

helps provide the answer: "Southeast Asia has had the most astonishing progress of all the regions." Over the last decade, the economies of ASEAN, with the exception of the Philippines, have enjoyed high growth rates and are on the way to becoming full-fledged "newly industrialized countries." Evidently, such a prospect is a threat to Washington, and its strategic partners, London and Beijing.

Documentation

AFLI representative: 'We trained them all'

The following interview with Philip Fishman, head of the Asia-American Labor Institute (AFLI) of the AFL-CIO in Bangkok until he became head of the AFL-CIO International Division, was made available to EIR:

On the role of the labor unions in the democracy protests: They played a fairly big role, a bigger role than I thought originally. There was at least one, and maybe two. I know one for sure who was on the demonstration organizing committee with Chamlong, and whether there was an arrest warrant or not, he was one of the people cited. . . . There was another leader from the labor movement who was basically in charge of erecting barricades and was very well known. The vice president of the Thai Trade Union Congress, which is the largest private sector congress in Thailand, spoke at the demonstrations that were taking place in other places. And I just saw . . . that at least seven labor leaders were arrested during the demonstrations, so I think they played a bigger role than I originally knew about. . . .

It is often the case, and it's personally something I'm quite proud of, that most of these labor leaders who are playing a role in these pro-democracy demonstrations are people who were closest to us and received the most extensive training. One of the interesting programs that our institute had been conducting there for five years was a sort of democracy education program, where a cadre of labor leaders were taught to teach model courses to rank-and-file labor leaders on the basic aspects of democracy, the role that trade unions play in building and protecting democracy, how to run a democratic union, these types of things. And almost without exception, these labor leaders who were involved in the leadership and most active in these democracy demonstrations were people that were part of the cadre of educators. So, it is something that we are very proud of.

We used materials here that we had developed basically at our Latin American institute, who sort of have been doing these kinds of programs longer. And then we adopted them to an Asian-Thai context, and we held a series of long training programs, day-long, residential training programs for these democracy educators, out of which emerged a core group of 10 or 12. The rest of them really didn't measure up for one reason or another.

And then these 12 used these materials and boiled them down to a two-day curriculum for rank-and-file union members, and then developed materials in Thai based on the materials that they had been presented in their training programs. The materials they presented were each about five pages long. They developed a series of four or five pamphlets which were developed in very basic language. One was on the political aspects of democracy, and the social aspects of democracy as well as unions and democracy. . . .

The workers themselves did the outlook forum and so on, and there was a series of democracy education programs for rank and file union members and local union leaders in Thailand, which were held at least once a month. And, about the time I left, there were about 1,400 unionists who had attended these programs and the democracy educators themselves used to get together on a quarterly basis and review curriculum and review training techniques, evaluate and so forth, and usually between that and the quarterly meetings I would try to expand upon their own experience and knowledge.

For example, we had Bertil Lintner [correspondent for *Far Eastern Economic Review*, who has led a campaign against the Thai military—ed.]. They were curious about what was going on in Burma for example. During one of these quarterly meetings, we invited Bertil to come and give a presentation on what happened in Burma. So usually we would bring another piece into it.

There was some difficulty, for example, the difference between the political spectrum and the economics spectrum. And there is such a strong identification, as you might know, in Thailand, between democracy and capitalism, that it was hard for our people to see that democracy was a political idea and that there was a whole range of economic structures or systems that could be democratic, that could go along with a political democratic system; so we brought in an ICFTU [International Congress of Free Trade Unions] official who's from Scandinavia, from Sweden, to give them an idea of the Swedish model, to make them understand that when you talk about democracy, you're not talking about laissez-faire capitalism. So, we added a piece to it.

Another time, we had a long session on coalition building, on how to reach out to other groups in a society on particular issues and develop coalitions. It was very interesting.

For me, it was an eye opening. It was really inspiring. It seems to have paid off, in very unexpected ways.

On the role of the U.S. embassy: I have heard that this is something the embassy has taken note of there. There is some indication that they were kind of surprised to see our people play such a preeminent role. They're supportive. . . . The political section, which is responsible for maintaining contact with the parties, with the workers, with the students, with the political opposition, they are usually more understanding of the broader picture and usually more sympathetic. . . . I am sure that the political section people are very cognizant of who is involved and what kind of role they are playing, and very appreciative of some of the work we did, in not only helping to build a democratic institution, but also training individual people who have now emerged in such essential roles. Whether or not that extends up to the ambassador, I really don't know.

On opposition leader Gen. Chavalit Yongchaiyuth: Throughout the '70s and perhaps leading into the early '80s, there was a sort of activist element within the military—the Young Turks they were called; they were responsible for some of the early coup attempts in the early 1980s. Chavalit was identified with that group. Chavalit really rose to fame by putting together the policies in the south that coopted the communists. . . . One of the ironies of the situation is that a lot of those people who came out of the jungle became advisers to Chavalit, and became advisers to a lot of different politicians and so on. They were not only not thrown into jail, but they were immediately accepted as being credible. . . . Chavalit was identified with this soft response to the communists. He was identified with Prasert Supkongkorn, one of the founders of the Communist Party. He was identified with more of the leftist elements.

The irony of it was that the American embassy was in love with Chavalit. He was their boy. He was trained in the U.S.

Asia Foundation: Is Asia following Ibero-America?

The following interview with Asia Foundation staffer Steven Clayborne was made available to EIR:

On environmentalism: That's one of our major focuses in Thailand over the last couple of years, to help strengthen the environmental NGOs in Thailand, and work with businesses and the government on compliance issues and on policy issues, environmental policy issues. So that is something that is definitely on the horizon in Thailand. . . .

The other thing we are trying to do is to hook into some local government assistance. The Interior Ministry runs local government basically in Thailand, but there is some talk that

they will devolve some power, so we are going to pick some municipalities and help with some planning, so that they can actually make requests to the Interior Ministry for money for their own development projects. And hopefully this will tie into the environmental planning aspect of things.

On penetrating Thai democracy: We are trying to work with the Parliament. We have been trying to work with them off and on for a long time. The latest project we had was working with a group of young, would-be parliamentary research analysts who would be housed in an office—a research bureau, basically—who would do research on the budget and provide research services to the parliamentarians, to the congressmen. And this was done through a public think tank, the Institute for Public Policy Studies. And we are still working on this project, if the Assembly ever gets it together. We had them here for nine months basically, studying state legislatures and support services there. So hopefully, we had a couple of guys who were elected to Parliament again who were behind this project, and they will get things off the ground.

So, hopefully, they will help push this through, or at least get it off the ground, with the idea that congressmen need some independent sources of information and research on things. So, that is our major project, which we are still trying to get going.

And then we have been working on accountability issues as well. Trying to bring government accountability departments together, auditing departments, for example, and a corruption commission, and different bureaus in the Thai bureaucracy, to take another look at accountability mechanisms, financial accountability, and basically in helping them to develop some training programs. . . .

And then we are also working with the press, the Press Development Institute of Thailand, on investigative reporting training programs to strengthen their ability to do that kind of investigative journalism. That's the other side of accountability. Again, focus on accountability.

The institute is about 10 years old. It's not what you would call one of our creations, but we helped get it off the ground. We have a lot of journalist friends. It's a fairly free press. . . . So we're pretty active. We have a pretty big program in Thailand.

On the military: There is definitely some sort of dialogue going on—it's in the streets now. It's always been a bone of contention. I think we have tried to address it by bringing military people over here and looking at the relations between our military and civil society, and we are planning to do more in this area in Asia. But I guess the study of civil-military relations is not as advanced as in Latin America, for example, where they have really gone through some kind of process. The question is, is Asia following the same sort of process?