether or not the death toll fits the terms of the UN genocide convention has been vigorously debated … Those arguing against the term suggest that racist motives were much lower on DK's agenda (except for the systematic execution of Vietnamese residents in 1978 and, in some case, Muslim Cham) than was destroying the regime's political enemies … For these critics the term 'crimes against humanity' fits what happened in DK better than the highly charged and perhaps misleading 'genocide'.

*Chandler, D. 2008.* A History of Cambodia. *Boulder, USA. Westview Press. pp. 259–60*

## SOURCE D

*Cambodians and Vietnamese soldiers stand over a mass grave in the 'killing fields'*

## SOURCE E

We cannot locate it precisely. The illness must emerge to be examined. Because the heat of [previous stages of the revolution] was insufficient at the level of people's struggle and class struggle … we searched for the microbes within the party without success. They are buried. As our socialist revolution advances, however … we can locate the evil microbes.

*Extract from Pol Pot's speech in December 1976. Quoted in Chandler, D. 2008.* A History of Cambodia. *Boulder, USA. Westview Press. p. 267.*

## Student answer

Those parts of the student answer that follow will have brief examiner's comments in the margins, as well as a longer overall comment at the end. Those parts of the student answer that make use of the sources will be **highlighted in green**; those parts that deploy relevant own knowledge will be **highlighted in red**. In this way, you should find it easier to follow why particular marks were – or were not – awarded.

*The main reason for the large numbers of deaths in Cambodia during this period is because of the Khmer Rouge's hatred of urban life, and their intention to build a society based on the countryside and agriculture.*

**Examiner's comment**
This is a good introduction, showing an overall understanding of the topic and the question.

*Source A is a photograph of people being forced to leave Phnom Penh in April 1975. The Khmer Rouge did this to the people in the capital – and in the other towns and cities of Cambodia – within weeks of coming to power. In the years just before they came to power, many people had fled into the towns to escape the bombing and fighting. The photograph suggests that people didn't have much time to pack food or clothing. Once out of the cities, people were sent to work in agricultural districts; many of these people were not used to manual labour, and conditions were very basic. The photograph shown in Source D gives some idea of the numbers working in the fields.*

**Examiner's comment**
There is clear use of Sources A and D, with a little precise own knowledge.

*Source B explains why the Khmer Rouge wanted people out of the cities, as they thought the towns were where capitalists lived, and were evil places full of luxurious Western technology and culture. Before 1975, the Khmer Rouge had fought against the military government of Cambodia, led by Lon Nol, who had taken power in a US-sponsored coup. The war had been very bitter, and was made worse by very heavy US bombing of guerrilla-held areas. As a result, many people had fled to the cities for safety. Once the fighting was over, the Khmer Rouge were thus doubly keen to get people out of urban areas.*

**Examiner's comment**
Again, there is good explicit use of Source B, as well as some additional own knowledge.

*Source E gives another reason why there were so many deaths. This shows that Pol Pot was paranoid, and felt those who opposed him had an 'illness', and were 'microbes' that needed to be got rid of. This relates to a purge of party members that began in 1976. Pol Pot feared that many members ('the microbes' in Source E) were more loyal to Vietnam than they were to him (this was the 'illness' mentioned in the source) – he had always resented Vietnamese influence over the Cambodian armed struggle in the period before 1975. This purge continued while the Khmer Rouge remained in power and it is believed that almost 15,000 men and women were executed during it.*

**Examiner's comment**
This is a good section. There is explicit use of Source E, along with some precise own knowledge that is integrated to produce a synthesis of both source and own knowledge.

*However, the main reason for the high number of deaths is what happened in the villages once the urban dwellers arrived there. People from the cities were known as 'new people' and they were treated very harshly by the Khmer Rouge guards and officials. They were given the hardest work to do, and they were made to work 10 or 12 hours a day, every day. As a result of this, and of the lack of sufficient medical care, many died in these 'killing fields' before the Khmer Rouge were deposed by the Vietnamese army in 1979. Some historians believe that almost 2 million people died during the years 1975–79.*

**Examiner's comment**
There is some relevant and precise own knowledge here, but this is not really linked to any of the sources.

## Overall examiner's comments

There is good and clear use of sources throughout, but the use and/or integration of precise own knowledge to both explain and add to the sources is rather limited. The overall result is an answer clearly focused on the question, but with own knowledge which, in the main, is not integrated with the sources. The candidate has done enough to reach Band 2 and achieve 6 marks.

## Activity

Look again at the all sources, the simplified markscheme in the course book, and the student answer above. Now try to write your own answer to this question and see if you can make some extra points with the sources (nothing is said about Source C, for example), and integrate some additional own knowledge (food shortages and executions in the 'killing fields'), to give a fuller explanation of the reasons for the high numbers of deaths.

# Paper 2 exam practice

## Paper 2 skills and questions

Before attempting this Paper 2 question, refer back to pages 226–27 of the course book, which deal with the skills needed to score highly, examiner's tips, common mistakes and a simplified markscheme.

## Question

Analyse the reasons why Laos was able to achieve independence from France by 1954.
[20 marks]

### Skill

Analysis/argument/assessment

### Examiner's tip

Look carefully at the wording of this question, which asks for an *explanation* of the *reasons* for Laos achieving independence from France by 1954. This will involve consideration of a *range* of factors, with precise supporting knowledge. Also, try to assess *relative* importance – this will help ensure you take an *analytical* approach, thus avoiding simple narrative.

### Student answer

Those parts of the student answer that follows will have brief examiner's comments in the margins, as well as a longer overall comment at the end. Those parts of the answer that are particularly strong and well-focused will be **highlighted in red**. Errors/confusion/loss of focus will be **highlighted in blue**. In this way, you should find it easier to follow why marks were – or were not – awarded.

*Laos was the last of the countries of Indochina to become a French colony and part of their Union of Indochina. This was in 1893, and Laos remained a French colony – or 'protectorate' – until 1954. There are several reasons why Laos achieved independence; these include the impact of the Second World War and the outbreak of the First Indochina War. Another factor was the growth of nationalism in the period between the two World Wars. Some were more important than others.*

**Examiner's comment**
This introduction is quite well thought through. It identifies several factors, and also suggests (by introducing the idea of relative importance) that the answer might be analytical rather than descriptive in approach.

*The first reason Laos became independent was what happened after France had been conquered by Germany in 1940 during the Second World War. France was split into two parts – one part was ruled by Nazi Germany, and the other part ruled by Marshal Pétain, a Nazi collaborator. This part of France was Vichy France. French people who opposed this formed the Free French movement, which was led by Charles de Gaulle. The government of Vichy France was determined to hold on to its empire, especially French Indochina. When Japan invaded Southeast Asia, the Vichy administration in Indochina agreed to co-operate (this included letting Japanese troops be stationed in Indochina) in return for holding onto their colonies. At first, the Japanese presence in Laos was small but, after the liberation of France in 1944, the number of Japanese troops was greatly increased as they feared that a Free French would soon replace the pro-Vichy governor of Indochina. So, in March 1945, the Japanese carried out a military coup and took control of all French Indochina.*

**Examiner's comment**

There is some precise own knowledge that is relevant to the question, but the reason that this contributed to Lao independence has not yet been made explicit. Hence the answer, so far, is more of a narrative than an analysis and some parts are not particularly relevant.



*This Japanese action contributed to Lao independence in several ways. Firstly, many Lao – as in many of the other Southeast Asian countries invaded by Japan – saw the defeat of European armies in the region as showing that Asian countries could become independent. There was thus a growth in nationalist feelings. This was increased in Laos when, in April 1945, the Japanese authorities pressured the countries of Indochina to declare independence from France. Although some Lao did fight with French forces against the Japanese takeover, many were prepared to co-operate with the Japanese in order to become independent.*

**Examiner's comment**

This continues the examination of the factor identified in the previous paragraph, but the relevance is clearer here as there is some attempt at analysis.

One of those who was prepared to work with the Japanese was Phetxarat, who used his position as prime minister of the northern province of Laos to replace French and Vietnamese officials with Lao civil servants. When Japan surrendered in August 1945, many of these were opposed to the return of the French. In September, Phetxarat declared that, because France had failed to protect Laos against the Japanese, the French protectorate was over, and announced the formation of an independent and united Laos. Those who supported this and were thus opposed to the return of the French, began to form the Lao Issara. This included some members of the Lao Seri (who had fought the Japanese, but were also against the return of the French), as well as those who had worked with the Japanese. However, although they fought against the French, the Lao Issara government and its forces were unable to win. By mid 1946, the French had re-established control. The Lao Issara government then went into exile in Thailand.

**Examiner's comment**
Another valid reason is identified, and there is some precise knowledge here – but as before, it is more descriptive than analytical.

Although the French were back, the situation had changed since 1940 – in particular, Lao nationalists had seen the defeat of France as proof that they were not invincible. Also, although they were back under French rule, many were encouraged by the determined fight being waged by the Viet Minh in Vietnam, in what became the First Indochina War. The changed situation was recognised by the French who, in 1946 and 1949, made agreements with Laos to hand over some of their powers. They also brought all the different pre-war regions of Laos together in one united kingdom. These developments acted as further encouragement to Lao nationalists to demand full independence. However, they also led to a split in the Lao Issara: some nationalists now thought it would be better to work with the French for complete independence, while others wanted to carry on the fight, and were prepared to work with the Viet Minh. Those prepared to carry on fighting were led by Souphanouvong.

**Examiner's comment**
This gives another explanation/reason for eventual independence, and there is reasonable own knowledge, but it is still more descriptive than analytical.

Souphanouvong then went on to form the Pathet Lao, which opposed the French and worked closely with the Viet Minh to increase their hold on parts of Laos. Their continued opposition and guerrilla warfare took place while France was being defeated in Vietnam. In April 1953, Souphanouvong announced the formation of a rival Pathet Lao government. These problems led the French to agree to Lao independence later in the year. This was confirmed by the Geneva Conference of 1954. In conclusion, there were several reasons why Laos had won independence by 1954. However, this did not bring peace to Laos, as it got dragged into the Cold War and the Second Indochina War.

**Examiner's comment**
This gives another explanation/reason for eventual independence, and there is again reasonable own knowledge, but it is still more descriptive than analytical. There is a brief but reasonable conclusion – though, despite the introductory paragraph, it doesn't attempt to identify relative importance of factors.

## Overall examiner's comments

This answer examines some relevant factors, with some precise own knowledge. However, its approach is a mixture of analysis and description – at times, it is more descriptive than analytical. It does not mention other factors (such as earlier revolts/uprisings, and the cultural nationalism that began to flourish in Laos in the inter-war period). Overall, the candidate has done enough to get into Band 3, possibly scoring 8 or 9 marks. To improve this answer, other reasons would need to be given, with more of an emphasis on **explanation**; while some **mention of relevant historians/historical interpretations** would be necessary to secure a Band 1 mark.

## Activity

Look again at the simplified markscheme in the course book and the student answer above, and identify where it can be improved to ensure a Band 1 mark of 20. Try to provide more linkage and analysis, as well as integrating some references to relevant historians/historical interpretations.

## Further information

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