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Popular Movements

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INTRODUCTION

I would like to thank the Institute of Asian Studies and especially its Director, Dr Supang Chantavanich, for inviting me to edit the 2002 issue of *Asian Review* on the theme of "Popular Movements".

Across Asia, the 1990s saw an upsurge of movements about environment, gender, corruption, media freedom, labour rights, cooperatives, land rights, forests, dams, marine resources, and much besides. For Thailand, as I suggest in my contribution to the volume, this upsurge is significant because of the absence of any previous mass movement in the country's history. These movements combine elements of the "new social movements" discovered in the west since the 1970s, but in fact are neither specially "new" in their concerns nor exclusively "social" in their approach. They concern "old" issues of class and livelihood, and they overflow into politics.

Moreover, the adoption of "old" or "new" approaches is a matter of dispute within these movements. Somchai Phatharathananunth details how the Isan NGOs in the 1980s fiercely debated the merits of grassroots work (the community culture approach) or political mobilization (the political economy approach). He shows that the debate was resolved not at the theoretical level but in the course of struggle. The multiplication of issues concerning livelihood and natural resources made political mobilization an imperative.

The same has been true in the Philippines. Jaime Mendoza Jimenez details local opposition to a government-backed, land-grabbing property development. In background, the case is similar to many campaigns in Thailand. But the campaign differs for one important reason: the leftist movement of the 1960s and 1970s was never totally destroyed. The local campaign takes its place in a national framework. As Jimenez stresses, there is a strong emphasis on training and ideology.

Again the Philippines, Teresa S. Encarnacion Tadem shows how some, like the community culture school in Thailand, turned to grassroots work, but focused on the cooperative movement rather than community revival. Initially the results, measured by the expansion of the cooperative movement, were spectacular. But ultimately, as for Thailand's community activists, the politics were stacked against them. They faced the power of the rice cartels in the grain market, and the

complexity of patronage politics in the administration.

Labour movements have had equal difficulty trying to manage the opportunities and threats of the globalization era. Napaporn Ativanichayapong traces the Thai labour movement from the 1973–1976 era to the present. Trade unions have weakened on a global scale as a result of the growing power of international capital. Napaporn argues that labour activism must build social alliances to overcome its own weakness, and shows how this strategy succeeded during the 1973–1976 period and was revived successfully in the 1990s over specific issues of interest to women labour. But she warns that trade unions must not cede leadership of labour issues to other organizations which may be sympathetic about labour issues but are not directly affected by the outcomes.

While trade unions have weakened, other forms of popular organization have strengthened, particularly movements which engage with environmental issues. Tim Forsyth warns us to examine carefully the claims that such organizations make both about the constituencies they represent and the environmental goals they want to achieve. There are many variants of environmentalism, and he directs us to ask clearly "who will benefit?" from any particular campaign.

This new phase of popular movements marks a stage of maturity in the emerging politics of the more democratic states of Asia. These movements are here to stay.

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Recent Popular Movements in Thailand in Global Perspective

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Abstract

The last decade has seen an explosion of popular movements in Thailand. Although many share characteristics with "new social movements" (identity issues, networking), they also resemble "old" movements in their class base and political concerns. Because Thailand had no mass nationalist or revolutionary movement, these movements are the first political assertion by the "little people". Many campaigns concern environmental destruction and competition over natural resources. Women have a large role, in contrast to the male domination of formal politics. Many issues are class-based but expressed in ways which facilitate cross-class alliances.

Introduction

Since around 1990, Thailand has seen an outburst of demonstrations, protest marches and new organizations by people of various walks of life. In 1978 there were 42 demonstrations and protests marches, rising to 170 in 1990 and to 988 in 1994 (Praphat, 1998: 34, 35, 39). These protests have not been just one-shot events. In most cases participants have organised into a movement to demand their rights, or to fight to protect the environment and their livelihood on a long-term basis.

This paper is based on a research project on social movements in Thailand, funded under the Thailand Research Fund's Senior Researcher (*medhi wijai awuso*) programme, and carried out between 1999 and 2001.[1] The project covered eight movements by eight research teams. The sample of movements was not "representative" in any scientific sense. But it includes many of the most prominent movements, and it indicates something of the variety. This upsurge of political activity cannot be assigned to one group, one grievance, one cause. The movements are both varied and complex. Collectively they mark a

significant change in Thai society and politics. The aim of this paper is to understand something of that change. Let me first summarize the eight studies.

Kritiya Atchwanitkul and Kanokwan Tharawan study the movement among women to gain full control over their bodies and sexuality, using four specific cases: the struggle for the rights of women to abort; the campaign for the right to choose a woman as a lover; the women's movement about AIDS; and the fight to eliminate violence against women. Voravidh Charoenlert deals with women workers' struggles for health and safety in work places. Nalinee Tanthuvanit and Sulaiporn Chonvilai study the roles of poor rural men and women in fights against dam projects which destroyed natural forests and fish breeding grounds and thus took away their means of livelihood and dispersed their communities. Sayamon Kaiyunwong, Atchara Rakyutitham, and Krisada Bunchai study the northern hill farmers' movement to win rights to manage local natural resources and to maintain their cultural identities. Praphat Pintoptaeng and Anuson Unno cover the movement by small-scale fishermen in southern Thailand to protect the coastal environment. Maneerat Mitprasat examines the slum dwellers' movement for housing rights and for participation in urban development. Nualnoi Treerat and Chaiyos Jirapruekpinyo trace the rural doctors' movement against bureaucratic and political corruption in the public health ministry. Narumol Tapchumpon and Charan Ditthapichai focus on the movement for the new constitution of 1997 and its aftermath.[2]

These studies range from the northern hills to the southern coasts, from hill minorities to educated civil servants, from local issues about natural resources to national concerns over constitutional principles. The nature of the peoples' struggles, their novelty and variety, have motivated the research project. These social movements are not only the expression of discontents of the present, they also represent the collective wishes of large numbers of people. "Society itself is shaped by the plurality of these struggles and vision of those involved" (Escobar and Alvarez, 1992: 5).

Social movements are controversial. Some political analysts have argued that modern social movements are a dangerous delusion: because these movements emphasize civil society rather than class, networks rather political parties, local action rather than the capture of the state, they result in a futile populist strategy with no hope of success against the entrenched power of the internationalized capitalist state (Brass, 1994). Defenders have responded that such criticism simply ignores

contemporary realities. Class has become much more complex in the globalized, post-industrial world (Veltmeyer, 1997). States are unlikely to be overthrown by old-style movement parties because modern states have impressive resources and broad foundations of tacit support. Social movements have arisen precisely because of these characteristics of the modern world, and we need to reconcile to these facts rather than cling to an idealised past (Omvedt, 1993; Byres, 1995).

Several thinkers have rediscovered the Gramscian discussion of hegemony as a way to reconcile social movements with leftist thinking. Whereas old-style political movements sometimes succeeded in capturing the state, they then often failed to disturb deeper hegemonic ideas such as the domination of one group over another, the exclusion of minorities, the necessity of hierarchy, or the privileges of an elite. Social movements, by contrast, mount direct attacks on such hegemonies from the base of civil society.

Social movements and NGOs have also been criticised, for retarding the development of a political party system which would truly represent the society, and particularly the urban and rural mass. By deflecting people's interest away from the establishment of political parties, these critics suggest, social movements and NGOs cede this realm to old elites and business gangs who directly represent only a minute proportion of the population. Social movement activists respond that party politics are not the only type of politics, nor necessarily the most effective for the mass of the people given current structural conditions and money politics (see below).

The plan of the paper is as follows. First a brief summary is given of the worldwide theoretical debate on social movements, which has developed since the 1960s. Second, the learning from past debates is analyzed. Third, this is followed by a discussion of the main features of recent popular movements in Thailand. The paper ends with a conclusion and dedication.

INTERNATIONAL DEBATES ON SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

Social movements are simply collective actions—many people acting together. The phrase "social movement" has taken on new meanings since the 1960s when it was first used to describe anti-war, anti-nuclear, student rights, feminist, gay, and environmentalist movements. Some writers dubbed these campaigns as "new social movements" because participation cut across class lines and included a large number from the

educated white-collar middle class. The "new" tag distinguished these movements from movements which were class-based, such as trade unions, communist parties, and socialist movements. The "social" tag was used because the movements were not directly political. They had no aim to capture or overthrow the state. They tacitly accepted the political framework of liberal democracy. Some movements wanted to establish different cultural identities, or make the society accept different ways of life (gay, lesbian). Many were about the quality of life, and the assertion of the rights of the individual or community.

The US debate

Political scientists argued that these movements demanded new theoretical approaches, different both from the Marxian paradigm of class, and from mainstream theories about interest groups and political recruitment. The first attempts at theorizing in the 1960s and 1970s were in the US.

These attempts focused not on why the movements took place (this was seen as being self-evident), but on how they were organized, and why some were more successful than others. The *resource mobilization theory* purported to show that the success of a movement depended on the resources available (people, money, allies), and the ability to mobilize these resources (by persuasion, organization, networking). Resource mobilization theory was wholly about the *strategy* to make a movement succeed in demanding a change in government policies or legislation. It focused on political action, and paid no attention to civil society.

A variant of this approach became known as *political process* or *political opportunity theory.* This approach analyzed the success or failure of movements in terms of the "opportunities" available. If the government is strong and committed to repression, then the *political* opportunity is small and the movement likely to fail. And vice versa. Analysts in this school paid less attention to the "resources" available, but concentrated on the interaction between the movement on the one hand and the state or other forms of established power on the other.

Western European debate

Debates in Western Europe began a little later than in the US, in the 1970s. From the start, the debates differed from those in the US. This reflected the big difference between the two continents in political

history and in the traditions of political theory.

The subject of debate was essentially similar—namely new movements about the environment, women and sexual identities. But instead of focusing on strategies and on the requirements for success or failure, the European debate focused on *why these non-class-based movements arose*.

The early theorists came mostly from Marxist traditions of political economy. They were concerned that Marxist analysis of social movements, which stressed the importance of consciousness, ideology, social struggle, and solidarity, seemed inadequate to characterize and explain the new movements. They argued that theories which stressed the primacy of structural contradictions, economic classes, and crisis in determining collective identities were inappropriate to understand movements which did not appear to have a class base, and did not seem to be related to any crisis or structural contradiction.

However, the European theorists were not at all impressed by the US theories of resource mobilization and political process. They asserted that present day collective action is not confined to negotiations and strategic calculations to gain political access. Rather, movements involve issues of social norms and identity, and the struggles take place in the realm of civil society rather than in the realm of politics.

The prominent European theorists such as Alain Touraine and Jurgen Habermas linked the upsurge of new social movements to the failure of the democratic system in post-modern society to guarantee individual freedom, equality, and fraternity. In the view of these theorists, the state has become more subject to the market, and democratic processes are being crushed by the growing power of authoritarian technocracy. The power which people once enjoyed through their role in the production process has been eroded by technology and managerial technique. The main socioeconomic role of individuals is not as workers but as consumers, and in this role they are manipulated by the technologies of media and markets.

For Touraine, as the technologies of state control, of mega-corporation economics, and of mass communications advance, so the liberty of the individual is diminished (Touraine, 1995). For Habermas, the expanding structures of state and market economy colonize the public and private sphere of individuals, which he calls the *lifeworld*. This lifeworld includes the domains in which meaning and value reside—such as family, education, art, religion. So private life becomes steadily more politicized by this double encroachment (Habermas, 1973; Foweraker, 1995: 6).

For Habermas, social movements are defensive reactions to protect the public and the private sphere of individuals against the inroads of the state system and market economy. Similarly, Touraine sees participation in social movements as the only way in which the individual can recover liberty. For both Habermas and Touraine, the main role of social movements is the mobilization of "actors" or "subjects"—their terms to refer to human beings in their full role as free and creative members of a pluralistic society, as opposed to victims of state and market domination.

Social movements in the European theory involve a process of self-awareness to create human and social identities, which are free of the domination of the technocratic state and the market. But the creation of these identities is part of the process of a social movement, not its ultimate goal. The social movement is a collective form of action to contest the abuses of political and economic power, and to change the political and market institutions in order to produce a better society. Social movements come into conflict with existing norms and values. As put by Cohen and Arato (1992: 511), "collective actors strive to create group identities within a general identity whose interpretation they contest".

Both the US and Europe are advanced industrial societies with established democratic systems, yet the analysis of social movements in the two continents has differed very widely. Foweraker explained this difference by reference to the historical context. Western Europe has a history of social democracy, welfare states, institutionalized trade union movements, and strong corporatist traditions linking trade unions with the state (Foweraker, 1995). European theorists try to explain the appearance of a new type of social expression by reference to shifts in society and culture. They conclude that the new social movements are concerned with the construction of new social and political identities in opposition to the power of market and state.

In the US by contrast there has been no tradition of social democracy, no trade union corporatism, and no powerful labour movement. Social movements are thus explained not as a consequence of social or structural change, but simply as part of the political manoeuvring whereby groups mobilize resources to gain political representation and to realize social changes. The US theorists are not interested in why social movements arise. They concentrate on why some succeed and some fail.

Debates in Latin America

The debate on social movements in the developing world surfaced first in the late 1980s and early 1990s in Latin America—as a result of

the close historical connections between Europe and that region, and because of the heavy American involvement there. Latin American theorists found that many of the insights of the western debate were useful because many movements (women, gay, environment) were either concerned with similar issues, or were linked to the US and Europe in increasingly international arenas of debate. However, the Latin Americanists also found that local movements, which arose in the region in the 1980s had many features which required extension or adjustment of the western theories.

First, the early movements in Latin America were primarily urban movements resulting from problems of rapid urbanization due to industrial development, capitalization of agriculture, and resulting shifts from rural to urban areas. These urban social movements often revolved around the demand for public utilities, or access to land and water. The movements gained momentum in part because of the crudeness of the government reaction. Thus the movements themselves were affected by the repressive policies of the state and the suppression of traditional forms of organization, such as trade unions and political parties.

Second, older forms of organization and agitation such as trade unions and agrarian movements did not disappear. But many new social actors come onto the scene, such as women, teachers, students, ethnic groups, as well as environmental movements.

Third, the movements often involved struggles to establish rights. These included rights to livelihood, rights over the body, rights to land, and "the right to have rights". Such movements were not so much expressions of civil society, but rather something much more basic: attempts to *create* or *recover* civil society in the face of state power, dictatorial repression, and exclusionary hegemonies. (Foweraker, 1995: 6).

Fourth, these movements were not divorced from the political process, but often by necessity overflowed from civil society into the political realm. Often movements were locked in contest with authoritarian regimes. As part of their strategy, they demanded democratization, political participation, and constitutional change. While some movements appeared to have the post-modern, non-class-based, networking form of the European model, others were much more obviously class-based and directly political.

Fifth, these movements were much more likely than European versions to be concerned with material issues of access to and control over resources such as land, water, and the means of livelihood.

Sixth, while European theory situated new social movements as an

extension of the traditions of liberal individualism, many social movements in Latin America were based in communities, leveraged community solidarities, and demanded community rights. Foweraker, for example, studied how the Chiapas movement drew on customary practices within the community as part of network building, and evolved demands for the rights of Mexican Indians as a community (Foweraker, 1992).

Finally, in Latin America the success rate was not impressive. Repression by the state was tougher and more effective in disrupting and preventing any meaningful success.

Latin American theorists adopted some of the vocabulary and approaches of the western literature, but found that they confronted some important differences. At the close of the 1980s, theorists advanced some tentative conclusions. First, they argued that the question of the class base of social movements was an empirical matter. In the advanced world, many movements were either middle-class or cross-class. But in Latin America, most were attempts by the poor and disadvantaged to gain basic rights and improve their economic standing. Second, they proposed that the success or failure of movements was related not simply to the *local* strength of the state, but also to the neo-colonial framework and the *international* backing for local state power. Touraine's observations about the domination of state system, market economics, and mass communications had to be modified to stress the extreme nature of this domination in the situation where the power base of state, market, and communication media was remote from the local context and hence even more difficult to oppose.

In the early 1990s, two new developments in the Latin American movements prompted still further extension and adaptation of social movement theory. The first development was a much larger prominence of *rural* social movements, with the spread of land-grab movements and the explosion of the Chiapas peasant resistance. The second was the paradoxical development in the political economy, which saw a revival of democratic forms of government running in parallel with rapid widening of the gaps between rich and poor, powerful and powerless.

The explosion of rural movements further emphasized the importance of competition over resources. It also drew the focus back to issues of identity, culture, and community. Many of the movements in Latin America were centred among minority groups, which drew some of their movement's strength from reassertion of identity. Even in cases where ethnicity was not such an explicit issue, movements drew on a background of rural identity and culture raised in opposition to a

dominant urban ideology of market and state. Similarly, movements drew on concepts of community, which found little place in the theories worked out within the liberal-individualist traditions of the west.

The paradox of democracy and social division drew attention to the special conditions of subordinate societies within an increasingly globalized world. Latin American theorists argued that the region's urban centres and urban elites were being annexed (politically, economically, and culturally) to a globalized world system dominated by the USA. In this process, the power of the national state was diminished. Hence, even though dictatorships were being replaced by democratic politics, there was no space for meaningful negotiation of social and economic demands. The strength of internationally backed repression meant that local political defiance was increasingly ineffective. The decline of trade unions and welfare provisions was evidence of this trend. Hence social movements acquired a new importance as a basis for defiance (Escobar and Alvarez, 1992; Escobar, 1995; Alvarez, Dagnino, and Escobar, 1998).

Debates in India

In the 1980s, the debate spread more widely in the developing world. In India there was a long tradition of socialist and communist movements prior to the 1980s. The social movements in the 1980s took on new features in several respects. To begin with, many old causes declined in importance. The trade union movement, for example, had previously campaigned heavily for nationalization of industries or for increasing the state's role in managing privately owned industrial enterprises. Over the 1980s, this issue disappeared. Similarly, the movement for land reforms—in the sense of reallocating land from big landlords to the landless—diminished in importance. At the same time, movements related to community, minorities, religion, women's rights, natural resources, and the environment grew in importance. Untouchables demanded that the government increase their quota of civil service posts. Environmental movements protested against big dam projects and demanded alternative development strategies. Local communities demanded rights to manage local resources. Small farmers demanded specific forms of government support. None of these new movements adhered to the old socialist ideology and none seemed to have a definite idea of an "ideal society".

According to Omvedt (1993), the social movements in India in the 1980s differed significantly from those occurring previously. The participants showed no interest in class analysis, but insisted on the

specific nature of the exploitation they suffered. They were unimpressed by socialist ideology as a way to explain their position. They rejected alignment with leftist political organization as a strategy for redress.

Omvedt concluded that these new movements in India required researchers and analysts to reimagine the whole of Indian society. The varied movements expressed a new cultural dynamism. Although the individual movements were scattered and diverse, together they amounted to a rejection of old ideologies and values, namely the dominant high-caste Brahmanism, the state system constructed since independence, and the integration of Indian society into post-cold war global capitalism. The aim of the movements was to find new ways to affect change (Omvedt, 1993: 313, 318).

Orthodox Marxists reacted strongly against Omvedt's analysis. Utsa Patnaik argued that the emphasis on culture and identity were signs of backwardness and anti-modernism. Brass (1994) argued that the new movements were suffused by various forms of false consciousness (post-modernism, communitarianism), and were a threat to the traditions of socialist political organization. But Omvedt countered that leftists had to accept the new movements for what they were, rather than arguing that they *should* be something different. She urged theorists to analyze new social movements in order to adapt old ideas of class analysis and political mobilization to fit with the new reality. In her view there must be a reinterpretation of revolution (Omvedt, 1993: 312, 319).[3]

LEARNING FROM PAST DEBATES

Two things emerge from the above discussion. First, the movements, which emerged in Thailand in the 1990s have many similarities to the Latin American and Indian cases. Second, the theorists in Latin America and India found many useful elements in the studies of social movements in the west, but also found many differences in their local situations. Before turning to the Thai experience, let us summarize four key areas where the Latin American/Indian debates have modified or rejected the western models.

Double domination

Touraine (and other European theorists) argue that new social movements are specific to a post-modern society—by which he means a society in which the major part of the workforce are educated, skilled, white-collar, and probably in service industries. However, the

technocratic states, market forces, and mass communications which Touraine identifies as the forces oppressing humanity and making social movements necessary, are clearly present in societies which cannot yet be called post-modern. Indeed, this domination is a global process. Hence the diminution of liberty, which this dominance entails is also present in non-western societies, and also needs to be opposed. Indeed, many of the new movements in the non-western world have been focused precisely against the power of the state, the expansion of big business at the expense of small, and the monopolies over modern communications.

But the problems have become more complicated in non-western countries by the extra dimension of subordination or dependency to a western dominated world. The dominating forces which Touraine identifies are globalized. The big businesses are multinational. The mass communication systems are US-owned and global in scope. National state systems are being weakened and coopted. Touraine talks about social movements contesting directly against corporate and state power. In non-western countries, the contest is more complex because these powerful forces are more remote, and the balance of power even more unequal. Social movements in developing countries must be seen in the context of a double repression: at the local level by the power structure of the society and the market forces in question; and at another global level by the forces of world capitalism and multinational corporations.

Social or political

Theories constructed for the west are concerned with movements, which focus on the quality of life, rather than on the material aspects of life. The movements' actors are often those in the middle class. In non-western countries, where the material aspects are still a problem, many social movements are about bread and butter issues, particularly access to resources. The actors involved in many cases are the underprivileged, the marginalized, workers, and poor farmers.

In a sense, Latin America and other similar parts of the world are experiencing *at the same time* two different types of movement ("old" and "new") which in the western case took place in *two historically separate phases*. Moreover, these two types cannot be simply separated. Because they exist in the same place and time, they are inevitably interrelated—through people, organizations, network, shared context.

Two important features of the recent movements in the developing world have been struggles for livelihood, and demands for basic rights.

In most cases, the struggles are by definition political, because they have to challenge the political control of resources, and the political arrangements for the allocation of rights. Hence, it is questionable how far these movements deserve to be labelled "social", in the sense that this suggests they are not "political". It is also questionable how far they deserve to be labelled "new" when much of their content is very traditional. Because of this, the use of the term "new social movement has declined in use, and been replaced by "popular movement" or "people politics".

From democracy to people politics

Many of the movements in developing countries since the 1980s aimed to establish or strengthen democratic systems and structures in the belief that this was an important precondition for removing oppression, allowing participation, and hence overcoming many of the inequalities and injustices in the society and economy. But recent experience suggests that this democratizing goal is important but insufficient. States have retained their authoritarian character even while taking on many of the outward forms of democracy. They have access to modern technology and communications of social control. Their authoritarianism is sometimes reinforced by global forces. The theoretical equality under a democratic system is ineffective when there are large differences in income leading to "money politics". In these circumstances, democratization is ineffective in challenging economic inequalities or embedded social hierarchies.

Hence there has been a shift away from democratization to "people politics", which implies more direct participation of people in the decision making process on matters which affect their livelihoods and their ways of life.

Individual and community

Touraine, and other western thinkers are writing firmly in the historical traditions of western liberalism with its emphasis on individualism. Touraine is explicit in wanting to revive the French Revolution ideals of liberty, equality, fraternity—especially liberty. However, in the non-western world, which has a different historical tradition and a much shallower experience of advanced capitalism, such an emphasis on individual liberty is either absent or much weaker. Often it is an import with uncertain local roots. Local traditions of philosophy and political practice place more emphasis on the role of communities and groups. Touraine has to go through some complex argument to

explain why a *social* movement (which involves collective actions) is a way for an *individual* to reclaim liberty. In the non-western context, this stage of the theorizing can be (and often already is) conveniently by-passed. Communities are resurrected, reinvented, or reimagined as the basis of new movements of defiance against the power of state and markets, as well as the guide for alternative development of a desirable future society.

Many social movements in the developing world since the 1970s have been based in poor, peripheral, or minority communities. The Chiapas movement in Mexico is a classic case in point. In Thailand movements among small farmers, small fishermen, and hill peoples all have a base in the community, or are community movements, not individual movements. Chairat (1995) has analyzed the discourse on community culture in Thailand as a social movement based in the village community. These movements have pressed for alternative development strategies, or imagined ideal future societies, different from those of the ruling mainstream. Sometimes they have sought to protect community rights against the inroads of market individualism. Sometimes they have actively revived community solidarity and community cultures as a political strategy. Sometimes they have demanded that the broader society accepts and respects the culture and values of a minority or repressed community.

In sum, while European theory describes movements which operate in civil society, reject old forms of political organization, challenge post-modern forces of state and market, and seek to defend traditions of liberal individualism, those that have appeared in the non-western world seem to be very different. They are often movements of the poor and oppressed. They cannot avoid confronting the political structure. They are increasingly involved in combating forces of globalization. They are often based in the community and draw on its strengths.

RECENT POPULAR MOVEMENTS IN THAILAND

The upsurge of popular movements in Thailand over the past decade obviously shares many similarities with the experience of Latin America and India—the broad base of participation, rejection of old forms of organization, emphasis on environment, and role of community discourse. But there are certain ways in which the details or emphasis of the movements in Thailand have been importantly different.

Historical shift

A large number of movements of great variety have arisen within a very short space of time. In a broad sense, this is a result of changes in the global and local context. The end of the cold war has led to the decline of dictatorship. The opening up of democratic politics has created more space for social agitation and political expression. The global discourse on topics such as rights, identity, and environmental protection has stimulated reactions within Thailand. At the same time, the rise of the modern state, market-oriented economy, and new forms of global power (hegemonic states and dominant multinationals) has caused conflicts over resources, dislocation of communities, and erosion of ways of life. In sum, the combined impact of democratization, economic growth, and globalization creates contradictory results. They encroach on people's lives and livelihood, and at the same time they open up political opportunities and give legitimacy to social movements.

The new movements in Thailand include a wide variety of social groups. But the significant fact is the large participation by the "little people" who have traditionally been excluded from a political voice. These include hill peoples, small fishermen, marginal peasants, slum dwellers, and working women. They have become more assertive than before about their rights and roles in society. This is partly explained by the passing of the cold war and the era of dictatorial rule. But there has also been an important synergy between these various different movements. The space created by one movement is available to another. Experiences feed on one another and become cumulative. The sum of several movements is greater than their individual contributions alone.

This upsurge is significant because it represents a break from the past. Thai society has had little or no experience of mass political mobilization. Nationalism was orchestrated by the elite. With no colonial control, there was no anti-colonialist mass movement. Socialism was crushed within the context of the cold war. Hence the social movements of the 1990s represent some of the first, sustained examples of mass social action. With an ever faster pace of globalization, social movements are definitely here to stay in Thailand.

Democratic limits

In different ways, various movements express frustration over the poor operation of Thailand's parliamentary democracy. The rapid rise of "money politics" has stimulated middle class support for the movement for constitutional reform and campaigns against corruption such as that

in the public health ministry. The failure of representative democracy to provide any meaningful representation for poor and marginal groups has prompted many agitational campaigns. Despite wide differences in social background, these various movements share a feeling that politicians and bureaucrats imagine themselves as a ruling caste rather than as public servants.

This shared perspective can at times become a basis for common action. The Assembly of the Poor supported the constitutional movement although the constitution was peripheral to its major concerns.[4] Many of the activists in campaigns over the constitution and corruption have lent moral and organizational support to little people's campaigns for rights and resources. Of course, such cooperation has strict limits. But in the short term it helps to create a snowball effect of benefit to many contemporary movements.

Environment

About half the movements covered in the research project on social movements in Thailand are concerned in some way with the environment and competition over natural resources.[5] Over the past half century, natural resources have been captured and destroyed for private gain, with the process often justified by discourses about development and national interest. Those most sensitive to the loss of such resources are the little people who depend most heavily on nature for their livelihood and culture. The attempts to halt this process and protect both resources and livelihoods has become a trend which transcends any particular local campaign, and acts as a common base for alliance between groups of varying background.

The past pattern of development assumed that lots of little people could be sacrificed in the business of creating modern industrial society on the model from the west. But the recent movements show that it has become more difficult to maintain that belief. The government will have to think more seriously in pursuing old policies and strategies without regards to the effects on people.

Women

One striking feature of this upsurge of popular movements has been the role of women. This includes involvement in movements on specifically female issues (abortion, aids, violence against women), but also a leading role in other campaigns.[6] Women have been a major force in the labour movement, in slum campaigns, in rural protests, and in the

constitutional campaign. This is significant because it offers a strong contrast to the extreme male bias in Thailand's formal public life. The female share among parliamentarians, senior bureaucrats, and local politicians is very small.

Traditionally women had a strong role in Thai society. In the realms of the family and local community, there have never been traditions of suppressing the female contribution. The male bias in formal politics developed within the modern bureaucracy and political system based on western models. The strong and often leading roles taken by women in modern popular movements represents a reassertion of traditional female power.

Culture, identity, alliance

As in other developing countries, Thai social movements mobilise concepts of culture and identity to build solidarity and inspire action. This is similar to earlier western movements, but also importantly different. The cultures and identities mobilised are very often those of the poor, the peripheral, and the excluded. This gives these movements some of the moral power (against injustice) of old-style class-based action. But at the same time, the fact that these movements are *not* founded explicitly on class concepts and motivated by class antagonism makes it easier for them to mobilise support from a broader public. Appeals to universally acceptable concepts—protection of the environment, health for all, no corruption—make it possible for movements of the underprivileged to build support from the educated middle class, through the links forged by NGOs.

NGOs

Around the world, the role of NGOs has become controversial. To what extent do they actually *create* the movements, which they claim only to facilitate? What is the moral or political justification for their role? Are they a force *for* democracy, or are they helping destroy democracy by diverting attention from parties, parliaments, and other official democratic institutions? Are they part of the globalizing forces which are undermining sovereignty and national government? Our study did not set out to be an in-depth analysis of the role of NGOs. But the above questions are so much part of current debate that it is worth offering some tentative conclusions which arise from the research project.

In terms of its resource base, the Thai NGO movement remains rather weak. The numbers of people directly involved on a full-time basis are

small. Funding is very limited. Foreign funds and assistance are available and important, but they are not large.

At the same time, NGOs have played an important role in all of the movements studied in the project. It is probably fair to say that without the NGO contribution, several of these movements would be significantly weaker and less effective. What then explains the fact that the NGO movement is weak in resources but able to exert such an impact? In part this is simply due to the levels of effort and commitment on the part of a small number of people. But there are also structural and strategic aspects.

The roles which the NGO workers play are very specific. They accumulate practical political experience which allows them to serve as effective advisors on strategy and tactics. They act as transmitters of information between groups and across movements, which allows local groups to shorten the learning curve. They have contact networks which can bring in expertise (from international sources, academics, researchers), and which can pass out publicity to the press and other media. They have educated skills which are important for compiling documents, conducting negotiations, framing publicity, and so on. In none of these roles do the NGOs have the ability to *create* movements, though they certainly can contribute to making them stronger. The NGO workers themselves argue that whatever role they have is dependent on the strength of the popular movement which they assist.

This NGO role has arisen because of the upsurge of popular movements on the one hand, and the authorities' attempt to combat these movements by a mixture of constructive neglect or the exercise of traditional power on the other.

Often the NGOs are described as a "middle class" element. As a recent study has shown, many of the older (1970s) generation of Thai NGOs did have middle class backgrounds, and were motivated by political commitment; however, those of the new generation (1990s onwards) are more likely to come from a rural or urban lower-class family, to have climbed the ladder of educational achievement, and to have made a decision to remain true to their roots.[7]

Strategies

Among those in Thailand committed to social and political change, three general strategies for action are being debated. The first is to work within the existing system and to press for changes in law, law enforcement, institutions, and mindsets, through various forms of social

action and political lobbying. The second alternative is to form a political party to provide a more direct channel for change. The third alternative is the so-called New Anarchism—people should just ignore the state, pursue their preferred way of life, and seek strength within the community and through networking between communities. [8]

Most popular movements in Thailand adopt the first option. The anarchist solution is problematic because of the intrusive power of the state (particularly its control over natural resources), and because of the difficulty of evading various forms of hegemony handed down from history. The option of establishing a new political party has been actively debated in recent years, but to date most activists fear that the result would be infighting, disunity, and distraction from the goals of direct social action and counter-hegemonic political activism.

CONCLUSION AND DEDICATION

The project on social movements, upon which this paper is based, was an academic research project, but it was also conceived as a contribution to the movements being studied. All of the principal researchers and their assistants working on the eight case studies were chosen because they are committed activists. I hoped they would profit in some way by being asked to research these movements and reflect on the forces behind them, the strategies adopted, the successes, and the failures. That much was intentional. But beyond that, the subjects of the research got involved in the project in ways that I had not expected. In an early work-in-progress seminar, an activist was orchestrating the fishermen's blockade of Phangnga bay over his mobile phone from the back of the room. At the final seminar in October 2000, several of the dam protesters attended and cheered on the researcher. Leaders of the doctors' movement came to the presentation on the public health scandal, contributed advice and information, and insisted on presenting a garland to the research team. And one man from the Hmong hill community attended the seminar to get tips on how to help his home village, which had been ransacked a few days earlier by vigilantes covertly encouraged by the forest department. One of the important aspects of modern popular movements is that they are not confined within any formal frame.

This research is dedicated to all those who believe that Thai society can and should be moved ahead by collective action of various kinds.

[1] I thank the Thailand Research Fund for their generous support. I would also like to thank the Center for Southeast Asian Studies Core University Programme at Kyoto University, where parts of this paper were written.

[2] All the studies are published in Pasuk et al. (2002).

[3] For criticism by other Marxist writers see Brass (1994), Veltmeyer (1997). Garner and Tenato (1997) give a review of literature on social movements from 1945 to 1995, including analysis of the Marxist standpoint.

[4] On the Assembly of the Poor, see for example Suthy (1997), Missingham (2000), Praphat (1998), Baker (2000).

[5] See chapters 3, 4, 5, 6 in Pasuk et al. (2002).

[6] See chapters 2 and 3 in Pasuk et al. (2002).

[7] For an excellent analysis of NGOs and social movements see Missingham (2000). See also Prudhisan and Maneerat (1997), Narong (1999), and Somchai (2001) on the northeast.

[8] See Somchai's contribution to this volume on the debate within the NGOs working in the northeast of Thailand with regard to the community culture approach and the political economy approach.

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The Politics of the NGO Movement in Northeast Thailand

Somchai Phatharathananunth

Abstract

This paper examines the struggle of the NGO movement in northeast Thailand (Isan) during the 1980s and 1990s. The paper begins with analysis of the differences between the NGOs in the 1970s and in the post-1970s era. This analysis gives the background to the debate within Isan NGOs between the political economists, who engaged in political mobilization, and the community culturalists, who refrained from any kind of political mobilization. In the 1990s, the differences between the two sides were resolved in the course of struggle.

Introduction

NGOs are increasingly seen as important agents for socio-political change and vital components of a thriving civil society. They "play a significant role in the politics of many developing countries and they have become significant political actors in civil society in Asia, Africa, and Latin America" (Clarke, 1998: 23). This paper examines the struggle of NGOs in Isan (northeast Thailand) during the 1980s and the 1990s. The paper is comprised of three main parts. The first part looks at the development of NGOs in Thailand. The second part examines debate within Isan NGOs. The third part looks at conflicts that had important impact on the strategy of Isan NGOs.

The Development of Thai NGOs

The first non-governmental development organization, the Thailand Rural Reconstruction Movement (TRRM), was founded in 1969. The central idea of the TRRM was that "rural reconstruction is human reconstruction" (Suthy, 1995: 99). The TRRM rejected government development policies which emphasized economic growth at the expense

of equity and development of the cities at the expense of the countryside. Another important NGO was the Komol Keemthong Foundation (KKF). Based on Buddhist values, the KKF advocated improving the quality of life through self-reliance (Pasuk and Baker, 1995: 384–5). From the 1970s to the 1990s, the NGO movement experienced changes in terms of ideology, organizational structure, and strategy. The account below focuses on the differences between the NGOs in the 1970s and in the post-1970s era, as a background for understanding the dynamics of NGO movements, and the debate within Isan NGOs.

According to Banthorn Ondam, a veteran NGO leader, in the early period the majority of NGOs were large organizations run by academics, bureaucrats, members of the upper class, or foreigners. Their work focused on rural poverty and social welfare, and their outlook was borrowed from the west. During the 1970s, there was no cooperation among them. As a consequence, they did not turn into a movement; they were mere non-profit groups (Wasant, 1993: 20).

During the "democratic period" of 1973–1976, NGOs represented a middle force, which advocated gradual improvement within the existing system. As a result, they faced hostility from the left and right. According to Rosana Tositrakul, a veteran NGO leader, NGOs were not popular among social activists, who were committed to socialist revolution. For them, NGOs were unable to bring about meaningful changes because the scope of their activities was too narrow and did not address the causes of social problems. Therefore, NGOs were not considered agents of change but were branded as "reactionary" organizations that obstructed the wheel of history (*Bangkok Post*, 10 October 1993: 20). Despite being cold-shouldered by the left, NGOs were mistrusted by the right. Before the 1980s NGOs, like other social movements, were viewed by the right as communist agents set up as legal organizations to operate on behalf of the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT). After a military coup on 6 October 1976, their activities were suppressed by the ultra-right government (Amara and Nitaya, 1994: 27, 56).

Revival of NGOs after the 6 October Coup

The revival of NGOs was a result of changes in government policy. NGOs were able to actively expand their activities again after the Kriangsak government (1977–1980) decided to compromise with the left by re-opening political space for them. The compromise was designed to prevent the growth of the CPT. After the 6 October coup, some 3,000

leftist activists, who were assaulted by the military, gave up their peaceful struggle and joined the armed struggle of the CPT. The new recruits not only strengthened the insurrectionary forces, but more importantly, they legitimized the party's armed struggle. More and more Thai viewed "the CPT as the only credible alternative to the status quo" (Bowie, 1997: 137). To prevent the victory of the party, Bangkok introduced new policies to win over the left and so isolate the CPT. According to Kasian Tejapira, a political scientist at Thammasat University, "the government tried to encourage NGOs to grow as alternatives for idealistic people who were disillusioned with socialism and yet were distrustful of the government" (Wasant, 1993: 20). By the mid-1980s some fifty new NGOs had been set up all over the country (Suthy, 1995: 102). In 1985 the Coordinating Committee of Non-Governmental Organization for Rural Development (NGO-CORD) was set up both at national and regional levels, with a total membership of 220 organizations (Amara and Nitaya, 1994: 46).

The development of NGOs in the 1980s was not just a response to new opportunities by the old NGOs when political space opened to them, without any meaningful change in their scope of work and political orientation. Actually, NGOs in this period differed from NGOs in the previous decade in several respects. The political composition of NGO members in the 1980s was more diverse than that of the 1970s. While most of NGO workers in the 1970s were moderate activists, NGO workers in the 1980s included both moderate and radical activists. The radical elements within NGOs came from the ranks of former left-leaning social activists, who were disillusioned with socialism but still held on to their desire for social justice. These groups of radical activists included not only those who returned from the jungle after the collapse of the CPT, but also idealistic youths who were searching for a better society (*Bangkok Post*, 10 October 1993: 20).

The influx of these radicals into the ranks of NGOs had a significant impact on the development of NGOs in the 1980s and 1990s. Some veteran NGO leader such as Rosana tended to believe that the presence of the radicals did not produce any meaningful changes within NGOs, since the newcomers worked under the existing NGO philosophy (Wasant, 1993: 20). Yet in reality, when the radicals joined NGOs, they transformed themselves and the old NGOs at the same time. This transformation resulted in a more radical and more diverse NGO movement. While the radical-turned-NGO activists rejected the centralized organization and confrontation strategy of the social

movements of the 1970s, and searched for a new strategy (Callahan, 1998: 99–106), some of them still appreciated the value of political mobilization as a means to defend the interests of the poor, and were willing to adopt such a strategy when the political situation required. In the early 1980s, they followed the non-political involvement strategy of the NGOs of the 1970s, and concentrated their work on micro-issues such as alternative livelihoods, health, education, and so on. However, from the late 1980s when conflicts over natural resources and environment in the countryside escalated, they turned to radical tactics of mass mobilization (see below). In the city, they engaged in a variety of political activities such as campaigning for human rights and greater democracy. They assumed the role of the democratic movements of the 1970s, even though they were not as radical as these earlier movements.

As a result, from the late 1980s onwards NGOs divided into two main factions. The first faction comprised NGO workers who followed the "old" strategy of the NGOs in the 1970s. The second faction was made up of NGO workers who engaged in political mobilization. Because of the nature of their work, the former were known as the "cool" faction, and the latter as the "hot" faction. The "hot" faction had its strong base in rural Isan (Sanitsuda, 1994: 33). The relationship between these two factions was not static. They both accepted and rejected the ideas of each other in the course of continued debates and practices (see below).

The NGOs of the 1980s also differed from the NGOs in the 1970s in other respects. According to Banthorn, large organizations were replaced by small, issue-based groups. Their activities were not concentrated in Bangkok. They spread into every region of the country. Moreover, they set up networks to coordinate their work all over the country. As a result, they did not function as an isolated group but as a broad social movement (Wasant, 1993: 20).

Development of NGOs in Isan

In 1980 NGOs began expanding their works into Isan (Isan NGO-CORD, 1998: 11). In the early period they concentrated their efforts on the so-called "cool issues"—non-political activities such as community development. They focused on "fertilizer, jute, wells, toilets, meetings, training, seminars, study tours, rice and buffalo banks, revolving funds, cooperative stores" and then developed into alternative agriculture, handicrafts, and community businesses (Isan NGO-CORD, 1998: 19). According to Bamrung Boonpanya, a prominent figure among Isan NGOs, in the early period NGOs activities in Isan were not different

from those of the state except that they emphasized people's participation (Bamrung, n. d.: 5). In 1987 there were forty-nine NGOs working in Isan and all of them were involved in rural development projects (Chatthip, 1991: 131). These activities were completely different from the activities of the popular movements of the 1970s. Such differences did not arise from tactical moves, but reflected the strategic shift of the new movements. The activities of NGOs in the 1980s, according to one of their leaders, contrasted with the activities of the popular movements in the 1970s "which had adopted a single confrontational strategy for social transformation that *had proved unrealistic in the context of Thailand*" (Srisuwan, 1995: 69–70, emphasis added). During the 1970s, according to Pornpirom, popular movements believed that "social transformations and creation of a just society could only be the result of a revolution", and the revolution would be achieved only under the leadership of a centralized political organization of the working class (Pornpirom, 1987: 14). The new strategy, by contrast, emphasized long and gradual progress based on "consciousness-raising", rather than political mobilization or any kind of political organization. Such a strategy derived from the idea of community culture.

DEBATE WITHIN ISAN NGOS: COMMUNITY CULTURE VERSUS POLITICAL ECONOMY

During the 1980s, there was a fierce debate among Isan NGOs over the strategy and tactics of the movement. The debate was later known as the debate between the "community culture" and the "political economy" approach.

The idea of community culture

The idea of community culture is a variant of populism. According to Brass, populism, in different forms and guises, "has emerged and re-emerged periodically as a reaction by…. farmers to industrialization, urbanization and capitalist crisis" (Brass, 1996: 154). Central to populist ideology is an advocacy of a return to a traditional community. Populism, argues Brass, shares the anti-capitalism stand of Marxism. It criticises "big business, political injustice, and the effects of capitalism generally". However, populism "does this not in the name of the common ownership of the means of production (as does Marxism) but rather in the name of individual, small-scale private property". Moreover, while Marxism emphasises the importance of class

differentiation, populism "denies the existence of class and accordingly essentializes the peasantry". It "casts them in the role of 'victims', uniformly oppressed by large-scale institutions/monopolies located in the urban sector (the state, big business and 'foreign capital')" (Brass, 1996: 155).

The community culture approach emerged in Thai society in the 1980s, after the failure of the CPT's socialist revolution. The idea was elaborated by NGO leaders from their experience, and developed by academics in Bangkok and in the regions. It has now become an important approach in examining development issues (Yukti, 1995: 75–8). The community culture approach argues that Thailand's form of economic development, which was imported from western countries by the state, destroyed the economy of the village community. According to Bamrung Boonpanya, a prominent Isan NGO leader, such capitalist economic development benefited only the rich and westerners, and made the poor poorer (Chatthip, 1991: 121).

Kitahara labelled this argument "anti-modernism" (Kitahara, 1996: 78). "At the economic level", argues Kitahara, the community culture theorists criticized the commercialization of agriculture by modern technology, such as the use of "chemicals and machine, limited kinds of marketable crops, and large scale management", on the grounds that it "often results in total bankruptcy, in particular for farmers who work at it hardest". The community culture theorists, according to Kitahara, also pointed out the negative aspects of commercialized farming at the social level. For them, the introduction of the market system "broke down the traditional mutual help and fraternity of the community", and "substituted the egoistic competition and resultant rivalry among fellow villagers". Furthermore, at the cultural level, they bitterly attacked capitalism for having "stimulated materialist values and caused mental dissatisfaction and instability associated with anomie, by stirring up greed" in order to "make more profit and to get more consumer goods". At the political level, they rejected state-led rural development schemes implemented under the hierarchical orders of the central government (Kitahara, 1996: 78–9).

According to Bamrung Boonpanya, to avoid the negative effects of the market economy mentioned above, farmers should withdraw from the market economy and rely on the subsistence economy as they had done in the past. He felt that they could return to self-reliance because the village community had its own culture and way of development. As Chatthip (1991: 121) has pointed out, Bamrung believed that:

> No matter what outside circumstances have been and how they have changed, the essence of a village or a community, its economic,

social and cultural independence, has remained for hundreds of years. The village community thus has its own independent belief systems and way of development.

For Niphot, another community culture theorist, if the community culture is strong, it is easy for farmers to organize themselves into groups to carry out various work. In addition, the strong community culture "also makes it possible to resist external exploitation" (Chatthip, 1991: 119).

Since the strength of the farmers lies in their community, their history, and their way of life, new forms of organization or any progressive ideas are unnecessary. The farmers, argue the community culture theorists, can rely on local wisdom, indigenous culture, traditional technologies, and Buddhist values (Pasuk and Baker, 1995: 387–8). In other words, for community culture theorists, "the answer is in the village" (Isan NGO-CORD, 1998: 18).

Nevertheless, there is a contradiction in the argument of the community culture school of thought. While community culturalists believed that farmers are able to solve their problems by relying on their own culture, they also proposed that to achieve strong communal culture, the villagers needed some help from outsiders ("development workers") to recover their forgotten cultural consciousness (Chatthip, 1991: 139). Such a contradiction reflected the incompatibility between theory and reality. As Bamrung admitted, farmers had succumbed to the influence of "the cultural domination of the money culture". They had given up their "cultural roots", and turned to western culture (Sanitsuda, 1992: 31). Under such a situation, it is clear that villagers were unable to regain their roots, their own culture, without some help from outsiders. NGO workers were introduced to perform that role. On the one hand, this helped to solve the theoretical difficulty, and, on the other hand, it justified the presence of NGOs in the villages.

The role of the outsider in "consciousness-raising" in the community culture school of thought is quite similar to that of the Leninist theory of organization, which also argued that workers had an inherent class consciousness but were unable to achieve such consciousness by themselves. To raise their consciousness, they need some help from intellectuals (Lenin, 1969). However, there is also a big difference between the two schools of thought on this issue. While Leninists believed that intellectuals could help workers gain their class consciousness by introducing them to the revolutionary ideas of Marxism which had developed outside their everyday lives, the community culturalists, on the contrary, believed that the knowledge

necessary for villagers' self-consciousness was generated within the community itself. The task of intellectuals was to discover it, and then help farmers to regain the folk wisdom which was part of their communal lives.

The political economy approach

The community culture line of thought, according to Nakhon Sriwipat, the present secretary general of the Small-Scale Farmers' Assembly, was contested by another group of NGOs and school teacher activists, who called themselves the "political economists". Although they agreed with the community culture theorists that the western-style development had had devastating effects on the rural economy, they rejected the solutions proposed by the community culture approach. For them, the self-reliant economy was a kind of utopia which was impractical in real life. Since capitalism now penetrates deeply into rural areas, it was impossible to return to a subsistence economy. Moreover, many kinds of problems within villages are caused by outside factors rooted in politico-economic structures beyond the control of villagers. The solution to the problems, therefore, lies not in trying to escape from capitalism but trying to live with it, and to develop greater bargaining power. The bargaining power of farmers lies in political organization, not in local wisdom as the community culture theorists believe. Efforts to solve farmers' problems within the villages based on communal culture without engaging in "hot issues" or political struggle outside the villages is hopeless (Nakhon Sriwipat, interview, 14 December 1997).

However, among political economists there were differing views about the nature of the political organizations they needed to found. The majority, according to Son Rubsung, a leading figure among Isan political economists, proposed that they should set up a farmers' organization and then develop it into a strong political organization with a wide mass base for bargaining with the state. This group of political economists rejected the idea that farmers should have a political party of their own. For them, to set up a political party was impractical and undesirable for a number of reasons. Firstly, running a political party needed a huge sum of money which farmers were unable to afford. Secondly, it was very difficult to supervise or control party members in the parliament; after being elected they would seek to advance their own interests rather than working for the masses. Nevertheless, a minority disagreed with this view. They contended that only a political party could assert influence on policy-makers effectively.

The idea of becoming involved in electoral politics was bitterly criticized by the community culturalists. For them, all politicians were corrupt and insincere; they offered help to the poor only to serve their political interests. In addition, the community culturalists also branded the idea of building a strong mass-based organization as an "out-of-date political strategy that failed to understand the new political environment" (Son Rubsung, interview, 10 July 1998). For them, as Bamrung Kayota pointed out, organizing protests was alien to the culture of community. Such activities belonged to workers, or to western culture (Naruemon and Nitirat, 1999: 101).

To strengthen their organizations, the political economists suggested that farmers should have a high level of political consciousness, learn to think scientifically, and apply modern knowledge to their work and production. Although believing that some communal traditions are useful for farmers, they insisted that superstition prevented farmers from developing their ability to cope with the modern world (Nakhon Sriwipat, interview, 14 December 1997). The community culture theorists, on the contrary, ferociously attacked the efforts to convince villagers to give up their superstitious practices as "brain washing". For them, local tradition including superstition is useful for strengthening the village community (Volunteer for Society Project, 1984: 241–2).

According to the Isan NGO-CORD (1998: 18), "no one won" in the debate between the two sides. However, during the 1980s the NGO movement in Isan operated under the influence of the community culture school of thought. The popularity of this approach reflected the ideological atmosphere at that time. Disappointed with socialist ideas, most activists were searching for a new orientation and strategy. While the political economy approach shared many assumptions with the popular movement in the 1970s, the community culture perspective offered them a new and experimental perspective. Even though the community culture school of thought prevailed in the 1980s, the changing situation in Isan rural areas in the early 1990s undermined its validity.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONFLICT AND THE RADICALIZATION OF ISAN NGOS

The non-political involvement strategy of the community culture approach was put to the test by the intensification of the penetration of capitalism into the countryside and associated changes in state policy.

The aims of this section is to show how industrialization led to environmental conflict in the Isan countryside, and how this conflict impacted on the strategy of the community culture approach.

Unequal development and environmental conflict

In the late 1980s, Thailand was experiencing rapid economic growth. Between 1987 and 1991 the country's GDP increased by 10.5 per cent annually. According to Hunsaker, the source of economic dynamism came from the ability to access foreign markets, foreign direct investment, and "the conversion of Thai natural resources into exportable goods" (Hunsaker, 1996: 1). The country's modernization drive was based on the exploitation of the countryside. The wealth created by the agricultural sector was channelled to finance industrialization and growth in Bangkok (Missingham, 1996: 193). According to Medhi, since the first Economic and Development Plan (1961–1966), the agricultural sector has been the source of cheap labour, cheap food supply, and government revenues. However, the most important role of agriculture in industrialization has been in earning the foreign exchange necessary to purchase technology and industrial inputs (Medhi, 1995: 43–50). It is not surprising to find that after more than three decades of development the income of the agricultural sector lags far behind that of the non-agricultural sector. In 1990 the income ratio of the non-agricultural sector to the agricultural sector was 11:2. Moreover, in 1992 Thailand had the sixth worst income distribution in the world (Pasuk et al., 1996: 12–14).

Unequal development not only resulted in extreme economic disparities between urban and rural areas, but also in environmental degradation and conflict. Economic growth led to conflicts over natural resources in the countryside between farmers, on the one hand, and the business sector and the state, on the other. According to Ubonrat (1991: 299), disputes over the rights to control the use of land, forest, river, and water ways have become the focal point of conflict. In the early 1980s, there were only two protests concerned with environmental issues. However, after the economic boom in 1987 the number of such protests increased sharply. In 1990 the number of conflicts over natural resources rose to 58 cases. Between 1994 to 1995, there were 1,742 protests in Thailand, in which 610 cases involved the use of natural resources. In Isan alone, there were 187 conflicts over natural resources in the period mentioned (Praphat, 1998: 30, 39–40). Politicians, bureaucrats, police, and businessmen tried to suppress popular protests by using force or

intimidation (Fairclough, 1996: 20). Between 1993 and 1996, ten protest leaders were killed and nine protesters were injured. In addition, twenty NGO and village leaders were arrested (Naruemon et al., 1996: 31).

Radicalization of Isan NGOs

The changing situation invalidated the basic assumption of the community culture approach. In many cases, the conflicts in their areas forced NGOs to join protests. According to Sompan, a committee member of Isan NGO-CORD, "NGOs do not want to involve in 'hot issues' but they had to be involved because these issues happened in the areas where they worked. Sometimes villagers and students asked NGOs to help them bargain with the government. Sympathetic to the villagers, NGOs decided to get involved" (Sompan, 1990: 107).

In April 1990 about a thousand villagers from Mahasarakham, Roi Et, and Srisaket provinces protested against rock salt mining in Mahasarakham. The protest demanded that the government close down salt mines which had discharged salty water into the Siew river which runs through the three provinces (*Bangkok Post*, 8 April 1990). NGO workers in the area who normally refrained from involvement in political conflict decided to join the protest (Sompan, 1990: 108). During the same period, in Ubon Ratchathani, students and NGOs from Bangkok, especially the Project for Ecological Recovery, organized a protest against the construction of Pak Mun dam. The protest arose from various reasons. The dam would flood 5,700 rai of farmland affecting 903 families. In addition, the dam would, according to research, have caused health problems along the river and "create new habitats for certain species of disease-carrying snails" (*Bangkok Post*, 23 September 1991: 3). Another negative effect was that the dam would cut the reproduction routes of fresh water species, which would result in a sharp decrease or even extinction of some species (Atiya, 1991: 21).

Another important event was the protest against the National Farm Council Bill. In April 1991 the Anand government planned to pass a bill establishing an agricultural council. However, NGOs and farmers, mainly in Isan, opposed the bill. According to Bamrung Boonpanya, the council represented the interests of agro-business, instead of farmers. The objective of the bill was to subjugate small scale farmers to big corporations. Such a policy, for him, would push small scale farmers to bankruptcy (Bamrung, 1991: 15). The conflict between NGOs and the Thai state intensified when the army implemented the *Khor Jor Kor* project.

Khor Jor Kor and farmers' resistance in Isan

Khor Jor Kor was an effort of the Thai state to evict farmers from their lands in the so-called "degraded forest reserves" for commercial reforestation. The reasoning behind the implementation of *Khor Jor Kor* was that farmers are primarily responsible for deforestation in Thailand. Their presence in forest reserves areas was illegal, and therefore they had to be evicted from the areas for reforestation. It was estimated that there were more than 10 million farmers living in degraded forest reserves (Handley, 1991: 15). Under the project, the military was to relocate 970,000 families (9,700 villages) from 1,253 forests all over the country (Pasuk et al., 1996: 45). Isan was chosen as the first region in which to implement the project. Environmentalist NGOs believed such a decision was made because Isan was the poorest region and also the region which was considered by Bangkok as inferior (Pasuk et al., 1996: 46). Between 1991 and 1995, the military planned to move more than one million farmers (250,000 families from 2,500 villages) living in degraded forests in various parts of the region and resettle them on other degraded land (Hirsch, 1993: 21).

The effort to drive farmers off their land began a new chapter of state-farmer conflict over land rights in rural Isan, right up to the present day. Farmers, who believed that they had rights on their land, waged strong resistance to *Khor Jor Kor*. The anti-*Khor Jor Kor* movement was an important event of rural activism in Isan. It was the first major farmers' movement in the region after the collapse of the CPT. The movement marked a new phase of radical grassroots movements in Thailand.

In March 1991 the military began to evict farmers from various villages in Isan (*Bangkok Post*, 16 October 1991: 29). Threatening force against any resistance, the military succeeded in evicting farmers from their land during the early period of the project. However, when farmers were able to organize themselves, they began to resist *Khor Jor Kor*. To pressure the government to abandon *Khor Jor Kor*, on 25 June 1992 affected farmers from all over Isan held a meeting in Khon Kaen and decided to march on foot from Nakhon Ratchasima to Bangkok (about 160 kilometres). Some 4,500 farmers moved from Nakhon Ratchasima Provincial Hall along the Friendship Highway to Pak Chong district, the border between Isan and the central region (Pasuk et al., 1996: 74). They demanded to meet the Prime Minister or his representative. When the government refused to negotiate, they blocked the highway for three days. This measure proved effective; after the road blockade the government's negotiation team flew from Bangkok to meet them on 5

July and agreed to cancel the *Khor Jor Kor* scheme (*Bangkok Post*, 30 June 1992: 2; 3 July 1992: 3; 5 July 1992: 1, 3).

The campaign against *Khor Jor Kor* had a profound impact on the Isan grassroots movement. According to Bamrung Kayotha, a leading figure among the Isan political economists, the anti-*Khor Jor Kor* activities not only helped to strengthen unity among farmers, but also healed the rift between the community culturalists and the political economists. Both sides worked together against *Khor Jor Kor* (Naruemon and Nitirat, 1999: 101). However, after the anti-*Khor Jor Kor* campaign, the relationship between the two sides was not stable. Sometimes differences emerged over political strategy and over the scope of activities. But cooperation was the main form of their relationship. The founding of the Assembly of the Poor (AOP) in 1995 signified the new phase of cooperation when both sides joined the same organization. The AOP was a network of NGOs and people's organizations. Mobilization was its main strategy in campaiging for social justice. In Isan a number of NGOs, who worked under the philosophy of community culture line of thought, joined the AOP because they realized that without political mobilization the state would not respond to their demands (field notes, 16 November 1997). Nevertheless, the AOP did not work only under the influence of the political economists, but was also influenced by the community culturalists. The AOP's campaign for alternative agriculture was evidence of the influence of the community culturalists within the Assembly (see Praphat, 1998).

CONCLUSION

This paper has examined the struggle of the NGO movement in Northeast Thailand during the 1980s and the 1990s. NGOs in the post-1970s era were more diversified than the old NGOs of the 1970s. Diversification within the movement led to differences in the movement's strategy. The difference was known as "the political economy vs. the community culture approach". However, the conflict between the two sides was resolved in the course of struggle. Their ability to settle their conflict through the course of the struggle showed that the political economists and the community culturalists were pragmatists, who did not strictly follow their doctrines. In retrospect, we can see that the community culture approach was a one-sided strategy, insufficient for solving the problems of the farmers. The farmers needed

political mobilization for bargaining with the state, and needed alternative agriculture to reduce their dependency on the market.

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BREAKING FREE THROUGH OPPOSITIONAL PEASANT POLITICS IN THE PHILIPPINES[1]

Jaime Mendoza Jimenez

ABSTRACT

KMP is a peasant movement which draws its strength from local struggles. One example began in 1995 in Batangas when a property company seized land for a tourist development, with government backing. Local peasants blocked the development with human barricades. They formed an organization and allied to the national KMP. They were subject to bribery, intimidation, and selective murder. They responded by taking their case to the people at the local, national, and international level through demonstrations and networking. As a result, they were able to retain control of the land. The strength of the movement comes internally from the experience of struggle, and externally from its linkage with broader radical movements.

INTRODUCTION

In the last two decades, two developments can explain the negligible attention given to peasant politics and movements. First, the remarkable popularization of the concept of civil society from the mid-1980s to the late 1990s overwhelmingly put the NGOs (non-governmental organizations) at the forefront of society's dealings with the state. This phenomenon overlooked a major political-historical force in the course of societal reproduction and transformation—social movements. Moreover, peasant politics and movements have rarely been a topic of civil society literature.

Second, "social movement theory has predominantly analysed social movement organizations from a reform perspective, emphasising movement participants' demands to be recognized by, and incorporated into, the dominant culture" (Fitzgerald and Rodgers, 2000: 573–92). In the 1990s, the question of rural political mobilization has likewise slipped down the agenda within peasant studies. Scholars have shifted

their focus towards "new social movements"[2] emphasising urban politics and investigating organizations such as human rights, environmental, gender, and ethnic movements. And as the "everyday forms of resistance" paradigm (Scott, 1985) dominates the field of peasant or rural studies (Fletcher, 2001: 37–66), the tendency to lose sight of the frequency and force of open peasant movements or collective action is becoming a dominant practice (Starn, 1992: 92).

Peasant politics encompasses issues of class, gender, ethnicity, human rights, environment, and rural political participation. These issues continue to represent a variety of important and interrelated concerns not only in the Southeast Asian region but elsewhere as well.

In general, peasant politics includes the political behaviour of peasants, their political culture and identity, political economy, moral economy, agrarian reform and rural development, mobilization, organization, ideology, history, nationalism, agency, social structure, collective struggle (armed and unarmed), and resistance, protection of the rural base, and other issues that concern the rural society and population.

The Southeast Asian milieu offers a rich terrain for exploring the dynamics of oppositional peasant politics and movements. In the Philippines, the axis of mainstream peasant politics seems to be the issue of agrarian reform and rural development focused on the implementation of the 1987 Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP). At the same time, peasant politics is also concerned with structural change within which the implementation of the revolutionary agrarian reform programme of the Communist Party of the Philippines and New People's Army (CPP-NPA) is one of the key steps towards a socialist society.

One interesting typology categorizes peasant struggle in the Philippines into three political poles. As Franco (1999: 1–4) puts it:

> The *outright opposition* (far left) is represented by KMP (Maoist-inspired, CPP-influenced) that perceives CARP as inherently limited and implementation is impossible… The second pole, *uncritical collaboration* (center-right) is exampled by Agrarian Reform Now! (which is of a pro-Ramos social democratic orientation). It relies on formal-legal means to move lands and lays exclusive emphasis on the state for implementation. And the third pole, *critical engagement* (left-of-center radical reform pole), is represented by Partnership for Agrarian Reform and Rural Development Services. It does not only rely on formal-legal means to move lands but more importantly on organized social pressure from above and below to drive land reform.[3]

In contrast, I use a realist view of civil society and differentiate peasant societies into those that cooperate with the projects of the state and those that challenge these projects (Jimenez, 2002: 12–14, 85–90):

> *Members* pertain to those working within the rules of the game set by the state and collaborate towards the achievement of reforms. They believe that the policies and programs of the state can work toward the benefit of the people or their constituents. Empirically, they are likewise the more endowed organizations that "possess the political and economic resources necessary to influence institutionalized political decision making and who therefore can work to realize their interests through standard political channels" (Smith, 1991). They generally eschew the use of armed struggle to achieve their goals.
>
> On the other hand, *challengers* refer to those organizations that contest the exercise of power by the state and dominant groups in society. They act on unaccepted and neglected social issues and primarily work outside of the conventional decision-making process. They have the capacity to initiate and sustain extra-parliamentary political and collective action in their struggle to oppose the state and powerful groups in society and implement their version of social reform and change. In the course of its political dealings with powerful social forces, the political contestation may evolve into the radical perspective of challenging the *status quo*, tilt the balance of power and consequently work to establish a new order. These groups are oftentimes the less endowed ones and those who have become exploited and oppressed by other social forces.

This paper aims to achieve four goals. First, it calls for a renewed attention on peasant politics and movements. Second, it demonstrates and conceptualizes how a challenger peasant movement can contribute to the strengthening of civil society. Third, it underscores the significant role of ideology in the struggle of social movements. Fourth, it stresses the importance of local struggle as the basis of national and international actions of social movements. This third objective has two corollaries: it shows the important role of national organizations and international linkages in providing a broader and higher venue for local struggles; and it shows how national state policies are effectively contested at the local level not primarily through lobbying and formal-legal means or patronage politics.

THE POLITICS OF KMP

The KMP (Peasant Movement of the Philippines) clearly stands in opposition to the Philippine government and its programmes. Its

oppositional politics, carried out together with a host of other militant organizations, are a real challenge to the state.[4]

The political pedigree of KMP has so far been shaped by four historical junctures in the history of peasant movements in the Philippines: (a) the era of the PKP (referred to as the old Communist Party of the Philippines), HUKBALAHAP/HMB (People's Army Against the Japanese/People's Army for Liberation), and PKM (National Unity of Peasants) in the 1940s and 1950s; (b) the founding of the CPP and NPA in the late 1960s; (c) the establishment of the AMGL (Central Luzon Peasant Alliance) and its provincial chapters in the early 1980s; and (d) splits in the 1990s within the CPP and NPA that reverberated throughout the peasant movement, NGOs, and people's organizations. Established on 24 July 1985, this peasant movement is said to have an effective leadership over a total of 800,000 rural people comprising roughly 9 per cent of the Philippine agricultural labour force with six regional and fifty-five provincial chapters (as of the Fourth KMP National Congress in 1993).

KMP is a national democratic organization believing that "imperialism, bureaucrat-capitalism, and feudalism are the triumvirate reasons for Philippine underdevelopment and subservience to foreign interests, especially the US. Under such political orientation, the movement envisions national freedom and democracy as the starting stage that will rid Philippine society of these social maladies."[5] Another principle that distinguishes the KMP from member peasant societies is the application of class analysis in society. It proposes that Philippine society is in a state of prolonged semi-feudalism and semi-colonialism— a diagnosis which other movements perceive as anachronistic. A third contentious issue that separates KMP from other peasant movements is its political standpoint on revolutionary armed struggle. It openly respects armed struggle as the primary and most effective means of achieving agrarian reform and societal transformation. Danilo Ramos perceives this as "an embodiment of a high commitment and strong principle in advancing the peasant struggle and societal transformation as a whole".[6] An undated KMP brochure summarizes its agenda as follows:

> It advocates and struggles for a revolutionary agrarian reform program that will abolish all forms of feudal and semi-feudal exploitation and implement a free and equitable distribution of land and resources to the tillers. It espouses a rural development program complementing agrarian reform that encourages agricultural cooperation among farmers and enhances local production and

productivity. Agricultural productivity, however, is perceived to go hand in hand with sustainable agriculture and environmental protection. It likewise seeks to promote the rights and welfare of peasant women and eradicate all forms of discrimination against women, and the recognition and respect for the right to self-determination of indigenous peoples.

On a broader scale, the KMP stands for economic nationalism and freedom from foreign domination and control, particularly by the U.S. and Japan, and a nationalist industrialization program that counters imperialist globalization. It works for the establishment of a free, democratic, and independent nation that respects the people's political and civil rights and pursues an independent foreign policy based on mutual interests. It strives for the realization of a comprehensive and progressive social policy that ensures the provision of basic social and public services for the people. In the cultural realm, it seeks to promote a nationalist, pro-people, and scientific culture.

The same brochure describes the KMP's strategies and program of action as follows:

KMP carries out painstaking organizing and education work among the peasants as an important requisite in building a strong and mass-based organization. To fulfill its vision and mission, the movement employs various forms of struggle ranging from simple legal protests and lobby work to massive defiant actions such as nationwide strikes and land occupation. Alliance with other sectors of society especially with workers, students, and progressive sections of the middle class has been instrumental in generating popular opposition to government's anti-people policies and programs.

The movement respects the option of armed revolution being waged by an increasing number of peasants who believe that this is the only means to redress grievances and achieve genuine people empowerment. KMP likewise struggles for tactical and temporary reforms that could bring economic relief for the people through programs and projects and contribute to actual socio-economic upliftment of the peasants. Livelihood, health, disaster relief, cooperative-building, and technology-development projects are some of the projects being undertaken.

KMP challenges the Philippine state and other dominant social forces through oppositional politics. This process of contesting dominant powers, however, does not exist in a social vacuum. The movement launches its oppositional peasant politics at different scales—the local, national, and international levels. Political contestation is initiated and

sustained through specific means and processes—political organization, advocacy and education, and mobilization. The political actions of KMP are orchestrated through extra-parliamentary, non-legal, and formal-legal arenas. The nucleus, however, of all political opposition launched by KMP on the national and international scales is anchored on the movement's struggles at the local level. This paper focuses on KMP's oppositional politics at the local level. The struggle of UMALPAS-KA (People's Association Against Land Destruction, but literally translatable as "Break Free!"), a hacienda-wide organization, epitomises the struggle of KMP at the local level in contesting land conversion and challenging government and real estate developers.

LAND APPROPRIATION[7]

Land conversion practically refers to the alteration of land use from agricultural to non-agricultural purposes such as residential, industrial, commercial, and other uses. But for the Philippine peasants, it specifically refers to "an irreversible process that can mean a permanent loss of the soil's capacity for agricultural production" (Nantes, 1992, cited in PIAF, 1998: 9). And in the Philippines, where at least 43 per cent of the population (31.3 million) and 63 per cent of the poor (16.9 million)[8] traditionally depend on the sector for their livelihood (NEDA, 1995: 3), misguided land conversion becomes virtually a crime.

Land conversion has become the instrument of the unscrupulous to legally grab lands and perpetrate brute harassment and coercion among the farmers, fisherfolk, and indigenous peoples, and make profits from destroying the ecological balance of the country.[9] Today, peasants and peasant-based formations continue to build organizations and networks, advocate their concerns, and carry out collective action to fight the land conversion rush.

A very classic, concrete, and on-going case is the experience of Hacienda Looc farmers in Nasugbu, Batangas. The hacienda includes a lush stretch of coastline and agricultural land located southwest of Metro Manila and northwest of Batangas City covering a total land area of 8,651 hectares. It consists of four villages namely Calayo (929 ha), Papaya (1,205 ha), Looc (4,521 ha), Bulihan (1,393 ha), and a part of Cavite, Patungan (602 ha). Productive land (rice, coconut, mango farms, and other crops) covers more than 5,000 ha, while the mountainous parts comprise the remaining more than 3,000 ha.

Political tension in the hacienda intensified when peasants discovered that in January and June 1996, the Department of Agrarian Reform

Regional Adjudication Board (Region IV) had issued three Partial Summary Judgements cancelling several certificate of landownership awards or land deeds. The Department of Agrarian Reform claimed the farmers had voluntarily returned the land[10] and the Department's village, municipal, and provincial offices testified that the lands were not suitable for agriculture and were declared as a tourism zone. The certificates covered around 3,432 hectares all located in Calayo and Papaya.

Later investigations revealed that the Manila Southcoast Development Corporation (MSDC) had mysteriously acquired rights over the whole hacienda. The MSDC then forged a joint venture with the Fil-Estate Properties Inc. (FEPI) to develop the hacienda into a world-class tourism and leisure complex. The project, dubbed the Harbortown Golf and Country Club, was to include two marinas, four golf courses, a resort hotel, beach resorts, and residential and agropolitan subdivisions. It would eventually evict 10,000 families.

To make things worse, the peasants and the residents were victimized by what they refer to as a series of unscrupulous manoeuvres. First, coercion was primarily used to lure the peasants to give up their lands and possessions.[11] Second, they were led to believe that it would be better to sell their land rather than let government take it away from them. Third, what is even more painful for them is that their very own village leader Max Limeta, whom they considered as their "father", was the very first person to convince them to capitulate.

Fourth, not a single hearing or consultation with the peasants and communities of the hacienda was undertaken by government or the FEPI-MSDC to inform them of what was really happening. And fifth, members and sympathizers simply asked "why do they have to use military pressure and violence against our communities?" With these things at the back of their minds, the peasants and residents concluded that they would never be part of the "development" being undertaken.

NAISSANCE OF A CHALLENGE

The peasants of Hacienda Looc could not "comprehend" the overwhelming flow of events. In their view, this was a land grabbing spree by real estate developers and businessmen in connivance with government. As early as 1993, Hacienda Looc, particularly Calayo and Looc, was swarming with real estate brokers, speculators, and land buyers offering "large amounts of money" for land. Even before the cancellation of land deeds, FEPI had actually started dredging activities

in the last quarter of 1995 without even bothering to secure an environmental compliance certificate.

The situation alarmed the peasants and made them reflect on what was happening. Earlier in the 1970s, the Philippine Tourism Authority (PTA) had attempted to take over their lands. The PTA invoked Marcos' Presidential Decree No. 1520 of 28 November 1975 declaring the whole of Nasugbu as a tourism zone. After two years of dredging and drilling preparations for construction, the PTA was already claiming the land in 1979. The peasants, however, led by a certain Jose Bautista, spontaneously formed a barricade to block the PTA and nothing was heard from the agency afterwards.

Guillermo "Gemo" Bautista (45 years old), the son of Jose Bautista (now 81 years old), took over leadership of the peasantry of the hacienda in the struggle for land and livelihood. In the third quarter of 1995, Gemo and four other villagers decided to organize themselves. The initial stage was secret and the original plan was to launch an armed resistance against the land grabbing by FEPI-MSDC and government.

The militant instinct demonstrated by the organizers coheres with the history and peculiar characteristics of Calayo. In the 1940s, the Hukbong Bayan Laban sa Hapon (People's Army Against the Japanese) reached Nasugbu via Cavite and many Japanese soldiers were killed during armed encounters with the Huks. This was one of the reasons why the hacienda was one of the very few places that were not physically controlled by Japanese forces. The villagers are used to carrying arms, and the place has a reputation for the number of guns.

The 1950s witnessed the rise of the Mananalasap—armed elements who rob local villagers of their livestock, crops, and other possessions. In the 1960s, however, these bandits started to disappear one by one. The villagers observed that not a week or a month would pass when they would not hear a gunshot during supper time, signalling that another Mananalasap was dead. This experience explains the inborn activism and vigilance of the villagers to defend themselves against perceived enemies.

After careful deliberations and consultations with members and other peasant movements, the organizers opted to employ legal and extra-parliamentary means of struggle. Armed resistance, however, remained an alternative. Each of the organizers painstakingly and clandestinely recruited another three or four members and upon reaching a total of twenty, they decided to form the UMALPAS-KA (People's Association Against Land Destruction-Calayo) on 4 September 1995 and contest land conversion.

From Calayo village, the organization expanded and was able to

cover the whole hacienda and some parts of Cavite. Today, UMALPAS-KA is estimated to have 40 per cent of the residents as members and another 35 per cent as sympathizers. UMALPAS-KA is now a hacienda-wide association of peasants and fisherfolk coming from the villages of Calayo, Bulihan, Papaya, Looc, an additional nearby village, Balaytigue, and Patungan of Cavite.

It operates under a simple structure where the leaders of each village chapter make up a Leaders' Council that meets on a monthly basis. The leaders in turn take responsibility in disseminating information to their respective villages. During monthly meetings, the leaders collectively affirm their determination and plan their strategies and tactics to counter the plans of their political opponents. Regular consultations and tactical planning and assessments are held depending on the intensity of the day-to-day situation.

The organization chiefly relies on indigenous forms of communication to facilitate the flow of information throughout the hacienda and monitor the activities of enemies. Trusted couriers ensure that important messages between the chapter leaders are delivered safely and on time. Fish vendors and those who have to work in other villages serve as casual messengers and sources of information. This type of communication system becomes very handy when modern means of communicating with the national and provincial chapters fail, that is through an old Nokia cellular phone.

UMALPAS-KA also possesses simple "enterprise tools" (Smith, 1991) to facilitate its day-to-day activities. A ball pen, few pieces of paper, and a mobile meeting place are enough to formulate plans of action. It was only in August 2000 that the movement formally set up its office in Calayo to serve as the official meeting place and a reception area for visitors. Committees administer planned and emergency activities. A committee is comprised of several members or leaders who oversee the preparations, and they in turn appoint those who are free and willing to perform the task on hand. This explains an aspect of the political-organizational dynamics of UMALPAS-KA. The leaders and members not only rely on their formal organizational ties but equally on kinship or familial ties to organize actions and manage day-to-day affairs.

The organization gained support from other movements. The leaders realised that they needed external help to boost their campaign against powerful enemies. Gemo Bautista spearheaded the search. Through one of his cousins, they were able to contact a university that had been actively involved in social action since the 1980s. From here they were

put in contact with SENTRA (Center for Genuine Agrarian Reform), an NGO that provides legal and para-legal services to peasants.

In turn, SENTRA coordinated with the Public Interest Law Center (PILC), an established law firm, and PILC became the legal counsel for UMALPAS-KA. PILC also discussed the matter with the KMP. Consequently, the movement received organizational support from KMP and later became one of its local chapters. Finally, the KMP national office coordinated with its provincial and regional chapters in Southern Luzon endorsing UMALPAS-KA to SAMBAT (Batangas Peasant Movement) and KASAMA-TK (Association of Peasant Movements in Southern Luzon). The reinforcements provided by the larger support organizations helped the fledgling challenger become stronger.[12]

Provincial, regional, and national mobilizations are planned at their respective levels. Like other local organizations, UMALPAS-KA accommodates these broader plans in its own programme of action, but the decision to participate is taken locally and depends on local circumstances. Peasant leaders from the local, provincial, and regional chapters are consulted in the KMP national office for tactical briefings and last minute instructions on national events.

TRAINING AND ADVOCACY

The life-and-struggle of UMALPAS-KA is not simply "to expose and oppose" as many mainstream activists bemoan of radical social movements.[13] Engaging in concrete consciousness-raising activities constitutes an important building block of the organization for political action. In coordination with its network of peasants and other social forces, the leaders and members of the movement undergo popular and formal education and training. The leaders and members have taken several educational courses on Philippine society and its revolutionary tradition.

They begin with basic courses for peasants, fisherfolk, indigenous peoples, women, urban poor, and youth. These courses are taught and discussed by full-time peasant organizers and activists from the provincial and regional offices of SAMBAT and KASAMA-TK. At the intermediate level, they undergo a higher level of educational training by taking activist courses and studying revolutionary agrarian reform. These political courses are coupled with various training programs to develop the skills of the movement's leaders and members, such as mass campaigning and planning administration, instructors' training,

propaganda/speakers' training, para-legal training on agrarian cases and human rights, research and documentation, and the art of negotiation.

These activities are carried out to augment the movement's politics. The leaders and members collectively thresh out the learnings they have absorbed and translate them into political advocacy and action where the day-to-day battle of building influence and gaining support is fought. They won the support of other communities through painstaking and brain-drying discussions with barrio folks. They rallied support most effectively by demonstrating to other residents and villagers the disastrous impact of land conversion and by disclosing the real intent of government and real estate developers. They have brought their problems to public attention and created a dialogue among themselves and between peasant and non-peasant forces. They have likewise been exposed to the complexities of social and class analysis that have become a very useful tool in explaining their grievances and mustering local support.

Advocating a peasant discourse was the backbone of all consciousness-raising activities of UMALPAS-KA. One basic propaganda, for example, opens by asserting that "Hacienda Looc, just like the Philippines, is rich in resources but the (Filipino) people are poor". This fundamental statement is followed by a class analysis of Philippine society, emphasising the core contradiction between the ruling and the ruled classes, between oppressor and oppressed, exploiter and exploited. The peasants obviously belong to the ruled classes and comprise the majority of the population while the landlords and/or capitalists comprise the ruling class. This discourse epitomizes a basic propaganda line of the national democrats and the CPP-NPA. Movement members and leaders accept this discourse because it reflects the reality of Southern and Central Luzon's landlord-dominated society.[14]

The affirmation of collective identity and calls for collective political action are emphasized through various cultural media like songs, poems, and skits. Singing with the guitar and composing songs have become part of the daily life-and-struggle of the peasants. The song "Tano" (name of a peasant), for example, depicts how a peasant lost his land through usury and the tyranny of a haciendero (landlord). It shows how the peasant reacted to the situation by joining a peasant movement and ultimately the armed revolutionary movement.

In the office of UMALPAS-KA, the lyrics of the song "Buhay at Bukid" (Life and Farmland) is posted on the wall to constantly remind leaders and members of the exploitation that peasants experience. The

song states that someday the land and the farmers will be liberated with the workers as their partners, and that the people, not only the few, will reap the benefits from the land.

Another peasant song always played in gatherings and meetings is "Dapat Bawiin" (Reclaim!). It reasserts the principle that land is for the poor tillers and not for the rich and "we" have to reclaim it. Lastly, the song "Kamagong"[15] was adapted and renamed "Hacienda Looc" by the *culturati* of the movement to depict how government and real estate developers tried to grab their lands, and destroy their livelihood and the environment, and more importantly how the people of the hacienda fight to win back their land and life.

During mobilization and confrontation, the leaders and members never fail to chant slogans promoting their peasant identity and their unity as a class, and hence as a social force in society. Slogans with stirring rhymes state "the peasantry as a class is now fighting for liberation" and "the peasantry is a liberating social force". Gemo Bautista claims, "the peasant discourse, however, is always linked to the struggle of other social forces like the workers, indigenous peoples, urban poor, women, students, professionals, health and cultural workers, scientists, and even government employees".

Consequently, the movement has imbibed the political language and slogans of the national democratic movement, socialists, and communists: "no to imperialist globalization and plunder, oust US-Estrada regime,[16] and down with feudalism and bureaucrat-capitalism". For UMALPAS-KA members and the hacienda residents, however,

> [I]t may be part of a whole ideology and there's nothing wrong with it. We, as a movement, cannot just be docile but continually search for answers and explanations as to why is this thing happening to us. My son, Siting Derain declared, was a Philippine Army soldier and was killed in an ambuscade launched by the NPA. But that does not bother me. We are advancing a very legitimate struggle and in the final analysis, this ideology (Communist as they say) is a mere instrument to fight for our legitimate rights. After all, no one is more to be blamed but the government and greedy capitalists.[17]

CONFRONTATION

The road to organizational and political consolidation has not been easy and without bloodshed as the resolve and commitment of UMALPAS-KA was immediately tested. In December 1995, FEPI and

cohorts started bulldozing the 216-hectare entrance of Harbortown in the uplands of Calayo. In the second quarter of 1996, a second attempt to bulldoze was confronted by a spontaneous reaction from the movement. Instantaneously, twenty of its members rushed to the area and formed a human barricade.[18]

With rain pouring very hard, other members soon brought food, cooking utensils, shelter materials, and extra clothes. For three days and two nights, around fifty people camped out in the area to guard the mountain. With a little help from an acacia tree that unexplainably fell and blocked the path of the bulldozer, the operations were forced to stop. Consequently, all "development" activities of FEPI-MSDC ceased by the last quarter of the year.

This confrontation was just the beginning. After the successful human barricade, the movement and hacienda residents (especially from Calayo) started to experience both violent and non-violent harassment. Leaders were lured with money. Gemo was offered 1–3 million pesos directly by Mayor Apacible of Nasugbu. Today, the leader is being teased with a "name-your-price" bid. None, however, gave in to the economic coercion having learned from their experiences and others as well. Eventually, the iron fist was used to compel the farmers to vacate their lands.

The first salvo of harassment involved no fatalities. Leaders, members, and sympathizers were directly threatened with death, physically and verbally bullied around, and their houses stoned. A daily parade of armed men (village militia) and indiscriminate firing of guns put them under constant pressure. In 1946, FEPI allegedly created a parallel organization of peasants, SAMA-CA (Association of Peasants in Calayo or "Join!"), headed by the village captain. This pro-land conversion organization consisted of only around 150 members but was backed by an armed group of village militia and several migrant farmers and fisherfolk loyal to Limeta.[19]

Then harassment moved beyond intimidation. In December 1996, two SAMBAT peasant organizers were ambushed and killed by armed men believed to be MSDC security guards. Two months later, Francisco Marasigan and Maximo Carpinter (members of UMALPAS-KA) were gunned down by FEPI-MSDC security guards on the evening of 13 February 1997 in the village of Papaya. The guards were apprehended by the Nasugbu police but eventually released without trial. In November of the same year, another active member was brutally murdered by the same security force. And more than a year later, two more members, Terry Sevilla and Roger Alla, were likewise executed by armed men on

4 March 1999. Coming from a fiesta celebration, they were intercepted by "men in uniform" on their way home to Calayo.

The daunting presence of these armed goons and mercenary security guards, however, is not the only imminent danger that the residents of the hacienda have to live with. Since the land conflict, their once peaceful place has become militarized by the Armed Forces of the Philippines. Not a month passes in which the army or the police do not conduct reconnaissance operations in their villages. In May 1997, the hacienda was used as a training ground by a company of soldiers from the Regional Special Action Force. The villagers clearly recall that the place was never used as a military training ground in the past. And on 21 August 2000, at least sixty members of the Philippine Army conducted their usual reconnaissance in Hacienda Looc and concentrated their forces in the Calayo area for at least three days.

As a result of this violence, many of the peasants have ceased cultivation, and their economic status has deteriorated. Former middle peasants have become lower-middle or poor peasants, the lower-middle ones have become poor, and the poor even poorer.

The movement has survived five years of struggle mainly through credit. The members are in debt for tens of thousands of pesos. Yet they maintain that a lot more would be lost if they surrender their cause.[20] Donations from researchers, sympathizers, and supporters are far from sufficient.

The whole ordeal has created a dialogue between members, non-members, and the pro-conversion members who support the FEPI-MSDC project. It created bitter antagonisms between families who were ranged on different sides or caught in between the conflict.

Yet the leaders Philip de Guzman and Gemo Bautista stress that "we are able to demonstrate in theory and practice that the state and its apparatuses are there to defend the interests of the landlords and capitalists and that the only way to hold on to our lands is through a protracted struggle based on unity and militant collective action". As a result, several former members of the now-defunct SAMA-CA are already apologizing to the organization and more and more non-members are giving their sympathy and support to defend Hacienda Looc from government and real estate developers.

BEYOND LOCALITY

Violent harassment failed to shatter and silence the movement. The members and residents have seemingly become more politically aware,

determined, and militant as they have proven in practice the real intent of government and real estate developers. Every time FEPI-MSDC and government agencies make a move, the movement files petitions and counter-appeals to expose the unscrupulous manoeuvres.

On 3 March 1999, for instance, UMALPAS-KA made use of the radio station (ABS-CBN *6:30 News Flash* program) to expose the dredging activities in Maniba Creek, Balaytique and the adverse effects on the properties and crops of the residents. At the burial ceremony for two of the murdered members of the movement (Sevilla and Alla), they marched the streets of Calayo to expose and condemn such atrocities and tried to get the sympathy of the people. This was dubbed as the Calayo Death March.

On grounds that Nasugbu Mayor Raymund Apacible is as guilty as Max Limeta in the crimes committed against them, the movement took their protest to the municipality. In February 1997, hundreds of residents of Calayo marched to the town hall to condemn the harassment and the collaboration of local government agencies with FEPI-MSDC. On 25 March 2000, the movement members stormed into the municipal hall and the headquarters of Nasugbu Philippine National Police to protest the assassination of their comrades. And on 4 September 2000, the movement celebrated its fifth anniversary by engaging the municipal council in a 3-hour dialogue on their grievances. Leaders Nardo Sevilla and Poling Villanueva described this as a "reaffirmation that only death can make them give up and vacate their lands".

At the national level, UMALPAS-KA, in coordination with KMP, SAMBAT, and KASAMA-TK, has also conducted many pickets, demonstrations, camp-outs, and vigils in the offices of the Department of Agriculture (DAR) and the Supreme Court. In April 1997, the movement spearheaded a 3-day demonstration dubbed the DAR Camp-out. On 15 April, participating peasants burned copies of CARP books, land deeds, and Supreme Court and DAR decisions to condemn their pro-landlord and pro-developer stance. And on 16 April, the activity culminated in an action where peasant leaders and members locked the gates of DAR with an extraordinarily big padlock and fenced the gates with big bamboo shanks.

On 6 March 1997, protesters trooped through the streets of Ortigas, the central business district of Mandaluyong, and held a demonstration in front of the FEPI office, waving placards bearing the statements "Fil-Estate – Landgrabber, Murderer!!!" and "Hey, There's Blood On Your Stocks!". Over 14–17 April 1998, the movement joined with local[21] and

national[22] organizations to launch the "Oppressed Batangas Folks Manila Camp-Out" in front of DAR to highlight DAR's six years of nakedly pro-landlord decisions under the Ramos administration and Garilao bureaucracy. The 800-strong delegation condemned the massive cancellations of land deeds, land grabbing and scams, and human rights violations in Hacienda Looc, Hacienda Roxas, Patugo, Lian, Rosario, and San Juan.

In coordination with KMP, SENTRA, and PILC, the movement launched a national press conference on 17 August 2000. People from the broadcast and print media in Manila witnessed how the UMALPAS-KA is committed to the struggle. They published several articles in the newspapers and broadcast the grievances and experiences of the movement over radio.

One of the latest engagements of the movement in national protest actions was during the 2000 October Peasant Campaign. Together with other peasant organizations in Southern Luzon, UMALPAS-KA participated in the October 16 nationwide signature campaign against agro-chemical transnational corporations. On 28 October, the movement took part in the celebration of the Peasant Week by marching into Mendiola.[23] And on 28–30 November, the members took part in the People's Caravan 2000[24] that culminated with a demonstration and vigil in Mendiola.

The movement also presented its case at the international level. In 1998, Xavier Renard of Terres de Hommes (a French NGO) in coordination with KMP visited the Hacienda Looc peasants. After several days of living with them, he decided his organization would adopt this struggle for land reform as a major international campaign. Upon his return to France, a group of French NGOs and POs met to forge common actions and initiatives for Philippine concerns and the meeting led to the formation of the "Philippines Collective".[25] On 17 April, this grouping delivered a letter to the Philippine ambassador in Paris "questioning" the government's economic policies that have caused more hardships and misery to the peasants. The letter also expressed the support pledged by the French support organizations to the cause and demands advanced by the Hacienda Looc peasants.[26]

In the first week of August 2000, Filipino Americans living in the US went to Calayo. They represented the League of Filipino Students, Los Angeles chapter, New Patriotic Alliance (*Bagong Alyansang Makabayan*) International, and GABRIELA[27] International. Having learned of the movement's experiences, they launched a series of

educational and fund raising campaigns in December 2000 to gather support for the movement in the US.

In the same month, the hacienda was chosen as one of the sites of study for the International Fact Finding Mission conducted by international organizations such as La Via Campesina and Food First International to assess the state of agrarian reform in the Philippines and other parts of the world.[28] The occasion was a big eye opener. Members of the movement were simply overwhelmed by the fact that they are not alone in their struggle. Non-members were dumb-founded to witness the kind of support the organization is getting.

At the opening of the International Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development on 5 December 2000, UMALPAS-KA constituted 25 per cent of the 500-strong delegation that staged a demonstration in Tagaytay City to confront DAR Secretary Horacio Morales with their agrarian problems. The delegation was not permitted to enter the premises of the conference site and by the order of Morales, the security guards moved to disperse their formation. Negotiations ensued and three delegates intervened to avoid violent confrontation. The UNORKA (National Coordination of Local Autonomous Rural People's Organizations), however, was permitted to enter the premises because of its "pro-CARP" stand.

On 5 July 2000, the Office of the President affirmed the rights of FEPI-MSDC to develop the land. As a result, UMALPAS-KA and its network conceded that they may never win the battle within the formal-legal institutions of the state. They concluded that the use of extra-parliamentary and non-legal means should be intensified. This was clarified by a concluding remark at the movement's fifth anniversary:

> This is the land where our forefathers have lived through countless generations. Without any help from government, we have managed to develop and sustain our economic activities and live a happy peaceful life. This land is ours, our life. We are here because of the land and the land is here to be made productive and provide our necessities—not to fulfill the whims and caprices of the rich, landlords, real estate developers, and government. To take it away from us is synonymous to extinguishing the very basis of our existence. Hence, we rather die fighting and get buried in our lands and let future generations realize that their land has been purified and nurtured by valiant human blood and not with poisonous fertilizers used for fairways and greens.[29]

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CONCLUSION

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Peasant politics thrives in Philippine society. Movements may naturally grow old and perish (Ahrne, 1998: 91) but KMP has thus far withstood the test of time and disproved the peasant adage of 1980s— that there are two ways of killing an organization, with repression or with money (Edelmann, 1999: 188). The experiences of UMALPAS-KA and other peasant movements in Southeast Asia (Assembly of Small-scale Farmers of the Northeast, Assembly of the Poor, and the Federation of Northern Thai Farmers in Thailand) are testimony that peasant politics in Southeast Asian societies will continue to play a significant role in this age of globalization.

Civil society and oppositional peasant politics

At the base of UMALPAS-KA's oppositional peasant politics were three fundamental concepts: pedagogy, socialization, and organization. First, participants gained education both in the course of struggle, and from the deliberately pedagogical approach of the established radical movement organizations. As Chandhoke (1995: 34) puts it, "civil society possesses a pedagogic character since it educates the individual in the values of collective action". The pedagogic character of civil society thus rests on the capacity to construct or develop a particular kind of consciousness. Second, civil society is also "the sphere where the individual learns sociability, the value of group action, social solidarity, and the dependence of his welfare on others" (Pelczynski in Keane, 1988: 364). Socialization is a route to political mobilization. Through sociability and social action, actors develop a certain degree of collective self-confidence. Third, organization harnesses individual interests into a broader collective will and transforms individual initiatives into collective action. To challenge powerful structures and processes naturally necessitates a significant degree of unity. A challenger movement like UMALPAS-KA builds a strong civil society by educating, socializing and organizing.

Local struggles as the nucleus of opposition

Struggles at the local level are the "microfoundations that transform individual agents into a collective actor that can engage in social activism" (Buechler, 2000: 149). This level is likewise the site where oppositional movements directly encounter and contest the exercise of power by the state and dominant forces. Local peasant struggles are a

critical representation of bigger agrarian and social processes.

Local peasant struggles are the basis of KMP's oppositional politics. These struggles, however, may always be perceived as insignificant and parochial, and easily dismissed as isolated cases of rural unrest if their cause and nature are not projected and elevated at the national level. This is where the role of national organizations comes in. KMP with its affiliate national organizations transformed the local struggle of UMALPAS-KA into national opposition, a broader and higher level of contestation. National opposition also demonstrates how local opposition is reciprocated by national actions and vice versa. At the local level KMP is able to confront its political opponents face-to-face through UMALPAS-KA, while at the national level the movement confronts the source of policies that engender local conflicts. By participating at the national level, local peasant movements are able to compare their experiences and learn from each other.

The oppositional politics of KMP is not confined within the local and national socio-historical structures. Beyond these, a larger and still broader formation exists. Under globalization, nations, countries, and societies begin to realise the interconnections of their concerns and problems. KMP's international linkages add an international dimension to the local and national peasant struggles of the movement. Local contestation is linked to global processes and structures, and vice versa. Projecting a local peasant struggle to the international level and contesting the dominance of international structures becomes a way to advance local and national peasant interests.

At the local level, the failure of real estate developers and government to evict the residents of Hacienda Looc and convert it into a tourist spot concretely manifested how national policies could be resisted. Through direct action UMALPAS-KA challenged and defied the Philippine state and big business and all their apparatuses—FEPI-MSDC, the military and police, the national, regional, and local agencies of DAR, the Supreme Court, and the Office of the President.

Ideology

It is very tempting to dismiss the role of ideologies in analyzing present day movements. "Ideology has become an orphan in social movement theory" (Buechler, 2000: 200). Yet some of the most thriving movements in the present day are intensely ideological. The struggle of UMALPAS-KA demonstrated how the development of an insurgent consciousness and the belief in a programme for national liberation

helped its leaders and members persevere and retain control of their lands.

KMP thrives through class politics. The movement addresses peasant concerns and grievances, directly and indirectly, through class-based organizing, mobilization, and pedagogy. Ideology remains important not only in the emergence and development of contemporary social movements and civil society but in their analysis as well.[30] Ideology has not vanished in Philippine politics and society, and in others as well.

Notes

[1] This paper draws on my dissertation "KMP (Peasant Movement of the Philippines): Strengthening Civil Society through Oppositional Peasant Politics". Sections of this paper have also been presented in two international conferences, see Jimenez (2001; 2002).

[2] Starn (1992: 91) states that "peasant mobilisation has received little attention in the literature on new social movements" and notes the "greater visibility of urban politics" in the work of Touraine, Gilroy, Laclau and Mouffe. Buechler (2000: 45–51) considers Castells, Touraine, Habermas, and Melucci as the four major theorists of this paradigm.

[3] Ananias Loza of PAKISAMA (a member organization of Agrarian Reform Now!) wrote to Franco that AR-Now! is not pro-CARP, not anti-Morales, and not anti-ERAP, but acknowledges the serious limitations of CARP and has always maintained a "critical engagement" position vis-à-vis government. *See* Political Brief, December 1999, Letters: 21–3.

[4] Hewison (1997: 10) critically observes that "constestation is not always a challenge to the state especially where an expanded political space is considered a legitimate part of political activity".

[5] Interviews with KMP leaders, Rafael Mariano and Danilo Ramos, 17 August 2000.

[6] Interview with Danilo Ramos (KMP President), 28-30 November 2000.

[7] For the background see OPP (2000); PILC (2000); KMP's website, http://www.geocities.com/kmp_ph/strug/looc/looc.html; and UMALPAS-KA etc (2000).

[8] Based on 1999 population of 72.7 million. In 1999, the poor population comprised about 36.8 per cent of the total population or 26.8 out of 72.7 million (1999 Philippine Statistical Yearbook, NCSB: 2–25).

[9] Philippine Peasant Institute (PPI) (1993: 4–5); Flores (1994: 6–7); IRDF, RMP, and SENTRA (1994); SENTRA (1997); ACSPPA-IDR-KAS (1997: 32–8); PIAF (1998); Kelly (1998); KMP (2000).

[10] The DAR presented hundreds of signatures as evidence. These signatures were collected in a meeting of residents from the four villages called by then Mayor Rosario Apacible (mother of incumbent Mayor Raymund Apacible) in July 1995.

The residents did not know their signatures would later be used as an evidence that they have waived their land rights. In front of the Lipa City DAR officials, the mayor told the people not to sell their land deeds during the meeting. Ironically, payments for the sale of land deeds were transacted in the Mayor's house. Instalment payments ranged from P5 to P30 thousand (see the PILC Petition to the Court of Appeals, 4 September 2000: 50).

[11] Prices ranged from P 80,000 to P100,000 per hectare and for two years many plots were bought by government officials from the village up to the regional level, including the village head and the Mayor. Details cannot be determined. What made them suspicious was the mode of payment. Villagers were given cash advances in instalments. The first payment for example was 10 per cent of the offered value and amounted to P10,000. As a cash advance, this automatically became a loan to the peasants with interest compounded monthly. The second payment was not so straightforward. The peasants were ridiculed and even slapped in their faces. Hence, almost none of them was really paid the right price for their land (Interviews with Calayo and Looc residents and those who transacted with the Mayor, August 2000).

[12] UMALPAS-KA, however, was likewise affected by the latest split within the revolutionary movement. In 1997, the Jose Magdangal faction known as *Kilusan para sa Pambansang Demokrasya* (KPD, Movement for National Democracy) declared its independence from the CPP-NPA. Unknown to them and to the KMP, peasant organizers and leaders Frank Pascual and Ed Mora of the national office belong to this faction. In December 1998, UMALPAS-KA started to notice major changes in planning and conducting mobilization activities. Organizers Ana and Abel (faction members) later succeeded in convincing four members of the *Samahan ng Nagkakaisang Kabataan sa* Calayo (Association of United Youth in Calayo), the youth arm of the movement. On the other hand, Gemo Bautista, the first one to notice that there was something going on, talked to the leaders and was able to win back the youth members who eventually changed the name of their organization (Interviews with Calayo youth activists, August 2000).

[13] As Tarrow (1998: 3) said, "social movements do not solely contend… they build organisations, elaborate on ideologies, socialize and mobilize constituencies, and members engage in self-development and the construction of collective identities".

[14] Landholdings in Southern Luzon are concentrated in the hands of fifty-three landlords/corporations who control at least 276,410 hectares (see KASAMA-TK Manifesto, "Landlords in Southern Luzon": 1–2). In Central Luzon (Bulacan, Tarlac, and Nueva Ecija), land is concentrated in the hands of thirty-nine landlords/corporations who control at least 70,876 hectares (see AMGL – Central Luzon Peasant Alliance) "Manifesto on Landlessness", 1998).

[15] This song was created in 1988 by the Gintong Silahis Cultural Band, an armed cultural group in Southern Luzon. It recounts the experiences of Kamagong villagers in the 1960s when they reclaimed their land from a despotic landlord named Platon through armed means (Personal communications with former members, 1989).

[16] National democratic forces believe that the Estrada administration is just another lackey of the US government. This formulation has been consistently used

since the Marcos regime without qualification. Others would say that it is already archaic.

[17] This was the determined reaction of three peasant women in Calayo when they heard about the July 2000 decision of the Office of the President. This opinion is similar with the perception of Atty. Dominique Misa saying that "it should not be allowed to muddle the true purpose of their campaign. Ideology is just a means, a tool to get whatever they want to achieve" (CyberDyaro September 1999).

[18] The barricade was the initiative of UMALPAS-KA and only later (on the second day) did KMP (national office) and SAMBAT (provincial office) come to know of the situation.

[19] This private army has at least fifteen high-powered rifles (M-16, M-14, baby armalite, shotguns, M-1 Carbine, M-1 Garand, Springfield, and Uzi) and around eight to ten short firearms (caliber .22, .38, .45, and 9 mm). Conrado Sevilla knows their fire power because he was likewise victimized by their atrocities. On 9 June 1999, these goons (as the people have learned to call them) entered his house by force and threatened to shoot and kill him together with his daughter Nenet. The para-military group is further supported by the 134-strong FEPI-MSDC security unit in the hacienda. The people simply ask one question: Where do they get their firearms?

[20] Rutten (2000: 215–52) refers to this practice as high-cost activism.

[21] DAMBA, the Association of Farm Workers in Batangas; HABAGAT, the Foundation of Batangeño Fisherfolks (Batangeño means people from the province of Batangas); and KMMLT, the Small Fisherfolks Movement in Lake Taal.

[22] SAMBAT, KASAMA-TK, and KMP.

[23] Mendiola refers to the historical place where activists march and demonstrate their disappointment and resentment with government. It is the place where Malacañang, the office of the President, is located.

[24] The campaign, "Caravan 2000: land and food without poisons" was an international and national mass mobilization, education, and direct action to demonstrate how poor countries stand against (imperialist) globalization. In particular, it was a protest against the domination and control of TNCs over their lives and the disastrous effects of pesticides, agricultural genetic engineering, land conversion, food insecurity, and environmental destruction. Similar activities were held in India, Bangladesh, Japan, Korea, and Indonesia.

[25] The collective is comprised of FIAN, Femmes de Changements, Terres de Hommes, CGT, AUI, Transverses, Ligne d'Horizon, Frères de Hommes, and the Association de Coopération et de Solidarité Internationale (KMP, 1998).

[26] See also Philippine Peasant Update, June 1998: 5, "French partners pledge support for Looc peasants". KMP Research Desk: Quezon City.

[27] National Alliance of Women's Organizations in the Philippines.

[28] La Via Campesina (LVC) is an international movement of small and middle peasants, agricultural workers, rural women and indigenous people in more than sixty-three countries in the Americas, Asia, Africa, and Europe. The main aim of LVC is to develop the solidarity and unity in diversity between rural organizations in order to promote economic relations based on equality and justice, the defense of

their lands, food sovereignty, and a sustainable agriculture based on small and middle producers, http://ns.rds.org.hn/via/what-is.htm; http://ns.rds.org.hn/via/theme-agrarian.htm. Foodfirst Informations and Actions Network (FIAN) is an international human rights organization working for the right to feed oneself and with members in more than fity countries. FIAN aims to contribute in the implementation of International Bill of Human Rights. It works in particular for the right to feed oneself of persons and groups threatened by hunger and malnutrition (http://www.fian.org/).

[29] General consensus of the UMALPAS-KA Leaders' Council held in the first week of September, firmly supported by its members during the celebration of the movement's fifth anniversary.

[30] As Buechler (2000: 200) aptly puts it, "the social movement theory of the 'end of ideology' is premature, and it limits our ability to conceptualise the larger role of ideas in social activism".

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NGOs Organizing Cooperatives: The Philippine Experience

Teresa S. Encarnacion Tadem

ABSTRACT

Pre-1986 Philippine governments promoted cooperatives as an anti-communist strategy but were unable to make them viable. After the People Power Revolusion of 1986, Left activists promoted cooperatives through NGOs to achieve social justice. Buscayno organized at the grassroots with support from the Aquino Administration. Morales worked at the centre to change the environment for cooperatives by legislation and budget support. The cooperative movement expanded rapidly, but faced huge problems: competition from rice cartels, mismanagement, natural disasters, the temptation for farmers to sell land to real estate developers, and shifts in political patronage. Despite these challenges, the movement continues to grow.

INTRODUCTION

During the post-Marcos period, members of the Philippine Left, i.e., the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP), its united front organization, the National Democratic Front (NDF) and the New People's Army (NPA) found important expression in NGO work, particularly development work. This was viewed as an integral part of a larger progressive movement that aims to relieve problems of inequality and injustice at the grassroots when neither militant anti-government struggle nor nationwide and substantial reforms seem likely avenues for change. Development NGOs emerged which were independent of the old political formations and which strengthened their ties with mass communities and people's organizations (CPD, 1991: 13).

In the Philippine Left experience, development work has always been viewed as secondary to the armed struggle. There were, however, NDF mass organizations which believed that the socio-economic projects these organizations were setting up and implementing had a crucial role

in the movement, and that economic assistance should be channelled to these livelihood schemes rather than be used for buying arms. This view gained further prominence with the split of the CPP in the 1992 which

> encouraged disgruntled national democratic groups to enter into new political spaces which were being explored by the left groups which emerged during the downfall of the Marcos dictatorship. National democratic activists either chose to join these other left formations or create new ones (Rocamora, 1993).

One of the more popular avenues for change was development work through NGOs. These NGOs provided these left activists with an opportunity to continue "serving the masses" through the implementation of economic projects, particularly in the countryside. This was most welcomed, especially by war-weary NPA communities, who wanted to focus on improving their economic conditions. Development work through NGOs provided a venue for harnessing what the Left perceived as the "middle forces" which fought against the Marcos dictatorship. It also allowed the integration of "new politics" issues such as environment and gender which appealed to the middle class. Thus, a broad coalition alliance was made possible through NGO development work.

One of the more popular vehicles through which NGOs have sought to attain their objectives is the cooperative movement. This was most particularly seen during the post-Marcos period. After the 1986 People Power Revolution, NGO-assisted cooperatives increased from an average of four cooperatives per NGO in 1988 to five cooperatives per NGO in 1990 (San Pascual, 1991: 3). The rebirth of cooperatives during the post-Marcos period is not attributed to government but to people's initiatives mainly through NGOs and people's organizations. Although the average growth rate of cooperatives from 1981 to 1985 was 0.05% (*Angkoop*, 1993: 27), official figures reveal that there was a significant 125% increase of cooperatives in the country from 1985 to 1990 (PSSR, 1992: 105). For 2000, Cooperative Development Agency (CDA) statistics show that there are 57,470 registered cooperatives with at least a membership of 5 million individuals as compared to 1990, when there were only 212 cooperatives. The most popular of these cooperatives are the multi-purpose agricultural cooperatives which increased from 134 in 1990 to 32,574 in 2000. Agriculture multi-purpose cooperatives (AMCs), constitute 57 percent of the total cooperatives in 1997. A far second in number, amounting to only 28 percent of the total cooperatives are the non-agricultural multi-purpose cooperatives (CDA, 2001).

This paper discusses the challenges confronted by NGOs in cooperative organizing as experienced by two former leading personalities of the Left: Horacio "Boy" Morales, former NDF head, and Bernabe "Dante" Buscayno, founder of NPA. Both Buscayno and Morales used NGOs to establish cooperatives in various parts of the country. The paper will look into the initiatives they have taken in reviving a dormant cooperative movement into a vehicle of economic empowerment for thousands of Filipino farmers. More importantly, it will look into the successes as well as the obstacles in using the cooperative not only as a vehicle for popular empowerment but also for furthering development and democratization.

BACKGROUND ON THE PHILIPPINE COOPERATIVE MOVEMENT

The importance of NGO development work in the cooperative sector is best seen in the light of the failure of the government's agenda, particularly in its attempt to use this rural organization as an antidote for peasant unrest.

The Philippine peasantry grew increasingly disillusioned with the local elite who promised them land in return for their support during the Philippine revolution of 1896 and the Philippine American War of 1898. Sporadic uprisings broke out in the 1920s and the 1930s. The deterioration of the world economy adversely affected the country's export crops. With the decline of the prices of these commodities, peasants were evicted from their homes and land, while those who continued working became heavily indebted (Constantino, 1975: 359).

After 1950, the government attempted to pacify the peasants by resuscitating cooperatives (among other measures). The first government cooperative programmes in 1953 were established in the bastions of the *Hukbong Mapagpalaya ng Bayan* (HMB), the armed communist guerrilla movement of the old Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP), generally referred to as the *Partido Komunista ng Pilipinas* (PKP) (Constantino, 1975: 359). The Agricultural Credit and Cooperative Financing Administration (ACCFA) and Cooperative Financing Administration were created to organize farmers into Farmer's Cooperative Marketing Associations (FACOMAs) and to lend farmer members credit through such associations.

This cooperative experiment was, however, besieged with problems, including the slow development of the cooperative principle of capitalization by the savings of members. FACOMAs also became

highly politicized as they were used as stepping stones to local political office. Thus, the economic functions of the cooperative movement were constantly threatened. A survey done by US-based Arthur D. Little Inc., a firm of economic consultants, revealed that there was an extensive mismanagement of both the FACOMAs and the ACCFA. Of P86 million of outstanding ACCFA loans at the end of 1958, two-thirds, or P57 million were left unpaid. The blame was placed on the rampant graft and corruption occurring in these two government agencies, made possible by an inadequate accounting system and incompetence or gross negligence due to complacency (Golay, 1961: 288–9).

Despite this dismal performance during the pre-martial law period, former President Ferdinand Marcos saw the value of the cooperatives when he declared martial law in 1972. The government's cooperative policy was subsumed within the administration's land reform policy as stipulated by Presidential Decree (PD) No. 2 issued on 26 September 1972 declaring the entire country a land reform area. On 21 October 1972, Marcos promulgated PD 27 emancipating the tiller from bondage. PD 27 aimed to transform tenants in rice and corn areas into owners of the land they were tilling by allowing tenants to purchase their farmlands on instalment. This decree required that all agrarian reform beneficiaries must become members of a farmers' cooperative known as the *Samahan Nayon* (SN). Marcos saw the cooperative replacing the landlord. The Code of Agrarian Reform (R.A. 6389) passed in 1971 sought to "establish cooperative cultivatorship among those who live and work on the land as tillers" and to "create a truly viable social and economic structure conducive to greater productivity and higher farm incomes through a cooperative system of production, processing, marketing, distribution, credit and services" (Golez et al., 1987: 132). The SN was basically a "body corporate composed primarily of small farmers residing and/or farming within the geographical limits of barrio (village) for the purpose of improving the quality of life of the people" (Quintana, 198: 134).

Like the cooperatives during the pre-martial law period, the *Samahan Nayon* did not perform up to par. A study by the University of the Philippines, Los Banos revealed that only 40 percent of the SN members considered the programme a success while 11 percent said it was a failure and the rest viewed the programme as making no big difference (Terso, 1989: 57–9). A study commissioned by the Cooperative Foundation of the Philippines Inc. (CFPI)found the foremost obstacle to cooperative success was the inability of the Barangay Guarantee Fund

(BGF), which was supposed to provide the initial capital to organize an area marketing cooperative (AMC), to pay for the liabilities of defaulting members. It became apparent that the major reason why farmers became members of the SN was because membership was a condition for the issuance of the Certificate of Land Transfer (CLT). SN members were not interested in the Barrio Savings Fund (BSF), whereby an SN member was required to contribute a membership fee of P10,000 (US$200) and annual dues of P5.00 (US$0.10) to the SN general fund. The reason for this disinterest is that the loan which the farmers were paying to the BSF did not go to production (Terso, 1989: 57–9). The same problem applied to the BGF, to which every SN member (even those who did not benefit from agrarian reform) was supposed to contribute one cavan of *palay* (unhusked rice) per hectare per harvest (or its equivalent in cash). It was difficult to convince the SN members to contribute to the BGF when they got no benefit in return. The farmer cooperative marketing associations (FACOMAs) also had problems of mismanagement. The professional managers who were trained to run these did not perform well (Terso, 1989: 57–9).

Studies have also shown that the weakness of the *Samahan Nayons* could be partly blamed on the cooperative education and training which was often not relevant to the needs of the cooperatives and their members (Rola, 1989: 73). There was also a lack of dedicated leaders. Several of them did not attend to their duties because they were preoccupied with their work at home or in the office (Rola, 1989: 73). The SN members were also to blame for the failure of the cooperative as they were mainly motivated by self-interest. Studies revealed that an overwhelming majority of the members considered it an honour to be an SN member and they perceived significant benefits to be derived from joining the organization. Thus, the members were more keen to get something out of the organization rather than to give it their time and effort (Quintana, 1989: 135).

Another major obstacle to the success of the cooperative movement was the failure of government to effectively implement a land reform programme. Although the Marcos government's PD 27, which subjected the landlord's rice and corn lands exceeding seven hectares to land reform and distribution to tenant-beneficiaries, was seen as a great improvement over previous laws, the structure of social inequality continued to prevail. Cooperatives were also tied to rural banks, commonly known to be owned and managed by landowning families (Po, 1980: 87). The government's model of development cooperatives

assumed that rural communities were pluralistic and that all social classes had an equal chance to participate in the local economy. The reality, however, was that 70 percent of the population lived in rural areas and 80 percent of land was controlled by a small elite. Even the government-sponsored cooperatives were dominated and controlled by rich landlords. Tenant farmers and landless agricultural workers were often excluded from these programmes because they did not have the necessary collateral for loans (Kabalikat, 1990: 1, 4).

NGO CONCERNS IN COOPERATIVE DEVELOPMENT

Despite the dismal failure of the cooperative movement, two leading personalities of the Left movement embarked on their own cooperative ventures through NGOs. Horacio "Boy" Morales used the Cooperative Foundation of the Philippines Inc. (CFPI), a quasi-government agency where he was Executive Director, to launch a national advocacy campaign for a better environment for cooperative organizing as well as to organize cooperatives all over the country. Bernabe "Commander Dante" Buscayno, on the other hand, established his own NGO, the People's Livelihood Foundation (PLF), to focus on cooperative organizing in his hometown province, Tarlac, where he had earlier organized the New People's Army. Both Morales and Buscayno adopted development principles which the NGO movement had been utilizing in their previous economic projects.

Morales saw CFPI as a vehicle for improving the socio-economic conditions of the people in a just and democratic environment. He believed improvement was was only possible when the people had equal and direct access to and control over political and economic power for sustainable development. It is within this context that the CFPI sought to promote, organize, and develop cooperatives for the poor as instruments for social justice and people empowerment (Teh, 1990: 6). As pointed out by Morales, "any program … for social justice and economic development must contain a strategy which would reverse the concentration … of wealth, power and resources in our society" (Kabalikat, 1990: 5).

Morales viewed self-reliance and self-management as key strategies of people empowerment to transfer economic and political power at the community level to those outside the power enclave. He pointed out that there was a need for structural change in "the effective control, access, or ownership of key resources such as land or facilities through a

redistributive process" (DRS, 1988: 36).

NGOs generally believed that if people were actively engaged in the conceptualization and implementation of economic projects, they would not only take these seriously but more importantly, they would have the political will to attain their goals. Government-initiated cooperatives failed because the members were not involved in the organization's decision-making process, much of the planning was left in the hands of the state and its technocrats, and the farmers were merely the recipients of cooperative "benefits". Worse, the farmers were even forced to join these cooperatives as in the case of the agrarian reform beneficiaries of the martial law regime's *Samahan Nayon* programme. Thus, for Buscayno, the major players in the cooperative experience would have to be the members who would address problems and formulate solutions based on their analysis of their own situation (Buscayno, 1990).

Morales argued that provincial federations of people's organizations should be created to take on the responsibility of nmaking provincial development plans (Morales, 1990: 10). Buscayno argued that popular participation was not only limited to the organization but was also concerned with intervening in societal problems that impinged on its members and the larger community (Buscayno, 1990).

Buscayno also emphasized the leadership aspect. He contended that the leader must not only understand personal interests but should be able to link this with the society's general welfare. Aside from the cooperative organizer and manager, a core of leaders had to be developed to link the economic venture with external developments specifically in the immediate community and in the country as a whole (Buscayno, 1990).

NGOs also noted that these educational programmes are not only technical but more importantly, political. NGOs wanted to make the people aware of sources of potential opposition to their economic projects, including agrarian reform. Thus, NGOs also carried out educational programmes about re-organizing tenurial relations and resisting to land usurpation. To strengthen themselves as a force to be reckoned with in Philippine society, NGOs have found it necessary to form alliances to push for their development agenda. Working together with people's organizations, NGOs have forged broad coalition fronts which might not have been possible on an inter-ideological basis. Thus, a united front of the progressive movement based on political and socio-economic issues raised by NGOs/POs has been the mode of coalition politics. CFPI's function was to build cooperatives to handle socio-

economic activities and community organizations to take care of the basic needs of society's marginalized sectors. These organizations were intended to form the basis of power in the community through political structures, such as people's councils, which would interact with the government (DRS, 1988, 36).

The 1986 People Power Revolution also inspired sectors of the mainstream Left to focus on the use of "legal" as well as "extra-legal" means to preserve as well as enlarge the "democratic space". NGOs joined in the electoral game to pursue their cooperative development goals. Although these organizations generally view elections as the game of the politico-economic elite, they also see the electoral arena as an avenue for bringing about change to cooperative policies, as well as a chance to conscienticize the populace on issues such as cooperative development. The NGO movement's solidarity has allowed it to engage the government in the development discourse on cooperatives. More state agencies now rely on these organizations to carry out economic projects at the grassroots level. It is not rare for NGOs to carry out cooperative pre-membership seminars which are generally the task of the state.

NGOs have also initiated economic projects among marginalized communities. They pay attention to the cooperative members' capability to generate their own capital and not to rely on outside loans. The experience of cooperative both before and during the martial law period showed that there were little savings generated by the members. NGOs have blamed the past record of mismanagement on the inadequacy and ineffectiveness of government training programmes. They argue for proper cooperative education, including pre-membership seminars for cooperatives as well as follow-up seminars.

IMPLEMENTING THE VISION THROUGH NGO-GOVERNMENT COOPERATION

Buscayno's People's Livelihood Foundation (PLF) was registered with the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) as a foundation in August 1988. The initial membership was 506 farmers. By April 1990, the Tarlac Integrated Livelihood Cooperative (TILCO), a spin-off from the PLF, was formed and registered with the Cooperative Development Agency (CDA), a newly formed government cooperative regulatory body. Buscayno chose to tap government resources in terms of credit, infrastructure, and technological resources (Buscayno, 1990). PLF's strategy was NGO-government cooperation.

This was possible because Buscayno had earlier allied with Benigno Aquino in opposition to Marcos, and the late Benigno's wife, Corazon C. Aquino, had now become the nation's president. PLF was able to gain access to the resources of various government agencies which knew that this was a presidential pet project. Thus, the Department of Agriculture (DA), the Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR), the National Irrigation Authority (NIA), the Technology and Livelihood Resource Center (TLRC), the Land Bank of the Philippines (LBP), and other line agencies coordinated with one another in giving assistance.

The TLRC provided the technical training and skills for cooperative members while the LBP loaned money to the farmers at a low interest rate (12 percent a year). Because of the loan from the Land Bank, the farmers were spared from going to usurers who charged as much as 10 to 15 per cent interest a month on loans in cash or kind such as production inputs like fertilizers and pesticides. A farmer commented that the usurers had actually taken the place of the landlords (Encarnacion, 1993). With the training which the farmers received from the TLRC as well as from the Department of Agriculture, the farmers were able to increase their yield from 40 to 80 cavans of rice per season which was usually twice-a-year.

The cooperative members also welcomed the luxury of having their agricultural inputs such as fertilizers, seedlings and pesticides, delivered to them by the cooperative. The construction of farm-to-market roads in the various PLF *barangays* (the smallest political unit in the country) and the establishment of post-harvest facilities such as warehousing, drying, milling, grading and marketing at the heart of the PLF areas made it easier for farmers to market their produce and at the same time fetch a higher price. Dry *palay* (unhusked rice) fetches a higher price as compared to wet *palay*. In the process, the farmers also learned the intricacies of grains trading.

These cooperative schemes were aimed to prevent the farmers from falling prey to the adverse socio-economic forces in the Philippine agrarian sector. Middleman traders usually buy from the producer at a low price and sell to the consumer at a high price. They are accused of being rice hoarders. They control 22 percent of the inventory of the rice stocks sold in MetroManila alone (Romero, 1995: 6). They have also been known to assume the role of usurers who farmers run to when in need. They work closely with the country's rice cartels which currently control 90 percent of the *palay* and rice trading in the country through around 22,000 rice dealers. The biggest rice cartel is part of the so-called

"Binondo cartel" which is run by Filipino-Chinese rice traders (*AngKoop*, 1989).

Government assistance to the cooperatives immediately had tangible results. In October 1988, the PLF was formally launched in six *barangays* in Capas, where Buscayno earlier had organized the NPA. There were fifty farmer-beneficiaries tilling an area of 1,019 hectares of rice and averaging about 0.5 to 2 hectares each. In less than two years, the total number of regular active members jumped to 3,911 tilling approximately 8,000 hectares of farm land. And by 24 April 1990, the cooperative had 4,933 regular active members tilling approximately 10,312 hectares of land. From the original sixteen employees in 1988, the number reached its peak of 197 in March 1991 (PLF-TILCO, 1991). PLF expanded from a primary-purpose cooperative producing rice into a multi-purpose one with activities ranging from rice marketing to reforestation.

IMPLEMENTING THE VISION THROUGH POLITICAL ADVOCACY

Morales' CFPI did not rely on government assistance but on external sources, mainly Dutch NGOs such as the Inter-Church Coordination Committee for Development Projects (ICCO) and the Catholic Organization for Development Cooperation (CEBEMO). Unlike the PLF, the CFPI chose to pursue its cooperative struggle at the national level. Its primary job, pursued during 1986–7, was to demand a new cooperative code.

After the 1986 People Power revolution, the Aquino Administration appointed Morales as the head of a newly established task force to assess the role which cooperatives could play under the new political dispensation. In May 1986, the task force recommended the "inclusion of a provision on state policy concerning cooperatives in the proposed constitution, rationalization of various laws pertaining to cooperatives and the integration of the disparate functions by different government agencies concerned with cooperatives under one agency" (Gaffud, 1990: 29).

CFPI's efforts, together with those of the cooperative movement's members, bore fruit on 10 March 1990 when two new laws on cooperatives were promulgated. The Republic Act (R.A.) 6938, known as the Cooperative Code of the Philippines, created an organic law for cooperatives and R.A. 6939 established the Cooperative Development Authority (CDA) as the government agency to implement the

Cooperative Code. The CDA seeks to "foster and promote the growth and viability of cooperatives among people of limited means" with the objectives of "harnessing people power, assuring their self-reliance and nurturing their economic well-being towards the establishment of a just and equitable society" (CDA Primer, n.d.).

Despite the implementation of a new cooperative code, CFPI together with the other cooperative sector's members continued to lobby for more government support in the areas of financing and access to capital for cooperatives, infrastructural support, the creation of a favourable marketing environment for these organizations and the formalization and institutionalization of the cooperative movement (Gaffud, 1990a). CFPI also believed that it had a role to play in cooperative training, working in alliance with government agencies (CDA, DA, and LBP).

CFPI pursued political advocacy not only at the national level, but also at the local level. The CFPI recognized there were social forces opposed to the cooperatives. For example, in the CFPI-organized *Kaunlaran* Multi-Purpose Cooperative Inc. (MPCI), former landowners attempted to regain their former land from cooperative members who had benefited from agrarian reform. The landowners filed a case against five members of the cooperative claiming that the land distributed to these five farmers was not supposed to be subject to agrarian reform (this was a common strategy by landowners). The CFPI, realizing that the ownership of land was the very basis of the farmers' membership in the cooperative, sought the assistance of the Partnership for Agrarian Reform and Rural Development Services (PARRDS), an alliance of NGOs engaged in assisting farmers over issues of agrarian reform and rural development.

Together with PARRDS, the CFPI informed the farmers of their rights. They also organized meetings with the municipal agrarian reform officer (MARO) and the provincial agrarian reform officer (PARO) concerning the landowners' harassment cases against the farmers. PARRDS also provided lawyers for the farmerss, and raised the harassment issue at their forums with PARO. These forums generally seeks to pinpoint trouble spots in the government's agrarian reform programme, and more importantly, to take action. Former DAR Secretary Ernesto Garilao repeatedly expressed his appreciation for the NGOs' efforts as DAR needed NGO support against powerful landowners.

CHALLENGES TO CONFRONT

The CFPI and the PLF have adopted apparently contrasting strategies in the attainment of their cooperative vision. In the case of the PLF, the approach is very localized with massive government assistance. In the case of the CFPI, the focus is on political advocacy for a better cooperative environment at the national and local level. What the PLF and the CFPI share in common, however, is the need for government assistance in the cooperative venture—specifically, the need for government agencies to assist cooperatives to do their jobs. This emphasis, however, is double-edged. The PLF became too dependent on government assistance. Thus, when Aquino was no longer president, the NGO did not get the same assistance from the Ramos Administration, despite the fact that Ramos himself openly advocated cooperative development. Buscayno had supported another candidate rather than Ramos for the presidency. Thus, government support for cooperatives also brings in political patronage.

The challenge is to seek government assistance that will not lead to dependence. It is a reality that cooperatives need government support. One of CFPI's cooperatives, the *Bakabakahan* Multipurpose Cooperative Inc. (MPCI), collapsed because the members decided to sell their land for P1 million pesos (US$2,000) to real estate developers. The farmers argued that they were not earning enough from their land, despite being organized into a cooperative, because of the absence of government support.

Both the PLF and CFPI-assisted cooperatives had a difficult time marketing their *palay* harvest because of the existence of the rice cartels and the middle traders whose network for *palay* selling had been established for decades. They could easily dictate the price of rice. The government National Food Authority (NFA), which is tasked to buy *palay* from farmers, was unable to do its job. As pointed out from 1990–1994, the agency has failed to meet its procurement target of *palay* which is needed to stabilize the price of rice in the market. The alternative trading marketing association organized by CFPI to link the producers directly to the consumers, was unable to eliminate the middlemen and rice cartels who control the *palay* buying and selling. The PLF viewed this as the government's failure to provide an alternative marketing arm which can go against the monopoly of the country's rice cartels. When the PLF farmers could not pay their debts, they went back to the usurers and middle traders who offered loans at usurious rates.

There is also the reality that the agricultural sector is high risk. The ashfall from the eruption of Mt. Pinatubo in 1991 dried up the irrigation system of PLF cooperative members. Some farmers shifted to shift to sugarcane planting because this required less water. But the PLF farmers in general could no longer pay back their loans leading to a massive default. The PLF had to borrow P42 million (US$823,529.00)from the Land Bank.

There were also internal factors which hindered the success of the cooperative. The PLF suffers from problems of mismanagement similar to those of previous state-initiated cooperative ventures. Because of the massive amount of government assistance, PLF expanded too rapidly. The loan from the Land Bank was used to finance new projects but the returns were not enough to pay back the farmers' loans, leading to massive default. The rapid expansion of the cooperative also led to inefficient loan collections. Cooperative collectors tasked with collecting loans from farmers absconded with the money. As Buscayno noted, there was really a need to professionalize the running of the cooperative.

Another problem was leadership. There was a tendency of the PLF farmers to perceive Buscayno as their patron because through him the organization was able to access government resources. In the CFPI's Tarcan Mulawin MCPI, on the other hand, Morales was deemed "authoritarian" but the members did not want him removed because they perceived that he was the best person in the cooperative to access funds.

The PLF experience also created some soul-searching on the part of the Land Bank which was blamed for failing to monitor its loans. Because of the PLF default, the Bank introduced new policies imposing more caution on lending and stringent supervising processes.

CONCLUSION

Despite all these challenges and hindrances to cooperative organizing, both Buscayno and Morales contributed to the popularity of cooperatives as a vehicle for the economic survival of farmers. Despite the collapse of the PLF, Buscayno's cooperative experiment inspired its members, as well as other farmers all over the country, to set up their own agricultural cooperatives. Furthermore, the PLF also made the government aware of the need to support people-initiated cooperatives. The enthusiastic support for cooperatives which began during the Aquino Adiminstration with the PLF as the model cooperative was continued by the Ramos Administration. The government decreed that it will no longer lend to

individual farmers but to cooperatives, forcing farmers to organize into this kind of economic venture. One can only look positively into this as cooperatives can provide the foundation for farmers to come together to pursue other issues, such as, pressuring government for further support. In Tarlac, because of the PLF, farmers learned to approach local politicians and government agencies for financial support to start off their cooperative.

The CFPI's cooperative advocacy work at the national and local levels has contributed immensely to a vastly improved cooperative environment. The establishment of the Cooperative Development Authority (CDA) is a testimony of the people's efforts to regulate the cooperative movement. It has been ten years since both the PLF and CFPI began their experiments, and as shown by the statistics, cooperatives have continued to grow. Morales has also brought his advocacy work all the way to government where he was the Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR) Secretary in the Estrada Administration. The DAR plays a crucial role in cooperative organizing as the most popular cooperative are agricultural cooperatives. The CFPI, like the PLF, however has decided to dissolve itself due to lack of funds. But its NGO members have joined a bigger cooperative umbrella, the Cooperative Union of the Philippines (CUP).

Thus, the CFPI and the PLF have shown how the cooperative can be used for empowering the farmers at the grassroots level. This will hopefully not only alleviate their impoverished status but also transform them into a force for further democratizing Philippine society.

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SOCIAL MOVEMENT UNIONISM AND ECONOMIC UNIONISM IN THAILAND[1]

Napaporn Ativanichayapong

ABSTRACT

After the student uprising in 1973, Thai trade unions adopted social unionism. They allied with other forces, especially students, and promoted issues of benefit to other social classes. This phase ended with the coup of 1976. When union activity again became possible in the 1980s, the unions turned to economic unionism. They campaigned on issues of specific worker benefit (wages, social security), but allowed their alliances to decay, and forfeited broad support. In the 1990s, female workers again forged broad social alliances to fight campaigns on issues of specific female interest (maternity leave, occupational health). Because of its weakness, the trade union movement needs to cultivate social alliances. But worker issues will not have sustained support if trade unions allow others to lead campaigns.

INTRODUCTION

From the 1970s, social movements that played important roles in the political and social development in Thailand can be roughly categorized into four types: workers' movements, peasant movements, student movements, and the non-governmental organization (NGO) movement. This article focuses on the workers' movement, which has been driven by trade unions. The study emphasizes the role of the trade union movement as a social movement and its relations with other social movements from 1973 up to the present. Social movement unionism and economic unionism are the two models identified as polar opposites in the analysis of trade unions' characteristics.

The trade union is one of the oldest forms of workers' organization and still plays an important role in many parts of the world. In Thailand, trade unions and their members are now regarded as a numerically limited force. Nonetheless, trade unions have been the most important

voice of wage earners since they were established. We therefore cannot ignore the development and survival of these organizations in the future.

The history of the trade union movement in Thailand can be traced back to the early 1930s. However, the early development of the Thai workers' movement was interrupted by a military coup in 1958. Under authoritarian rule, labour organizations stagnated for more than a decade. After the political uprising on 14 October 1973, the workers' movement revived and trade unions actively presented themselves as the representatives of the working class.

Social movement unionism developed as the dominant form of the trade union movement from October 1973 to October 1976, with three components: defence of the common interests of the working class, class collective action, and participation in the movements for broad social objectives. Economic unionism developed to replace social movement unionism in the post-1976 period. Trade unions turned to emphasize only the defence of the workers' common interests and distanced themselves from movements for broad social objectives.

SOCIAL MOVEMENT UNIONISM UNDER THE POST AUTHORITARIAN REGIME

The three years between 14 October 1973 and 6 October 1976 were the best years for the development of social movements in Thailand. For the workers' movement, labour organizations could be formed again after new labour protection laws had been promulgated in 1972. During this period, modern trade unions could develop and play an important role as a social movement. I use the definition of a social movement as a series of collective actions by people with common interests who have mass mobilization as their source of power in sustained interaction with elite, opponents, and authorities, and who are chiefly concerned with defending or changing society or changing their own position of social relations (Scott, 1990: 6). Thai trade unionism in 1973–1976 had reached the level of a social movement in terms of both its capability for mobilization and its social concerns.

Trade unions and the defence of workers' interests

The student-led uprising on 14 October 1973 resulted in the end of the military dictatorship regime and the establishment of a parliamentary democratic system. The political situation from the uprising until the coup of 6 October 1976 contributed to the growth of social movements

including the trade union movement. According to Udehn, the critical mass of a social movement often comes from the middle class, who are typically people rich in resources, while the passive mass often consists of less resource-rich people from the lower class (Udehn, 1996: 236). However, the 1973 people's uprising converted the working class from a passive mass to a critical mass which acted collectively to defend its common interests and to participate in the movements for broad social objectives.

The success of the 1973 people's uprising in overthrowing the authoritarian regime, followed by the emerging democratic climate, brought about a great change in people's attitude toward political participation. Many people shifted from a sense of powerlessness to a belief in their own power. For workers, the main instrument used to express their power and release the pressures that had been accumulating for over a decade was the labour strike.

Industrial growth under the import-substitution and export-promotion strategies since the 1960s had been associated with low wages and poor working conditions. As a result, when the political situation facilitated the workers to exercise their collective bargaining power, the demands made by workers during 1973–1975 were mostly related to wages, working conditions, labour law, welfare, and fringe benefit issues (Suwit, 1977: 16). In the state enterprises, strikes not only aimed for higher wages and working benefits, but also demanded improvements in management and the elimination of corruption (Napaporn, 2002: 71).

The labour organizations that led the strikes were industry-based employee associations. However, after the Labour Relations Act was promulgated in March 1975, the employee associations were transformed into company-based trade unions.

From individual strikes to class collective action

From late 1973 to mid-1976, many strikes and demonstrations were not actions staged by isolated groups at individual workplaces, but collective actions organized by labour centres that mobilized wide support from workers and trade unions across factory boundaries. These events became a workers' class collective movement. When the workers undertook collective action as a class, they often confronted employers who also coordinated with other employers as a capitalist block to react against the workers' demands. Many cases of disputes between employees and employers during 1975–1976 were class confrontations rather than collective bargaining of the two partners in individual workplaces. In some cases the confrontation became a conflict between

the workers and the state, as the workers' demands evolved from work-related issues to political dimensions.

During this period, there were two important national labour centres—the Trade Union Group of Thailand (TUGT) and the Labour Coordination Centre of Thailand (LCCT)—that mobilized workers' class collective action. The TUGT evolved from the coordination organization of sixteen industry-based employee associations. It had been recognized by the state as the formal labour centre of the trade unions. The Department of Labour promoted the TUGT in several ways, such as facilitating its meetings and giving financial support for holding May Day celebrations. In 1976, when it became more powerful, the TUGT changed its name to the Labour Congress of Thailand (LCT).

The LCCT was not an autonomous labour organization, but a labour and student-led organization. When it was formed in 1974, Therdphum Chaidee from the Labour Association of Hostels and Hotels was the first president, Prasit Chaiyo from the Labour Association of the Textile Industry in Samut Sakhon was the vice president, and Seksarn Prasertkul, an important student leader of the October 1973 uprising, was the general secretary. The LCCT survived as an important labour centre for around one year before it gradually declined in mid-1975 when its leaders were threatened by the state powers. Under the leadership of these two organizations, trade unions could mobilize support from workers across industries to support labour strikes. In addition, the LCCT and the TUGT gained support from students and socialist-oriented political parties. The two labour centres organized class collective action and mobilized wide support from non-labour groups to support several important strikes.

In the general strike of textile workers in June 1974, the workers' demands began with concerns over immediate problems of layoff, but then expanded to include demands for increased minimum wages, revision of labour laws, and worker participation in the inspection of working conditions. Seven demands were presented to the director-general of the Department of Labour on 9 June 1974 (Sungsidh, 1989: 146–7). The strike was supported by the sixteen employee associations and by the National Student Centre of Thailand, People for Democracy Group, Federation of Independent Student of Thailand, and Socialist Party of Thailand (Chirakan, 1995: 121).

The students and the socialist political parties also supported the strike of the Dusit Thani Hotel workers and the strike of the female workers at the Standard Garment Company, which took place in May

1975. During these two strikes, violence occurred. The Dusit Thani management employed the "Red Gaur Group"[2] to guard the hotel building against the strikers. The Standard Garment employer asked the police to protect the strike breakers, resulting in a clash with workers.

After violence occurred, the TUGT and the LCCT organized a four-day rally at Lumpini Park on 3–7 June 1975. The National Student Centre of Thailand (NSCT) and three socialist parties[3] supported the rally. The immediate economic demands of the workers were supplemented by a political dimension: government was pressed to dismiss the police colonel who ordered the use of violence against the strike, to guarantee a non-violent policy in the settlement of labour disputes, and to remove the Red Gaurs from the Dusit Thani Hotel (Samrej, 1987: 132).

In another strike at the Hara Blue Jeans Company from late 1975 to March 1976, the workers seized the factory to operate production by themselves They were supported by the NSCT and the Socialist Party of Thailand. Student activists helped the workers sell their products at much lower prices than they had been sold in the market. In addition, students organized a "Workers' School" to teach political knowledge to those working at the Workers' Solidarity Factory. The workers operated the factory for almost three months before it was closed on 12 March 1976 by order of the Minister of Interior.

However, the workers' class collective action in this period did not imply that the trade union movement became a Marxist revolutionary movement. As Touraine points out, there is no organic link between class consciousness and revolution (Touraine, 1986: 153). The workers' class collective action was the product of industrial relations problems. It did not stem from revolutionary consciousness. Although some labour leaders were influenced by socialist ideology, the majority of the union actors learned to act as a class from their experience in industrial relations conflict under the leadership of national labour organizations. Consequently, the aims of the class collective action were limited to the defence of the workers' common interests within the existing social conditions rather than aiming at radical transformation of the foundations of the entire society.

Political activism and broad social objectives of trade unions

Another notable feature of the trade union movement in the three years after the October 1973 uprising was the involvement of workers in movements for political purposes and broad social objectives. The

political ideology and activism of the trade union actors during this period were influenced by two political forces: the students and the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT). Since 1974, students had expressed their support for workers' and peasants' movements and had encouraged labour and peasant leaders to participate in political demonstrations. The CPT had not played such an important role in the workers' movement, but had some relations with labour activists.

In the 1950s, the CPT had played an important role in spreading socialist thought among Thai intellectuals. Up to 1973, the CPT had concentrated on armed operations in the rural areas under the strategy of "countryside surrounding city". However, after the October 1973 uprising, the CPT tried to infiltrate the student movement, and by 1975 was able to influence some groups of student leaders in both ideology and organization (Pornpirom, 1987: 14–8). Workers were also a target of the CPT. Some union activists, particularly those who were former students or had close connection with the student movement, were approached by the CPT's cadres to mobilize the students to support workers' strikes and organizations (Narong, 1992: 203). However, the CPT's efforts with the workers were unsuccessful because the students had no experience and most CPT-committed workers were dismissed during 1974–1975 (Kanya, 1995: 3–8).

Although the CPT-cadre students could not play much role in the labour movement, other groups of student activists made significant contributions to the development of workers' political consciousness. In mid-1975 the NSCT announced a formal cooperation of three social forces.

The "Tripartite Alliance" of students, workers, and peasants was formed on 2 May 1975 in order to demand social justice, starting with the peasants' issues (Kriangsak, 1998: 255). This type of political coalition, unprecedented in Thailand, was viewed by some state authorities as the basis for implementing a communist strategy of inciting urban riots supported by an organized peasants' uprising (Morell and Chai-anan, 1981: 160).

In fact, the coalition of workers, students, and peasants was a political tactic rather than an exact organizational strategy. The most significant impact of this coalition on the trade union movement was the cooperation between workers and students, which strengthened after the forming of the Tripartite Alliance. When the workers initiated a protest demonstration, rally, or strike, students participated. When the NSCT launched political campaigns, such as the anti-US imperialist campaign

and the campaign against the return of the former dictators, the LCCT and TUGT led its members to join.

Apart from political activism, the trade unions also presented themselves as the representatives of the people at large. This new role of trade unions as a social movement appeared in the general strike to protest the government policy on the increased prices of rice and sugar on 2–5 January 1976. The strike was led by the TUGT and involved seventy trade unions included all the major unions from both state and private enterprises (Bandit and Pairot, 1989: 50–1).

The TUGT demanded the government guarantee the price of paddy at over 2,500 baht per *kwian* (*kwian* = 2,000 litres) as approved previously, postpone any further increase in the prices of sugar and rice for one year, immediately implement a land reform programme, promote and establish agricultural cooperatives throughout the country, and improve the efficiency of the Bank for Agriculture and Agricultural Cooperatives (Arom, 1979: 189–90). This general strike was very important for at least two reasons.

First, it is the only general strike in which the workers' demands did not directly relate to the common interests of the working class. Although the demand to cap prices of rice and sugar benefited the urban workers, this demand also affected all the urban poor, not the workers in particular. In addition, the other three demands did not relate to the workers' interests but directly benefited the peasants, who were the majority of the country's population.

Second, because only a small number of workers were organized and their bargaining power was weak, labour organizations had been seen as a limited force in Thai society. Since October 1973, workers were seen as only allies of the students in the political movement. It was only in this strike that the trade unions could lead the movement on non-labour issues and successfully use their collective bargaining power to achieve demands for broader social interests. This strike therefore changed the public attitude on unions. People began to recognize them as a powerful social force, which did not only fight for their own interests, but was also concerned with the interests of other classes.

The role of the trade unions, during 1973–1976—defending the common interests of the working class by organizing class collective action, and participating in movements for broad social objectives—was seen by a number of labour activists and academics as an ideal model of Thai trade unionism. During this period, organized workers were a powerful social force and trade unions sought to represent the workers as a whole, and present themselves as a mass social movement rather than just as trade unions

FROM SOCIAL MOVEMENT UNIONISM TO ECONOMIC UNIONISM

The development of social movement unionism was interrupted by the sudden change in the political situation after the violent coup on 6 October 1976. The trade unionism that developed thereafter can be defined as "economic unionism" in which trade unions play a very prominent role in the mobilization of workers for economic objectives but fail to produce class-oriented ideology and collective action for broad social objectives. During this period, the social movement unionism of the mid-1970s was replaced by the "economic unionism" in which the trade unions in the state enterprises and private enterprises separately defended the specific interests of their members and distanced themselves from other social movements.

Apart from the change in the political situation, rapid economic growth under export-led industrialization was another condition that facilitated the development of economic unionism in the 1980s. Non-government organizations (NGOs) played important roles in shaping the trade union movement, while the influence of students on the workers' movement declined.

New political and economic situation

The political system in the period 1977–1990 was characterized by three different phases: authoritarian rule in the one year after October 1976 ; "semi-democracy" over 1978–1987; and liberal democracy in 1988–1990. These phases created different political opportunities for the growth of the trade union movement and other social movements.

Although the authoritarian Thanin Kraivixien government that came to power after the coup on 6 October 1976 could last only one year, the impact of this government's extreme anti- communist policy on the social movements of the mid-1970s was very great. The violent suppression of the social activists who participated in the political demonstrations and protests during 1973–1976 resulted in the transformation of peaceful movements into guerrilla forces under the leadership of the CPT. A large numbers of student activists, labour and peasant leaders left their organizations to join the CPT in the jungle after the October 1976 coup. Subsequently, the NSCT, the LCCT, and the PFT, which were the important national centres of the student, worker and peasant movements, all collapsed.

Political conditions changed after General Kriangsak Chomanand staged another coup to overthrow the Thanin government in November

1977. After a shift away from the conservative policies to a more liberal regime, student and labour organizations could revive again in the late 1970s, but the peasant organizations collapsed until the early 1990s. Trade unions once again began to organize under the new political circumstances of the 1980s.

The first half of the decade after the 1976 coup was a period of ideological struggle between the Thai state and the CPT. However, the ending of the communist threat at the beginning of Prem's premiership in the early 1980s loosened up the state's control over society. This development gave the people more political space to assert themselves. The amnesty programme initiated for defectors of the CPT under the policy directive No. 66/23 also assisted the development of the parliamentary democratic system. CPT defectors returned to the city and later became leaders in various sectors of society. Political movements led by armed or radical social organizations were superseded by relatively less radical, pro-democratic institutions such as political parties, NGOs, and other civil groups.

The Prem era (1980–1988) was the first time that parliamentary politics were relatively stable and democracy in Thailand was institutionalized. However, the period was characterized as "semi-democratic" because the military continued to play a strong political role and economic growth was given higher priority than the development of political rights and the deepening of democracy.

After the Prem regime ended in mid 1988, General Chatichai Choonhavan became the first prime minister since 1976 who was an elected MP. From August 1988 to February 1991, the Chatichai civilian government rigorously challenged the country's conservative state by moving decision making away from bureaucrats and military into the hands of elected politicians. Non-bureaucratic forces such as businessmen, politicians, organized workers, and social activists grew rapidly in the late 1980s. The bureaucrats and military still played a significant role in politics, but were forced to negotiate with other powerful forces. The major political actors during 1988–1990, therefore, comprised both the military-bureaucratic alliance and the emerging forces of political parties, business groups, labour organizations, and NGOs (Surin, 1996: 153–7).

The shift of economic strategy from import substitution to export-oriented industrialization occurred simultaneously with political changes from military domination towards democracy with increased business influence. The Thai economy went through three phases: the recession of

1983–1984; the economic take-off of the mid-1980s; and the bubble economy of 1988–1991 (Pasuk and Baker, 1997: 27). The rapid growth of the industrial sector in the export-led economy brought about important changes in the structure of employment. There was a proportional expansion of the industrial labour force, with large numbers of female workers incorporated into export industries. In particular, women workers were concentrated in industrial lines that produced the country's key exports: garments and footwear, textiles, leather goods, precious stones, and processed food. Consequently, trade unions in these industries had women as their important power base.

New alliances of trade unions: labour NGOs

The trade union movement after 1976 was no longer led by one or two strong national centres of trade unions as it was in the mid-1970s. The workers' collective action was mobilized by organizations of three types: national labour congresses, trade union groups, and labour NGOs. National labour congresses were the formal centres of trade unions that had to register at the Department of Labour. However, the inefficiency of the national labour congresses in defending the common interests of the workers, as a result of the lack of unity among their leaders, gave rise to the development of trade union groups as a new organization for workers' collective action.

In private enterprises, trade unions in the same industrial area or same industry formed trade union groups in three main industrial zones around Bangkok: i) Rangsit and Nawanakhon, in Pathumthani province, just north of Bangkok; ii) Phrapradaeng in Samut Prakan province to the southeast of Bangkok; iii) Omnoi-Omyai, in Samut Sakhon province, and Nakhon Pathom province to the southwest of Bangkok.[4] In state enterprises, trade unions also formed the State Enterprise Labour Relations Group or State Enterprise Relations Confederation (SERC), which became the most important coordinating organization of state enterprise employees.

During 1988–1990, trade union groups forged cooperation across the industrial zones and set up a new labour coordination centre to replace the national labour congresses in leading the trade union movement. The increasing role of trade union groups in the trade union movement was facilitated by labour NGOs, which actively supported the workers in campaigns during this period.

After a shift to a more liberal regime in late 1977, trade unions organized activities and began to create relations with the students again.

However, alliances between trade unions and students were loosely formed. Student activists did not directly participate in labour strikes or involve themselves in workers' movement, but occasionally coordinated with the trade unions in campaigns where the demands of the two parties overlapped.

Coordination was begun in protests against rising oil prices in 1979–1981, and in campaigns over bus-fares in 1982. However, in the early 1980s, the student movement began to decline as the result of "ideological confusion". Since the late 1970s, a number of student activists who joined the CPT in the jungle after the 1976 coup, had some serious conflict with the leaders of the CPT and began to return to Bangkok. In addition, information about the suffering of people in the Indo-China countries which had become socialist in 1975–1976, spread to Thai society in the early 1980s. These two events were important factors for the decline of socialism as a dominant ideology among student leaders, resulting in a situation of "ideological confusion". Under these circumstances, the student movement that used to be a catalyst of social transformation in the 1970s became stagnant. The role of the students in social development was replaced by other social forces, especially the NGOs which became increasingly important in the mobilization of collective action in the 1980s.

While the student movement was a catalyst of the social transformation in Thailand in the 1970s, the NGO movement became an important factor for political and social development from the early 1980s. Although the number of NGOs increased rapidly in the 1980s, only a small number of NGOs were interested in the labour field, especially on industrial-labour issues and trade unions.[5] Among these organizations, there were only a few NGOs that played significant role in the development of the trade union movement in the 1980s. These NGOs were the Union of Civil Liberty (UCL), the Arom Pongpangan Foundation (APF), and the Friends of Women Foundation (FOW).

The APF is a labour NGO that deals directly with labour and union issues. The UCL is a human rights NGO that operated a Section of Promoting Labour Rights in 1984–1995. The FOW is a women's NGO whose activities include the Project of Women Workers in Promotion Industries. Both the FOW and UCL carried out their activities on labour in the Omnoi-Omyai industrial area. The labour NGOs covered in this article include these three NGOs and some others that played an important role in the trade union movement.

The success and failure of economic unionism

The growth of economic unionism was evident in the second half of the 1980s. During this period, the state of the country's economy began to change from recession to economic boom. In addition, the political climate developed from the "semi-democratic system" of the Prem regime, towards more liberal democracy under the Chatichai government. These economic and political conditions facilitated the success of trade unions' demands on wage increases and enactment of legislation to improve workers' welfare.

Among private trade unions, economic unionism could develop although the trade unions were weak and there was no unity among the national labour congresses. The crucial factor that enabled this development was that the area-based trade union groups formed a new labour centre of the national trade union movement. In addition, the trade unions were strongly supported by labour NGOs.

In the 1980s, trade union groups in the private sector and labour NGOs were successful in campaigns to demand wage increases and to compel the government to pass important labour laws that improved the working conditions and welfare of workers in the private sector. The important workers' demonstrations during this period were campaigns to increase the national minimum wage, protests against the proliferation of short-term employment contracts and subcontracting, and the campaign on the Social Security Act. Among state enterprise unions, workers could achieve their demands when SERC led workers to organize strong collective action on wage increases and opposition to privatization policy.

However, the trade unions failed to build any unity within the trade union movement. The national labour congresses lost their position as workers' representatives, and became self-serving organizations of the union leaders. The self-serving character of the national labour congresses was also indicated by the high competition among the national labour congresses to increase their union affiliates and compete for prestigious seats on various tripartite bodies. This competition was encouraged by the methods of electing employee representatives for tripartite committees, which granted each union one vote regardless of the size of its membership. Competition between national labour congresses reflected the changes in the characteristics of these organizations from national centres of the social movement unions in the mid-1970s towards self-serving interest organizations of some union leaders in the late 1980s.

For state enterprise unions, the SERC was strong enough to organize collective action independent from the national labour congresses and the NGOs. However, the development of the state enterprise union movement indicated both the success and failure of economic unionism in the 1980s. The unions could organize strong autonomous action to defend their members' interests but failed to gain support from the public and from other social movements. The unions' unity and strength thus could not save them from a crisis of legitimacy and unpopularity.

Unlike the trade unions in the private sector, the state enterprise unions were rich in terms of resources for mobilizing collective action. Their organizational strength resulted in two different impacts on the development of trade unions. On the one side, there was no way for social activists outside the trade unions to intervene in the determination of unions' objectives. The state enterprise unions were thus little influenced by other social movements when they determined their aims and strategy. On the other side, the trade unions had no need to make alliances with other organizations because they could organize strong collective action by themselves. These conditions, however, led to the isolation of the state enterprise unions from other social movements. The cause of the unions' strength were thus also the source of their isolation.

The strong bargaining power of trade unions without wide public support was not a sufficient factor to protect the unions from being destroyed. After a military group calling themselves the National Peace Keeping Council (NPKC) staged a coup to seize political power from the Chatichai government on 23 February 1991, the junta that came to power wasted no time in imposing severe restrictions on labour rights. The state enterprise employees could gain little sympathy from the media and the public when their union rights were abolished.

New Campaigns and Coalitions

The growth of economic unionism in the 1980s was interrupted by the coup in 1991 and the economic crisis in 1997. After the coup, the NPKC introduced some new labour laws to abrogate the state enterprise unions and strictly control the collective bargaining rights of trade unions in the private sector. This labour control policy undermined the bargaining powers of organized workers and limited the ability of trade unions to defend their common interests. The workers' demands, particularly on wages, were further constrained after 1997 as a result of the economic crisis.

Because trade unions in the 1990s are not as strong as they were in the past, the major demonstrations since 1991 have been organized

through coalitions of trade unions and their allies. The successes of unions' demands since 1991 have been thus dependent on the support of their alliances rather than the trade unions themselves. In addition, in response to new economic conditions, trade unions had to shift their collective demands away from the immediate economic issue of wage increases to issues that affected the workers' quality of lives in the long term. These new characteristics were evident in two important labour campaigns: the 90-day maternity leave campaign and the occupational safety and health (OSH) campaign.

The campaign for 90-day maternity leave

Many studies of First World trade unionism have argued that the lack of participation by women in trade unions is due to certain structural features such as: male domination in unions; the fact that women are employed in industries which are difficult to organize; the double burden which means women do not have time for union activities; or the gender socialization that reinforces women's roles as mother and wife. However, Chhachhi and Pittin (1999: 75) argue that feminist theorizing on women workers has been challenged by women's actions in the Third World. Women in developing countries have responded to pressure created by changed economic conditions, and have initiated or joined in actions at various levels to support themselves and their families.

In Thailand, women workers were an important power base of the trade union movement since the mid-1970s, but did not carry out any campaign on issues of particular interest to women. The main issues of labour campaigns in the past were matters of common benefit for the working class such as wages, fair employment contracts, and social security systems. Men dominated the decision-making positions in trade unions at all levels, and showed little concern for issues of specific benefit to women workers. However, the situation changed from the early 1990s when gender issues were promoted by both international and domestic organizations.

The development that had significant implications for the status and role of women in the trade union movement was the rapid incorporation of women into the industrial labour force. There was a significant increase in the number of women working in the export-oriented manufacturing sector. By the first half of the 1990s, more than 50 percent of the total labourers in this sector were women (see table 1). However, after 1996 when economic growth slowed, the proportion of women workers decreased to less than 50 percent. More women than

men were dismissed during the economic crisis.

Table 1: Number of Women Workers in Workplaces, 1992–2000

Year	Total Labour	Women Workers	Women (%)
1992	4,413,780	2,770,090	*62.8*
1993	4,911,787	2,550,043	*51.9*
1994	5,920,350	3,126,879	*52.8*
1995	5,920,350	3,589,422	*53.6*
1996	7,249,952	3,317,869	*45.8*
1997	7,608,227	3,486,824	*45.8*
1998	4,381,248	2,082,783	*47.5*
1999	8,134,644	3,881,317	*47.7*
2000	8,062,338	3,829,770	*47.5*

Source: Department of Labour Protection and Welfare, Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare

Both international and domestic organizations promoted issues of women's status and rights in the trade union movement. The unions' priority demands, which traditionally were issues of common benefit to workers in general, began to include issues of specifically women's interest.

The campaign to demand 90 days of maternity leave was the first labour campaign that related particularly to women workers' benefits. The campaign started in 1991 during the authoritarian regime of the Anand Panyarachun government. An alliance was formed between trade unions and NGOs concerned with women, children, and labour issues. This alliance called for the Ministry of Interior to amend the law to entitle female employees a maternity leave of 90 days with full pay. However, on 19 November 1991, the Cabinet only approved the female government officials to have such right but refused to give the same rights to female employees in the private sector, on grounds that the resulting increase in production costs in private industries would affect employment and economic growth as a whole (Bandit, 1999: 130).

The government discrimination policy led to a lengthy campaign to extend maternity leave entitlements to women workers in the private sector. The campaign was conducted by a coalition consisting of trade unions, and NGOs on labour, women, and child issues. Members of the government were lobbied and public rallies held. NGOs organized seminars to support the campaign including an international workers' forum to celebrate the People's Plan for the 21st century (PP21), which included the 90-days maternity leave demand (Jadet, 1993: 33).

On 27 April 1993, the Cabinet authorized the Interior Minister to amend the labour law so that female workers in the private sector would have the 90 days with full pay. According to the new law, the workers would be paid by their employees for the first 45 days and would have to claim their wages from the Social Security Fund for the remaining 45 days. In 1993, the Social Security Fund was effective only in establishments with at least ten employees. The new law thus benefited only women workers working in firms with at least ten employees, that registered with the Social Security Office.

In fact, the campaigning committee wanted the 90-day maternity leave with full pay to be enforced by the Labour Protection Laws, which would be effective for every women worker even if she worked in a workplace with only one worker. However the campaigners decided to stop their action because they were satisfied with what they had achieved (Jadet, 1993: 34).

The success of this campaign did not depend only upon the collective action of trade unions but also on the ability of trade unions to seek support from non-labour organizations, especially from the labour, children and women NGOs.

The OSH campaign and the new network

Following the successful campaign for maternity leave, another important labour campaign arose on the issue of occupational safety and health (OSH). This lengthy campaign was launched from 1993 up to the present. The OSH campaign indicated a new stage of the Thai labour movement in which workers and labour NGOs made alliance with peasant organizations and academics. The remarkable character of the OSH campaign is that it created a new network of social movement organizations consisting of trade unions, networks of the rural poor, NGOs, and academics.

The OSH campaign is an articulation of two labour agitations: first, the demand for improvement of occupational safety after the Kader fire tragedy; and second the demand for fair compensation for Bangkok Textile Company workers suffering from occupational ailments. The former agitation was led by an ad hoc network of trade unions, NGOs and university academics, while the latter was carried out by a network of occupationally ill patients supported by the Assembly of the Poor.

Industrialization has generated problems of occupational safety and health for a long time. However, OSH was assigned a low priority by government in industrial development policies, and trade unions also

gave less importance to OSH issues than to union rights, fair wages, and fair employment contract. Problems of OSH attracted increasing attention of trade unions and the general public in the early 1990s as a result of two important factors. First, there was a number of serious disasters caused by unsafe working conditions, and a worsening situation of industrial sickness caused by occupation-related health hazards. Second, OSH became a significant issue for international labour organizations and local labour NGOs, which strongly supported the unions in their demand for an improvement of OSH standards.

The labour campaign on occupational health and safety was first launched after a fire disaster at the Kader Factory of a toy-producing company on 10 May 1993. The Kader disaster was a tremendous tragedy in the history of Thai workers as 188 workers died and 481 were injured. In the same year on 13 August, the collapse of the Royal Hotel in Nakhon Ratchasima killed 137 persons, including hotel customers and workers, and injured more than 360.

Occupational health hazards also became serious problems. In the early 1990s, lung diseases and lead poisoning were found to be common diseases among labourers working in textile and electronic factories. Some of the most well known cases were the mysterious deaths of twelve workers in the electronic factories at the Northern Region Industrial Estate, Lamphun province,[6] and Byssinosis patients working in the Bangkok Textile Mill.

The campaign on OSH issues which started in 1993 indicated a significant change from the trade unions' concentration on wage benefits. In addition, this campaign created a new organization for workers' collective action in the form of a social network between workers and other classes. Immediately after the Kader fire accident, an ad hoc committee for assisting the Kader workers was set up by two union organizations, the Omnoi-Omyai Trade Union Group and the Textile, Garment and Leather Workers' Federation of Thailand, in cooperation with some NGOs.[7]

This ad hoc Committee for Monitoring the Assisting of the Kader Workers, carried out major tasks to help the Kader workers by dealing with three relating parties: the families of the workers, government agencies, and international organizations. It also launched a campaign to demand fair compensations for the deceased and injured. The campaign mobilized wide support from labour organizations at both the domestic and international level.

As a result of the campaign, the family of each deceased worker was

paid 200,000 baht by the Kader Company. However, the more important consequence of the campaign was the development of the Thai trade union movement's interest in the OSH issue. Trade unions began to have more concern over health and safety problems in the workplaces. Some NGO activists and academics, who worked closely with trade unions in the Kader campaign, decided to form an ad hoc committee on the OSH issue, the Campaign Committee for Workers' Safety and Health (CWSH). In addition, the Council of Work and Environment Related Patients' Network of Thailand (WEPT) was formed in February 1993. It is not a union-based organization but developed from the Byssinosis Patients Group of Bangkok Textile Mill, the first group of workers who acted collectively to demand fair compensation for a respiratory disorder contracted by inhaling cotton dust.

Since mid-1993, a network of workers who suffered from occupation-related disease began to spread to other companies in various industrial areas. In September 1993, a new organization of occupation-related patients was formed. With the help of the Women Workers' Unity Group and the Friends of Women Foundation, WEPT played the key role in the struggle for fair compensation for occupation-related patients. WEPT's members came from various industrial areas. All had taken ill because of toxic chemicals and unsafe conditions in workplaces located in Rangsit, Phrapadaeng, Omnoi-Omyai, as well as in Bangkok vicinity and Lamphun Industrial Estate.

CWSH and WEPT led the campaigns on OSH issues. CWSH comprises trade unions, NGOs, and academic and has union members as their base in the OSH campaign. WEPT is a non-union organization which joined the network of the Assembly of the Poor (AOP) in 1996 because trade unions paid little attention to the rights of occupation-related patients.[8]

The emergence of AOP was one of the most important events in the development of social movements in Thailand in the 1990s. Government policies to build infrastructure, to speed up industrialization, and to clear rural villagers out of forest zones for commercial reforestation caused the emergence of protests by various people groups, mostly peasants from northeastern and northern provinces, affected by these policies. The AOP is a network of various groups of people representing various problems. Although the core of the AOP are the peasant groups and its main agenda concerns problems over land, dams, and forests, the AOP drew in some fishermen, urban poor, and industrial workers as its allies. In late 1995, the leaders of the AOP decided to formally establish the AOP as a

network of all types of organizations of the poor. They thus contacted a labour NGO, the Friends of Women Foundation, in order to include some groups of industrial workers who had also suffered from government development policies. Subsequently, the AOP was suggested to invite labour activists from two organizations, the CWSH and the WEPT, to attend the founding of the AOP on 10 December 1995 at Thammasat University.[9] However, only WEPT was interested in the AOP's activity and began to involve itself as a member of the AOP's networks. The original AOP network comprised five groups: three groups of rural villagers whose livelihoods were affected by dam construction projects, by government policies on the utilization of land and forest, and by development projects such as the establishment of an industrial estate in Ubon Ratchathani province; the urban poor; and the WEPT. During the early years of the AOP in 1995–1996, most unions ignored the AOP (Nukun, 1996: 10–11).

NGOs rendered considerable assistance to the AOP. The majority of problem groups networked in the AOP are from areas where NGOs had operated for many years. Also the WEPT was supported by the Friends of Women Foundation to expand its work across factories and unions.[10] However, the constituent groups of AOP had their own ability to organize and to articulate their demands while the NGO activists and a few academics assisted them as advisors, particularly on legal, procedural, and documentary matters (Prudhisan, 1998: 267).

From 1995, the OSH campaign demanded the establishment of an Institute of Occupational Safety, Health and Environmental Protection in the Workplace (IOSH). The main idea was to transfer the state power in the manipulation of the Social Security Offices' Workmen Compensation Fund to the new independent institute, which was to be managed by five parties including government officials, employers, employees, specialists or academics, and occupation-related patients (Voravidh, 1998: 23). A draft bill to establish the IOSH was finalized in June 1997 by representatives of the government, trade unions, WEPT, NGOs, academics and medical experts. After strong collective action for almost a decade, the IOSH bill was approved by the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare and is in the process of approval by the Cabinet.

Success of the OSH campaign and limitations of trade unions

The labour campaign on OSH issues since the early 1990s achieved some success. The campaign started with the immediate demand for fair compensation for the occupationally injured and diseased workers, and

developed to the plan for establishing the IOSH, which will benefit workers at large and empower workers on OSH problems over the long term. The success of the OSH demands arises from two important reasons.

First, the OSH demands are not strongly opposed by employers or government. Unlike wage demands, OSH issues are seen as mutual benefit issues. Unlike trade union rights, collective bargaining, freedom of association, and other fundamental rights of workers, OSH is presented as an area of mutual interest between workers and employers, and is free from the confrontation politics of unions. Business, government, and trade unions commonly describe OSH as an investment which will lead to higher labour productivity and efficiency, with fewer causes of absenteeism due to illness, and a lower rate of labour turnover.

From the Marxist perspective, the reason for the introduction of OSH standards by the state, and the establishment of a state institute to manage OSH, is political. The state is concerned with the social reproduction of the labour force. Acting to preserve the long-term interests of capitalists and the capitalist system as a whole, the state intervenes to ensure that the proletariat is able to reproduce itself and that a pool of exploitable labour is always available. High accident rates, fatalities, and poor health conditions threaten to diminish this pool of labour, possibly leading to a labour shortage. Furthermore, in many countries, the state introduced official minimum standards and set up government agencies to manage OSH issues in response to the working class struggle against brutal exploitation. Strikes and protest movements stemming from workers' deaths (which often involved powerful community-wide protests in industries like mining) required more effective means of managing this unrest, especially at the local political level (Greenfield, 1998: 4).

Another reason is that OSH demands gain wide support from many organizations apart from trade unions. The OSH campaign is a popular campaign led by various groups of people rather than workers' collective action led by trade unions. In terms of incentive to mobilize workers' collective action, OSH issues are different from wage issues. They are not about immediate benefits that could easily attract the workers' attentions. Only some groups of workers and trade unions, which realized the long-term benefits that would improve the quality of their lives, actively participated in the OSH campaign. However, this type of demand attracted the attention of social activists among NGOs, academics, and medical experts in a way that demands for the immediate

benefit of some particular groups of workers could not. Consequently, a broad-based cross-class organization was formed to lead the campaign on OSH issues.

The formation of a broad-based coalition highlighted the limitations of the trade unions' role in the OSH campaign. Trade unions in the 1990s are organizations of the relatively powerless. They cannot derive significant power from their members. They achieve success as campaigning organizations only when they cultivate alliances with other social movements whose aims overlap with the unions' demands.

But a coalition movement may not be sustainable. When the campaign is over, or when interest slackens, there is no permanent organization to continue the aims of the movement. The NGO activists and academics are not directly affected by the success or failure of the campaign. The OSH campaign will not be sustainable without the active participation of workers and trade unions.

Table 2: Number of Registered Labour Organizations and Employer Organizations in 2000

Type of Organization	Number of Organizations
State Enterprise Labour Union	44
Private Enterprise Labour Union	1,084
Labour Union Federation	19
Labour Union Congress	9
Employer Association	226
Employer Association Federation	3
Employer Council	10

Source: Labour Studies of Planning Division, Department of Labour Protection and Welfare, Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare

CONCLUSION

Trade unions in Thailand are not only economic interest organizations that defend the particular interests of their members, but also organize collective action for a wide spectrum of reasons. The Thai trade union movement is not independent from other social movements, either when the trade unions limit their objectives to collective bargaining for their own interests or when they aim at more radical political purposes and broader social interests.

Other social movements that have influenced the determination of the unions' social objectives are the student movement, peasant movement, and NGO movement. In certain periods, trade unions organized

collective action to support the aims of other social movements. In other periods, they needed to seek support from those social movements. Now that trade unions are not as powerful as in the past, the success and failure of labour campaigns are more dependent on the support of other social movements. This development requires the trade unions to redefine the interests they represent, and the membership they seek.

First, in order to develop coordination between trade unions and other social movements, trade unions had to broaden their demands and extend their collective action to include the interests of those social movements. Only when the unions' collective demands offer mutual benefits for trade unions and other social movements and when trade unions show their commitment to represent a wide range of interests, can the coalition of trade unions and other social movements develop.

Second, as a result of changes in the structure of employment, the possibility of trade unions continuing to be relevant for social development depends on their ability to open up membership beyond those who work in the formal factory system. As a consequence of the economic crisis, a large numbers of trade union members were laid off. Increasing numbers work in the informal industrial sector, such as home-based workers and casual workers. Trade unionism based on factory workers is hence in crisis. The future of the trade union movement depends on its ability to extend its agenda to cover the interests of workers in the informal sector in order to expand its power base.

According to Tarrow (1995: 145), movement organizations must cultivate ties with like-minded groups in order to compensate for any weakness of their constituency base. Given that trade unions are weak and relatively powerless, the formation of a coalition can strengthen the workers' bargaining power. However, collective action for workers' interests can be sustained only when trade unions play the key role in the coalition and have other parties as supportive elements in the campaigns for their own interests. If their allies play a more active role in the leadership of the campaigns, the continuing role of trade unions as representatives of the working class will be in doubt. Crouch (1990: 359) poses a challenging question: unions may have a long-term future, but do union movements?

Notes

[1] This article is part of the author's dissertation, **"**Trade Unions and the Workers'

Collective Action in Thailand, 1972-2002". The author would like to thank the Thailand Research Fund for providing financial support to this dissertation.

[2] By mid-1975, some anti-student movement groups were formed, the most important ones being the Ninth Power, the Red Guars, and the Village Scouts. It was pointed out that these organizations were devised by the powerful elite in order to counter student political power, and to destroy the emerging coalition of peasants, workers, and students (Morell and Chai-anan, 1981: 236).

[3] These parties were the Socialist Party of Thailand, Socialist Front Party of Thailand, and New Force Party.

[4] Apart from these three industrial zones, trade union groups were also formed in the south-east. For example, in Chonburi province, where a number of industrial factories were located, some trade unions also formed a union group, namely the Trade Union Group of the East. However, due to the distance from Bangkok, these unions rarely participated in unions' campaigns, which mostly took place in Bangkok and nearby provinces.

[5] This was shown by the absence of labour NGOs from the networks of NGOs working on urban social issues, established by a number of Bangkok based NGOs in 1990. These networks focused on issues of urban poor, human rights, primary health, children, women, and AIDS (Jaturong, 1992: 97–108)

[6] The story of the twelve workers was publicized in the *Bangkok Post* newspaper in 1994. It was believed that those workers were killed by lead poisoning after working in the factories for many years. The Lamphun Industrial Estate was promulgated by the government as an export-processing zone and there was no trade union in the companies located in the Estate. The workers who were sick and died lost their legal rights to claim compensation from their employers because they lacked knowledge on labour laws and there was no union to help them (Sombat, 1994: 22–3).

[7] These NGOs were Friends of Women Foundation, Project for Labour Information Service and Training, Arom Pongpangan Foundation, and Union for Civil Liberty.

[8] Interview with Sombun Srikhamdokkae, the President of the WEPT, on November 22, 2001.

[9] Interview with Jadet Chaowilai, the coordinator of the Friends of Women Foundation, 29 November 2001.

[10] Interview with Sombun Srikhamdokkae, 22 November 2001.

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ENVIRONMENTAL SOCIAL MOVEMENTS IN THAILAND: A CRITICAL ASSESSMENT[1]

Tim Forsyth

ABSTRACT

Much popular debate about social movements suggests that they are necessarily positive forces for democratization, and that alliances within social movements can be effective means of representing the interests of marginalized people. This paper critically assesses these statements in relation to social movements associated with opposition to the filming of the *The Beach*, and the debate concerning community forestry in Thailand. The paper argues that social movements may not be as representative as commonly thought, and that more attention needs to be paid to how social movements construct environmental norms as another means of politics.

INTRODUCTION

This paper looks critically at environmental social movements in Thailand. Much popular discussion has suggested that social movements may be positive forces for democratization and for resisting environmental degradation. This paper, instead, argues that such optimism needs to be matched with greater awareness of how social movements may also replicate, rather than resist, power bases. In particular, the paper points to the role of different social classes in environmental movements, and to the influence of movements on constructing environmental discourse. The paper does not suggest that social movements have no positive influences. But it is clear that many contemporary approaches to social movements as agents of environmental reform need to be countered by attention to how far movements may successfully represent poor and marginalized people.

The paper is divided into three main sections. The first section summarizes current debates from the social sciences about

environmental social movements—firstly outlining optimistic insights, and then describing more critical views that suggest that social movements may not be as politically representative as commonly thought. The second section then illustrates these arguments in relation to Thailand, and specifically the cases of social movements concerning opposition to the filming of the Hollywood movie, *The Beach*, and concerning the movement for so-called community forestry. The final section then analyzes these events, and draws lessons for how we can approach environmental social movements more critically in the politics of Southeast Asia.

ENVIRONMENTAL SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AND POLITICAL REFORM

In recent years, many social scientists and environmental activists have urged the active involvement of social movements within environmental policy. Much of this involvement is based upon the relationship between social movements and the establishment of a vibrant civil society. As Cohen and Arato (1992: 492) noted, "social movements constitute the dynamic element in processes that might realize the positive potentials of modern civil societies". In this sense, social movements may be defined as examples of collective political activism by several sectors of society within diverse social arenas in order to enact change. They are often associated with, but not necessarily simply composed by, social movement organizations such as non-governmental organizations (NGOs) or grassroots organizations (GROs).

Writers focusing on environmental reform have echoed such views. Arturo Escobar (1996: 65), wrote:

> We need new narratives of life and culture…. they will arise from the mediations that local cultures are able to effect on the discourse and practices of nature, capital, and modernity. This is a collective task that perhaps only social movements are in a position to advance.

And similarly, Peet and Watts (1996: 37,34), describing an approach to environmental politics using social movements known as "Liberation Ecologies", commented:

> movements are collectivities organized around common concerns and oppressions. But as well as being practical struggles over livelihood and survival, they contest the "truths," imaginations, and discourses through which people think, speak about, and experience systems of livelihood.… Rather than "speaking for" subaltern peoples, the idea is to help uncover discourses of resistance, put

them into wider circulation, create networks of ideas. Rather than saying what peasant consciousness should be, were it to be "correct," the idea is to allow discourses to speak for themselves.

Environmental social movements and organizations have also been linked to the rise of environmentalism as a force in international politics, and the role of international advocacy coalitions in enhancing environmental reforms in the developing world. At the 1992 Earth Summit, for example, negotiators urged that NGOs, community-based organizations, and citizen groups should be consulted whenever possible in order to strengthen environmental protection as a political objective and to enhance its implementation at the local level. Bryant and Bailey (1997: 190), for example, argued that environmental grassroots activists and NGOs represent a "natural alliance" against states and transnational corporations. Keck and Sikkink (1999: 215) claimed that international advocacy coalitions between environmental NGOs and campaigners in different countries allow "ecological values to be placed above narrow definitions of national interest". And Princen et al. (1994: 226) similarly argued, "NGOs are increasingly prominent forces in framing environmental issues. They help establish a common language and, sometimes, common world views."

These optimistic accounts of social movements in environmental politics, however, may be questioned for two key reasons. First, it is not always clear how far social movements may represent diverse groups in society, or become dominated by the most powerful groups, even if they are opposed to the state or business interests. Second, it is also unclear how far the political activism associated with social movements may co-produce a form of environmental concern—or discourse—that is also representative of dominant interests.

Social movements and representation

Environmentalism has always experienced a controversial relationship with social classes. Environmentalism has been commonly described as one of the classic "new" social movements—those movements typically associated with the resistance to the instrumentality of modern life in Europe and North America in the 1960s (see Touraine 1981). As such, new social movements are claimed to be different from "old" social movements based on historic class divisions because they concern topics such as environmentalism, gender, or racial rights which (allegedly) cannot be expressed in terms of class alone. Yet, significantly, new social movements have often been composed of

relatively more powerful middle classes who have sought to achieve reform for the sake of all classes. Giddens (1973), for example, claimed new social movements were "class-aware" but not "class-conscious." Offe wrote:

> New middle class politics, in contrast to most working class politics, as well as old middle class politics, is typically a politics *of a* class but not *on behalf of* a class (Offe, 1985: 833, emphasis in original).

This class emphasis within environmentalism has led some critics to suggest that its objectives are necessarily more oriented towards bourgeois, or middle-class, interests than working-class or peasantry perceptions of environmental concern. Historians of environmentalism in the USA, for example, have highlighted how perceptions of wilderness as fragile or beautiful have been linked to the emergence of urban middle classes (see the seminal work of Nash, 1982). Giddens (1994), again, has linked the desire to conserve nature to the anxieties about the perceived "loss of tradition" in late modernity, rather than to real and underlying environmental threats. Yet, the influence of such middle-class activism, "on behalf" of other classes may also imply that an environmental scientific concern, *per se*, is inherently class-based. The Marxist analyst, Enzensberger (1974: 10) famously commented:

> The social neutrality to which the ecological debate lays claim, having recourse as it does so to strategies derived from the evidence of the natural sciences, is a fiction.… In so far as it can be considered a source of ideology, ecology is a matter that concerns the middle class.

Such dominance of wilderness concerns in social movements has also been noted in regards to alliances between NGOs and grassroots organizations. Covey (1995), for example, in the Philippines found that coalitions between local, grassroots activists and urban NGOs often led to the loss of local concerns. Yet Lohmann (1995) also noted in relation to Thailand that such alliances always offered advantages and disadvantages: grassroots activists may often have to sacrifice total control over a campaign's objectives in order to gain the benefit of an NGO's greater political power and visibility.

Environmental concerns and dominant discourse

Such statements have also been echoed in debates concerning environmental discourses and the politics of environmental science. In particular, some theorists of science have argued that the focus on preserving wilderness within much mainstream environmentalism is

linked with the adoption of so-called "balance of nature" or equilibrium-based notions of ecology (see Botkin, 1990; Zimmerer, 2000). Equilibrium-based approaches to ecology, in simple terms, refer to the belief that ecosystems illustrate principles of entropy, balance, and progression to pre-defined points of stasis (such as under Clement's theory of succession). Increasingly, however, these approaches have been questioned by so-called "non-equilibrium" ecology, which, in contrast, highlights insights from physical chaos theory and social debates about the construction of physical reality. Under non-equilibrium ecology, ecologists acknowledge the role of disturbance within ecosystems as a creative and influential force in ecology and landscape. There is also more awareness of how different social systems and values identify the time and space scales into which ecological change is seen to be "stable", such as in valuing wilderness as "pristine" or fragile (Adams, 1997). Importantly, according to some political scientists, such notions of stability and fragility may sometimes be used to legitimize policies—such as resettling villages, or forbidding some agricultural practices—that might otherwise attract criticism for their impacts on forest settlers or shifting cultivators (Leach and Mearns, 1996; Zimmerer, 2000).

There are several implications of these debates for the analysis of social movements in environmental politics. First, the environmental concern used by social movements to legitimize political activism against degrading state or industrial activities is itself socially situated and shaped by the activism of movements. Second, there is a strong relationship between the nature and composition of environmental activism by different classes and the scientific assumptions used to justify environmental concern. Environmentalism based on wilderness preservation may reflect equilibrium, or balance-of-nature approaches to environmental explanation, even if such approaches are increasingly questioned.

Reflecting such concerns, Guha and Martiniez-Alier (1997) have described "varieties of environmentalism" based on class differences, and have called for an "environmentalism of the poor" which focuses less on landscape conservation, and more on sustainable local livelihoods and environmental protection for poor people. Similarly, Satterthwaite (1997) has claimed that hegemonic environmentalism in many developing countries has been influenced too greatly by the so-called "green" agenda (of conserving landscapes, trees, animals) rather than the "brown" agenda of protection against industrial or urban pollution as relevant to people.

Environmental social movements are therefore commonly portrayed as being necessarily beneficial for environmental policy and civil society. Yet, evidence suggests that they are also highly diverse, tend to be dominated by middle classes, and influence the construction of what is meant to be "environmental" in ways that are not often acknowledged. Consequently, there needs to be greater awareness of the inherent politics of different interests *within* social movements, as well as attention to how social movements influence politics between state, industry and society, or at the international level.

ENVIRONMENTAL SOCIAL MOVEMENTS IN THAILAND

Thailand presents a fitting example to consider the impacts of environmental social movements. Environmentalism has played a significant part in the struggle for more democratic forms of government. In 1988, a long-term campaign finally succeeded in persuading the government to postpone the construction of the proposed Nam Choan dam in a rainforest in western Thailand. Later in the year, a related campaign to ban all forms of logging within Thailand also finally succeeded in a logging ban effective in 1989. Events such as these proved that environmental social movements were increasingly inclusive of diverse sectors of society, for questions of everyday livelihood and accountability of government. Before these events, environmentalism had been promoted mainly by urban, educated citizens such as the Association for Wildlife Conservation of Thailand, or in specific locations such as the mountain of Doi Suthep in Chiang Mai where residents proposed a cable car. As Phil Hirsch (1997: 179) noted optimistically:

> The environmental movement in Thailand has become a significant force in recent years.... The movement has drawn in a wide range of social, economic and political actors in Thai society, yet it has also maintained its role as a significant challenge to dominant patterns of development and vested interests embodied in the *status quo.* In this respect, environmentalism represents an opposition force, but one that has, ironically, been *increasingly inclusive* (emphasis in original).

Yet, such political activism associated with environmental social movements does carry its own bases of power, and the forms of environmentalism emerging reflect wider social changes and attitudes. One important theme has been the perceived loss of heritage and

tradition following rapid industrialization. Thailand has lost some 50 percent of its forests within the last forty years, with subsequent loss of wilderness, and biodiversity. Some observers have suggested these changes together have caused activists to equate the preservation of wilderness with a sense of holding onto a sense of heritage and order (Stott 1991).

Other concerns associated with environmentalism have been the criticism of the state for allowing destructive activities to continue, or for being implicated corruptly. For years before Thailand's first effective democratic government in 1988, opposition to environmental projects was often the only major form of public protest that the state would allow. Within the state, the Royal Forestry Department has been accused by activists of being an outdated and ineffective organization that was originally set up more than 100 years ago to oversee logging, yet now has the unfamiliar role of protecting forests. A further theme is the metaphorical use of conservation to express a sense of nationalism or autonomy over natural resources against their use or export by foreign companies. As is well known, Thailand is the only Southeast Asian country not to be formally colonized and this theme of independence has remained prominent in much popular political discussion.

Yet the sense of autonomy and localized control may also be directed at people within Thailand that seek to degrade environment. Such views may also influence the evolution of environmental discourse. The following quotation (from a respected environmental magazine published in English in Bangkok), presents the image of environmental degradation resulting from deforestation that is commonly adopted throughout Thailand:

> When I was a boy, our village was surrounded by dense forest. There were tigers and lots of big trees, some two meters in diameter. When I was about 30, I saw the forest beginning to disappear, but then there was still water in the streams. Fifteen years later, the stream had disappeared too. Now we only have artesian wells which are so inadequate that people fight over them.[2]

This statement, while undoubtedly indicating a variety of problems experienced by rural people in many areas of Thailand, also reflects many wider—or middle-class or equilibrium-based—framings of environmental concern. Framings include the loss of wildlife; a sense of lost equilibrium or harmony in the countryside; and encroaching conflict and strife as a result. Different quotations do not share these framings. The following quotation comes from a highland farmer (of the Iu Mien,

or Yao ethnicity) in Thailand, who historically practiced shifting cultivation including the occasional burning of forest, and who traditionally lived high up in the hills rather on the plains beneath them. This statement apparently contradicts the preceding description.

> It has been a saying in our people for many, many years that in order to get a regular, year-round long-term supply of water you need to cut down the largest trees around the village. I have seen it myself. It is only since we arrived in Thailand that we have heard people claim that this is not the case, and it is the Thai extension workers who tell us this (Forsyth, 1996).

The point of this comparison is not to explore which statement may be more accurate but instead to indicate that both are examples of different evaluations of environmental change from different experiences of hydrology. The first quotation may be seen to be more accurate and more resonant with the experiences of many environmental campaigners. Yet, the second statement also suggests that the knowledge claims about the impacts of deforestation on water supplies locally may result more from the powerful influence of the agricultural extension workers in highland regions than on the experiences of local farmers. Water shortages in Thailand are indeed common and urgent problems, yet there is much debate about how far these are actually caused by deforestation—as commonly claimed by lowland settlers and farmers— or by increasing demand for water through the growth in irrigation, industrial estates, and cities (see Alford, 1992; Forsyth, 1996, 1999). In such cases, the emergence of social movements that urge an end to deforestation in order to prevent water shortages may be considered to represent only some of the perspectives of stakeholders involved in water and forest use. Relying only on the information carried by social movements about land use and environmental impacts may therefore contain hidden political implications.

The following case studies consider in more detail the role of social movements in creating new forms of political power concerning the uses of natural resources in Thailand. The first case study summarizes the high-profile campaign against the filming of the Hollywood movie, *The Beach* in a national park. The second case assesses the campaign for community forestry—or enhanced public governance of forests—in general. The point of these cases is to illustrate the two key points of this paper: that the analysis of social movements in environmental policy needs to consider more closely the class basis of who participates (and wins) in social movements; and that social movements influence

underlying environmental discourse. Both cases may be seen to be part of general environmental activism rather than two specific social movements, but the two cases offer a useful opportunity to demonstrate activism that first highlights the "balance" of nature, and the alternative forms of activism that challenge this principle. The cases are described in basic detail first, and then the paper discusses them in greater detail afterwards.

Resisting "The Beach"

In 1998, the Royal Forestry Department (RFD) incited controversy when it allowed a foreign company to film the Hollywood movie, *The Beach*, in the two national parks of the Phi Phi islands in southern Thailand, and in the Khao Yai national park in the northeast. During the 1970s, a distinctive limestone cave in the neighboring southern province of Phangnga became known as "James Bond Island" after *The Man with the Golden Gun* was filmed there, and has remained a tourist attraction since. It was hoped that *The Beach*, starring such a Hollywood idol as Leonardo Di Caprio, and featuring a story about backpackers, drugs and self-exploration, would generate a new flow of tourism and publicity for Thailand.

Unfortunately, the film crew wanted to change the physical properties of the selected beach in Maya Bay, Phi Phi Leh Island. Bulldozers were used to widen the area covered by sand in order to shoot a soccer game, and sixty coconut palms were imported and planted on the beach in order to make it conform to the image of a tropical paradise that the team wanted. This was in clear contravention of the 1961 National Park Act of Thailand that stated it was illegal to damage or change any aspect of landscape in parks. The decision by the RFD therefore appeared to be a case of the government both bending national laws for international investors, and failing to protect natural resources.

Throughout the dispute, campaigners sought to represent the actions of the RFD in terms of an assault on a unique and fragile ecosystem. Indeed, these statements represent a strong application of "equilibrium"-based approaches to ecology. A leading campaigner, a woman who had been active for years as a freelance journalist and environmentalist, was quoted as saying:

> If they were just shooting the film, that would be fine, but they're going to take out the indigenous plants and keep them in pots in a nursery. The place is beautiful but it's not Hollywood's idea of a tropical island. For them a tropical island needs coconut trees so

they're going to plant 100 coconut trees. This is a major ecological disaster.[3]

A particularly graphic editorial in *The Nation*, an English-language national daily newspaper, stated:

Imagine filming an ambitious Hollywood blockbuster on Phi Phi Island, one of the most beautiful islands in the Pacific. All the elaborate and crushing equipment and ravaging crew laying waste to most of what they touch. This is what is about to descend on Phi Phi if 20th Century Fox gets the final go ahead from the Thai Government to shoot *The Beach*.[4]

Much concern focused on the disturbance to the plants, sand and coral in the bay. Newspaper reports and information on Internet pages mentioned exotically named local plants such as Giant Milkweed, Sea Pandanus, Spider Lily and other beach grasses. Some journalists also suggested that introducing coconut palms to the island may be damaging because they may not be indigenous. A university biologist also expressed concern at the company's restoration efforts, saying:

From years of experience and numerous experiments around the world, there's never been a case where the altered environment can be completely restored,[5]

Meanwhile, the campaign also maintained pressure on the RFD and its high-profile director, Plodprasob Suraswadi, for alleged corruption in overturning national legislation, and also for accepting a payment of some $200,000 from the company to assist with cleaning up the site. Fishing communities and villagers on neighboring islands and the mainland also joined the protest, although newspapers reported that many villagers also supported the filming.

Although middle-class activists dominated the campaign, the national labour organization and the Assembly of the Poor, sent representatives to show support. Indeed, several organizations supported the presentation of a lawsuit against the RFD in Thailand, and some twenty civic and environmental groups also filed a petition to the US Department of Justice alleging that Fox had acted corruptly by offering the RFD a bribe.

The campaign effectively ended when the filming was complete and when the film was eventually released to poor reviews. Although the campaigners had failed to stop the filming, or succeed in getting the lawsuit heard, they did succeed in drawing attention to the apparently undemocratic and highhanded actions of the RFD. The ecological claims of the campaigners, however, were questioned by a variety of observers. Two marine biologists from the USA wrote to Thai newspapers stating

that, after their inspection of Maya Bay, "no coral appeared to have been damaged in any way" and that the plantation of coconut trees had been done in an "exemplary" way. They also drew attention to the fact that the filming company had actually removed some two tones of garbage from the beach area that had been left over some years by tourists. One of the biologists had worked for Reef Check, a non-profit project endorsed by the United Nations. They wrote to question

why *The Beach* was the target of all this environmental ire?… Who put on this show? Who scripted it? If they were concerned enough to put together a coalition of environment groups, why aren't they complaining about the trawlers, the bombing of coral reefs in the Similans [neighboring islands], the nets that cover the shallow corals there, the rape of the rocks off Koh Phi Phi Don where all of the baby black-tipped sharks have been taken to be served up in local restaurants? Why are they not protesting the dumping by boats of sewage that is destroying the water quality and diving off both islands?[6]

This statement may be somewhat naive by failing to appreciate that such protests would usually lead to personal danger for anyone taking part. But the statement does show that the controversy surrounding *The Beach* is just one of several possible environmental concerns in the region.

Debating "community forestry"

The second case study concerns the long-standing debate about so-called community forestry. The term, "community forestry" refers to the governance and management of forest resources by local people such as villagers, rather than centrally through government agencies such as the RFD. Indeed, the words, "community forests" are sometimes used instead of "forestry" in order to indicate a separation from orthodox concepts of forest management and logging, and to acknowledge the diverse definitions of forestry that may occur outside plantation forests (see Somsak and Permsak, 2000).

Concepts of community forestry have been discussed and used for many years in Thailand. But the debate became more controversial after the logging ban of 1989. The ban was originally introduced in order to protect both the livelihoods of local dwellers who used forests and forest products, as well as to protect forests for wilderness and biodiversity (PER, 1992). Under the logging ban, all forms of deforestation, including some forms of community forestry, were considered illegal, and so in 1990 activists originally proposed a Community Forestry Bill

in order to clarify the rights of entry to forests. Conservationists, however, have been concerned that increasing forest access for limited agriculture may also imply allowing more damaging economic activities such as mining and logging concessions. The following debate, including various proposed drafts of the Bill, have involved many social movements, including a body of NGOs and activists seeking to protect forests against all further kinds of encroachment; and other activists who have seen access to forests to be a crucial element of democratization and local autonomy in Thailand (see Johnson and Forsyth, 2002).

The first official draft of community forest legislation was produced by the RFD in 1990, shortly after the passing of the ban on logging in 1989. Yet this first draft was criticized by NGOs, academics, and grassroots organizations for effectively maintaining forest management as a state monopoly. In response, a coalition of activists and NGOs such as the Project for Ecological Recovery developed a new "people's" draft bill that asserted the rights of local villages to enter and use forests. This bill was referred to in the Thai Forestry Sector Master Plan of 1993, but in general, official action on developing "community" forests (or officially recognizing those already in existence) was held back during the early 1990s largely because of the re-emergence of a military government (1991–1992). During this period (and shortly afterwards), the government sought to reforest large areas of northern and northeastern Thailand, often including forcible resettlement of villages such as at Pa Kham in Buri Ram province. Such reforestation was often justified on grounds that it was good for environment or watershed protection (such as the *Isaan Kheow* or "Green Isaan" campaign). But critics suggested reforestation was also a quick way for the government to regain control over land that officially was state owned, or for entrepreneurs to make profits from plantations of teak or eucalyptus.

Eventually, in 1996, the government requested the National Economic and Social Development Board (NESDB), a policy-making body composed of both government and public figures, to organize and draft a new version of the Community Forestry Bill, with participation of representatives from government, NGOs, academics, and grassroots communities. This NESDB version was approved subsequently by the Cabinet, but still caused controversies among NGOs over the issue of allowing community forests within protected forest areas such as National Parks or specifically identified watershed protection areas. Some environmental groups argued that the then Prime Minister, Chawalit Yongchaiyudh, had proposed to allow community forests in

official sanctioned protected areas as a covert way to allow limited business interests in forests. This led to a public hearing concluding that community forests in the protected areas were allowed on condition that communities proved that they settled before 1993 and that they used forests sustainably. Yet following this, and further changes in government, some more conservationist environmental groups and government officials within the RFD, notably the new Director General of the RFD, Plodprasob Suraswadi, argued in emotional terms that people and forests cannot co-exist, leading to yet more redrafting of the Bill, and more opposition from social development NGOs and activists (see also Pinkaew, 1997).

In 1999, a revised version of the NESDB draft was submitted to parliament along with 50,000 supportive signatures from across Thailand. In July 2000, this draft, along with the more conservationist environmental version, and four further drafts from other parliamentary parties, passed the first reading in parliament. The aim was to reduce discussion to these existing proposals. Currently, debate focuses on choosing which of these opposing versions to accept. One key debate, for example, refers to the definition of "community". The "people's" version proposes, in accordance with the 1997 Constitution, that a local community is defined as a "social group" living in the same locality and having the same cultural heritage, and that such a community can apply for that status after a minimum of five years experience in safeguarding forest land. By contrast, the alternative government version proposes that a "community" may comprise at least fifty individuals living in proximity to forest, regardless of how long they have been there or how forest is managed. Critics fear this latter scheme may allow commercial projects and plantations rather than the empowerment of villagers. Similarly, the two main proposals also differ on the power of the RFD to propose or veto land-management plans (see also Achara, 2000; Anan, 2000).

Yet, the debate about community forestry has also seen differences in the types of social movement and activism techniques. On the one hand, ironically, many conservationist NGOs have found themselves allied with the RFD because they both seek to exclude access to many forest areas by all actors, including local dwellers and farmers. The statement of Plodprasob, that people and forests cannot co-exist, in essence represents a statement about ecological equilibrium that implies that irreparable damage may occur from people gaining access to forests.

One the other hand, however, this statement is widely challenged by

various social development activists or farming groups who claim that
local people may provide a better form of forest management than the
RFD, or that disturbed forests are not necessarily degraded forests. For
example, one representative of the Karen—an upland group who have
been described as adopting various forms of community forests—
commented:

Community forestry's main concern is the livelihoods of local people
and local communities.… Scientific foresters [such as the RFD] assume
that humans only make problems in a protected area, but our work is to
let outsiders understand how local people conserve the forest.…
Community forestry is about decentralized management by
communities, but conventional scientific forestry is about centralized
management.[7]

And one other internationally respected expert in community forestry
suggested the RFD—and proponents of so-called scientific, or
plantation-based forestry—unhelpfully exclude less powerful people
who often have equally valid, but different, knowledge of forest
management:

> Forestry education follows the curriculum and style of Western
> forestry education... it ignores the local knowledge.[8]

Such statements reflect various elements of social movement activism
discussed above. Much activism about forestry in Thailand has often
sought to represent, or "speak on behalf of" (see Offe, above), less
powerful social groups such as those who may lose agricultural land to
plantation forestry, or whose livelihoods depend on access to forests.
Frequently these actions have acknowledged that allowing access to
forests may also mean confronting conservationists. One campaigning
journalist, for example, commented:

> We must... stick together, work together, and we just couldn't kick
> the poor out of the scene just to save the trees.[9]

But some proponents of community forestry have also adopted
elements of green (or conservationist) discourse in order to legitimize
their concerns. For example, one recent colorful book about the Akha
ethnic minority (in English) in northern Thailand adopted the rather
romantic title, *Akha: Guardians of the Forest* (Goodman 1998) because
the Akha have a reputation for protecting forest zones close to villages
for spiritual purposes. Research on biodiversity and Akha shifting
cultivation in general, however, has suggested that agricultural land
tended by Akha is less biodiverse than land tended by other groups such

as the Karen and Lawa (Schmidt-Vogt, 1996). Other critics have also pointed to the romanticization of the Karen as necessarily protective of forests, in order to demonstrate, contra-Plodprasob, that people and forest can co-exist (Walker, 2001). Such arguments, of course, do not suggest that the Karen or Akha should or should not be criticized for forest management, but illustrate how the debate about forest management in Thailand is increasingly commoditizing ethnic groups for the sake of the debate, but in ways that do not necessarily match the groups' own views about themselves.

Conservationists have also used similar tactics. In 1991 an Australian television documentary about forest disputes in northern Thailand used the title: "*The Monk, the Princess and the Forest*" (van Beld 1991) in order to focus on one particularly notorious conflict at Chom Thong where lowland villagers, with the support of a local monk and royal benefactor, were working to exclude highland farmers from the forest. The documentary romanticized the dispute by inaccurately describing the local forest as "rainforest", and by claiming the dispute was a good example of grassroots resistance against environmental degradation. Later analyses have criticized this group as racist and inflammatory for their actions, and particularly for erecting a new barbed-wire fence with posts painted in Thai national colours around land used by upland farmers (Pinkaew 1997; Lohmann 1999). Indeed, the use of Thai colours in this context again indicates nationalism being used to define locality, or the boundary around which certain actors will allow debate to take place. The adoption of nationalism was again shown at a conference in Chiang Mai in 2001 when members of this conservationist group sought to delegitimize scientific statements from foreign academics on the grounds they were "foreigners" who wanted to impose their own views or "steal Thai nature from Thai people".[10] Some activists have also resisted the ratification of the international Convention on Biological Diversity because it may also allow foreign companies to "steal" Thai biodiversity. In this confrontational sense, the national territory itself is being used as a form of locality, and a device to include or exclude participants in debate.

Perhaps most directly, however, there have also been occasions when some forms of political activism by social groups have been forcibly stopped by the state. In May 1999, for example, some 5,000 upland and lowland farmers demonstrated outside the provincial hall of Chiang Mai with a variety of demands including better access to Thai citizenship and an end to unwanted reforestation. Such protests represented a different

form of environmental concern to that commonly stated by conservation groups, or those proposing an equilibrium approach to ecology. The protest was forcibly broken up by RFD and police. When Thai academics called for a more informed approach to forest rights and citizenship, the governor of Chiang Mai denounced them as "traitors". In 2001, a coalition of pro-democracy groups also called on Plodprasob to resign because of his use of force to resist calls for community forestry, and his tendency to declare agricultural or settled land as "sanctuary forest" in order to legitimize resettlement.[11] This paper has summarized only a few examples of conflicts about community forestry. Debates and activism continue.

ASSESSING THE HIDDEN POLITICS OF SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

The case studies presented above suggest a few important lessons about social movements and environmental activism in Thailand. As noted in the introduction, much popular political debate has suggested that social movements are effective means of opposing environmental degradation, and of regulating the state. In addition, some writers have suggested that coalitions between NGOs and grassroots organizations may enhance the political strength of environmentalism. Indeed, much mainstream environmentalism under "new" social movements has been shown to be a coalition of different classes, or at least the middle classes seeking to act on behalf of other classes for the benefit of society at large.

The case studies, however, has suggested such views require more critical scrutiny. Two important points are worth noting. First, it must not be assumed that the social movements are indeed speaking on behalf of other groups. The campaign against *The Beach* spoke authoritatively and loudly about the immense ecological damage produced by the filming process. But, as shown in the case of community forestry, the arguments in favor of ecological fragility and equilibrium were more publicly opposed, and were also shown to be linked to various exclusionary land-use policies that are contested by a wide variety of scientists and poor people alike.

Second, it is also clear that the social movements themselves help construct notions of ecological concern that are presented as factual, yet which are highly uncertain and contested. Different participants in environmental social movements may produce different emphasis on the type of ecological concern. For example, if debates about community

forestry are dominated by upland farmers and the campaigning journalist quoted above, then environmental policy may seek to address rural livelihoods and access to land rather than exclusion of people from land. Such framings of environmentalism do not suggest that orthodox scientific approaches to watershed degradation or deforestation need be dismissed, but that political solutions should be found within what is agreed about the impacts of deforestation and agriculture.

As a result of these findings, it is clear that the analysis of environmental social movements needs to be far more attentive to the construction of norms of environmentalism, or scientific concern, rather than simply looking at different political actors who support or oppose such norms. In the case of resistance to *The Beach*, the activists spoke with great confidence about the alleged ecological impacts of filming. But many statements are contentious according to perspectives of non-equilibrium ecology. For example, the statement of one academic above, that "there's never been a case where the altered environment can be completely restored" is ironic because such landscapes are changing constantly anyway, and that some impacts from humans may be difficult to differentiate from those occurring naturally (see Adams, 1997; Zimmerer, 2000). Similarly, the overall framing of the criticism in terms of what was occurring to a beach already polluted by tourists removed attention from other local possible concerns such as overfishing or dumping of sewage. The dominant environmental discourse associated with this disputes was shaped by activists, and their choices concerning which strategies would gain the maximum political goals. (As the scientist from Reef Watch noted: "who put on this show? Who scripted it?") It is also worth noting that activists resisting *The Beach* also included family members and close friends of NGO workers working for watershed conservation in the north of Thailand, who are actively seeking to exclude upland agriculture because of its alleged impacts on fragile ecology. Hence, there may be coordination of such "scripts" between both case studies.

Yet, while the critics of *The Beach* sought to resist filming by highlighting alleged ecological fragility, ethnic groups or marginalized people may be misrepresented. The case of community forestry demonstrated that some activists and writers have sought to portray some ethnic groups in somewhat romantic terms as protectors of nature. There is much evidence already that ethnic minorities such as so-called "hill tribes" may not be as damaging to environment as commonly thought (e.g. Alford, 1992; Forsyth, 1996). But the implication of some

descriptions of hill tribes as "Guardians of the Forest" indicate that activists are adopting pre-existing green environmental discourses in order to represent upland minorities, rather than seek to redefine such discourse on fairer grounds for them. Indeed, the social activism performed by minorities themselves—such as at Chiang Mai in 1999— framed environmental concern within terms of sustainable agriculture and an end to plantation forestry on agricultural land. But the police and RFD quickly terminated such activism, and the government quickly castigated academics seeking to highlight the causes of citizenship and land rights. It may therefore be very difficult to achieve, what Peet and Watts (1996, quoted above) called, allowing subaltern discourses to "speak for themselves." Indeed, it seems such discourses are quickly subsumed or shaped by more powerful interests.

CONCLUSION

This paper has adopted a critical tone towards some popular debates about the influence of social movements in environmental politics in Thailand. The paper has argued that many optimistic approaches to social movements are overstated, and that there needs to be more attention to how far social movements actually represent marginalized people, and how far the needs and concerns of marginalized people are shaped by more powerful interests.

Most importantly, this paper has argued that greater attention needs to be paid to the construction of the environmental norms that are often used as scientific justifications for social activism. As shown in the case of opposition to the film, *The Beach* and debates concerning community forestry, concepts of ecological fragility and equilibrium have been used to add political urgency to campaigns to criticize the state, or to encourage land-use policies that exclude certain types of land use that affect wilderness areas. Yet, such claims have also been shown to be highly contested, and arguably influenced more by concerns to regulate a corrupt state; maintain national autonomy against ethnic minorities or foreign companies; and maintain senses of lost tradition and wilderness within a rapidly changing Thailand. As Zimmerer (2000: 357) noted:

> Many abuses that have stemmed from conservation policies are rooted in the belief, held by policymakers, politicians, scientists, and administrators, of a balance or equilibrium-tending stability of nature.

Political reformers need to adopt a more critical perspective towards environmental social movements. Environmentalism has been associated

with the "new" social movements, and as such arguably has overlooked the ways in which middle classes may dominate such movements. Grassroots organizations and poorer people may lack the political or communicative power to influence existing discourses to propose a reframing of policies to address their needs. Activists may willingly choose to adopt pre-existing—if inaccurate—discourses in order to add legitimacy and potency to their campaigns, even if ultimately such discourses do not ultimately match their concerns.

The lessons of this paper are that each social movement or conflict needs to be assessed for how far different sides may—or may not—represent different social groups. Social movements should be seen as any other form of political activism—with winners and losers, engaging with, as well as opposing, state policies. Only by understanding the innate politics of social movements, and their adopted environmental discourses, will the democratic potential of movements be fully achieved.

Notes

[1] This research was supported by the Economic and Social Research Council of the UK, project: R000222767, 'The local and the global: environmental knowledge and social movements in Thailand'.

[2] *Watershed* magazine 1:1 (1990).

[3] *Bangkok Post* 18 October 1998.

[4] *The Nation*, 17 October 1998: A4.

[5] Surachet Chetmas, Dean of Faculty of Forestry, Kasetsart University, quoted in *Bangkok Post*, 19 December 1998.

[6] *Bangkok Post*, 18 February 1999.

[7] Saw Frankie, Coordinator of Karen Education Information Center in Bangkok, quoted in *Watershed* 6:2 (2001): 22.

[8] Dr. Somsak Sukwong, Director, Regional Community Forestry Training, Center, Bangkok, quoted in *Watershed* 6:2 (2001): 12.

[9] Santisuda Ekichai, *Bangkok Post*, personal interview with author, 19 March 1999.

[10] Personal observation at: International Symposium on Watershed Management, Highland and Lowland in the Protected Area Regime: Towards New Principles and Practices, International Centre, Chiang Mai University, 23–6 March 2001.

[11] *Bangkok Post*, 30 July 2001.

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