

Revolutionary Female Medical Staff in Tram Kak District

Sokhym Em

(Continued from the November 2002 Issue)

The 12 morality points were created to help all cadres build themselves into perfect citizens in the new and pure society. The sixth point concerned sexual relationships between men and women: "Do not do anything violating to women." Clandestine love was regarded as a crime and was punishable, since "violating sexual morals is a nasty behavior belonging to the enemy and may put the revolution at risk."

Riel San revealed that a number of nurses in Tram Kak did not obey the 12 points. He added that they violated the established morals, carried out illicit activities with men, spoke inappropriately to patients, were careless, and disobeyed organizational discipline. He said that a woman named Han who committed moral offenses was sent to Krang Tachann prison, tortured and detained. Khoeun was removed from the hospital to a mobile unit for her misconduct with military patients. Vy was removed from her post as the chief of Prey Lvea subdistrict hospital for a moral offense.

Female medical staff who were base people often spoke rudely to April 17 patients. Neang said that in the Khmer Rouge regime good-hearted nurses were hard to find. Sun also said that only two or three among twenty nurses were compassionate. Phan revealed that medical staff discriminated against April 17 patients. Patients had no rights to argue with the staff. "The revolutionary medical staff were still partisan; all societies are like that. Those staff were completely uneducated," said Phan.

In addition to their daily tasks, the staff had to attend daily livelihood or self-criticism meetings. The

purpose of the meetings was "eliminate [enemies] and build forces; destroy feudalism, capitalism and imperialism and build socialism; destroy the class system and build the internal solidarity of the revolution." In the minutes of the second central committee meeting dated May 31, 1976, Pol Pot ordered all offices and ministries to have a meeting once every month in order to examine the overall situation in each ministry so as to reinforce them so they could become as brilliant as the slogan "Great Leap Forward" expressed. However, the lower levels had to conduct meetings every day, or at least three times a week.

Decorating one's body with jewelry and fashionable clothes, wearing long hair, and perfuming oneself were totally banned, for "cosmetics belong to feudal people." Vuth was condemned by the hospital chief for having a feudal attitude because she wore shirts with short sleeves. She was eventually sent to Phnom Sanlong prison for further education.

Angkar did not permit nurses to have love affairs or choose their spouses. Before marrying people, Angkar scanned their biographies to determine their morals and political backgrounds. Prior to April 17, 1975, the marriage age was 25 or older for women and 35 or older for men. After April 17, men could marry at 25 and women at 20. The purpose of marriage was not "personal happiness and having children. Marriage is for the revolution. It is done for the purpose of achieving the honorable tasks of liberating the nation, the people and poverty-stricken classes, and bring socialism and communism to the country."

Relatives had no right to know in advance or get involved in the marriage process. Angkar took care of everything.

There was no exception for nurses in Tram Kak. They had no right to decide who they would marry and live with for the rest of their lives. Everything could be done only when Angkar permitted. Angkar married people of the same class—middle-class peasants to middle-class peasants, poor peasants to poor peasants, educated citizens to educated citizens.

In Democratic Kampuchea, many female

medical staff married soldiers, high-ranking cadres or fellow medical staff. Women never knew in advance when they were to get married or to whom. Angkar kept everything secret. Women could only do what they were told to, and were not to complain. In his interview with a Belgian delegation, Pol Pot said that “youths marry voluntarily and when problems arise in the family, the public helped to solve the problems.



Khmer Rouge medical women producing local tablets.

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However, if the couple cannot live together any longer, a divorce is their choice.”

In marriage, Angkar called the grooms and the brides out to hold each other's hands. Then it read the biographies of the grooms and the brides to the participants. After that, the brides and the grooms swore “I shall live with my spouse for the rest of my life.” That was the end of the wedding ceremony. Afterward,

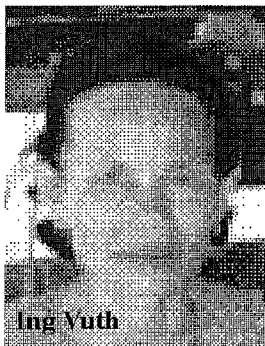


the new couples lived in pre-prepared houses. Five to ten or more couples were married at a time. At night, soldiers eavesdropped on the new couples. If a couple refused to accept each other, Angkar would immediately summon them to be reeducated. If they did not change their minds, the couple would be punished or disappeared.

Sok Kim said that no one knew who they would be married to and they could not reject the other, regardless of how they felt.



Sok Kim



Ing Yuth

In 1977, Ing Vuth was forced to marry a man who she had never known. Angkar took her by vehicle to Tram Kak district office without informing her about what was going on. When she arrived, she was surprised and complained, but Angkar proceeded. After they were married, she and her husband were unable to live together. They tried to avoid seeing each other by going to work sites. Seeing this, Angkar gave them a long ideological session. Eventually, she accepted

him because she was afraid of death.

The hard work and strict regulations of Angkar made medical staff become fearful. Their apprehension decreased their productivity. They tried their best to fulfill what they were ordered to do. Food, clothes, accommodation, family life and other personal issues were all the responsibilities of Angkar. Even the breaths they took belonged to Angkar and they were to live or die as Angkar determined; no one had the right to complain.

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