Chapter Five

THE "ROYAL CRUSADE FOR INDEPENDENCE"
King Sihanouk, instead of going direct to Paris, settled himself at La Napoule, on the French Riviera, to think about the future course of action. From La Napoule he wrote a lengthy letter to President Auriol on 5 March 1953 pointing out the difficulties he himself and his country were facing at the moment. He recalled that he was solely responsible for placing Cambodia in the French Union, and for signing the 1949 agreements with France. Since these treaties suffered from serious "lacunae," particularly in the economic, financial, military and judicial matters, his government was powerless to counter the rebel propaganda. On the other hand, the unrealistic and unresponsive French attitude helped to increase political unrest in the country. The rebels, he said, accused him as anti-nationalist, and considered him to be the "principal obstacle" in the way of Cambodia's independence. The propaganda of Son Ngoc Thanh gained wide response from politicians, students and even the bonzes. (1) "The French policy," he warned President Auriol, contained in it the risk of "allowing the

(1) The King claimed that 80 per cent of the bonzes were the sympathisers of Son Ngoc Thanh. See King Sihanouk's letter to President of the French Republic on 5 March 1953 in Livre Jaune sur les Revendications de l'Indépendance du Cambodge depuis 5 Mars 1953, 1 (Phnom Penh, 1953) 17.
Cambodians to throw themselves into the arms of Son Ngoc Thanh, then of communism." (2) He claimed, moreover, that three-fourths of his kingdom was under the "occupation" of the Vietminh. (3) Under these conditions his position as king and that of the Cambodian throne were under grave danger. He said:

The Monarchy itself is in danger. I have bound my future as King and that of my dynasty on the policy of adhesion to the French Union and collaboration with France, to which I am and shall be loyal. (4)

France, according to him, had two courses of action open to her. The first course could be that of making a few modifications in the existing treaties, but that would not be helpful because of the changed political conditions. So he suggested:

The other solution, which, I permit myself to suggest, consists of entrusting to the King and his Government the principal responsibilities for the administration of the Country, which implies the transfer of prerogatives until now retained by France and, in consequence, the obligation for the King and the Royal Government to find for themselves the means necessary for exercising their powers and for undertaking their responsibilities. (5)

The French Government did not take seriously the alarmist attitude of King Sihanouk. President Auriol, after considerable delay, invited the king for lunch at the Elysée Palace on 25 March 1953. The discussions held there did not produce any "positive results" except the "renewal of French promise to examine the Cambodian problem." (6) The French attitude, in

(2) Ibid.
(3) Ibid., 4.
(4) Ibid., 11. See also Ibid., 196-7.
(5) Ibid., 12.
effect, was to persuade the king to return home. (7) The king was obviously disappointed with the cool reception accorded to his appeals and proposals. His personal position as well as that of the Royalists became all the more weak in his country. This unhappy position was succinctly put by Prime Minister Penn Nouth:

> For my part, I am in the black-list of the nationalists. The communists would behead me if they come to power. His Majesty is promised the same treatment because of his pro-French attitude. We are caught between two fires. France considers us to be traitors because we do not always say 'amen,' and our adversaries accuse us as working for you / the French/. It is true that we want to work with you, but in conditions that preserve our sovereignty and our independence. (8)

Under these conditions, his return home might lead to a civil war, or to an intensified anti-French and anti-monarchical activities. So the royal crusader was determined in his mind not to return home with empty hands.

King Sihanouk, being disappointed in Paris, decided almost suddenly to visit America with a view to influencing the public opinion there as regards Cambodian independence. (9)

He left behind him his trusted lieutenants, Penn Nouth and Sam Sary, Minister for Conferences, in Paris to be at hand to

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(7) M. Letourneau, Minister in charge of the Associated States, had an interview with King Sihanouk at Fontainebleau. He told the King that the latter's demands were "inopportune," and suggested that he should return to his Kingdom forthwith. See Norodom Sihanouk, *L'Action de S. M. Norodom Sihanouk pour l'Indépendance du Cambodge, 1941-55* (Phnom Penh, 1959) 35. See also Sam Sary, "Note Explicative du Ministre des Conferences," xi.

(8) Penn Nouth's interview to the *Paris Presse*, quoted from *Cambodge*, 7 May 1953.

(9) It was rumoured at first that King Sihanouk would return home via Calcutta, but he later on decided upon visiting the American states. See *Cambodge*, 8 and 9 April 1953.
negotiate should the French Government change her mind. Both in Canada and in the USA, the king drew pointed attention to the impending danger to his country from the Vietminh. He told a New York Times correspondent that, because of the short-sighted policy of the French, a growing volume of Cambodian public opinion was feeling that the communist-inspired Vietminh alone was fighting for genuine independence. He was doubtful if he could count upon the support of his people in case of massive invasion of the Vietminh on Cambodia. "If we have an invasion of the sort that Laos had suffered recently," he said, "I am not at all certain that I can call for a general mobilisation as did Laos. If there is a menace, the people will say that the French are encircled and their end has come." (10) If France did not grant independence to Cambodia "in the next few months" there was every danger of the Cambodians revolting against the royal government and joining the Vietminh, (11) for his people "do not want to die for the French and help them stay here." (12) This did not mean, however, that Cambodia would sit idle after winning freedom. On the contrary, she would join hands with France in her fight against communism. (13)

Paris did not view with favour King Sihanouk's visit to the USA and his nationalistic pronouncements. He became the


In Laos, the Pathet-Lao-Vietminh army was forcing the French army to withdraw from Sam Nena and Xieng-Khousang and Luang Prabang, the royal capital, itself was under imminent threat. Le Monde, 14, 15 and 22 April 1953.


(12) Ibid.

(13) Le Monde, 23 April 1953.
target of hostile criticism of the Press in Paris. (14) Sihanouk's mission to the USA itself was a failure. Secretary of State Dulles, whom the king met at Washington, was indeed sympathetic towards Cambodian nationalist aspirations. But he was not sure whether the grant of independence at the moment would be appropriate in view of the communist threat. (15) He was "profoundly disappointed" with the outcome of his mission to Paris and Washington. He would not "simply go home," but would settle down in Tokyo to watch for the outcome of his exile.

While he was in Tokyo, the proposals of 9 May 1953 were signed by Premier Penn Nouth representing Cambodia, and M. Tezenes du Montcel, Director-General (Administrative) in the Ministry of Associated States, representing France. The King returned to the capital thereafter with high hopes. These proposals, however, did not aim at making any radical concessions to Cambodia. On the contrary, as M. Sam Sary stated, these proposals had only the task of studying the ways and means of putting into effect certain clauses of the 1949 treaties so far postponed or partly applied. The French officials who were entrusted with the task of studying these proposals, did not however, give serious consideration to them. For example, the French representatives who were entrusted with the task of studying the question of Police, excused themselves from going

(14) For the kind of adverse comments in the French press, see Ibid., 14, 15 and 23 April 1953.

into the problem on the ground that they had not consulted the
Police department. (16) M. Sam Sary, the Cambodian Minister of
Conferences, observed: "All these reservations gave the impression
to the Royal Government that France was not disposed to give
effectively to Cambodia all the attributes and prerogatives of
her independence." (17)

The Second Exile

King Sihanouk, disappointed for the second time in two
months with the attitude of the French authorities, left Phnom
Penh for Bangkok on 13 June 1953 on a self-imposed exile "to
alert world opinion." Restating, of course, with some force this
time the Cambodians' urge for freedom, he observed that if a
plebiscite were held in Cambodia 90 per cent of his people would
oppose Cambodia continuing in the French Union, and that they
would demand a major revision of the 1949 agreements. He warned
that if France persisted in her ostrich-like policies there
would be a "general revolt against France" in which all sections
of his people would join. (18) He finally stated: "In this
decisive turning-point of our national history and of our relations
with France, I have to choose between France and my people.

(16) Sam Sary, "Note Explicative du Ministre des
Conferences," xii-xiii, in Livre Jaune, 1.

(17) Ibid., xiii.

(18) "Note Royale (Personnelle) Communiqué au Milieux
Politiques et Diplomatiques du Bangkok," Ibid., 124.
I have, obviously, chosen my people." (19) If France granted total independence, Cambodia, on a reciprocal basis, would promise to stay in the French Union enjoying the same equality and freedom as the members of the Commonwealth of Nations (formerly known as the British Commonwealth of Nations) enjoyed, or she would enter into a treaty of alliance and friendship with France. (20) Cambodia, at the same time, would promise to respect the economic and other interests of France in the kingdom.

The Thai Government did not view with favour the nationalist activities of Sihanouk in Bangkok. He therefore withdrew to the Battambang-Siem-reap region in his kingdom on 16 June. For a few months from that date Cambodia had, as it were, two capitals: the royal capital at Siem reap and the official capital, as usual, at Phnom Penh. The King's determined struggle to win his country's freedom was acclaimed by all shades of nationalist opinion. The Issarak chiefs, Puth Chhay in Kandal, Ouch in Battambang, and Oum in Kompong Thom, laid down their arms and surrendered to the Royal Government, promising to work along with their king for regaining independence. (21) Son Ngoc Thanh also recognized the "genuine

(19) Ibid., 125. (emphasis by the author), In a message to the French nationals in Cambodia, on the eve of his departure to Bangkok, King Sihanouk said that he was "distressed at breaking off my relations personally and provisionally with France whom I love sincerely." He said, he was "compelled" to lead the independence struggle which he would do "without permanently compromising our fraternal relations with France." Ibid., 120.

(20) Sam Sary, "Note Explicative du Ministre des Conferences," xiii.

patriotism" of his King and offered to join hands with him. (22)
The King, however, did not send any reply. (23) Many Cambodian
army and naval officers who were under French control deserted
their posts and proceeded to Siem réap to join the king. (24)
Alarmed with these developments, the French military command
in Cambodia brought foreign troops composed of Vietnamese,
Algerians, Moroccans, etc., to Phnom Penh, besides installing
canons at the Pochentong air-port directed at the capital. (25)
The Royal Government, in reply, stationed its troops "on all
the points occupied by the French troops." (26) There was an
uneasy calm in Cambodia.

(22) Livre Jaune, 1, 204.
(23) Ibid., 204.

Writing in 1958, King Sihanouk stated that, when he was
leading the independence struggle, he sent Dap Chhuon and Loñ
Nol, later on Minister of Defence, as his emissaries to ask
Son Ngoc Thanh to join him to continue the nationalist struggle.
But, the King says, Thanh refused to do so. See Sihanouk,
L'Action de S. M. Norodom Sihanouk, 15.

This statement is at variance with the one made above.
Whether this offer was made subsequently, we do not know.

(24) It is reported that about 50 students of the Cambodian
Military School deserted their posts and joined the king.
Le Monde, 4 July 1953. The occasion for these desertions was
this: Certain western papers like L'Aurore and the Daily Telegraph
(London) criticized King Sihanouk's demands for independence.
L'Aurore commenting on the inadequacy and inefficiency of the
Cambodian army, is reported to have stated, that in Cambodia
there are "ten times more bonzes than soldiers." The Daily
Telegraph, for its part, is said to have observed, that if
Cambodia attained her independence it would not be too long before
she became a satellite of Communist China. See Sihanouk,
L'Action de S. M. Norodom Sihanouk, 57.

As a reaction to this the king issued a proclamation on 28
June 1953 urging the Cambodians to join in large numbers in the
army. This organisation of what is known as Mouvement Forces
Vives du Cambodge (MFVC), also known as "Plan Sihanouk," is
claimed to have wide response from men and women of all ranks.
See Ibid., 57 and Sam Sary and Mau Say, Bilan de l'Oeuvre, 21.
(25) Sam Sary, "Note Explicative du Ministre des Conferences,
xiii. See also Le Monde, 7 June 1953.

(26) Ibid., 30 June 1953.
While Cambodia was thus in the throes of such convulsions, the French Indochina policy itself was undergoing a significant change. As the war with the Vietminh became intensified with every passing year, especially after 1949, French public opinion, which in 1946 was almost indifferent as regards the Indochina problem, began to view with grave disconcert the "dirty war" (la sale guerre), and the "cancer" that was draining away France's man-power and money. (27) Besides this, scandals like the French traffic in piastres in Indochina became subjects of serious public criticism. (28) Moreover, the defence of France in Europe assumed at this time greater importance in view of the resurgence of Germany. "The war in Indochina," M. Edgar Faure, a former Prime Minister, stated, "is at the heart of the European question." (29) Both France and the USA (unlike in Korea) were not prepared to internationalize the Indochina war. The USA was, in effect, prepared to send war material and money to continue the war, but she was not prepared to intervene directly in the war. Furthermore, in consonance with the changed French attitude, there was among almost all the political parties a growing realisation that a military solution alone would not solve the Indochina problem.

(27) It is stated that in 1952 the French expenditure on Indochina war was 1,600 billion francs, "twice the amount of American Marshal Plan aid to France." Communiques d'Outre-Mer, 18 December 1952, quoted from Ellen J. Hammer, The Struggle for Indochina (Stanford, 1954) 237. See also Alexander Werth, France, 1940-1955 (London, 1956) 685.

(28) For example, M. Servan-Schreiber stated that the war in fact was fought to help certain vested interests in France. He accused that certain groups of politicians have found "a principal source of revenue" in the Indochina war. Servan-Schreiber, "Pour Qui Nous Combattons," in Le Monde, 30 April 1953.

(29) Quoted from Hammer, The Struggle for Indochina, 309.
The 3 July Declaration and Transfer of Power

In accordance with the changed French attitude, M. Joseph Laniel, who formed his cabinet in June 1953 after a prolonged constitutional crisis, issued a declaration on 3 July of far-reaching effect on Franco-Cambodian relations. The declaration stated that France was desirous "of perfecting the independence and sovereignty of the Associated States of Indochina by assuring, in agreement with each of the three interested Governments, the transfer of the subjects which she / France/ still retained only in the interest of the States, because of the perilous conditions generated by the state of war." (30) Cambodia as well as Vietnam and Laos were called upon to negotiate with France for the transfer of power.

The negotiations that followed the 3 July declaration were prolonged and laborious. The Cambodian Government's proposals of 12 July insisted upon the recognition of Cambodia's freedom in judicial, economic, financial, military, diplomatic matters, while agreeing, at the same time, to grant a favourable treatment to French economic and financial interests in Cambodia, and to conclude a "military aid pact" with France. (31) The French

(30) Quoted from Livre Jaune, 1, 133-4. M. Joseph Laniel stated in the National Assembly: "I must repeat in the clearest and most categorical fashion that the French Govt. does not consider that the Indochina problem is necessarily requiring a military solution. . . . If an honourable solution were in view, whether on the local or international level, France would be happy to welcome a diplomatic solution of the conflict." France, Journal Officiel, Assemblée Nationale (Paris) 27 October 1953.

Proposals of 22 July agreed in principle to the transfer of certain subjects but did not agree to carry out the transfer without negotiations. But on the military question the French consented on the condition that Cambodia would agree to place under the French operational command certain Cambodian units stationed in the east of the Mekong to fight the "common enemy." (32) After considerable delay an agreement for the transfer to Cambodia of the judicial and police subjects was signed in Phnom Penh on 29 August 1953. However, the agreement regarding the transfer of military power took a much longer time. There was considerable amount of friction over the question of the French operational command of the Cambodian units stationed in the east of Mekong. On 17 October the military agreements were finally signed.

Cambodia, it may be noted, received somewhat less than what she had demanded. From 1 November, the Cambodian King assumed the territorial command of the whole country, the operational command of the five battalions, and of the Franco-Cambodian battalions belonging to the French Union forces stationed to the west of the Mekong. It was agreed to place "provisionally" under French operational command three battalions and nine companies of Cambodian forces. (33) The transfer of the rest of the subjects followed suit. The technical subjects like Geographic service, Hygiene, Public Health, etc. were transferred to the Cambodian


hands on 25 February 1954. As regards the transfer of financial and monetary powers, as well as of customs, immigration, etc., which so far were administered by Cambodia conjointly with Vietnam, Laos and France, Cambodia agreed not to "unilaterally denounce" the agreements signed at Pau in 1950. A Quadripartite conference would meet in Paris at a convenient time to settle these matters. (34) Soon after the signature of the Military agreements King Sihanouk returned to Phnom Penh greeted by his people as a "national hero."

Three important developments of far-reaching effect on Cambodia's future were in the making during this period. The first was the "neutralist" declarations of the Royal Government as regards communism. The second one related to the denunciation of Son Ngoc Thanh which radically affected his future political career. The third, and rather more immediate problem, was the invasion of the Vietminh regulars into the Cambodian territory which was solved only at the Geneva Conference summoned in April 1954.

As the country was on the verge of her independence, Premier Penn Nouth issued a proclamation on 10 September 1953 urging the Cambodian Radicals to shed their extra-national affiliations and return to the national fold because the cause for which they were fighting was being realized. The Premier,

(34) The Quadripartite Conference met in Paris from 26 August to 29 December 1954. Cambodia regained her sovereignty over finance, customs, immigration, etc. For details see Accords et Conventions signée à l'Issue de la Conference Quadripartite de Paris 26 Aout au 29 Decembre 1954 (Phnom Penh, 1955).
turning at the same time to the Vietminh then active in Cambodia, urged them to leave the country on the assurance that Cambodia would not, in any manner, interfere in their national affairs. (35)

This "neutralist" attitude of Cambodia was at variance with her earlier statements of fighting the Vietminh in association with France. (36) This change in Cambodian attitude as regards communism evidently shocked the "free world," particularly the USA which threatened to stop economic and other aid to Cambodia. (37) In spite of these threats Cambodia stood committed to her policy of non-intervention as regards communism provided that the Vietminh did not interfere in Cambodia's internal affairs. As the Free Cambodia puts it, the Cambodians "would fight all those who would menace them, in particular the Vietminh which invaded our land, conducted itself on our soil as in a conquered territory and flouted our national sovereignty." (38)

As the country was progressing towards independence, the remaining Issarak leaders — Prince Chantaraingsey and Savong Vong—surrendered to the Royal Government along with their men on 20 February 1954. (39) The only outstanding leader still to


(36) See page 176.

(37) The reasons for the neutralist declarations, according to the Royal Government, were that (i) Cambodia was not given the right of command over its army; (ii) as the army of Vietnam was not on the Cambodian soil, by way of reciprocity Cambodian army would not enter Vietnam except by an "adequate military pact" with the Vietnam government, and, (iii) the US aid was not given to Cambodia direct but through France. See Free Cambodia (issued by the Cambodia Office in India, New Delhi), 14 September 1953.

(38) Ibid. For further details see Livre Jaune, 2, 56-71, also see V. M. Reddi, "A Study of Cambodia's Neutralism," International Studies 2 (New Delhi) 190-205.

(39) Cambodge, 22 February 1954.
enter the national fold was Son Ngoc Thanh. Unlike other Cambodian nationalist rebels, Thanh stood on a different footing in the calculations of the King and the Royalists. Thanh was the bitter critic of King Sihanouk for his alleged anti-national and pro-French leanings. If the King had not achieved freedom in time his position in the country could have been seriously damaged by Thanh's propaganda.

When the King had succeeded in winning freedom, the future political career of Thanh was doomed. When, for instance, Son Ngoc Thanh sent his overtures of surrender to the King, the royal government issued a characteristic denunciation:

You would not serve His Majesty the King at the critical hour when he was accomplishing his royal mission, but instead went into the bush to work against the King and to try to prevent him from accomplishing his mission. You have broken promises, you have openly attacked the King and his government, saying that they have done nothing but play a comedy to lull the people to sleep so that the French could oppress the Cambodians. . . . If the Monarch had not obtained the independence of Cambodia, the people would have condemned him and his entourage to death, for you and your men have denounced them as traitors. (40)

"All of which was," Herz observes, "of course, completely correct." (41) Thanh could have no locus standi in the country so long as the Royalists were in power.

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**Dien Bien Phu and The Geneva Conference, 1954**

The third important and rather more immediate problem for the newly independent Cambodia was the Vietminh invasion. As the battle of Dien Bien Phu was in full swing, two battalions

*(40) Quoted from Martin F. Herz, *A Short History of Cambodia* (New York, 1958) 95.*

*(41) *Ibid.,* 95.*
of Vietminh regulars attacked on 2 April 1954 the province of Stung Treng to the northeast of Cambodia. After penetrating deep into the province, they attacked Veunsai and the post of Siempag. (42) Ten days later about 500 Vietminh regulars attacked the Phnom Penh-Battambang railway resulting in the death of a few hundred men, women and children. Simultaneously, Kampong, Takeo, Svay, Reing and Prey Veng were attacked. On 23 April the Cambodian Government appealed to the UN against the unprovoked aggression on Cambodian territory by the Vietminh. (43) The evacuation of the Vietminh forces, however, depended largely upon the outcome of the Dien Bien Phu fighting and the Geneva Conference scheduled to be held in April 1954.

The General Navarre and General Nguyen van Giap contest at Dien Bien Phu was a trial of strength between the forces of nationalism (despite its communist orientation) and colonialism, and also contest between the "free world" and the communist world. Whereas the Vietminh forces were placed in an advantageous position at the battle-field, the French army had to fight under heavy odds like strategic and logistic weakness, rains, and insufficiency of air-craft and pilots. No battle in recent times could have been more complete and more decisive than the battle of Dien Bien Phu. The fighting that started on 12 March ended on 7 May with serious losses to the French in men, and material, and in prestige. This battle has "decisively tipped the balance against the French" in Indochina. (44) Unless the Indochina war

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(42) Cambodge, 16 April 1954.
(43) Ibid., 26 April 1954.
was internationalized France had no *locus standi* in the
peninsula. More than ever, the battle has clearly demonstrated
the painful truth to France that "major decisions in Indochina
were not military but political." (45)

Meanwhile, the Western capitals as well as the capitals
of the non-committed Asian nations were seriously concerned over
the serious turn of events in Indochina. The war could now
either be internationalized, or peace could be brought to the
war-ravaged peninsula. Secretary of State Dulles was seriously
concerned over reverses the French were suffering at Dien Bien
Phu. He was keen on direct, unlimited intervention. But in the
USA the Congress and public opinion were not in favour of such
unilateral involvement. (46) Prime Minister Churchill and
Foreign Secretary Eden, who were then sounded, were neither in
favour of the continuation of the war nor intervention on the
side of the U.S.A. Nor were they interested at the moment in
participating in a defense system (the precursor of the SEATO)
as proposed by Mr. Dulles. This attitude of the UK was partly
due to the decline of her political interest in this area and
partly to respect the wishes of her Commonwealth partners –
India, Pakistan and Ceylon.

(45) Bell, *Survey of International Affairs*, 11.

(46) During and before the Geneva Conference Secretary of
State Dulles was keenly pursuing his object of direct intervention
in the Indochina war. He visited the UK on 11 April 1954 and
also Paris to urge them for an ad hoc coalition with the USA.
See *Ibid.*, 39. See also Lacouture and Devillers, *La Fin d'une
Guerre*, 78, 79 and 82-5.
Among the Asian leaders Prime Minister Nehru of India was deeply interested in the re-establishment of peace in Indochina. He told the Lok Sabha (the Lower House of the Indian Parliament) on 24 April 1954:

Indo-China is an Asian country and a proximate area. Despite her heavy sacrifices, the conflict finds her enmeshed in intervention, and the prospect of her freedom is jeopardized. The crisis in respect of Indo-China, therefore, moves us deeply and calls from us our best efforts to avert an extension and intensification of the conflict, and to promote trends that might lead to a settlement. (47)

On the same day he proposed a six-point plan, which was subsequently endorsed by the Colombo Powers, for settling the Indochina problem. The plan, among others, recommended cease-fire with immediate effect, termination of French sovereignty in Indochina, direct negotiations between the parties to the conflict, and an agreement of non-intervention by the Big Powers. (48) V. K. Krishna Menon was sent to Geneva as a special envoy of the Prime Minister to assist, in case of need, the parties involved in the conflict to find an amicable, peaceful solution. The mood and the climate in which the Geneva Conference, under co-chairmanship of the UK and the USSR, is given succinctly by Coral Bell:

The worsening military situation in Indochina, the slow-motion fall of the Laniel Government, the audible failure of Britain and the USA to compose their differences on the setting up of a South East Asian security organization, the dissensions between France and Vietnam . . . , and finally the evidence

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(48) Ibid., 399-400.
provided by Colombo Conference and some later events of the strong and critical interest which the uncommitted Asian Powers were taking in the deliberations at the Geneva — all affected the pace and mood of the Conference itself, not about Korea . . ., but about Indochina. (49)

The Cambodian delegation to the Conference composed of Tep Phan, Sam Sary, Son Sann, Nhiek Tioulong, etc., had to work against this background to insure the newly acquired sovereignty and territorial integrity of Cambodia. The delegation had to steer clear of the east-west rivalry to achieve its purpose. From the beginning of the Conference, the Cambodian delegates, supported by the French, insisted upon the separation of the question of Cambodia from that of Vietnam. For, M. Bidault, the leader of the French delegation to the Conference, stated that the Cambodian problem was not of the nature of a civil war, but an invasion of the Vietminh troops on the Cambodian soil. The moment these invading troops were withdrawn the problem was solved. (50) The second problem was the insistence of Pham Van Dong, the leader of the DRVN delegation, to invite the "democratic governments of Khmer Issarak and Pathet Lao." These governments, he claimed, have liberated vast areas in Cambodia and Laos, have established democracy and improved the moral and material condition of the people of the liberated areas. These proposals received the warm support of Chou En-lai and Molotov.

(49) Bell, Survey of International Affairs, 43.
(50) Lacouture and Devillers, La Fin d'une Guerre, 139.
Both M. Bidault and M. Sam Sary, however, rejected the proposals as simply unacceptable. Sam Sary said that "the democratic government of Cambodia exists only in the imagination of the ministers of the Eastern bloc." (51)

The Joseph Laniel government fell from power on 12 June 1954. Mendès-France, who formed the government on 17 June, undertook to resign if he did not obtain peace in Indochina by 20 July. This rather unusual declaration of the new prime minister accelerated the deliberations at Geneva which, in fact, helped to satisfy the Cambodian demands. The Communists agreed to drop the sponsorship of the "resistance governments" both in Cambodia and in Laos. On 19 June the Conference agreed that the Cambodian delegates study the questions relating to the cessation of hostilities on Cambodian territory, and the withdrawal of foreign troops and personnel from Cambodia. (52)

Cambodia, however, was to show her skill in her dexterous diplomatic moves in the last moments of 20 July when the mandate of Mendès-France was about to terminate. "And, at literally the eleventh hour, there was a final hitch over Cambodia." (53) The Cambodian delegation refused to sign the Final Declaration on the ground that some of the points in the draft were incompatible with the sovereignty of Cambodia. (54) The most important Cambodian demands were: (i) the right to enter into military

(51) Quoted from Ibid., 141.
(52) Bell, Survey of International Affairs, 53.
(53) Ibid., 64.
alliances in conformity with the principles of the UN Charter and to accept foreign military bases in case her security was menaced, (ii) the right to introduce into the country arms and military personnel from any point of her national frontiers (55), and (iii) disarming of the resistance elements before considering the question of integrating them into the national community. (56) Sam Sary is reported to have told the indignant Molotov and Chou En-lai: "No, I am not going to sign the document prejudicial to our sovereignty. . . . No, it is impossible. We desire to be free to do what we like. . . . I am not afraid of communism and the Great Powers." (57) After considerable hesitation and discussion the Cambodian demands were satisfied. On 20-21 July the Final Declaration was signed by the participants in the Conference. The USA however issued a separate statement in which she took "note" of the Declaration.

As provided in the Geneva Agreement an International Commission for Supervision and Control (ICSC), composed of Poland, Canada and India, the last as chairman, was established in Phnom Penh. It commenced its work from 11 August 1954. Largely because of good understanding and uniform cooperation from the Cambodian royal government, the ICSC was able to solve, and quickly, many of the ticklish problems without any serious

(55) The DRVN delegation insisted that arms and ammunition should be introduced from specified points like Pochentong, Phnom Penh, etc. See Ibid., 61.

(56) Ibid., 61-2.

(57) Quoted from Lacouture and Devillers, La Fin d'une Guerre, 270. For more details see Ibid., 270-3.
hitch. The hostilities ceased on 7 August, the prisoners of war were exchanged between Cambodia and Vietnam, and the Vietminh withdrew from the Cambodian soil by 18 October. There were, however, some complaints from the royal government that all the Vietminh personnel did not withdraw from the country. (58)

Two problems still remained: In the Final Declaration on Indochina on 20-21 July Cambodia undertook to (i) "to integrate all citizens without any discrimination, in the national community," and (ii) hold general elections guaranteeing free participation for all Cambodians. (59) On the reintegration question, initially there were complaints against local Cambodian officials of subjecting the former resistant personnel to "petty harassment." (60) The royal government, on its part, was also suspicious of those who belonged to the resistance movement. In its second report the ICSC stated that: "The Royal Government, on its side, was hesitant because not all the top leaders of the resistance movement had come out into the open and it felt that there was the nucleus of an underground opposition movement." (61) By April 1955, however, the problem of reintegration was solved amicably. (62) All the former Issaraks


(61) Ibid.

and other rebels were brought into the national fold with the notable exception of Son Ngoc Thanh.

As for the elections, the Cambodian Government contended that the elections were purely an internal matter, and as such the ICSC could only "observe," but not try to "control, or supervise, or inspect" the process of election. (63) Before the actual conduct of the elections, the country had to witness certain important and even far-reaching developments. On 7 February 1955 a referendum was held to judge whether the King had accomplished his "Royal Mission," or not. It may be recalled that on the eve of the dissolution of Huy Kanthoul Government in June 1952, the King asked the people to give him full powers for three years within which period he promised to bring peace and independence to his people. The people with an overwhelming majority returned the verdict in February 1955 that the King had fulfilled all his promises to the people. (64) Thereafter the King proposed "important changes" to the 1947 constitution. (65)

(63) Conference Publique de Sam Sary, 68.

(64) The procedure was as follows: The voter would be given two ballot papers, one black in colour and another white. If the voter cast the white one into the box it meant that the King has accomplished his royal mission. It was an open ballot system.

The official figures supplied by the royal government were as follows:

| Total number of votes cast: 927,646 |
| White Ballots: 925,812 |
| Black Ballots: 1,834 |

Percentage of voters approving the Royal Mission: 99.8 per cent.


(65) Ibid., 14-5.
King Sihanouk had a very surprising news for his people and also for the world at large. On 2 March 1955 he decided to abdicate his throne in favour of his parents late King Suvamarit and Queen Kossamak. The reasons for this sudden decision was given by the King in an address to his people on the eve of his abdication. After expressing his gratitude to them for their confidence in him as expressed through the recent referendum, he said:

I wish to demonstrate the gratitude which I have for thousands of my compatriotes, who, after the referendum, have come to bring me petitions of protest against the representatives of the Democratic Party, which is opposed to me. By these constitutional reforms, I had wanted to ensure the well-being of the people, but it has been difficult to apply them because of the systematic opposition of my adversaries. The students of schools and colleges have shown themselves hostile to my politics, even though I am very interested in education. These students have ranged themselves on the side of the Democratic Party of Son Ngoc Thanh. I have seen that in the political, intellectual and in certain privileged circles, few are the citizens who are satisfied with my policies for the defence of the interests and the liberties of the people. Some have even used their wealth to organize manifestations against me in order to satisfy their personal ambitions.

All these unfortunate facts have discouraged me from staying on the Throne to govern. . . .

I feel that while I stay on the Throne, I will not be able any more to satisfy the aspirations of the people, and, I am certain that, by leaving the Throne, and staying with my poor and loyal countrymen, I shall find the way to safeguard the interests of the people and the Fatherland. (66)

Soon after abdication King (now Prince) Sihanouk started an organization, or community, called the Popular Socialist

Community (Sangkum Reastr Niyum), which became a formidable rival to the Democratic Party. In all, eight parties, namely the Popular Socialist Community (Sangkum Reastr Niyum), the Democratic Party, the Liberal Party, the National Reconstruction Party (Redressement National), the People's Party (Pracheachun), Khmer Independents (Khmer Ekreach), Khmer Labour Party and Independents, contested for the elections held on 11 September 1955. (67) The real contest, in fact, was between the Sangkum and the Democratic Party. During as well as before the date of election complaints were lodged by the Democratic Party that its members were being harassed by the supporters of Sihanouk. (68) The Sangkum registered 83 per cent of the total votes polled winning all the 91 seats in the National Assembly, while the once-powerful Democratic Party registered only 12 per cent. (69) The results recorded significantly the culmination of what Herz termed as the "Agony of Democracy." The Sangkum and Sihanouk became the strongest and almost indispensable factors in the political life of Cambodia to-day.

(67) ICSC, Fourth Interim Report, 4.

(68) The 4th Interim Report of the ICSC stated that "because of official pressure, the application of certain sections of the Penal Code and the arrest of some candidates and campaign workers, they did not have the freedom to carry on legitimate party propaganda." The royal government made it known to the Commission that action would be taken if (i) the Sovereign members of the Royal Family were attacked, (ii) there was calumny and defamation of the Government, and (iii) there was incitement to disorder. Most of the arrests were made on the ground of lése-majeste and on the ground of criticism of American military aid agreement. Ibid., 9.

(69) Ibid., 15.