

## Letters to the Editor

### *The Cambodian Holocaust*

Stephen J. Morris's April 17 editorial-page article "The Wrong Man to Investigate Cambodia" is wildly inaccurate.

Mr. Morris quotes selectively from my writings before I began graduate training on Cambodian history in 1978 (not 1975, when I was 22 years old). I have never been reluctant to criticize my errors of interpretation during the early years of the Pol Pot regime. Mr. Morris does not inform your readers that in 1979, I published a frank admission that I had been "late in realizing the extent of the tragedy in Kampuchea after 1975 and Pol Pot's responsibility for it. It is quite clear that I was wrong about an important aspect of Kampuchean communism: the brutal authoritarian trend within the revolutionary movement after 1973 was not simply a grass-roots reaction"—which had been my assessment before 1978 (Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars, October 1979). Even so, I had already published a good deal of material detailing refugee reports of executions and hardship in Pol Pot's Cambodia.

Mr. Morris does not cite any of the books on Cambodia I have published in the past 15 years, though he asserts: "Since 1979, he has worked tirelessly as the academic world's defense lawyer for what he considers the good Khmer Rouge of the eastern zone." In fact, in "Revolution and Its Aftermath in Kampuchea," I described the Eastern Zone Communist faction as "ruthless, with as much blood on their hands as all pre-1975 Kampuchean political groupings" and I also stated that executions in the Eastern Zone in 1975-76 alone "probably numbered in the thousands" (Yale Southeast Asia Studies, 1983). So much for my "faith in communism."

Mr. Morris's article is only the latest round in his 15-year vendetta against a compatriot. Like perpetrators of other vendettas, he feels surrounded. In the Washington Times (Sept. 30, 1993) he complained of a conspiracy against him, and instructively listed numerous enemies, besides myself, out to "discredit" him. However, historical facts are his real problem, and *ad hominem* attacks his specialty.

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articles and letters since 1982 reveal a single-minded hatred of Vietnam that signals his entire view of Southeast Asia politics. Not only did Mr. Morris refuse to protest the Carter-Reagan-Chinese strategy of rehabilitating the Khmer Rouge to counter the Vietnamese presence in Cambodia, but after 1990, Mr. Morris fiercely protested congressional efforts to end the parallel, seven-year flow of overt U.S. support to Pol Pot's non-communist battlefield allies.

The 1994 establishment of a U.S. Office of Cambodian Genocide Investigation represents the first step ever taken by a non-Cambodian government to advance the prospect of prosecution of the authors of the genocide of 1975-1979. Mr. Morris should not be allowed to groundlessly discredit this overdue initiative.

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We take strong exception to the reckless charges made by Stephen Morris against our colleague Benedict Kiernan.

When recommending Prof. Kiernan's appointment to Yale in 1989, the History Department and the Council on Southeast Asia Studies were fully aware of the entirety of his work, including the juvenilia which figures so prominently in Mr. Morris's article. We were also aware of Mr. Morris's unsolicited communications to Yale University, with variants of the same accusations against Prof. Kiernan. Our decision was based on the high quality of his mature work, and the very great respect in which he is held by scholars of Southeast Asia.

We believe that the State Department's selection of the Yale Center for International and Area Studies and the Schell Center for International Human Rights as participants in the Cambodian Genocide Program under Prof. Kiernan's direction reflects recognition of his integrity, objectivity, and high scholarship. We are honored that he is our colleague.

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