



## Anti-Globalization Movements in Southeast Asia

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### Introduction

In the 1980s, while the United States and Europe were in recession, the Asian region was hailed as “living proof that the market offered a way out of poverty and underdevelopment” (Martin and Schumann 1996 p. 143). The region’s 1997-1998 economic crisis however brought out the darker side of the “Asian miracle.” As noted the boom went “hand-in-hand with corruption, political repression, massive environmental destruction, and often extreme exploitation of the labor force with no rights” (Martin and Schumann 1996, p. 145). For decades, the development pattern brought about by capitalism under a neo-liberal paradigm and advanced by the phenomenon of globalization was critiqued by “voices in the wilderness” that were basically ignored.

*... globalization, interpreted most importantly but not solely as the latest stage of capitalism, is compounding inequalities already in place and developing new ones. The process is intensifying economic, social and political inequalities by privileging the private over the public sphere and by marginalizing the actual, as well as the potential importance of the commons (Thomas 1997 p. 6).*

In Thailand, for example, capitalist development has been criticized as early as the 1960s because “the commercialization and technology imposed on the village by the state policy undermined the moral basis of a peasant society” (Kaewthep 1984 p. 142), “siphoned off village capital, narrowed peasant economic choices and contributed to discontent,” and accelerated widespread “peasant dispossession” (Bello et al. 1998 p. 139).

The 1960s also witnessed the rise of proletarianization, wage labor and industrial conflicts developing side-by side with state-led industrialization. Under the pro-US Sarit regime, various measures to promote capital investment were implemented at the expense of suppressing potential wage increase. Workers were also not allowed to strike (Dilokvidharayat 1984).

The Thai experience with capitalist development is not unique. It was duplicated all over the Southeast Asian region. In the Philippines, particularly under the Marcos’ authoritarian regime (1972-1986), repression of civil liberties and violation of human rights in the rural and urban areas facilitated an atmosphere conducive for the entry of foreign investments. All these however merely contributed to the growth and the strengthening of the communist insurgency in the country.

Rebel and other dissident movements not only questioned the policies and programs of multilateral lending agencies such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank but actively opposed these through military means, i.e., through the New People’s Army (NPA), the military arm of the communist party. Massive demonstrations were also led by various leftwing groups against what they called the Marcos-U.S.-IMF/World Bank dictatorship.

Similar issues and concerns were also raised by many elements of the middle-class and even some sections of the upper-classes already disillusioned with the economic policies of the Marcos government and appalled by the regime’s human rights violations. The combined efforts of all the above parallel movements eventually succeeded in overthrowing the Marcos dictatorship through what was billed as the “People Power Revolution” of 1986.

During this period, social movements in the other developing capitalist countries of Southeast Asia, i.e., Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand, did not have equally vibrant social movements (especially of the Left variety) as in the Philippines. One reason is that state control under more "able" dictators such as Suharto, Mahathir and the Thai generals seemed to have been more effective. What seemed, however, to contribute more to the absence of a strong social movement in these countries was the robust economic growth and the generally improved living conditions of the middle class that ensued particularly due to high growth rates in the 1980s and early 1990s.

Thus, the arguments against capitalist development and exploitation as brought about by the confluence of external forces such as the World Bank and the IMF and internal factors such as neoliberal-oriented elites seemed to have been marginalized in these countries. Thailand for one became, in 1991, Asia's "Fifth Tiger" with the world's fastest growing economy between 1985-1995 (Bello et. al 1998). The country was touted as the World Bank's poster model for the international community to emulate.

Malaysia and Indonesia were not far behind. Together with Thailand, they became known as the "New Asian Tigers" signifying their entry into NIC-hood as exemplified in the 1970s by the newly-industrializing countries (NICs) of Taiwan, Singapore, South Korea and Hong Kong. In these countries, one also witnessed the growth of the middle-class and the social movements which grew from this class focused on issues identified with "new social movements" (NSM), e.g., the environment, human rights, women and consumerism.

The concern of the NSMs was that rapid development was also a threat to quality of life due to growing industrial pollution and the absence of gender equality despite the growth in the numbers of working women. These NSM concerns were somehow tolerated by Southeast Asian authoritarian regimes as they did not directly threaten the political leadership, were seemingly devoid of class concerns, and did not raise the issue of democratization.

This was not the case in the Philippines as Filipino social movements carried the class issue and linked it with NSM issues. Together, these concerns were tied up with the issue of democratization hand-in-hand with the anti-dictatorship and anti-imperialist struggle. Such linkages only became a major concern in Thailand in May 1992 when there was an attempted coup that was generally opposed by a large percentage of the Thai populace led by the urban middle class. This ushered in the strengthening of the democratization movement in the country and there seemed to be no turning back for the Thai social movements in pushing further whatever democratic space there was left to be opened.

For Malaysia and Indonesia, however, social movements pushing for democratization became more prominent and visible when the 1997-98 economic crisis hit Asia. Beginning with the fall of the baht in July of that year, this witnessed the collapse of not only the seemingly formidable East Asian economies of Korea and Japan but also of the "New Asian Tigers" of Southeast Asia.

Thus, the crisis provided social movements with the opportunity to raise the issue of democratization. The economic crisis thus engendered a political crisis which witnessed the downfall of Asia's longest serving strongman, Suharto and the most severe challenge against Malaysia's Prime Minister Mohammed Mahathir carried out by his own Deputy Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim who called for *reformasi* (government reforms). Anwar's position was that the economic crisis was not a result of the neo-liberal policies of the government but because of the cronyism and corruption of the Prime Minister and his family and friends.

The political crisis paved the way for the further strengthening of social movements in the region. Though these social movements have been struggling for decades against the nature and social consequences of capitalist development in their countries, it was only with the onset of the 97-98 crisis that their views and influence became popular and widely disseminated.

One major concern these social movements have been raising is the issue of globalization as the path for development. Unlike colonialism or

imperialism, globalization as an “enemy” was quite abstract because of the initial “benefits” and the economic growth brought about by rapid liberalization, privatization and other neo-liberal policies. The economic crisis however served to unmask the real nature of globalization.

“Globalized” Southeast Asian economies were subjected to the uncertain “whims” of external forces and thus rendered vulnerable to the vagaries of international finance and trade. The issue therefore was that these countries have lost their national “sovereignty” to these external forces. An even harsher reality was that the crisis brought about the collapse of hundreds of companies, mass lay-offs and unemployment and in the social sphere an overall deterioration in the lives of all classes of people, depression and even suicides. And as seen in Indonesia, the economic crisis has spawned a political crisis of mass unrest leading to the deaths of hundreds of civilians.

Social movements in Southeast Asia followed the Battle of Seattle demonstrations 1999 with their own protests against the principal agents of globalizations—the IMF, the World Bank, the WTO, and the Asian Development Bank (ADB). It is thus interesting to note not just the critique of Southeast Asian social movements concerning globalization but also their proposed alternatives.

The first part of this paper therefore discusses the arguments which Southeast Asian social movements have against globalization. The second part focuses on the strategies they have used in highlighting their disagreements with globalization as an economic policy of their state. A discussion on the alternatives presented by Southeast Asian anti-globalization movements is examined in the last part.

### **Southeast Asian Movements and Issues Against Globalization**

One interesting argument by proponents of globalization is that it will bring about democracy. A globalized society is thought to bring about economic development which would result into the emergence of a

progressive middle-class which, based on the histories of Western countries, would challenge the authoritarian regimes in the Southeast Asian societies.

This seems to have worked only for Thailand but in the case of Indonesia and Malaysia, however, the “economic success” of their societies gave their respective authoritarian regimes the justification to intensify repressive policies and directions. Thus, Indonesian and Malaysian social movements questioning such authoritarian rule were dealt with harshly and their spaces for advocacy curtailed. In the case of Thailand, however, economic development indeed created a middle-class which is thought to have taken the lead in carrying out the democratization process. But true to its middle-of-road character, it only thinks of itself. This is a problem particularly given the growing disparities between the middle-class and the lower classes. Thus, the issues which Thai social movements were bringing out concerning poverty and underdevelopment in the countryside were basically ignored by the middle-class.

For instance, the Thai middle-class, the majority of which reside in Bangkok looked down on those protesting large-scale government development projects in rural areas, such as dams funded mainly by either the World Bank or the ADB. These protesters who would descend on Bangkok would be regarded as a nuisance and a traffic hazard. Such an attitude can only be attributed to the widening gap between rural people and the urban people. Thailand’s growth had benefited only the 15 percent of the population concentrated in the Bangkok metropolitan area. Moreover, Bangkok prospers at the expense of the Northeast region (known as Isan) which is the poorest part of the country (Bello 1997).

Moreover, the growth of Bangkok is not only at the expense of the people in the rural areas but also the people of poorer neighboring countries such as Laos, Burma, and Cambodia. As noted,

Bangkok grows rapidly, but this growth is fuelled by the rundown of natural capital, with the area of the country covered by forests down to less than 20%, from 60% in the 1950s. Rapid growth has also led to what many call Thai ‘resource imperialism’, with Thai entrepreneurs

now leading the plunder of the timber resources of Burma, Laos, and Cambodia (Bello 1997 p. 157).

A reality confronting all classes and sectors in Bangkok is that the city's air and water pollution are out of control "with the lower reaches of the mighty Chao Phraya River considered as 'biologically dead' and the Gulf of Thailand believed to be in a state of irreversible crisis" (Bello 1997 p. 157).

It was only after the 1997 economic crisis did the Thai middle-class find itself listening to the anti-globalization tirades of Thai social movements mainly composed of grassroots organizations, non-governmental organization (NGOs), academic-activists, and social critics. During the anti-Asian Development Bank (ADB) protest actions in Chiang Mai on the occasion of the Bank's 33<sup>rd</sup> annual conference in May 2000, the Thai social movements succeeded in securing the sympathy of the middle-class—a significant feat considering that they (the middle class) "rarely listen to what protests are really all about. They just expect the government to resolve them, although ironically, they are constantly disheartened by its inability to deliver anything" (Janviroj 2000 A4).

As for the Philippines, the issues of poverty and underdevelopment which leftwing movements blamed on globalization of which one faction equates with imperialism was generally ignored by the middle-class. The Philippine middle-class view was that poverty and underdevelopment were brought about by unfettered corruption and cronyism during the Marcos dictatorship years (1972-1986). This perception seemed to have been vindicated by the seven percent growth which the country experienced under the Ramos Administration from 1992-1998.

What was not realized however and this was brought to their attention during the 1998 Presidential elections was that this growth did not filter down to the masses. Thus, although former President Ramos was the favorite of both the local and foreign business community because of his policies of liberalization and privatization, i.e., policies associated with globalization, his anointed Presidential candidate Jose de Venecia lost

miserably to the then Vice President Joseph Ejercito Estrada who campaigned under a populist platform that appealed to the poor masses. During the campaign Estrada pledged to “redistribute wealth in society” and presented himself as a modern day Robin Hood. Some Leftwing leaders found themselves campaigning for Estrada although one faction of the Left threw its support behind de Venecia.

Philippine social movements have made the point that neo-liberalism lacks a redistributive aspect and therefore is no champion of income equality. As noted by its critics, globalization has resulted in the rich countries growing richer and the poor countries growing poorer and within the country itself, the rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer. Such a reality has been a major criticism of the neo-liberal development policy whereby “20 years of liberalization of the world economy has not led to the generous trickle-down that they have predicted, either in absolute or in relative terms” (Wiklin 1997 p. 28).

Both the state-led NIC-model as seen in the East and Southeast Asian experiences and the free market-model naturally generate and perpetuate social inequalities even as, in the case of the Asian capitalist model, rapid growth takes place. Indeed, high growth rates are necessary to allow a rise in absolute incomes without having to undertake redistribution of wealth. The conjunction of a rise in absolute incomes and worsening income distribution has characterized Korea, Taiwan, Singapore and Thailand in the last 20 years (Bello 1997).

In the case of Malaysia, a challenge for the advocates of anti-globalization is Prime Minister Mahathir Mohammad himself. Mahathir ushered in a period of de-control which allowed the economy to stabilize. For many Malaysian citizens, they have much to “thank” Mahathir for the economic development he has brought to the country while pursuing neo-liberal policies. The economic crisis however also brought out his major flaws, i.e., the cronyism and corruption of his family and friends. Thus, social movements in the country feel that there is a need to continue to pursue *reformasi* or the advocacy for democratization.

The Malaysian anti-globalization movement is therefore split into two factions. One faction feels that globalization, not democracy is the issue. This view can be found among consumerist groups such as the Consumer's Action of Penang (CAP) led by Martin Khor. Another faction on the other hand believes that the anti-globalization movement should work hand-in-hand with the pro-democracy movement. A leading advocate of this is Syed Hussein Ali, a political activist jailed for several years by Mahathir and former University of Malaya professor who now heads the People's Party (*Parti Rakyat*) in Malaysia. As for the jailed Anwar, himself a strong proponent of globalization and liberalization, he is predictably more concerned with democratic reforms and nothing else.

In Indonesia, the anti-globalization movement seems to be stymied by other pressing problems. These include political instability with the downfall of Suharto leading to political wranglings between the moderates as represented by the current President Megawati Sukarnoputri, the military establishment or *Tentara Nasional Indonesia* (TNI), the remnants of Suharto's Golkar party and his cronies, the Muslim political parties, and Muslim fundamentalists. The secession and consequent independence of East Timor was accompanied by the massacres of hundreds of East Timorese by militias controlled by the Indonesian military. Separatist threats continue the most prominent being in the northern Sumatran province of Aceh and in Irian Jaya. In the meantime violent racial and religious conflicts fester in Maluku and East Kalimantan.

It is within this scenario that the World Bank and the IMF are viewed as the "rescuers" of the Indonesian economy with the much needed economic loans and financial assistance subject to World Bank and IMF conditionalities which continue to promote neo-liberal solutions to the present economic crisis. The challenge therefore of the anti-globalization movement in the country is to highlight the severe repercussions such conditionalities will bring to bear on Indonesian people, particularly the labor and peasant sectors. The harsh reality, as experienced in the South in general, is that

The future of democratic consolidation in the South has largely been threatened by the contradictions generated by structural economic reforms. As by-products of economic conditionalities, much of the South has witnessed cuts in government services, growing poverty and social impoverishment of the majority (Wilkin 1997, p. 46).

This is something Indonesian social movements and the people in general have to watch for because experience has shown that

with widening tensions between economic and political liberalization, much of the South has already entered a precarious stage where emerging anarchy is increasingly shattering the future of democratic consolidation (Wilkin 1997 p. 48)

### Repressive Labor Policies

In her speech accepting the 2001 Ramon Magsaysay Award for Emerging Leadership, Dita Sari, Indonesian labor leader and former law student who was imprisoned by the Suharto regime for her political activities, highlighted the plight of the Indonesian working class. In doing so, she criticized transnational corporations for their exploitative practices against workers and the policies of the World Bank and the IMF for their loan conditionalities that only further impoverish Indonesian workers and their families.

The campaign against what are perceived to be socially harsh loan conditionalities that affect the workers' sector is also reflected in the anti-ADB campaigns in Thailand (Sarit 2001). The anti-ADB movement noted particularly the "reduced bargaining power of the provincial labor force after the ADB intervened to have the government limit the rise in minimum wages (Ashayagachat 2000). The ADB had actually called for the government to freeze the minimum wage at 162 baht until at least 2002. Thai NGOs noted too that the Bank's support for privatization of state enterprises would result into massive lay-offs of state workers (Post Reporters 2000). Thai social movements began to more intently monitor

ADB policies in the country after the 1997 economic crisis when the ADB granted loans with conditionalities designed to reform the structure of the country's social and economic systems (Thai Working Group on the ADB's Impact 2000).

Thus, despite the moves towards democratization in Southeast Asian countries as an unintended consequence of 1997-98 economic crisis arising from the failure of neo-liberal policies in the region, one continues to witness the exploitation of their labor force. In Indonesia, the fashionable Nike trainer shoes, for example, which cost up to US\$150 a pair in Europe and in the U.S.,

are stitched and punched by some 120,000 workers in the contract companies that supply Nike ... for a wage of less than three dollars a day. Even in Indonesian conditions, that is a starvation wage, but it complies with the legal minimum applicable to more than half of the country's 80-million labor force (International Herald Tribune 1996).

In Malaysia, labor strikes are forbidden and immigrant laborers who Malaysia desperately needs are also badly treated. It was noted that the

...growing economic strength of the middle-class goes together with often inhuman conditions. Conditions for the underclass, not to speak of the million or more immigrant workers from poorer countries in the region that can be squeezed dry in any way whatever. After three years, they must anyway leave the country and make room for new cheap labor (Martin and Schumann 1996 p. 145).

Such an issue is a major concern of Southeast Asian social movements concerned with migrant labor which has become greatly commodified with the freer flow of labor and the demand for this which is made possible by globalization. Unfortunately, the promise of work and money is accompanied by exploitative practices.

Many trade unionists hope that they would help to contain joblessness and the downward pressure on wages, but this is a mistake. The cost advantages of low-wage on countries do not stem only from political repressions or exploitative practices on the part of companies and government officials. The rising exports of a relatively small number of successful developing countries are based first of all upon generating low living standards of the population, with fewer demands made on income by food and housing (Martin and Schumann 1996 pp. 149-150).

Furthermore, globalization under Southeast Asian conditions has also brought about an emerging capitalist societies which

have not so far needed a social security system... because family structures are still largely intact. 'Our social system is the family'—such is the usual reply of Asian politicians when asked about provisions for sickness and old age... (Martin and Schumann 1996 pp. 149-150).

In the Philippines, it was recently announced in July 2002 that the Social Security System, the government pension agency for private sector employees, announced that it does not have enough money to pay the benefits of retiring employees five years hence. This resulted from bad investments made by the SSS officials under pressure from then President Estrada. Ironically, these SSS officials awarded themselves exorbitant salaries amounting to US\$10,000 a month in a country whose average monthly salary is less than US\$100.

The exploitation of labor has also been heightened under globalization because of the increase in trade. As seen in the current dumping that makes the exports of booming states unbeatably cheap. An example is the Siemens microchip factory in Malaysia would still be profitable even if it had to pay its female assembly-line workers 700 marks a month and the country had free trade unions. It would still be worth producing Nike sports shoes in Indonesia or Bangladesh even if the minimum wage were doubled (Martin and Schumann 1996 pp. 149-150).

### Campaign against the Neo-liberal Ideology

Southeast Asian social movements have also campaigned against the nature of development being envisioned by neo-liberalism, the ideology which frames globalization and which these movements perceive as perpetuating the exploitation of peoples. The present global anti-capitalist movements, which are supported by Southeast Asian social movements, “are directed against the relentless commodification of everything... that the neo-liberal hegemony has promoted and Third Way governments simply reinforced” (Callinicos 2001 pp. 110-111). Moreover, such a commodification has been defined as destroying the very culture of Southeast Asian societies.

In Thailand, this issue had been raised by social movements as far back as the 1960s whereby capitalist development was perceived to have brought about changing norms and values, increasing rate of urban crimes, prostitution, and drug addiction, among others (Prasartset 1984). Thus, this period witnessed the condemnation of the “Americanization” of Thailand and the pursuit of material wealth as expressed by social critic Sulak Sivaraksa (Pongpaichit and Baker 1995). Thus, Thai NGOs, “which also saw the contrasts between the capitalist culture and the village culture called for the government to separate the economy from outside pressure through a ‘nationalist economic policy of greater self reliance’ ” (Pongpaichit and Baker 1995 p. 385).

### Linking “New Social Movements” Issues with Labor Movements

Anti-capitalist movements have also linked issues identified with “new social movements” concerns such as the liberation of women and protection and preservation of the environment with traditional labor movements (Callinicos 2001). Southeast Asian movements, for example, can identify with the bread-and-butter issues of the latter with the issue of women and environment. In the case of the women’s concerns, globalization has facilitated the migration of women workers from Southeast

Asia to work as domestics in Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaysia and Taiwan as well as in Europe and the Middle East and in the case of the Filipino women as entertainers and prostitutes in Japan. Numerous cases have been reported of physical and sexual abuse by employers.

Another consequence is the trafficking and prostituting of women and children in the region. This has been the major concern of Southeast Asian movements like ECPAT which have concentrated their advocacy work on this issue. Southeast Asian women have been forced to migrate abroad because of the impoverished situation in their home countries. They have made big sacrifices to leave their families, husbands and children in the hope of earning money to remit back home. In the case of the Philippines, overseas remittances are a major foreign exchange earner for the country. In essence what has been taking place is the international commodification and exploitation of Philippine labor. *Migrante*, a Filipino migrant organization is one of the NGOs in the forefront in calling for the protection of Filipino labor abroad.

Environment issues on the other hand, were initially identified as a middle-class problem. But Southeast Asian social movements have also shown that it is the lower class which suffers the most from this. The Ormoc tragedy in Southern Philippines, whereby flash floods caused by massive deforestation killed hundreds of Filipinos and destroyed homes and property belonging to the lower classes, is only one example of an environmental tragedy where the masses are hardest hit. Overlogging is a grave problem in the region as it is a rich source of income for the powerful and the wealthy that control this industry in their respective Southeast Asian countries.

Some Southeast Asian environmental NGOs have come to the conclusion that "defending the environment means challenging capitalism" (Callinicos 2001 p. 116). For example, in Thailand, the market, the business sector, and state policies have created the convergence of two ecological catastrophes: massive deforestation and massive water pollution. These have gravely affected the agricultural communities where majority of the poor in Southeast Asian reside and have created severe crisis in agriculture.

Furthermore, like the NIC state-led model of development, the free-market model has resulted in destructive effects on local communities as seen

in the case of Thailand, the Philippines, Indonesia, and Malaysia, (where) the story is depressingly similar: big dam schemes imposed from the centre, uprooting and resettlement of communities, particularly indigenous communities, and the gradual erosion and silent destruction of resettled communities (Bello 1997, pp. 155-156).

### **Anti-Globalization Strategies of Southeast Asian Social Movements**

Globalization has therefore brought about the aggravation of material inequalities which threaten social cohesion. Thus, this has given impetus to citizen's movements which see it pertinent to define their basic democratic rights and strengthen social solidarity (Martin and Schumann 1996). While addressing the problem at the national and local level, social movements have also realized that an international campaign is just as important.

Whether at the workplace or in the local community, by helping out in the playgroups or in the integration of immigrants, there is a scope everywhere to oppose the exclusion of the economically weak and to push for alternatives to free-market radicalism and dismantling of the welfare state. Cross-border cooperation and networking could give much greater reach to the commitment made by millions of people... It is good to think globally and to act locally, but it is better to act together across borders (Martin and Schumann 1996 p. 241).

Southeast Asian anti-globalization movements are doing just these as can be seen in their yearly mobilizations against the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum and annual meetings of the Asian Development Bank. On the more organizational side of the struggle, efforts to come together in regular regional gatherings have taken place such as

the People's Plan for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (PP21) movement. The latter held a major gathering in Bangkok in 1993 lasting over two weeks which was participated in by over 500 people from various social movements and NGOs in Asia, including Southeast Asia.

### Campaign Against IMF and World Bank Conditionalities

Southeast Asian anti-globalization social movements, after the 1997 economic crisis, have also campaigned strongly against the conditionalities imposed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank in return for economic restructuring loan packages. In Thailand, for example, much of the anger of Thai social movements is directed towards the IMF and the WB which are considered responsible for the Thai economy's misdirected growth and their failure to foresee its eventual collapse. The IMF and the Bank have been instrumental in promoting Thailand with its heavy-handed prescriptions for trade and investment liberalization. Thus, the multilateral financial agencies have been seen as directly responsible for the 97-98 collapse of the Thai economy (Bello et al. 1998).

Together with the IMF and the World Bank, the ADB's loan conditionalities have also been seen as partly responsible for increasing poverty and fostering underdevelopment in the country. Despite its Poverty Reduction Strategy, ADB's initiatives have been described as not one of poverty reduction but "the rapid integration of local and national economic activities into the global market economy... leading to the impoverishment of people in Asia and the Pacific" (Guttal 2000 p.5). In Thailand, other loan conditions imposed by the ADB are the privatization of social services such as schools and hospitals and the imposition of a water tax. The former is a condition of the Bank's Social Sector Program Loan while the latter is a condition of the Bank's Agricultural Sector Program Loan (ASPL) to the government. These conditions were denounced by Thai social movements during the anti-ADB campaigns at the 33<sup>rd</sup> ADB Annual Meeting in Chiang Mai.

The same issue is also carried out in the Philippines whereby social movements have campaigned against the privatization of the National Power Corporation (NAPOCOR), the country's state-owned power generating company, because of the fear that it would increase the price of electricity. The ADB, however, has insisted on this condition before it would release particular power-related bank loans to the government.

In Indonesia, the 97-98 economic crisis was of such gigantic proportions that it precipitated massive displays of social unrest from students and workers which eventually led to the downfall of the Suharto regime in 1998. The crisis also reduced the country into a mendicant literally begging for foreign loans. The IMF and the World Bank have taken advantage of this situation and has imposed very stringent conditionalities which are opposed by Indonesian social movements.

The Southeast Asian social movements are not alone in their condemnation of the IMF and World Bank. Stanford University professor and 2001 Nobel laureate for economics Joseph Stiglitz, who was World Bank Executive Vice-President and Chairman of the Council of Economic Advisers under President Clinton, has openly condemned the IMF, the World Bank, and the U.S. Treasury for the secrecy with which they formulate their policies and for "seeking to remedy the financial crisis caused at least in part by economic liberalization with budgetary austerity and yet more bouts of liberalization..." (Callinicos 2001 p. 100). This goes against the view of neo-liberals such as British Prime Minister Blair who believes that the Asian crisis was "largely the fault of the affected countries themselves for lack of the appropriate level of financial transparency" (Callinicos 2001 p.102).

In Thailand, NGOs point out that ADB activities in the country are often shrouded in secrecy. It was only when the people came to know about the Bank's project plans for the country to rescue it from the economic crisis that the NGOs and other social movements began to strongly criticize it (Thai Working Group on the ADB's Impact 2000).

### Linking-up with International Anti-globalization Movements

Another major strategy of Southeast Asian social movements is to link up with the anti-globalization movements around the world. Thus, Philippine anti-globalization movements were present in the Battle of Seattle which marked “the beginning of the wave of anti-capitalist protests” (Callinicos 2001 p. 109). They were also present in those which followed in meetings of the IMF, WB, Group of Eight, UNCTAD, and APEC in Washington, Milan, Melbourne, Prague, Bangkok, Seoul and Nice.

It was in Thailand where anti-globalization activists waged protest actions during the February 1999 United Nations Conference on Trade and Development in Bangkok. The highlight of the protest was when American activist Robert Naiman, whose NGO represents the concern of bakers against anti-globalization, threw a cream pie at the face of outgoing IMF Chief Michel Camdessus (Business Day 2000).

In 1995, the Manila People’s Forum on APEC (MPFA) was staged to protest the meeting of leaders of Asia Pacific countries who comprised the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation forum. APEC, which included the US, Japan, China, Canada and most Asian and South American countries bordering the Pacific had set the goal of fast-tracking trade and investment liberalization and securing commitments from member-states to set definite timetables for doing so. MPFA gathered together more than 500 social movement and NGO participants from APEC member-countries. In a parallel effort, the International Conference Against Imperialist Globalization was organized at the same time by mainly left-leaning Philippine groups. When participants of both initiatives were joined by thousands of Filipino activists from various social classes and sectors and attempted to stage a caravan to the site of the APEC meeting, the government mobilized military troops to block the road leading to the meeting site.

### Regional Anti-Globalization Movements

Southeast Asian social movements have also linked up with regional anti-globalization movements. In 1988, for example, there was a concerted effort among NGOs in the region among which was the Asian NGO Coalition (ANGOC) to systematically question the ADB projects in the region. Together with the Environmental Policy Institute (now Friends of the Earth-US/FoE-US), ANGOC criticized the ADB's badly-designed and destructive projects. They also noted the absence of dialogue on policy reforms and the need for greater transparency and public accountability. The NGOs also called for a greater public transparency and public accountability. The NGOs also called for greater public awareness and debate on social and environmental impacts of the Bank lending on local communities (Quizon and Perez-Corral 1995).

ANGOC, together with other Asian NGOs, was instrumental in the organization of the NGO Forum on the ADB (formerly the NGO Working Group on the ADB), a coalition of national and international NGOs and grassroots groups campaigning for reforms within the ADB system by engaging the Bank's leaders. Its Secretariat is in Manila.

The strategy of engaging multilateral financial institutions (MFIs) however has recently been rejected by other Southeast Asian groups and scholars. For instance, the eminent radical intellectual Walden Bello, who also heads a leftwing political party in the Philippines, sees engagement as a divisive maneuver by the MFIs to separate so called "reasonable NGOs" from the "unreasonable" ones (Bello 2000). The "NGO Committee on the World Bank" for example, is seen by Bello as a way of legitimizing the Bank and neutralizing significant sections of the NGO community. As an alternative and given the "fundamental dysfunctionality" of the MFIs, Bello instead calls for the "deepening of the legitimacy of the whole system."

**Instead of trying to reform the multilateral institutions, would it (not) in fact be more realistic and "cost effective" to use a horrid neo-liberal term, to move to disempower, if not abolish them, and create**

totally new institutions that do not have the baggage of illegitimacy, institutional failure, and Jurassic mindsets that attach to the IMF, the World Bank and the WTO? (Bello 2000)

Regional NGOs with significant Southeast Asian constituencies have also been continually campaigning against globalization and its inimical effects on Asian peoples and societies. The Asian Regional Exchange for New Alternatives (ARENA), a network of prominent Asian scholar-activists, fosters exchange among progressive intellectuals in the region and attempts to formulate alternative development perspectives to counter corporate-led globalization. ARENA Fellows from Southeast Asia include Francisco Nemenzo, Joel Rocamora, and Randolph David from the Philippines, Arief Budiman from Indonesia, Suthy Prasartset and Surichai Wun Gaeo from Thailand, and Johan Saravanamuttu from Malaysia.

The high-profile Focus on the Global South, led by Walden Bello, works out of Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok and has been prominent in research, publication, networking and advocacy work. The Asian Migrant Center (AMC) focuses on the plight of workers, particularly (as its name implies) migrant contract workers. The Asia Monitor Resource Center (AMRC) started as a TNC-monitoring group but is now labor-based. The Bangkok-based Asian Cultural Forum for Development (ACFOD) deals with human rights and social issues. The Asian Students Association (also in Bangkok) and the Manila-based International Movement of Catholic Students (IMCS) looks after youth and student concerns.

ISIS International has its headquarters in Manila and deals with gender and women's concerns. The Committee for Asian Women (CAW) organizes research studies and conducts seminars on gender issues. The Third World Network was started by Martin Khor in Penang and is now an international movement with offices in several countries around the world. The Manila-based Southeast Asian Resource Institute for Community Education (SEARICE) has been active in international campaigns against biotechnology. Another Manila-based organization is

Social Watch Asia, part of the international NGO coalition which monitors implementation by governments of the Copenhagen Social Summit. The environmentalist activist Greenpeace International has also established a Southeast Asian branch in Bangkok.

Church-based regional institutions have also been engaged in advocacy and networking campaigns on behalf of victims of globalization. The Asia Alliance of YMCAs secretariat, despite the reputation of its national branches for conservatism, has been active in this regard particularly under the leadership of its two previous Secretary Generals – Tan Chi Kiong and Bart Shaha. The Christian Conference for Asia (CCA), particularly its International Affairs and Youth desks, has been similarly involved in anti-globalization campaigns. The CCA has also spawned two regional NGOs—the Documentation for Action Groups in Asia (DAGA) and the Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC).

In terms of the strategies, the Klong Dan villagers who are protesting the ADB's Samut Prakarn Wastewater Management Project SPWMP in their community were very much aided by the alliance forged among Thai social movements who share similar concerns regarding the ADB's projects in the country. The Klong Dan villagers believe that

the project poses serious environmental and social threats. The new site is subject to regular flooding and sea erosion; it is essentially a large bed of soft mud believed to be too soft to support a large infrastructure project. In addition, residents of Klong Dan, who depend on marine resources for their livelihood, are greatly concerned that the plant will damage their coastal ecosystem. Finally, there is evidence of corruption in the bidding process and selection of the project site, as well as evidence that several laws and Bank policies were violated by the ADB and the Thai Government throughout project design and implementation (Widagdo and Garrido 2002, p. 3).

More importantly, their alliance was very much strengthened with the support they received from international social movements which shared the same concern. Some may view the anti-ADB campaigns which

benefited the Klong Dan villagers as part of a recent phenomenon. This is the international anti-globalization movement which is defined as

a grassroots movement which is developing internationally and challenging the major pinnacles of globalization. This includes bodies such as the international financial institutions (IFIs), e.g., the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Trade Organization (WTO) and other multilateral bodies" (Widagdo 2001, p. 8).

Such experiences of Southeast Asian social movements at a global and regional level are in general part of the phenomenon in the South of the transnationalizaton of NGOs. It was noted that

The emergence of transnational networks of civil society groups has brought together a wider range of NGO work in the fields of peace, security and development across national boundaries against both the interests and exploitation of the global forces of production and finance. These transnational NGO networks begin to ensure meaningful participation of civil society association in international decision-making. In addition to advancing resistance to the current orthodoxy of neo-liberalism, these emerging transnational networks of voluntary organizations are actively involved in creating alternative routes for development (Wilkin 1997, p. 53).

### The Use of Global Media

Another strategy of Southeast Asian social movements is the use of the global media to highlight their interests. As one writer noted:

since the Battle of Seattle in 1999 where one witnessed violent demonstrations against the World Trade Organizations, this has been followed by a series of demonstrations and associated activities against similar meetings of international financial institutions (IFIs), like the ADB, with wide coverage and interest from the mainstream media (Widagdo 2001, p. 8).

This seems to be a worldwide phenomenon which social movements are able to take advantage of. It has been observed that

Global communication has made it possible for social movements not only in the region but all over the world to not only share their experiences but to also come together in collective action to fight common causes...not only do potential protestors learn about political opportunities through mass media; when they see people not very different from themselves acting in contentious ways succeeding, it is easy for them to imagine themselves doing the same (Tarrow 1994 p. 194).

Furthermore, global environment movements “are no longer cases of simple imitation and diffusion, but expressions of the same movement acting against similar targets” (Tarrow 1994, p. 194-195). Greenpeace plays a very active role in Southeast Asia through its Bangkok-based regional secretariat carrying advocacy work against toxic waste and World Bank and ADB environmental projects which are deemed harmful to the community. They are, for example, part of the campaign against the ADB SPWMP.

Thus, the NGO Forum on the ADB, a coalition of NGOs and grassroots organization all over Asia, were able to take advantage of the global media during the campaigns against the ADB as was seen in Thailand during the ADB’s 33<sup>rd</sup> annual conference in May 2000. The Thai social movements, in particular, who were part of this coalition, noted that an important instrument for propagating the anti-ADB campaigns and educating the public was the media.

As noted by Kasian Tejapira of Thammasat University, the demonstration had the benefit of the global media because it was an international conference. He added that the Thai state could not really do anything except ignore the demonstrations (Tejapira 2000). As declared by a Thai anti-globalization activist, “the media has communicated our message to the Thai public and the rest of the world about the negative impact of the ADB’s loan policy on the Thai people” (Sukin 2000).

Global communication has also allowed Southeast Asian anti-globalization movements to maintain contacts with one another as they make use of the Internet to access each other's webpages to keep informed of each other's activities, to discuss issues and to organize forums, workshops, training seminars, and street campaigns for common causes.

### **Alternatives to Global Capitalism**

Southeast Asian movements have not only been criticizing globalization, neo-liberalism and other current icons of capitalism, they also have been active in re-defining them. As noted,

...While regional elites have battled to defend the direction of Asia-Pacific development along free-market lines or along the lines of state-assisted capitalism, many NGOs, people's movements, and progressive academics have, over the last few years, evolved a powerful critique of both approaches (Bello 1997, p. 155).

It was also pointed out that the state-led NIC model and the neo-liberal model are one and the same.

Both models...intrinsically—are ecologically destructive and unsustainable. In the case of the market approach, there is a rundown of national capital since ecological costs are typically not factored into the real costs of production and in the case of NIC capitalist market, there has been a deliberate sacrifice of the environment to attract local and foreign capital in order to deliver high-speed growth. ...In the NICs, market and state, in fact, act in complementary fashion to create an accelerated plunder of the environment (Bello 1997 pp. 155-156).

### Points for Intervention

Contrary to the views being promoted by the apologists of neo-liberalism, social movements do not view globalization in black and white terms. It was noted that there are

progressive groups that are not necessarily opposed to globalization *per se*, and hence not necessarily in favor of re-nationalization of economic policies; instead, these groups question the way the U.S. presently participates in globalization and the keyword is not identity but democracy. It is through profound democratization of the decision-making structures in the world economy that a more socially and environmentally inspired global policy must be realized... (Rupert 2000 pp. xi-xiii).

This calls for the decentralization of the economic decision-making to communities, regions or ecological zones, and making national planning a bottom-up process (Bello 1997).

Southeast Asian movements can be found in the above mode. As the experience of struggling against the ADB shows, pressure from NGOs in the region led to a more systematic and open dialogue with the Bank and member-governments. NGOs were invited to attend the ADB Annual Board of Governors Meetings whereby they engaged in major lobbying activities which challenged the Bank's "overall development priorities based on a centralized economic growth model and to open up greater public accountability, transparency and participation in the Bank's processes" (Quizon and Perez-Corral 1995 p. 2).

In September 2000 in Thailand, representatives of social movements from Malaysia and Philippines joined Thai peasant groups and citizens from all parts of the country in a "Long March" that covered Songkhla in the south to Chiang Mai in the north in support of biodiversity and local people's rights (Third World Network 2000). In a declaration issued by the march's participants, agricultural transnational corporations were scored for genetically-induced products which will "inevitably

exacerbate destruction of the world's diversity and rapid genetic pollution.” This issue is related to the Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) provision under WTO rules which NGOs and social movements regard as mechanisms by which industrialized nations and their corporations seek to control the natural resources of less developed countries and prevent them from developing their own biotechnologies.

Southeast Asian social movements have supported issues raised in the Battle of Seattle such as the “Statement from Members of International Civil Society” which critiqued the “undemocratic characteristics of the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the inequalities it promotes...” (Rupert 2000 p. 149). These NGOs have also called for “a moratorium on negotiations for further liberalization until a comprehensive review of the WTO and its effects could be concluded—a review which they insisted, should be ‘conducted with civil society’s full participation’ ” (Rupert 2000 p. 149). What is deemed from here therefore is that

potentially transformative, then, are those forms of social change which entail the political self-empowerment of dominated groups and their allies and, by reforming social identities and self-understanding, which open up new possibilities for political practice and makes possible new forms of political and social organizations (Rupert 2000 p. 153).

In relation to this, there is a proposal for the NGOs and social movements to be the third pillar of the political economic system to balance state and business (Bello 1997). Such views have actually been threshed out even before the 1997 economic crisis during NGO consultations such as the People’s Forum in 1991. For the proponents of this Forum, what is needed is that the

regional program of sustainable development is a must for both the transnational capital (whose interests are served by the free market approach) and Asian capital operating with perspectives and plans that are regional in scope (Bello 1997 p. 159)

For these objectives to be achieved, the regional organizations promoting corporate-led globalization must be challenged at the regional level and by parallel and region-wide initiatives by social movements. Included here is

...the elaboration of a progressive regional alternative to both the APEC free-trade idea and East Asian Economic Growth (EAEG). It was also pointed out that both "Japan and the United States should be excluded, for one of the key purposes of such a bloc is precisely to change the power relationship between the weaker countries and the economic superpowers" (Bello 1997 p. 159)

Regional alliances of social movements and NGOs should address the problems created by globalization and present these as the main agenda of social change. This entails rejecting the agenda of neo-liberalism and replacing this with a people's agenda.

Rather than beginning with bringing down barriers to inter-corporate or intra-corporate trade, an alternative strategy for regional integration could begin by addressing the pressing cross-border problems that undercut the welfare of people and the environment. One such problem is posed by multinational corporations that pit one country against another by threatening to move their operations to a country with a lower labor costs and a less strict enforcement of environmental laws (Bello 1997 p. 159).

In confronting the above issue, social movements can push for region-wide solutions that protect the civil and political rights of the working class and ensure their economic well being.

The creation of a common regional environmental code with tight standards, and a common labor code with guarantee of labor organizing and decent wage standards, would be an important step in bringing about this people-based regional co-operation.

Furthermore, "... resistance to globalized capitalism has opened up possibilities for new reforms. Practices which are not circumscribed by the territorial state or by the conventional separation of politics from economics" (Rupert 2000 pp. 153-154).

In a conference-workshop entitled Integrating Alternative Development Efforts in Asia (IADEA) held in Kerala, India in March 1996, several examples were presented on alternative development practices by Southeast Asian communities assisted by NGOs and social movements (ARENA, KSSP, and RUA, 1996). These range from various organic and communal farming activities in Philippines, Malaysia, and Thailand; alternative trade between Philippine and Japanese NGOs, community forestry in Indonesia, agricultural planning in rural communities in the Philippines, and women's livelihood and credit projects in Thailand, among others. The workshop was co-sponsored by the Asian Regional Exchange for New Alternatives (ARENA), the Kerala Science Writers' Forum (KSSP) and Rural Urban Alternatives (RUA).

Alternative educational practices have also been initiated notably by the Education for Life Foundation (ELF) in the Philippines headed by the former rebel priest Edicio de la Torre and, on the regional level by ARENA which has held two sessions in Bali (1998) and Manila (1999). ELF's strategy is based in part on Denmark's "folk schools" experience.

Other alternative and counter-globalization initiatives in Southeast Asia by communities and NGOs that have been documented include cooperatives development, small-scale power generating projects (mini hydroplants), microfinancing, local marketing systems, integrated area development, and local governance systems (PDRC and IIRR, 2000). In Thailand, an alternative currency system was in place among local communities in the Northeast but was shut down by the local government (Powell, 2000).

While falling short of actually posing a direct challenge to corporate-led globalization, these local efforts nevertheless essentially go against the

prevailing paradigm given their emphasis on local initiatives, production for the local market, people-to-people economic relations, and local empowerment.

After the economic crisis, there emerged a “contest over the meaning and future of globalization—and other similar struggles in other sites” which has been deemed as potentially significant by the global power bloc in the wake of the Seattle WTO debacle (Rupert 2000 p. 155). Furthermore, “elements within that bloc have begun... to formulate a vision of globalization which might counteract these ideologies. Challenging and re-incorporating potentially rebellious subjects within the global liberal vision. These new ideology of ‘globalization with a human face’ are not seamless or univocal however” (Rupert 2000 p. 155).

In the Philippines, the government has come up with anti-poverty programs and social movements in the country view these programs as a venue for intervening with the government’s policy for the poor. These anti-poverty programs were conceived two years before the 97-98 economic crisis in the wake of the meeting of world leaders for the Social Development Agenda summit in Copenhagen in 1995. During this meeting the world leaders acknowledged that there was a need to address the poverty situation and income inequality in the world despite the economic growth and wealth brought about by globalization.

Anti-poverty programs, however, are not enough to confront the problems brought forth by the free-market model. Social movements are advocating that priority be given to agriculture and the reinvigoration of the rural society as the centerpiece of the development process as opposed to the free-market’s bias for urban-based industries. There is also a call for appropriate technologies for industries and organic, chemical-free agricultural technology. This is opposed to the adoption of capital-intensive high technology in industry and chemically intensive technology in agriculture (Bello 1997).

### Case Study: Thailand's Buddhist Economy

Following the 1997-98 economic crisis which saw the number of Thailand's poor increase by 3 million, disenchantment with IMF-World Bank prescriptions grew in the country and in response, a Buddhist path of economic development has emerged (Seneviratne, 26 May 2002). Called "sufficiency economics," it is based on the three pillars of Buddhism—*dama* (giving), *sila* (morality) and *bhavana* (meditation) and on taking the "middle path" by avoiding extremes. Around this model, a coalition has emerged composed of social activists, rural monks, grassroots people's organizations, economists and the Royal Palace.

The Thai Buddhist model, which has been endorsed by no less than King Bhumibol Adulyadej, rejects the neo-liberal prescription of high and rapid economic growth and sees consumerist-oriented economic development as "contrary to the Buddha's teachings." Buddhist monks at the grassroots level have been mobilized to initiate integrated and natural farming methods, set up alternative group credit and marketing systems, and in the process are transformed into "environmentalists, bankers, innovators, and shopkeepers."

As the influential social critic Sulak Sivaraksa (1997) who has been jailed in the past for the crime of *lese majeste* puts it:

As a Buddhist, I cannot consider economic efficiency as the ultimate value for a social order. I am constrained to evaluate a system of social organization in terms of its capacity to address human suffering, to promote distributive justice and allow for individuals within society to realize their full potential...I have seen the effects of the commitment to international trade...where rural farmers have...to abandon their lives of self-sufficiency and to pursue the development of crops for export. They have been unable to compete...and many have lost their land...male members seek employment in construction or manufacturing in the city...for \$5.00 a day...and daughters forced into prostitution. The family unit and the community have been decimated in pursuit of international trade.

In place of a “global economy,” Sulak proposes “the reinstatement of the community as the most significant social, political and economic entity.” Declaring that under the globalization and centralization of the Asian economy and the incursion of consumerism “greed and waste” have now replaced “compassion and sharing,” he proposes that “we should look to our culture and the traditions manifested in our public life as a source of value.” Furthermore, “we should be aiming for small-scale interdependent economies and decentralized institutions.”

These heretical views have understandably alarmed Thai neo-liberals who fear “a slow-down of Thailand’s growth and interference with its industrialization and development” (Seneviratne 2002). But because of the King’s endorsement, the Buddhist alternative has gained some form of legitimacy and cannot easily be disregarded.

### **Conclusion**

Overall, globalization as the panacea for underdevelopment has been taking a severe beating. Southeast Asian anti-globalization movements have realized that their cause is not isolated and was given a boost in November 1999 where a number of them participated in what became known as the Battle of Seattle. Here thousands of demonstrators violently disrupted the World Trade Organization (WTO) meeting forcing the declaration of a state of emergency in Seattle.

Seattle was to be an inspiration to social movements all over the world. It was followed by protest actions in 2000 in Bangkok (February UNCTAD conference), Washington (April WB-IMF spring meeting), Chiang Mai (ADB May meeting), Melbourne (September Asian Summit of the World Economic Forum, and Prague (WB-IMF Annual Meeting in late September) (Khor 2000 and Bello 2001). In Genoa, the Group of Eight meeting in July 2001 was disrupted by violent clashes between thousands of anti-capitalist protestors and the Italian police resulting in the death of one protestor and injuries to scores of street combatants.

The London-based World Development Movement documented the intensification of anti-IMF/WB protests in 2001 in 23 poor countries all over the world that resulted in the deaths of 76 people and thousands injured and arrested. The report, called "States of Unrest II," also "demonstrated that protests against these institutions and their policies were not limited to 'privileged students and anarchists' from rich countries, as some politicians and the IMF and WB themselves had tried to claim, but led by the world's poorest peoples" (Press Release, World Development Movement 2002).

The issues raised by the anti-globalization movement have also found support from 2001 Nobel Economics laureate Joseph Stiglitz, a former Executive Vice President of the World Bank.

The international financial institutions have pushed a particular ideology—market fundamentalism—that is both bad economics and bad politics; it is based on premises concerning how markets work that do not hold even for developed countries, much less for developing countries. The IMF has pushed these economic policies without a broader vision of society or the role of economics within society. And it has pushed these policies in ways that have undermined emerging democracies (Stiglitz 2002).

Indeed, as C. Fred Bergsten, chief of Washington's Institute of International Economics, has pointed out, "anti-globalization forces are now in the ascendancy" (quoted in Bello 2000). In Southeast Asia, the lingering effects of the 97-98 economic crisis, the inability and unwillingness of the region's ruling elites to break free of the WB-IMF-WTO and US stranglehold over their economic policies and programs, and the vibrancy of the social movements that challenge the prevailing hegemonic paradigm, will prove to be crucial in determining and changing the regions socio-economic, political and cultural landscape.

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