

The Genesis of Red Brotherhood at War

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Abstract

The paper traces Grant Evans' intellectual development from university times to his early academic writings presented as a pre-history of the book *Red Brotherhood at War* (1984). It situates this development in the historical circumstances of Australia between 1968 and the early 1980s, which were dominated by the Vietnam War and struggles between various leftist factions. The core of the argument concerns Grant Evans' reflexive attitude to dominant intellectual trends and his early critical attitude towards the totalitarian tendencies in countries that called themselves socialist at the time.

Introduction

I first met Grant Evans in 1969. We both came from farming backgrounds, came to Melbourne to attend university, lived in the student quarter near Melbourne University, and moved in the same social circles. We soon became good friends.

Over the following years, we engaged in constant discussion. There's a lot that could be said about Grant's personal qualities – his generosity, good humor and other qualities. I will not go into that here. Our discussions ranged freely over a myriad of topics, from pop music to astronomy. Most of these issues I will ignore.

What I will do here is to recall how our views on issues relevant to the writing of *Red Brotherhood at War* evolved. This is a retrospective summing up which brings coherence to discussions that were actually rambling and often confused. It ignores the diversions and sidetracks we explored from time to time, and does not attempt to give a full picture of the range of Grant's interests. This article simply tries to draw together the threads of what Grant and I discussed which led to *Red Brotherhood at War*.

I had begun a science degree at Melbourne University in 1966, but soon became more interested in politics and history. In 1969, I was doing night school to qualify for entry into an Arts course. Grant was majoring in English literature at La Trobe University, and completed that course. However, he became increasingly unhappy with discussions of Leavisite literary criticism.

This was a time of political and cultural ferment. The conservative hegemony in Australian politics forged by Robert Menzies in the early 1950s was unraveling. Social and sexual taboos were being swept away with the rise of the "counter-culture" of sex, drugs and rock'n'roll. A New Left emerged in the US, stressing empowerment of the powerless, human rights, and participatory democracy. The War in Vietnam provoked widespread protests and criticism of US foreign policy. China was swept up in Mao's Cultural Revolution. In 1968, the Soviet Union occupied Czechoslovakia to put an end to the "Prague Spring."

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Grant and I were both heavily involved in the student politics of the time, particularly organizing against the Vietnam War. We found ourselves arguing not only against defenders of the war, but against others in the anti-war movement. Many Labor Party supporters were lukewarm in their opposition to the war. On the other hand, the Maoists, who were numerous at La Trobe University, were sectarian and disruptive. One of Grant's Maoist opponents in those days was Ian Macdonald, who later became a Labor politician in NSW. In the last year of his life, Grant followed with keen interest the NSW Independent Commission Against Corruption's investigation into Macdonald's activities as Minister for Mining. These led to ICAC recommending Macdonald be prosecuted for corruptly issuing lucrative mining licenses to his mates (Shanahan 2013).

Marxist beginnings

Grant and I got much of our intellectual stimulus not from formal classroom discussion, but from debates with fellow students. Marxism was part of the zeitgeist, and we embraced it. But Marxism came in many different shapes and forms, from mathematical economics to cultural criticism. There was a lot of interest in philosophers, especially the "Western Marxists" who tried to create an alternative to Stalinism by developing a humanist version of Marxism. Grant and I diligently read Marcuse and wrestled with Hegel's ideas.

We were initially more attracted to Louis Althusser's criticism of the Western Marxist tradition, and to his defense of Marxism as a science. This lasted until he tried to explain what he meant by science. Then, at least as we saw it, he fell into incoherence and obscurantism. Neither of us paid much attention as the successors to Western Marxism and Althusser developed into post-modernism.

Both Grant and I read widely on current events. We were also both keen readers of the British journal *New Left Review* and the American *Monthly Review*. We both also read widely and eclectically, on mainstream social science. My main focus was more on economics and Grant's on sociology. We lapped up the works of C. Wright Mills and Ralph Miliband, and followed the British Marxist historians, especially Eric Hobsbawm. We were deeply influenced by Barrington Moore's *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* (1966; cf. Moore 1965a, b).³

At La Trobe, Grant worked on the student newspaper. In the early 1970s, with a group of friends we established a small-circulation magazine, *Intervention*, with the hope of stimulating a wider discussion of Marxist analysis of Australian economy, society and culture. Some of our friends joined the trade union movement, where they tried to apply ideas of participatory democracy and worker's control – as a rule, not welcomed by union oligarchs.

Grant and I also joined the Communist Party of Australia. The CPA had broken with the Soviet Union over the "Prague Spring" in 1968, and we supported its efforts to chart an independent course for itself and for Australia. Grant went to Sydney and worked on the CPA paper *Tribune* for a couple of years. Meanwhile, I did my Arts degree, majoring in history and economic history.

³ Barrington Moore, Jr, worked for the OSS (precursor of the CIA) in World War II, then at Harvard University.

We both left the CPA in the mid-1970s, having concluded that the efforts to reform the party were not enough to win it a wider base of support. Grant took a position teaching Sociology at La Trobe University and I took one teaching Politics at Swinburne Institute of Technology (later Swinburne University of Technology).

Actually existing socialism

This experience helped considerably to sharpen our thinking about “actually-existing socialism.” Initially, we were heavily influenced by the writings of Isaac Deutscher. He was sharply critical of Stalin’s dictatorship, but optimistic about the prospects for reform on the post-Stalin period.

I had read the classic literature of Cold War totalitarian theory before I met Grant. I thought Friedrich and Brzezinski offered a list of descriptors that did not capture the dynamics of the regimes to which it applied. They equated communist and fascist regimes, although their origins, ambitions and consequences were quite different. During the Cold War, the advocates of totalitarian theory tended to see all communist leaders as “new Hitlers” and any negotiations with them as “a new Munich.” This was, I thought, very dangerous.

I do not know if Grant read the classic literature on totalitarianism, but was certainly familiar with the general concept. We both found Isaac Deutscher’s arguments on the Stalin and post-Stalin Soviet system more persuasive.⁴

However, by 1969 we were beginning to think about the limitation to Deutscher’s interpretation. His views fitted well with the Khrushchev years, but after Leonid Brezhnev took over in 1964, democratization halted and even went into reverse, while the economy slid into stagnation. The suppression of the “Prague Spring” was not only a violation of Czechoslovakian national sovereignty; it was emblematic of all that was going wrong with the Soviet Union in the Brezhnev era.

Deutscher, we realized, was good on analyzing high politics but weak on economics. To understand the economics of the Soviet system, we looked to the writings of Paul Baran, one of the *Monthly Review* writers, and Maurice Dobb, the leading British Communist economist, who was a specialist on the Soviet economic system. They set out the best arguments we could find for the superiority of central planning over the market in achieving high rates of growth.⁵

Both clearly under-estimated the damage done by Stalin’s forced collectivization and purges. However, by 1969, it was clear that the problems went deeper than that. I had come across estimates for factor-productivity for the economies of Soviet-bloc countries,

The figures for the productivity of the capital stock in the USSR were not only lower than in the west (we knew that the Soviet economy lagged behind the west, so that

⁴ For the classical theory of totalitarianism, see Carl J. Friedrich and Zbigniew K. Brzezinski (1956). Isaac Deutscher (1907-67) was expelled from the Polish Communist Party in the early 1930s and moved to Britain shortly before World War II, where he worked as a journalist (cf. Deutscher 1966 a, b; 1970).

⁵ Paul A. Baran (1909-1964) was born in Russia, but lived mainly in Germany and France and migrated to the USA shortly before World War II. He also worked for the OSS during World War II. After the war he taught economics at Stanford University (cf. Baran/Sweezy 1966). For the career of Maurice Dobb (1900-76) see Timothy Shenk (2013).

was no shock) but it was actually declining. Far from overtaking the west, as Khrushchev had boasted, by the late 1960s the Soviets were falling further behind.

These figures indicated that the heart of the matter was the efficiency of investment, i.e., the system of central planning which Baran and Dobb had so praised. Furthermore, the problem was not unique to the USSR, but could be seen in more developed countries of the Soviet bloc.

At first, we looked to Ernest Mandel, the Belgian Marxist writer – like Deutscher, a follower of Trotsky – for a solution. He explained that the planning system in the USSR was warped by “bureaucratic distortions” which were defended by authoritarian controls. This could be fixed by democratization, the injection of “worker’s control” into enterprises and greater freedom into public life - without weakening the overall mechanism of central planning or the “leading role” of a Leninist party.⁶

The old communist Dobb did not accept this. In the 1960s, he took up the case for reform, for decentralization, as well as democratization. Dobb argued that a highly centralized system of resource allocation could work reasonably well in a poor country in the initial stages of economic development. But as development proceeds, the economy becomes more complex and such a system becomes increasingly dysfunctional. Reform becomes a necessity.

In 1971, I discovered Alec Nove’s textbook on the Soviet economy, which set out the problems in detail, and with great clarity. In 1972, his *Economic History of the USSR* reinforced the message. The centralized, top-down system of planning was itself the problem, reinforced by and reinforcing, the one-party system of rule.

The solution inevitably involved an expansion of the role of market mechanisms at the expense of central planning. This did not lead Grant and me to embrace the neo-liberal idea of the necessity of privatization. Elsewhere, Nove wrote extensively about how public enterprises could be run efficiently and accountably by salaried managers. This could be achieved without subordinating public purpose to generating and maximizing a private profit income stream.⁷

Grant and I agreed that the solution to the problems of Soviet-type economies was a transition to some form of “market socialism.” Public accountability meant making the “leading role” of the party contestable. This might lead to a western-style multi-party system, based on electoral competition between working-class and middle-class parties. However, this could not be taken for granted. Dominant-party systems, such as had emerged in Japan and Singapore, were al another possibility.

Accepting this, the question then became, where a Soviet-type system was entrenched, what pressures would be necessary to force change, and what would be the outcome? It was clear that in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, economic stagnation was providing the pressure. The ruling elite was resisting this, but Grant and I thought that eventually it would have little choice but to embark on the sort of reforms Alexander

⁶ Ernest Mandel (1923-95) fought in the Belgian resistance during World War II and became a leading official of the Fourth International after the war (cf. Mandel 1968).

⁷ Alec Nove served as a soldier in World War II, worked as a public servant in post-war Britain, then became Professor of Economics at Glasgow University. See Brown/Cairncross (1997). Crucial in shaping our views were Nove (1961, 1972, 1973, 1983).

Dubcek had promoted during the short-lived “Prague Spring.” The alternative, we thought, was not stasis, but regression to something like Rumania or Albania.

We did not think Mao’s China offered a credible alternative. It was still in the earliest stage of economic development, Even then, under Mao’s utopian impulsiveness China had not managed to operate central planning effectively. Yet from the early 1960s, *Monthly Review* writers, including Baran, had become increasingly enthusiastic about China (cf. the debate Sweezy/Bettleheim 1972). Baran died in 1965, so we will never know what he would have made of Mao’s Cultural Revolution. However, other *Monthly Review* contributors endorsed it with enthusiasm. However, Deutscher had realized that Mao was launching a devastating purge of the ruling party, reducing his country to chaos in the process. Grant and I were convinced that Deutscher’s analysis was right.

A realist approach to international politics

Marxism offered no coherent theory of international politics. Lenin’s theory of imperialism was essentially an explanation of the behavior of capitalist states before World War I. It did not purport to explain the international relations of communist states. They supposedly operated according to quite different principles from the international relations of capitalist states. The Soviet leaders claimed that their foreign policy followed the principles of socialist internationalism.

Grant and I thought that socialist internationalism had not survived the First World War. The realist framework developed by E.H. Carr in his study of interwar diplomacy *The Twenty Years’ Crisis* was a much more convincing explanation of Soviet foreign policy. Carr saw states as pursuing power politics in an insecure, unequal and competitive state-system. Carr rejected the view that foreign policy was driven primarily by moral principles or ideology, as idealists insisted. It was driven primarily by practical concerns and *raison d’état*.⁸

Soviet foreign policy in the 1920s and 1930s had been one of the case studies on which Carr based his argument. Then the USSR was the weakest and most vulnerable state in the European system. It played the other major powers of the day, Nazi Germany, Great Britain and France off against each other – successfully enough until 1941, when Hitler invaded the Soviet Union. The dramatic policy flips involved were incomprehensible to idealists, but easily explained by realists.

After World War II, to a realist the Soviet Union was an emergent great power. It had a hard-won sphere of influence in Eastern Europe, which it was determined to protect at any cost. In this context, we saw Soviet internationalism as essentially a rhetorical cloak for great-power domination. The occupation of Czechoslovakia in 1968 was a case in point.

In this respect, we agreed with the Chinese criticism of Soviet “hegemonism.” However, in our view, the revolutionary zeal of Mao’s China was the bluster of an isolated and vulnerable country. Once China broke out of that isolation with the opening of relations with the US in 1972, it began to play the great-power game itself. China’s

⁸ The British diplomat, journalist and historian E.H. Carr (1892-1982) is best known for his multi-volume history of Soviet Russia. But in this context, his key work is Carr (1964). For analyses of Carr’s evolving ideas, see Halsham (1999) and Cox (2004).

maneuverings between the US and the Soviet Union in the 1970s were basically similar those of Stalin in the 1930s.

The US had also emerged from World War II as a great power. The theory of imperialism had greater relevance here, as the US developed truly global commercial and financial interests. Even so, the realist approach addressed issues this theory overlooked. The war in Vietnam was always more about the “credibility” of US power than about American commercial interests in Southeast Asia.

Peasants and nationalism

Once Cold War blocs stabilized in Europe, Soviet Union and the USA fought out their Cold War competition in the emerging nations resulting from the collapse of the colonial empires. There was much discussion of the role of the “Third World” of the newly independent countries, poor and predominantly rural, as a counter-balance to the two Cold War blocs.

In 1974, the Portuguese were giving up their colony of East Timor. Grant visited the country, and wrote about it extensively (Evans 1975). He supported Timorese independence, but was one of the first to warn of the danger of an Indonesian invasion. This experience stimulated his interest in the sociology and economics of peasant agriculture.

There was a lot written at that time about the role of peasants in revolution. Much of this was fuelled not only by a romanticized view of Mao’s China, but also by the back-to-nature sentiments popular in the “counter culture” of the time. It was espoused, Grant and I thought, by people who had never had shit on their shoes. No doubt, our upbringing in Australian farming communities made us skeptical.

Our interest in peasant studies had begun with Barrington Moore. Before 1974, both of us had dabbled in anthropology. While studying Asian history, I had discovered Hsiao Tong Fei’s *Peasant Life in China* in the Melbourne University library.⁹ After East Timor, Grant began reading in this field much more systematically. I followed along in his wake. We were particularly impressed by writers such as Marvin Harris, Elman Service and Eric Wolf.¹⁰ On peasant agriculture in Southeast Asia, Grant introduced me to the works of James Scott (1976), Samuel Popkin (1979) and Charles Keyes (1977). He also investigated the Russian populist writer on peasant household economy, Alexander Chayanov.¹¹

We continued to oppose the Vietnam War. We saw it as primarily a war of peasant nationalism against foreign invasion. Vietnam was unusual in that such a war was led by

⁹ Xiaotong Fei (1910-2005) was a pioneer of anthropology and sociology in China. He was honoured in the early years of the PRC, purged in the “anti-Rightist” campaign of 1958, and rehabilitated after Mao’s death. When he died, Xiaotong Fei was Professor of Sociology at Beijing University. Crucial in shaping our views were Xiaotong Fei (1945, 1947).

¹⁰ Marvin Harris’ magnum opus was *The Rise of Anthropological Theory: A History of Theories of Culture* (1968). Elman R. Service wrote *Primitive Social Organisation: An Evolutionary Perspective* (1963) and Eric R Wolf wrote *Peasant Wars of the Twentieth Century* (1971).

¹¹ Alexander Chayanov (1888-1939) was a Russian agrarian specialist prominent in the 1920s, purged in 1930 for “defending the kulaks” in the face of Stalin’s collectivization, and executed in 1939. Grant had a copy of his *Theory of Peasant Economy* (1966).

communists. We found Chalmers Johnson's *Peasant Nationalism and Communist Power* (1962), analyzing the Chinese and Yugoslav experience during World War II, helpful here. This raised the issue of the relationship between communism and nationalism. In our view, this depended on circumstance. It was very different in Eastern Europe and Asia after World War II – in one case, the dominating power was the Soviet Union, in the other it was the US.

The nature of nationalism was a vexing issue. We were particularly influenced by the debate between Tom Nairn and Eric Hobsbawm in the pages of *New Left Review*. This was part of an extended debate between those who believed nations were communities of great antiquity, and those such as Hobsbawm and Ernest Gellner, who argued that nationalism was a product of modern history. We were persuaded by the modernists.¹² The idea of national self-determination only became an organizing principle of international politics with the Treaty of Versailles in 1919, and Eastern Europe in the interwar years provided a laboratory demonstration of how difficult it could be to apply it in practice.

The end of the Vietnam War

We were not surprised by the way the Vietnam War ended. Essentially, in its attempt to defeat what it misinterpreted as Soviet expansion the US had taken over the French effort to maintain foreign domination in Vietnam. Escalation turned a guerilla war into a war of attrition which took a huge toll of human life. The Americans were unwilling to bear the cost this imposed on them. When they withdrew, the Saigon regime they had propped up collapsed in two years. This left the Vietnamese communists finally in full control, but of a devastated country heavily dependent on Soviet and Chinese aid.

Nor were we surprised by the outcome in Laos. When the Americans left Vietnam, their allies in Laos began seeking an accommodation with their Vietnamese-backed opponents. The upshot was a more-or-less peaceful transition to communist rule. In both countries, post war reconstruction commenced under authoritarian one-party rule. This followed roughly the Soviet model, and we expected that it would work reasonably well for a few years before the familiar problems would begin to accumulate.

We were surprised – and shocked – by what happened in Cambodia. We had expected something similar to events in Laos; I had expected the political centre would hold out better under Prince Sihanouk, moderating the new regime. This was way off the mark.

Instead, the victorious Khmer Rouge expelled all foreigners, renounced all outside assistance, and evacuated the entire urban population to the countryside. Then they closed Cambodia off from the outside world. Sihanouk disappeared from sight. At first, the only source of information was official propaganda, which was upbeat. But within a couple of years a trickle of refugees had crossed into Thailand with terrible tales to tell.

¹² This debate was kicked off by Tom Nairn, 'The Modern Janus' (1975). Ernest Gellner first presented his ideas in *Thought and Change* (1964) and reformulated them most forcefully in *Nations and Nationalism* (1983). Eric Hobsbawm developed his ideas in his multivolume history of the 19th century, and summed up in *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (1990).

In the absence of hard information, debates about Cambodia generated much more heat than light. Noam Chomsky emerged as a leading critic of the “western propaganda machine” over Indochina and Cambodia in particular. He condemned journalists for reporting speculation in the absence of facts. When Francois Ponchaud published *Cambodia Year Zero*, an account of life under the Khmer Rouge based on his own experience (he was one of the westerners expelled by the new regime), refugee accounts, and close scrutiny of official propaganda, Chomsky published a critique which was scathing in tone and nit-picking in substance.¹³

Grant and I found ourselves among the pessimists. Vast areas of farmland had been abandoned due to fighting and bombing. The only possible outcome of repudiating foreign food assistance under these circumstances was widespread starvation.

We began following developments in all three countries as closely as we could, scouring newspapers for reports, gathering academic articles and whatever we could find by way of official documents. We soon became aware of the extent to which developments in the Indochinese countries were being shaped by the politics of the great powers.

The US was temporarily out of the game, but bitter about what it saw as its humiliation at the hands of the Vietnamese. Triumphant but desperately impoverished, Hanoi was demanding reparations from the US. Its chances of getting this were zero.

The Vietnamese were especially keen to get American reparations, because their patrons in the communist world had fallen out with each other. Throughout the war, Hanoi managed a careful balancing act between China and the Soviet Union. Now that the war was over, China demanded that Hanoi break its ties with the Soviet Union. Heavily dependent on economic assistance from the Soviet Union, Hanoi refused to do so. China stepped up the pressure. When the Khmer Rouge regime made its border dispute with Vietnam public and denounced the Vietnamese as aggressors, China immediately threw its full weight behind them.

Mao’s death in 1976 and the ascension to power of Deng Xiaoping brought about dramatic changes in Chinese domestic policy. Especially in agriculture, the country began making some the changes Grant and I had been discussing. However, there had not been the slightest change to China’s relations with Vietnam and Cambodia.

Clearly, this was not a matter of Maoist ideology. The crucial fact for Beijing was that Vietnam was in China’s backyard. In our view, this confirmed the realist view that Chinese foreign policy was the *raison d’etat* of an emerging great power. Embedded in an unequal triangular relationship with the US and the USSR, it was trying to assert its position as a regional power over communist Indochina.

Meanwhile, developments inside Cambodia remained shrouded in mystery. In 1978, a handful of sympathetic outsiders were allowed in, to write glowing accounts of the new regime. These included Ted Hill, leader of the Communist Party of Australia

¹³ Noam Chomsky and Edward S. Herman, ‘Distortions at Fourth Hand,’ *Nation*, June 6, 1977, concentrated on cataloguing errors in press coverage, which the authors treated as “propaganda” to whitewash America’s role in Indochina. They commented on the French version of Ponchaud’s book, which was published in English as *Cambodia Year Zero* (1978). Chomsky and Herman elaborated their approach in several works, culminating in *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* (1988).

(Marxist-Leninist). Grant and I agreed that if he thought things were good, they must be very bad indeed.

There were violent clashes on the Thai-Cambodian border, as well as the Vietnamese border. Rumors of high-level purges abounded. Only a couple of Khmer Rouge leaders appeared in public, and they blandly assured their listeners that all was well.

With the Soviet purges of the 1930s in mind, I remarked to Grant at this point, "Watch the General-Secretary!" This would be the person who ruled the Party. This would mean he would also run the regime, and in particular its secret police – presumably, the instrument of any purge. In 1978, the only thing I knew about this man in Cambodia was his *nom de guerre*, Pol Pot.

Deciding to write *Red Brotherhood*

In late 1978, we heard that an acquaintance of mine, Malcolm Caldwell, was going to visit Cambodia. Malcolm had even asked to meet Pol Pot himself. He was Southeast Asian specialist from Scotland who I had met a couple of years previously when he had visited Australia. I had found him very enjoyable company. He was highly intelligent, well informed, eloquent - and deeply deluded.

Malcolm was a romantic. He was opposed to industrialization, and believed that Mao's aim was to create a rural utopia in China. *Easy Rider* meets Chairman Mao, I thought to myself. He rejected my view that the Khmer Rouge had imposed a new catastrophe on Cambodia, claiming they were leading Cambodia where Mao had pointed, to an agrarian socialism.

Caldwell went to Cambodia in December 1978 in the company of two American journalists, Elizabeth Becker and Richard Dudman. They did an extensive but carefully arranged tour of the countryside. When they returned to the ghost-city of Phnom Penh, they were given an audience with Pol Pot. He delivered a tirade against the Vietnamese, who he accused of plotting with the KGB and the CIA against the Cambodian revolution. Then Becker and Dudman were returned to their hotel, while Caldwell got a private *tete-a-tete* with Pol Pot.

What Malcolm made of all this we will never know. Shortly after he returned to the hotel, gunmen broke into his room and shot him dead. Becker and Dudman were flown out ASAP, and a week later the Vietnamese army invaded Cambodia.¹⁴

Not long before Malcolm's murder, Grant and I found ourselves in argument with our friend Gavan McCormack. Gavan had written a lengthy article expounding the Chomsky view of postwar Indochina (McCormack 1979). Things were better than western propaganda had made out. The disputes between the Cambodian and Vietnamese had been blown out of proportion. They had fought as comrades-in-arms against US imperialism and were not about to go to war against each other.

¹⁴ The circumstances of Malcolm Caldwell's murder are described in Elizabeth Becker, *When the War was Over: Cambodia and the Khmer Rouge Revolution* (1986). Caldwell (born 1931) was a researcher in the School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London, and a founding editor of the *Journal of Contemporary Asia*. His rural romanticism is evident in his last book, *The Wealth of Some Nations: Introduction to the Study of Political Economy* (1977). His previous work, *Cambodia in the South East Asian War* (1973), was more narrowly-focused, conventional, and much better.

In fact, we argued, things were much worse than that. Comrades were murdering comrades. The Vietnamese would invade Cambodia as soon as the ground was hard enough to carry tanks. The whole region would then explode into war once again. The Soviet Union, China and the US would support opposing sides. We had no idea how it would end, but we knew a lot more people would die before we found out.

Grant and I found ourselves in such complete agreement on this assessment that we decided to write an article together about it. Then we decided to visit the region to see for ourselves what we had been talking about. We could afford to do this, because by then both of us had positions as lecturers – regular, reasonable incomes at last. Then, of course, the planned article turned into a book. The result, a few years later, was *Red Brotherhood at War* (1984).

We conceived that book as an immediate response to events in Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos. A basic motive for writing it was our disagreement with many of the arguments that were circulating at the time, both those of anti-communist Cold warriors on the right and of utopians on the Left. However we sought to base our refutations on factual evidence, rather than our own subjective preferences.

To gather that evidence, Grant and I both visited the region at every opportunity over the next few years, visiting as many of the places we wrote about as we could, and talking to people involved, at every level. Spent a lot of time with journalists covering events as they happened. We also learned an enormous amount from academic specialists on the region, too. But we were ourselves neither journalists nor regional specialists.

Commentators on the book acknowledged that we had gathered an impressive range of empirical material even when they disagreed with our perspective. The underlying theoretical scaffolding was not so widely recognized. We made few references to general political theories, but we brought the theoretical perspectives we had developed over the previous decade to the book.

The general methodology of the book was historical and comparative. We tried to explain different outcomes by looking at similarities and differences in historical background, social structure and political institutions. This approach owed much to Barrington Moore, and Marxism generally. It was also shaped by what we read on peasant societies and nationalist movements generally.

Our approach to the workings of the communist states of Indochina owed much to analysts of Soviet-bloc politics and economics, particularly Isaac Deutscher and Alec Nove. Our approach to the foreign policies of these states was based squarely on the realist tradition in international relations.

We organized the empirical material we gathered by conceiving our subject matter as existing on three distinct but interacting levels. There was, first, the internal politics of the individual nation-states, and the jockeying of individuals within them. There was the level of regional politics, with Thailand and the ASEAN states vigorously opposed Vietnam's role in Indochina after the overthrow of the Pol Pot regime. Finally, there was the level of the great powers, China, the US and USSR, whose rivalry shaped events in the region so decisively. This made a complex story manageable without oversimplifying it.

Grant would go on to a distinguished career in Asian studies, based on solid work he did after his collaboration with me on *Red Brotherhood at War*. But I think important

foundations of that career lay in the debates about politics and social theory Grant had with me and other friends in the decade before the two of us decided to join forces to write that book.

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