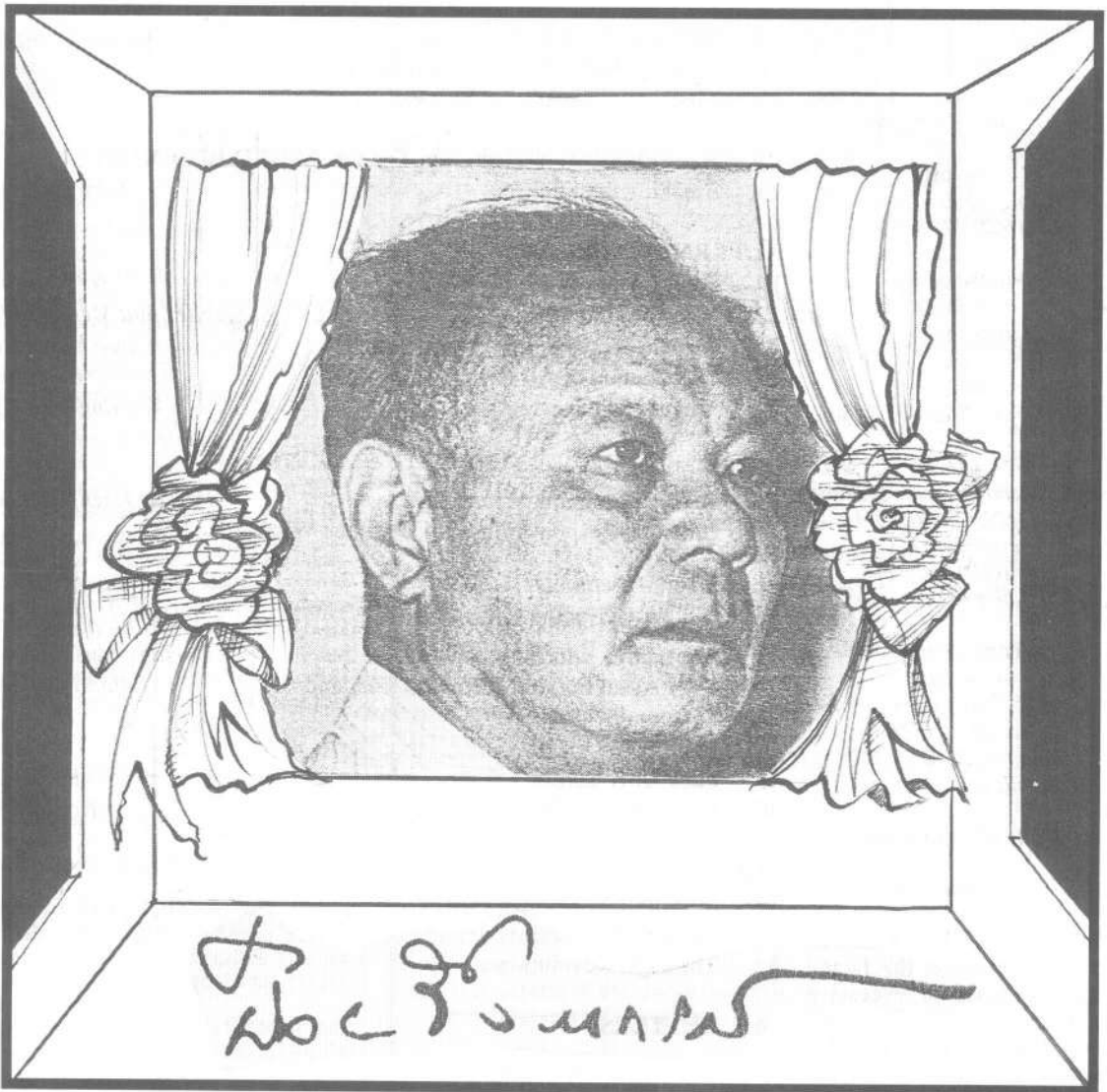


# SEEDS OF PEACE

Vol.15 No.3

Sept.-Dec. 2542 (1999)

## Engaged Buddhism in the New Millennium



In Memoriam, Dr. Puey Ungphakorn  
1916-1999 (2459-2542)



# SEEDS OF

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His Majesty will complete his 7<sup>th</sup> cycle birth anniversary on 5<sup>th</sup> December 1999.

*Long Live the King.*

# PEACE

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117 Fuangnakorn Road  
Bangkok 10200.

The mission of ATC is to inform and inspire people to seek a way of life based on compassion and sustainability. By collecting stories both of the dangers of rampant consumerism and greed-based development and stories of successful alternatives, ATC and its network members hope to counter the spread of the consumer culture, which is threatening to destroy the environment, cultural diversity and spirituality of our global village.

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3. Offer training and secure resources in terms of man-power and materials to support and enhance the agencies that need help.

**TICD**  
124 Soi Wat Thongnopakhun Bangkok 10600.



## **Dr. Puey Ungphakorn** **9 March 1916 - 28 July 1999**

We praised him briefly in Vol. 12 No. 2 May-August 1996, when he had been awarded the outstanding man of peace.

He did not write much, but his writings have a great impact on contemporary Thai citizens who care for social justice, democracy and freedom. There is a collection of English articles by and about him entitled *A Siamese for All Seasons*, which we believe, is very appropriate for him. His words and deeds will always inspire those Thai who seek for truth, beauty and goodness.

## **The Virtuous Man**

The two leaves of the pinewood gate fall shut.

A shimmering arrow leaves the bow,  
speeds upward, splits the sky,  
and explodes the sun.

The blossoms of the orange trees fall  
until the courtyard is carpeted—

Flickering reflection  
of infinity.

Thich Nhat Hanh

Reprinted from: *Call me by my true names: The Collected Poems of Thich Nhat Hanh*.  
Parallax Press, Berkeley, 1999 [www.parallax.org](http://www.parallax.org)

## EDITORIAL NOTES

This issue of *Seeds of Peace* is dedicated to the late Dr. Puey Ungphakorn, who passed away in England on July 28, 1999. In fact it was Dr. Puey who first coined the term, Santi (Peace), Pracha (Public Participation) and Dhamma (Truth) as an expression of the noble ideal to which all who aspire to bringing social and economic justice into the world should aspire. In fact the Santi Pracha Dhamma Institute is the main organ of the family of organizations led by Sulak Sivaraksa who was very close to and much influenced by Dr. Puey. All of these organizations strive in their various ways to introduce and spread the ideals of peace, democracy and truth in Thai society and worldwide. Thus for any of the good works which may be accomplished by these organizations, we must dedicate the merit to the late Dr. Puey for his inspiration.

In this, the last volume of *Seeds of Peace* for the millennium, we include an article about Dr. Puey for those who aren't familiar with his life and works as well as articles which pertain to and describe the many activities that have been spawned from the original idea of investing society with peace, public participation and truth. We hope that the wisdom of the past is carried into the future so that our new millenium can be peaceful and just and those whom Dr. Puey inspired directly and those who are the unknowing beneficiaries of his compassion and wisdom shall always honor Dr. Puey's name.

### Spirit in Education Movement Course Prospectus 1999

Date/time	Trainers	Title/Place	Fee
4,11,18,25 August 1999 Every Wednesday (18.00-20.00)	Suluk Sivaraksa Kwande Attawawuttichai and others	Workshop "The Art of Comprehending" 666 Charearn Nakorn Road, Bangkok	Donation
17-19 September 1999	Team	Workshop "Simplicity Life" at Ashram Wong Sanit, Nakorn Nayok	Will inform
23-25 October 1999	Angkarn Kanlayanapong	Study Trip "Kampangpetch: Old Path to Sukhothai Realm"	2,800 B
6-10 October 1999	Joanna Francis Wayne Elley	Workshop "Buddhist Psychotherapy" At Ashram Wong Sanit, Nakorn Nayok	3,250 B
13-17 October 1999	Joanna Francis Wayne Elley	Workshop "Skill for Self Help" at Children Village School, Kanchanaburi	3,250 B
22-24 October 1999	Joanna Francis Wayne Elley	Workshop "Psychotherapy Weekend" at Ashram Wong Sanit, Nakorn Nayok	2,000 B
26-28 October 1999	Medicine Doctor	International Conference on "AIDS" YMCA. Chaing Mai	Donation

## INDONESIA: Right Livelihood Award Foundation Mission to East Timor

The Right Livelihood Award Foundation also widely known as the Alternative Nobel Prize held its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary meeting in Salzburg, Austria in May of this year. Since there are about 4 awardees every year there should be 80 laureates all together. But some have died, of old age or by the hand of their oppressor, like Ken Saro Wiwa of Nigeria. Some were unable to fit the meeting into their busy schedule of social activist work. So in all, sixty of us gathered at Salzburg.

Our mission was to work together to develop solutions to the problem of consumer-oriented globalization for the new millennium. We wanted to tackle the contemporary situation in which the world is gripped by structural violence, the abuse of human rights and environmental degradation. In order to do so we discussed ways of building a desirable society for the future, one with self-sufficient communities that practices mindful living, honors local culture and makes good use of local products. We envision communities that shun the advance of the McWorld of Coca-Cola, blue jeans and hamburgers for everyone. We attacked the evil practices not only of ruthless dictatorships, but also those of the ruthless transnational corporations and international financial institutions. In essence we were looking for a humane vision of *The Post Corporate World* as envisioned by David Korten in his book of the same name which is subtitled, *Life After Capitalism*.



The human rights fight of East Timorese goes on. (Photo: Maya Vidon/AFP)

Jakob von Uexkull echoed the spiritual undertone of the meeting in his powerful background paper. He also noted the crucial importance of the issue of free and equal access to health care for all. This is indeed a crucial human right. His view is that health care crisis, such as the HIV/AIDS epidemic, are handled with the giant drug companies in mind, not the welfare of sick people. This is yet another example of the detrimental effects of the worldwide culture of consumerism.

At the Salzburg meeting, a few resolutions were adopted by the group of laureates in attendance after careful consideration and discussion. One of these resolutions was to send a peace mission to East Timor. East Timor has been under the thumb of the Indonesian military since it was forcibly occupied in 1975.

Carmel Budiardjo, who proposed the peace mission to East Timor, became a RLA Laureate in 1995, the same year that I received the award. It was no surprise when we teamed up to lead this peace mission. We also worked with Marie Terese Danielsson of Tahiti and Vijaya Pratap of Lokayam, the most prestigious intellectually based NGO in India. Unfortunately the Indonesian government failed to grant Vijaya a visa so he was not able to join us. So in the end, there were only two of us who made our way to East Timor from July 19-25, in the name of peace.

Carmel herself is an exile from Indonesia. She has been living in London for over two decades, having spent time in gaol in Indonesia, and she is not allowed to return to Indonesia. Her late husband, an Indonesian,

spent many years in prison enduring torture and poor conditions.

However, Carmel, Terese and I were able to come together in Bangkok to discuss our strategy for advancing the cause of peace in East Timor. After the trip we were together again to give interviews and to hold a press conference at the Foreign Correspondents Club in Bangkok which was kindly arranged by Forum Asia and took place on 27 July.

Our mission intended to be low key so that we could engage in our work properly. This was made possible by the helpfulness of our local partner Solidamor. This organization works in solidarity with the oppressed in various parts of Indonesia and it networks internationally as well. It stands with the various ethnic minorities in Burma, as one example. In Indonesia itself, even those in power who disagree with its stand respect Solidamor. Its leadership mostly consists of dedicated young people who are idealistic as well as pragmatic. Many of them have spent time in Suharto's gaols.

Bonas Tigor Naipospos (Coki) of Solidamor accompanied us to East Timor and invited us to stay in its headquarters in Dili as all of the hotel rooms had been taken by the UNAMET (United Nations Assistance Mission to East Timor). In fact we were surprised to be the guests of Bishop Belo, the Nobel Peace Prize laureate of 1997. Unfortunately, he was abroad at the time, attending a convention in Los Angeles. Yet luckily we were able to meet him in the airport as we were departing. We had a long conversation in the lounge.

We spent four nights in Dili and we met a wide variety of

people and organizations. Mostly they were NGOs but we also met government representatives, UNAMET political officers as well as East Timorese people who are pro-Indonesia.

Unfortunately we were not able to go out of the city. We questioned whether the elections could be fair with such security concerns and problems. Fear of pro-Indonesian militias make Dili a virtual ghost town after dark and many East Timorese complain that they are having extreme difficulty registering to vote in next month's ballot. The main issue is security, I feel. The situation is not safe physically and it is not safe psychologically. The UNAMET is cautious but I feel they neglect the issue of the possibility of bloodshed even if they can meet the international standards for fair elections. We must be more involved, especially after the elections; to ensure that there is no bloodshed.

In fact many people are encouraged by the presence of UNAMET despite the fact that their presence has also driven prices sky high as is typical of UN presence in a poor country. People feel that at least the presence of UNAMET gives visibility to their crisis and makes them feel a bit more secure. Some even ask that they remain behind after the election to help keep the level of violence down.

Right now, UNAMET is helping to secure the process of voter registration so that the scheduled referendum can take place. (The Indonesian government strongly dislikes the word referendum and insisted that it should be called a 'popular consultation'). The referendum is an attempt to allow the people of East Timor to decide democratically whether they will remain as

a virtual colony of Indonesia or become an independent state.

One must realize that the Portuguese occupied East Timor for over 300 years, like the Philippines under the Spaniards and Indonesia under the Dutch. When Indonesia rebelled against the Dutch and gained its independence East Timor still remained under Portuguese rule until the 1970s when a domestic liberation movement emerged. During a brief civil war in East Timor in August 1975, the Portuguese administration left the territory.

Unfortunately one faction of the independence movement betrayed the others and invited the Indonesian army to invade the country and eventually East Timor was annexed by Indonesia. Ever since the aforementioned invasion, which was a bloody massacre, the abuse of human rights has been on the increase. For two decades, fear has stalked opponents of the regime and attracted concern from Asian and international scholars like Benedict Anderson and Noam Chomsky each of whom has denounced the human rights violations under the Suharto regime.

After the fall of Suharto, Habibie announced that he would grant independence to East Timor if the East Timorese so desired. This led to the Portuguese-Indonesian agreement in the UN Security Council. Hence was begun the process of registering eligible voters to take part in the referendum. At any time if the process of registration or subsequent stages of the Referendum are thought to be compromised by the security situation, then the UN secretary-general may decide to delay the vote, which has already been delayed twice.



Thousands of pro-independence supporters parade atop trucks holding the colours of the National front for East Timor Resistance (CNRT) and portraits of their jailed leader Xanana Gusmao in Dili.

Under the agreement reached at the UN, the Indonesian police and armed forces are responsible for security in East Timor and have actively encouraged local anti-independence groups to perpetrate violence against those who favor independence.

Based on my impressions, on the scene, from now until the voting commences and perhaps beyond there will be more violence. The presence of UNAMET and other international agencies and observers will not be effective in lessening the violence. One reason this is so is that the violence being perpetrated is also psychological as well as physical; the use of intimidation is rampant. While we were there we met a member of the Norwegian parliament who has encouraged his own government to take an active part in bringing peace to East Timor. We were also aware that the Philippine ambassador to Indonesia had visited East Timor for the purpose of assisting in the peace

process. This is admirable. I wish that the Thai ambassador would show such character and lend his help as well.

In Jakarta I was privileged to meet Xanana Gusmao, the most prominent East Timorese leader who is still under house arrest. He can be described as the Aung San Suu Kyi of East Timor, courageously fighting for justice in a non-violent way. He feels that whatever the result of the election, there will be more violence for months and that the work for peace doesn't end once the election has taken place. I agree with him.

On my last day in Indonesia there was a great prayer meeting at the national stadium attended by tens of thousands of people and representatives of every political group, even some members of the military. As I sat upon the platform with Abdurahman Wahid and Megawati Sukarnoputri I asked both of them to persuade the army to be nonviolent in East Timor. Abdurahman said he would try his utmost and

Megawati simply smiled at my request.

Our mission to East Timor, in consultation with Solidamor and Carmel, would like to propose the following:

- 1) We would like to request that the Noble Peace Prize Laureates visit Jakarta and Dili during the election period. This should be a high profile visit, similar to the one in 1993 on behalf of Aung San Suu Kyi. Even though they were not allowed into Burma they came to Bangkok and reported to the Human Rights commission of the UN at Geneva.
- 2) We would like all RLA laureates to contact their governments all over the world and especially ASEAN and the EU, in particular Finland whose government now head the EU commission to gently pressure the government of Indonesia to be moderate and to restrain the Army, the police and the militias in East Timor from violence.
- 3) Even after the election, we strongly believe in the importance of future missions at various levels, from government officials and from NGOs to East Timor. Perhaps these could coordinate with Solidamor or Democracy and Alternatives to Consumerism Network.

If East Timor could achieve independence non-violently, this will be a hopeful sign to Burma, Tibet and all under represented people in the world, such as the members of UNPO, the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization which gave its award to Ramos-Horta before he won his Nobel Peace Prize with Bishop Belo in 1997.

*Sulak Sivaraksa*

## Marie-Therese Danielsson adds:

We met three groups of women who are more or less organized. They all have many experiences and share common objectives. They are trying to help women who have been terrorized, raped, tortured, sterilized, imprisoned or abandoned in concentration camps. The women they support also include widowed women and their children, women married to Indonesian soldiers and women who have been forced into prostitution.

In a country where seventy per cent of the people are farmers, these groups are also in touch with women living in mountain villages to inform them of the latest situation, in particular developments regarding the Referendum being conducted by the UN. They also produce handicrafts for sale so as to increase their resources. They have also set up public kitchens to sell food and to provide food for the resistance army.

Few of these groups have been invited to participate in meetings in Jakarta or overseas and they therefore have far too

few links with international women's organizations from which they could receive useful information and support. I also noted a lack of knowledge about East Timor's traditional culture, the result of a long period of colonization under the Portuguese and for the past 23 years, under the Indonesians.

I was struck by the need for study into the origins and culture of the people of East Timor, which could be one major task for a future University of East Timor. These studies should also include setting up an educational system as recommended by Rev. Dr Balthazar Kehi, which focuses on developing an individual and collective identity for each and every citizen of East Timor.

Regrettably, from what I observed, the only visible 'cultural' link with the outside world is through TV programs consisting of Indonesian newscasts and third-rate American and Indonesian serial shows. We were unfortunately not able to visit anywhere outside Dili because of the volatile security situation. But with regard to the capital, Dili, which is where we stayed for four days, I would like to say the fol-

lowing: It was certainly built with the intention of being a beautiful town; the colonizers responsible for constructing the town had ideas of space, plenty of flora and fauna and attractive views of the sea. But today, Dili gives the impression of a poor and abandoned town, without a soul, exactly reflecting the despair of its inhabitants.

I hope that Dili will one day blossom into one of the most beautiful seaside national capitals in the world, allowing its inhabitants to live in peace and happiness, after having suffered for more than two decades under Indonesian colonization.

\*\*\*\*\*

TAPOL, the Indonesia Human Rights Campaign  
111 Northwood Road, Thornton Heath, Surrey CR7 8HW, UK  
Phone: 0181 771-2904  
Fax: 0181 653-0322  
email: [tapol@gn.apc.org](mailto:tapol@gn.apc.org)  
Internet: [www.gn.apc.org/tapol](http://www.gn.apc.org/tapol)  
Campaigning to expose human rights violations in Indonesia, East Timor, West Papua and Aceh

## THAILAND: The final straw

*Growing frustrations with the Thai Sangha's inability to handle crises have prompted demands for a total reform*

**F**or Sulak Sivaraksa, one of the most vociferous critics of Wat Dhammakaya, the huge controversy over the capitalistic temple is really as light as straw. Yet in

spite of this, the camel's back—Mr Sulak's metaphor for the Thai Sangha—is under pressure having been plagued for years by ineffectual administration and allegations of corruption.

The Dhammakaya straw could be the one to break the camel's back and shake the mainstream religious establish-

ment to its roots, or split it into fragments.

"The Wat Dhammakaya phenomenon," said Mr Sulak, "is simply a facet of the larger social malaise. To eliminate the movement, it is crucial to reform the entire Sangha, and probably remove almost all the incumbent administrators." The critic, who



Phra Dhammachayo walks through a police security cordon after questioning on August 25

spent his early years in the monkhood, is adamant that the religious realm is in a state of chaos and is highly dysfunctional. A cursory glance reveals examples of monks across the nation engaging in unholy activities; temples have been turned into profitable parking lots and, in some cases, the saffron garb is merely a uniform for soliciting money.

Mr Sulak's proposal to reform the Sangha may appear a little blatant.

But consider the track record of the Sangha Council (*Mahatherasamakhom*)—the supreme administrative body of Buddhism in Thailand—in dealing with renegade monks. For the past eight months, the Sangha Council has been dragging its feet in resolving the Wat Dhammakaya issue.

The temple has been heavily criticized for both its theological stance and financial management. Buddhist scholars say the group's teachings distort the orthodox tenets of Theravada Buddhism. And the abbot's unusual

wealth—he owns about 1,749 rai of land according to latest reports—raises questions about whether he has violated the monk's code of conduct in acquiring donations from his followers.

The police investigation into the latter charge has seemed to make more headway than the ecclesiastical body. The police have already started gathering evidence and interviewing people involved in the case, whereas the Sangha Council have so far only managed to issue a summons demanding the abbot explain his position. This meeting has tentatively been set for Friday, but there is no clear timeframe for how long the whole process will take. Sadly the evidence suggests the Sangha Council does not have a clear vision for handling contentious issues. Take, for example, the case of former Phra Yantra who was accused of sexual misconduct. It took more than a year for the Council to investigate the case and finally decide to defrock him. A lack of clear action, on the part of the

Council, saw him flee the country before he faced the civil authorities.

And there is also the case of Kittiwuddho—infamous for his 1976 comment that “killing communists was not demeritorious”. Over the years he has been accused of involvement in a number of high profile fraud cases and yet the Sangha Council has remained silent on the issue.

In Mr Sulak's analysis, effective Sangha reform must involve the abolition of the ecclesiastical titles system (*samana-sakdi*), the titular stipend (*nitaya-phat*), and the Sangha Act, the current version of which was passed in 1962 (B.E. 2505) and amended in 1992 (B.E. 2535). These three elements, he argues, are historical anachronisms of the dominance and exploitation by the royal court (*anachak*) in the Buddhist realm (*phuttachak*). The Sangha thus became, by and large, incorporated into the state's bureaucracy.

“From the reign of Rama IV onwards, the titles system become the monarch's toy,” said

Mr Sulak. "Subsequent regimes exploited the Sangha's administrative and educational resources to consolidate its power." The establishment of the Dhammayuti Order by Rama IV during his monkhood, in particular, heralded the first takeover. Claiming to be superior to the Mahanikaya Order, the Dhammayuti monks have historically enjoyed political favours. Up until the end of the absolute monarchy in 1932, the majority of Supreme Patriarchs—the highest ecclesiastical title—were nominated and appointed from monks in this royal-initiated line.

But the educational reform launched by Prince Vajirayana, half-brother to Rama V and also the Supreme Patriarch in the subsequent reign, dealt a worse blow to the Sangha's future, Mr Sulak contends. The once holistic curriculum, that stressed both the theoretical and practical aspects of Dhamma studies, became geared towards the secular world—to produce people to serve in state agencies. Local knowledge and culture was abandoned in preference of the Western mode of learning.

The most severe damage was the alienation of the temple from the community. The Sangha Act, first implemented in 1903 (more widely known as the Ror Sor 121 bill), unified the Buddhist administration under the Sangha Council—which meant it was centered in Bangkok.

"The interdependence between the temple and the community was gradually eroded," Mr Sulak said. "More and more monks aspired for titles and ranks instead of following the Dhamma."

"The Sangha adopted the feudalistic attitudes from the court, and monks who followed

the king's dictates were held in higher esteem than those who worked with the villagers." Mr Sulak notes that certain rural monks managed to retain some degree of autonomy from the central regime. An outstanding example is Buddhadhasa Bhikkhu who founded the Suan Mokh monastery in Surat Thani in 1932, the same year a constitutional monarchy and democracy was introduced into the country.

In fact, of all the three versions of the Sangha Act, the one passed in 1941 (B.E. 2484) was generally deemed the most democratic. It was an attempt to strike a balance of power by setting up separate bodies to handle executive, legislative and judicial functions. This bill was eventually scrapped during the dictatorial regime of Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat in 1962. The subsequent version, however, revived the concentration of power in the Sangha Council, which was to consist of monks with officially-conferred high ranks and chaired by the Supreme Patriarch. The state still maintains the ultimate power, via the king who has the sole right to bestow the ecclesiastical titles, and the Department of Religious Affairs, a unit in the Ministry of Education, which carries out all the Sangha Council's directives as its *ex officio* secretary-general.

Mr Sulak notes the secular state apparatus has little understanding of the Sangha's problems, and the Council itself lacks the courage to change. He said, establishments both secular and religious, have ironically become indulgent and unresponsive to society's needs.

Mr Sulak's bold advice, for a radical upheaval of the status quo, may not be palatable to

many sectors. For who would willingly give up power they have long enjoyed? Recent moves to reform the Sangha-related laws strive for a compromise. One idea suggests monks with high titles, who are usually old, should withdraw from executive positions.

At present, there are two drafts slated for the public (and Sangha) hearing, namely, a revised version of the Sangha Act and the Buddhist Religion Patronage and Protection Act. It is not yet clear how long it will take for both drafts to pass through Parliament, and in what form they will appear—either as two separate bills or a merged bill.

However, demands for change are rising, especially following the much-publicized Phra Yantra and Wat Dhammakaya cases. Phra Sripariyatmolee, Vice Rector of the Maha Chulalongkorn Buddhist University, says the pyramid-shaped hierarchy discourages younger monks from speaking out or making contributions to the Sangha's administration.

Currently, most Sangha Council members, nineteen in all, are in their late 70s or 80s. The youngest is in his 50s.

One proposed way of reconciling the situation is to keep the Sangha Council but reduce its role to a merely advisory function. Day-to-day management instead being performed by panels of junior rank monks, who would oversee issues like administration and planning, social welfare, education, and public relations.

Within the new legal framework, the Sangha Council's legislative and judicial functions would be relegated to two new bodies, namely, the Sangha

Assembly (*Sangha-Sapha*) and the panel of judicial monks (*Phra Winaithorn*).

Dissatisfied with the inept performance of the Department of Religious Affairs, a number of progressive monks are also pressing to set up their own secretariat. The only state support they demand is a budget allocation, and they stress the new body must be separate and independent of the state bureaucrats' control. According to Phra Sripariyatmolee, the less complicated the law, the more effective it will be. He emphasizes the Dhamma-Vinaya (that is, the monastic rules and regulations as set out by the Lord Buddha) and says it should be the principal code of conduct for all members of the Sangha. "Had we followed the Dhamma-Vinaya from the beginning," he said, cases like Wat Dhammakaya would have already been resolved.

"Then if complaints arose, a panel of monks specialising in ecclesiastical rules could cross-examine the individuals involved directly. The present regulations dictate that only the immediate supervisor of the monk can investigate the case, or the Sangha Council, and that must be done on a step-by-step basis. This re-

sults in a big delay of the process," he said.

Phra Sripariyatmolee insists the Sangha in itself is fundamentally democratic. In the Buddha's time, all members of the Sangha were involved in decision making. Thus another proposal is to limit the judicial power of temple abbots. The present Sangha Act, critics often charge, gives abbots too much power in determining who can stay in the compound and in managing the temple's assets. The issue is likely to generate heated debate. A number of existing abbots may resent and resist the change. The need to reincorporate the temple into the community's life is crucial for the religion's sustainable future. Mr Sulak sees the Wat Dhammakaya's strength in creating a rapport with the urban middle class, something unfortunately lacking in most other temples. Phra Sripariyatmolee proposes creating a new assembly that consists of representatives of the monks and lay people (*Sapha Phuttaborisat*). However, details over a recruitment protocol have not yet been worked out.

On the other hand, the proposal to set up a Buddhist Religion Patronage and Protection Commission in the new draft law

has become a major bone of contention. According to the draft, the commission will be made up of mostly senior government officers. Buddhist scholar Thammakiat Kan-ari has asked whether this is yet another resurgence of technocracy, which may allow the state to keep control over the Sangha, but under a new guise.

Legal reforms are only a start though. Mr Sulak believes the most serious ills of society are poverty and the deprivation of rights among the majority. To tackle only the Wat Dhammakaya case, while skirting round the more fundamental issues of equality and democracy, would be, for Mr Sulak, as futile as pulling a thin straw out of a giant haystack.

This article is based in parts on Sulak Sivaraksa's public speech entitled *The Wat Dhammakaya Incident is the Last Straw for the Thai Sangha* delivered on July 26, 1999, and a discussion seminar on the new Sangha Act and the Buddhist Religion Patronage and Protection Act held in Parliament on July 30, 1999.

Vasana Chinvarakom

## THAILAND:

### Calling for a Concerted International Condemnation of and Opposition to the Recent Interference in the Workings of the Office of the Information Board by the Thai Government

It is a well-known fact in the international community that Thailand is one of the most corrupt countries in Asia and that it lacks political transparency,

especially when it comes to the allocation of the national budget.

Concerned with the creation of a just civil society, the Thai public has persistently and con-

sistently demanded greater participation in the government's administrative and policy-making process. Among other things, this requires access to relevant



Surasi and his family

information on ongoing or planned governmental projects or activities. The effort of the Thai public culminated in the passing of the Official Information Act by the Chaovalit Yongchaiyut administration in 1997. The Chuan Leekpai government later implemented the Act, creating the independent Office of the Official Information Board (OOIB).

The OOIB has brought several boons to Thai civil society. It has successfully investigated several cases, exposing the corruption and lies of governmental organs or bodies. Two important cases need to be mentioned.

One, the Board, as requested by a victim, brought to light the Sathit Kaseat Demonstration School scandal, showing that cronyism and political nepotism were deeply involved in the examination process and the admittance of first graders to the school this year. As a result, there was an intense public outcry. The public demanded greater transparency in the examination and admittance systems of all the governmental primary schools.

Two, the OOIB has successfully investigated the scandal involving the procurement of medicine and supplies for government healthcare clinics,

involving the Ministry of Health. In fact it has been suggested that the then minister of Public Health, who was appointed by the present Chuan administration, might have been involved. (A year on and no further investigation into this issue has transpired). The Board's investigation and exposure of corruption was a slap in the face of the government's Counter-Corruption Commission, highlighting their inefficiency and incompetence—if not outright corruptness. For the past 20 years the Counter-Corruption Commission has not exposed any major corruption scandal, thus encouraging the corruption in Thai society. Worse, the CCC lacks transparency; it is a government agency that has never been evaluated on the basis of efficiency, honesty or competence.

The significant achievements of the OOIB have earned it widespread praise from the public. Moreover, the public has come to realize the importance of creating governmental accountability, and having public access to information about the conduct and activities of the government.

The Thai government, because its vested interests are threatened, feels otherwise. The OOIB has gone too far. The government likes to insist that it cannot guarantee socio-economic equality to everyone, but argues that the populace should find some solace in formal political equality. It seems that the government wants to limit the democratic participation of the public to only the formal election of political elite every few years. The public has no direct say in the issues that really matter, i.e. of life, free speech, and economic matters.

Because of its effectiveness

in releasing relevant information to the public and in the process exposing corruption and cronyism the OOIB is under attack. The Prime Minister's office illegally ordered the resignation of Mr. Surasi Kosonnawin—the highly competent director of the OOIB. The government publicly claims that Mr. Surasi is needed back at the office of the Attorney General where he has previously

served as a public prosecutor. The government's interference has transgressed the independence and the autonomy of the OOIB. Moreover, Mr. Surasi is not even an appointee of the Prime Minister; he was selected by the Board based on his professional qualifications.

We hereby call for international groups who are concerned with human rights to expose and

lobby against the illegal conduct of the Thai government. The government's blatant interference in the workings of the independent Office of the Official Information Board is undeniably a major threat to democracy in Thailand.

Further details on the Surasi incident can be obtained at [www.nationmultimedia.com](http://www.nationmultimedia.com)

S.J.

## TIBET: TCHRD Press Release

*A Nun's Prison Sentence extended to 21 years. Ngawang Sangdrol's prison sentence extended for the third time.*

Dharamsala, July 30

**N**gawang Sangdrol, who was serving 17 years' imprisonment in Drapchi Prison, had her sentence extended for the third time in October 1998 by the Intermediate Municipal Court of Lhasa, bringing her total sentence to 21 years. She is the longest serving female political prisoner in Tibet. According to a reliable source from Tibet, Ngawang Sangdrol's sentence was increased by four years due to her participation in the May 1 and 4, 1998 prisoner protests at Drapchi Prison. Earlier reports indicate that since the protests in May last year Ngawang Sangdrol and another nun, Ngawang Choezom from Chubsang Nunnery were subjected to harsh treatment and were placed in solitary confinement. Sangdrol was suspected as a "ring leader" by Chinese au-

thorities and singled out for ill treatment. Following the Drapchi Prison incidence, 11 prisoners were reported to have died.

Ngawang Sangdrol's prison

sentence had previously been prolonged by the Intermediate Municipal Court of Lhasa in October 1993 and July 1996. Born in 1977, Ngawang Sangdrol, now



Ngawang in Drapchi Prison uniform

22 year-old was from Garu Nunnery. She was first arrested when she was only ten years old in 1987 for participating in a demonstration and was detained for 15 days. On August 28, 1990, at the age of 13, she again joined a demonstration led by nuns from Norbulingkha in Lhasa. She was considered too young to be tried that time and was detained for nine months without charge.

On June 17, 1992, at the age of 15, she had originally been sentenced to three years for attempting to stage a demonstration in Lhasa along with other nuns from Garu Nunnery. She was then charged of "subversive and separatist" activities.

Whilst in Drapchi Prison, Sangdrol's sentence was extended by six years on October 8, 1993 on charges of "spreading counter-revolutionary propaganda." Along with thirteen other nuns, she was accused of recording independence songs and poems on a tape recorder and smuggling it outside the prison. In July 1996, her sentence was further extended by eight years for shouting "Free Tibet" while she and other nuns were made to stand in the rain as punishment for failing to clean their prison cells. The latest extension of her prison sentence brought her current sentence to 21 years.

"Article 69 of the Chinese Penal Code clearly stipulates that the maximum sentence of

fixed-term imprisonment cannot exceed 20 years. By extending Sangdrol's prison sentence to 21 years, China has doubtlessly violated its own law," commented Lobsang Nyandak, executive director of the Tibetan Centre for Human Rights and Democracy.

Nyandak urged the Chinese authorities to immediately rectify their illegal action by releasing Ngawang Sangdrol. He further stated that Sangdrol's continued imprisonment will constantly remind the world of Chinese government's failure to uphold its own law.

Nyandak also said that the Chinese authorities have violated the Article 17 of the Chinese Penal Code, which states that minors below the age of 16 will not be held responsible for their infraction. Sangdrol was only 15 years old when she was arrested and sentenced to 3 years on June 17, 1992 on charges of "counter-revolutionary" activities. Her younger brother, Jamphel Tenzin who resides in India, testifies her year of birth as 1977.

Sangdrol's entire family has endured Chinese atrocities. The Lhasa City PSB arrested her father, Namgyal Tashi and brother Tenzin Sherab on June 12, 1991. Her father was sentenced to eight years in Drapchi Prison on charges of "counter-revolutionary" activities. His prison term expires this year and he is ex-

pected to be released if his sentence is not prolonged. Sangdrol's mother, Jampa Choezom, died just three days after her father and son was imprisoned. Her brother was detained for 12 months and after his release he was forbidden to rejoin his monastery.

Ngawang Sangdrol (lay name: Rigchog) continues to be subjected to harsh treatment. She was placed in solitary confinement on two occasions in March 1996 (6 months and 10 days) and after the prisoner protests in Drapchi Prison in May 1998. Sangdrol's prison mate, Lobsang Dolma, who spent 5 years in Drapchi Prison with her, reported that she has for long a kidney problem but was allowed for treatment only in prison clinic. She is made to weave wool and is never allowed outside prison to work.

Ngawang Sangdrol is now due to be released in the year 2013 at the age of 36. By that time she will have spent 21 years of her prime life in prison.

--Subscribe to our Barkhor mailing list. This list carries TCHRD's latest Press Releases and fortnightly Human Rights Update and more on current human rights situation in Tibet. To subscribe send an email to: [majordomo@cyborganic.net](mailto:majordomo@cyborganic.net) ...with the words: "subscribe barkhor"

**World Festival of Sacred Music** To usher in the third millennium with the message of peace, harmony and compassion, His Holiness the Dalai Lama has initiated an unprecedented project. The World Festival of Sacred Music will be held in all the five continents between October, 1999 and May, 2000. The culminating event, the global festival, will be held in India. The festival features commonly known strains of religious music as well as indigenous and ethnic musical traditions. [thouse@nde.vsnl.net.in](mailto:thouse@nde.vsnl.net.in)

## Breaking the Silence: The Roles of Buddhist Nuns Reconsidered



At the INEB conference: Ouyporn Kuankaew, Thai activist;  
Panadda Kosakarn, INEB's new Executive Secretary; and a Ladakhi nun.

During Feb. 20-28, 1999 the INEB Women and Gender Program (INEB-WGP), in co-operation with the Dhamavedi Institute, organised a seminar for South and Southeast Asian Buddhist nuns in Sri Lanka. This event was a follow-up effort of the INEB-WGP after the first seminar was held in Thailand a few years ago.

### The Aims of the seminar were:

- To provide an opportunity for Buddhist nuns from different cultures and traditions to share together their situations, problems and needs.
- To provide a chance for nuns to exchange their experiences both about their spiritual practices and their social works.
- To enable the nuns to identify

the training needs for the nuns, their organisations and/or their countries.

- To help strengthen and expand the network of nuns involved in different social works in South and Southeast Asia.
- To enable INEB to plan its direction and follow-up programs to help support nuns and nun organisations in corporation with its existing networks.

### The Participants:

All together 23 nuns, including 4 bhikkunis, participated in the seminar; 6 from Thailand, 5 from Cambodia, 2 from Foguanshan temple in Taiwan (one is working in Papua New Guinea), 3 Tibetan nuns in exile from Dharamsala and 3 nuns from Ladakh, and 2 from Sri Lanka. We had small number of nuns

from Sri Lanka because we planned to meet and share experience with them during the tour. The participants from Vietnam, Burma did not come to the workshop because their government does not allow them to go out of the country to join any conference other than the religious function. The nuns from Laos did not come because they are not involved with any social works and have not yet organised themselves into a form of group or organisation. This is the same case for the nuns in Bangladesh. We had one nun from Bhutan who now studies in Dharamsala and will go to help develop the nuns in her homeland when she finished the study. Ven. Wangmo, an active Bhutanese nun who came to the nun's seminar in 1997, sent this nun. We are very happy to be able to get the Tibetan nuns

from Dharamsala because they will be a good link for our future work with the Tibetan Buddhist friends particularly the nuns and lay women. Most of the nuns who came have been involved in different social works such as traditional medicine, teaching youth and young children, working with minority community and children, teaching nuns, monks and novices, working with different women groups, teaching meditation etc. The number of participants and the diversity among the group of the three Buddhist traditions (Theravada, Mahayana and Vajrayana) was the key factor that contributed very much to the rich and valuable exchanging and learning from each other.

### The Activities:

The first part of the program took place in Gangarama temple, an old temple about an hour drive north of Colombo. The aim of the workshop was to allow participants to get to know each other and to share information about the situation of the nuns in their own countries. One of the activities used during the introduction session was to have each of the nuns tell their name and what made them feel most happy in the past few weeks. Most of them said that what made them happy was that, for the first time, they have a passport and were outside their home country. Another aspect of sharing their personal life as a nun was to have them talk in small groups about the most challenging obstacle that they had overcome. The Bhutanese nun who now studies in Dharamsala told the group that her parents did not want her to be a nun, for she is the first child and is expected to help work in the field and raise her three siblings. But

she had determined when she was young that the only thing she wanted to be was a nun, so she asked her uncle who was a monk to convince her parents. She said that even after more than 7 years her parents are still not happy with her decision, and that only because of her uncle's financial support can she come study Dhamma in Dharamsala as there is no such education for nuns in her country. One of the Thai nuns shared a similar experience. In her case it was even more heart-breaking to hear because her father did not talk to her for several years after she became a nun. Her family thought she had lost her mind when she decided to be a nun because she had earned a college degree and was intelligent and good looking. Still even after 9 years, her father said that he is still waiting for her to disrobe and live a good and valuable life. After each story was told, tears dropped from some of the audiences' eyes. The group would hold the speaker's hands in support and keep saying, "you are a good daughter. You made the right decision".

The presentation about situation of nuns from each region/country gave us a bigger and more diverse picture of the Buddhist nuns in South and Southeast Asia.

The status of the Taiwanese nuns and bhikkunis seems to be better off than that of the nuns from other countries. They have educational institutes that can provide both worldly and Dhamma education for them. The roles of ordained women there are highly accepted by the public because they are actively involved in social welfare work.

The Tibetan nuns have suffered much from the suppression since the Chinese military in-

vaded Tibet 40 years ago. There are about 1,500 Tibetan nuns in exile living in India. Today there are still nuns in prison who are cruelly tortured by the Chinese soldiers as a result of their devotion to their robes and practices. The Cambodian nuns are striving very hard to try to bring back the Buddhist practice and tradition after more than two decades of civil war. There are only a small number of nuns left and only a few are of a young age. However, these nuns are determined to revive Buddhism and use its ethics and culture as a means to restore peace and harmony in their society.

For the Thai nuns, although there are over 10,000 in number many of whom have been actively involved in social work for more than twenty years, their roles and contribution have never been recognised. At the moment they are in the process of proposing the Nun Act so that they will be legally recognized.

The challenges the Himalayan nuns, including Ladakh, have been facing are poverty, lack of support for their Dhamma education and lack of recognition for nuns' roles. The Ladakh Nuns Association has been working very hard in the past three years trying to provide proper Dhamma education to the Ladakhi nuns. However, for the rest of the Himalayan areas, the only way nuns can have a proper Dhamma education is to go to study in Dharamsala. Since only a handful of nuns can afford to go for such study most of the Himalayan nuns are left ignored and live in their family home as the main laborer.

Although the situation of the nuns differed with each country and region, all of the nuns expressed in common their strong

commitment to the spiritual path and to the social work in which they have been involved. Overall, the nuns expressed a need for greater support for education and livelihood, so that they might further develop their potential as spiritual leaders and more effectively carry out their social work. The second part of the program was the study tour to different nunneries and temples in the North, Central and Western part of Sri Lanka.

On the first day of the tour, we went to visit Viharamahadevi nunnery situated in Anuradhapura, one of the most important Buddhist sacred sites in the country. At the sacred site there were two of the most important places that have influenced the role and history of ordained women in this country. One was the first and the oldest Bodhi tree, brought from India some 2000 years ago by the daughter of King Ashoka, Bhikkuni Mahintana, who established the bhikkuni order in Sri Lanka. In order to see the sacred tree, everybody has to walk past a huge gate that has graceful statues of bhikkuni Mahintana sided by two goddesses. Such a picture of having men and women walk under the statue of an ordained woman is not a common scene in most Buddhist countries.

The second site was the ruins that were once the nunnery where bhikkuni and nuns lived when the higher ordination of women was first established in this country. On the same day we went to visit Viharamahadevi nunnery which was built 40 years back when the area was still underdeveloped. This is the first nunnery in town and has been providing pre-school programs and other social and Dhamma services for local people for many years. We met

several nuns and lay women who came from different communities in the area, and they told us briefly of the situation of the Sri Lankan nuns. There are about 3,500-4,000 *Silamata* (the way nuns are called) in Sri Lanka. Compared to most of the Theravada Buddhist countries- Thailand, Laos, Burma and Cambodia- the status of the Sri Lankan nuns seems the most rapidly improving. The nuns here have their own temple, they get support from both the government and the public and they can do ordination and perform some religious ceremonies by themselves. This situation enables them to be the spiritual leaders of the community and effectively be involved in different social works. Aside from providing pre-school programs, the nuns are involved in other social works such as conducting Sunday Dhamma school, giving counseling services and spiritual support to women and girls, and care for the sick and the elders. We observed that there are many young girls who took the robe because they see the ordained life as a most valuable position and choice for their life.

The second place we went was to visit the nuns in the Polonnaruwa area. Before arriving, we spent an hour doing an introductory session on the conflict resolution workshop, which was received well by the nuns. We did this to prepare the group before meeting the local nuns who live near the border areas where there is conflict and fighting between the Tamil and the Sinhalese. In meeting with the local nuns, we learned that since the conflict has been so intense many local people and monks have left the area. However, some nuns still live in the war torn

areas, even though they are without skills or support to deal with the situation.

The third day of the study tour, we went to visit the temple of Ven. Punyasaro Thero. This monk is famous for his prominent role in supporting the revival of bhikkuni ordination in Sri Lanka. At his temple we had a chance, for the first time, to meet the bhikkunis who have their higher ordination inside the country. (Because of the strong opposition to the revival bhikkuni order in their home countries, the higher ordination for Theravada nuns had previously been carried out in Bodhgaya, India.) The bhikkunis told us that if Buddhism, especially in Theravada countries will survive and flourish the Buddhists have to reconsider the roles of women. The most important and urgent task is the revival of the bhikkuni order. Although the status of the nuns in Sri Lanka is better than many countries, nuns' roles are still limited and there is lack of support for the higher education that will enable them to more effectively ease the suffering of the people in their community. To day people in society, especially women and children face many complicated problems, but monks are not trained to help with such issues. The bhikkunis told us that after having high ordination they now can perform all the religious ceremonies and functions that are prohibited to them as *silamata*. One 20 year old Bhikkuni said that before having higher ordination, she had to attend a 6 month intensive training course that gave her lots of knowledge and skills both about Dhamma and knowledge of social issues. Being a Bhikkuni helps her have confidence to perform tasks that she never did before such as

visiting families that the husband likes to drink, and using the Buddha's teachings to talk to them about the consequences of such behavior to their family livelihood. From our lively and fruitful discussion we can see that these Bhikkunis looked very happy and confident with their decision to join the revival of the higher ordination movement. They ended their talk by challenging the Thai and Cambodian nuns to think about the Bhikkuni ordination in their homeland.

The next stop was at the nunnery of Ven. Bhikkuni Dhamma Sri, who received higher ordination in Bodhigaya last year. Ven. Dhamma Sri is very well known for her Dhamma teaching in this area. She built this nunnery many years ago when the area was still a jungle and had many problems. She helped bring peace, harmony and unity to the local communities in the area. We witnessed her popularity as soon as our bus arrived, for there was a very huge and graceful procession waiting to walk us to her nunnery. We later learned that the people came from many areas far and near. They brought food and offerings and peacefully joined in a long and beautiful offering ceremony that went on until late in the night. Before we left the next morning, Ven. Dhamma Sri took us to see the unfinished building that she and some community leaders are planning to make a kindergarten for poor children in the neighbourhood.

The next day we went to visit the Lady Blake nunnery in Kandy, a town famous for its beauty and also central to Buddhism. This nunnery is the oldest one in Sri Lanka. A nun who was born a Catholic but converted built it to honor Buddhism in

Burma where she learned and practised Vipassana meditation from a Burmese princess. Ven. Lady Blake was famous for her successful reconciliation work between the Buddhists and Muslims in this area where the conflict at that time was so intense that nobody dared to make any move. Her contribution not only brought in peace and harmony among the Muslim and Buddhist communities at that time, but also to the present time when Muslims are the main supporters for this nunnery.

We spent the whole of the following day on identifying the training needs for nuns. This workshop was the follow-up work after the INEB-WGP did the survey of training needs for the nuns in South and Southeast Asia last year. We used this opportunity to clarify and confirm our findings. In short, we learned that nuns have similar training needs, although they have different priorities. Their needs are in the areas of leadership, team building, conflict resolution, non-violence, social problems analysis, organizational development and management, training for trainers, counselling skills and English and computer skills. In the evening we spent an hour and a half, having nuns from each tradition share about their practice and the challenges on this path. This was one of the most active event because there were lots of questions from each tradition on the topic ranging from meditation practice, finding the teacher, living in the nuns or with monks community, challenges of the celibate life, challenges of taking the different numbers of precepts each tradition has, balancing working with meditative life and so on. There was also an active discussion again on the

Bhikkuni precepts and practice. By the end of the session there was still strong interest to continue sharing but we had to stop the group as we had more activity await for us in the morning.

Our last visit was to the Madiwela nun-training center near Colombo. The center was set up by one of the most famous Theravada Buddhist female teachers in this century, Ven. Bhikkuni Aya Khema who passed away 2 years ago. She wanted this place to be an international training center for Buddhist women. Today the center has two nuns from Nepal who study in University. The center also provides Sunday Dhamma school for children with help from the local women. Even with limited resources, the present abbess still tries to carry on the mission of the founder.

On the final day of the seminar, the nuns worked hard on their visions for the future. We had a presentation from each country/region on the vision they would like to see develop from their present situation and works. They were asked to discuss what were their strategies to reach that vision, what were the local existing resources that they could access and what kind of support they needed from INEB-WGP. We ended the program by holding hands in a circle and had each participant tell one another what would they remember from the seminar. While each of us took turns sharing our impressions and inspiration, we could feel the strength, the connection and the sadness that resulted from our 10 days of living and learning together.

*Uan Techapatikul*

# INERFAITH SOLIDARITY FOREST WALKS (Dhammayatra)

## In Support of the Indigenous People of Northern Thailand

December 7-17, 1999  
Invitation to Participate

### Background

For the past four years, the Spirit in Education Movement (SEM)—in cooperation with the U.S.-based Boulder Institute and several Thai NGO's—has conducted a series of seven Interfaith Solidarity Walks in support of the indigenous peoples of northern Thailand. The intention of the Walks is to bear witness to the life of indigenous communities and their struggle to remain in sustainable relation with their land and culture in the face of political and development pressures.

With each passing year greater trust and deeper friendships have been formed with the communities we have visited, and the contemplative nature of the Walks has expanded to include political solidarity. During last winter's journey we learned that because of a recent change in Thai government policy, many indigenous villages are facing imminent "re-location" to the lowlands. In this context the interfaith and intercultural Solidarity Walks have become a rallying point for a number of indigenous communities. While still contemplative in nature, this year's Walks hold the promise of contributing significantly to the political empowerment and cultural survival of these native communities.



### Bearing Witness

During the Walks we stay in villages, live and work with the people, and listen to their stories. In fact, a few years ago we asked village leaders what they most wanted from the Solidarity Walks. They replied, "To have our story heard". In that spirit we come to listen. This is the essence of "bearing witness"—to put aside our preconceptions and judgments and to enter each situation with respect and an open heart, with a willingness to ask questions, listen, and offer friendship and prayer. Our presence and intention provides an opportunity for tribal peoples to reflect on and articulate the values and ways of life they wish to protect and nourish, and to discuss strategies for responding to the challenges facing them.

The spiritual practice of bearing witness is not always

easy. It can challenge each of us to confront our prejudices, critical mind, or self-doubt, or to re-evaluate our own culture. In this way it is an opportunity for inner growth as well as outer solidarity and community healing.

Bearing witness also includes the practice of offering "testimony"—testifying to the truth we have witnessed. Following previous Walks we have held press conferences, written articles, and presented a formal "letter of concern" to the Prime Minister and Members of Parliament regarding issues concerning indigenous peoples. Because of the urgency of the present situation, this year's Walks will culminate with a very public witness—a three-day "Festival of Forest Communities" at Wat Luang, an ancient Karen Buddhist forest monastery west of Chiang Mai.

## What to Expect

Participants on previous Walks have come primarily from Thailand, Laos, Burma, the Philippines and India, with about 25% from Western countries. Depending on the number of people who register, there will be up to three simultaneous Walks of perhaps 20 people each. The separate Walks will begin and end together. Typically, many members of local villages join the Walks as they progress (over 40 Karen joined the Walk last year).

The tone of the Interfaith Solidarity Walks is contemplative in nature with daily meditation, prayer and ceremony. The Walks begin with a one-day teach-in on local issues and culture. There is close contact with the local people — in most villages we visit we will stay in villager's houses, share their food and help with the rice harvest or other tasks as appropriate.

Participants should be prepared for some rough terrain, hiking on footpaths through the jungle and camping in the forest-monk "Tudong" style (light tents, mosquito nets and sleeping bags). These Walks are not "eco-travel tours". There is no daily itinerary available. Participants must be able to live with last minute changes, lack of accustomed comforts, simple food, and basic camping and/or village home stays. Participants are expected to carry their own packs. However, if you wish to participate and have a physical limitation we can arrange for you to hire a porter to carry your pack. While participants should be in good health, the Walks are not exceptionally strenuous and there will be opportunities for rest, and several of the days we will stay in villages without moving on. A



suggested equipment list will be sent to you upon receipt of your registration.

This is a rare opportunity to experience and support the indigenous people of Thailand on their terms. It is also a chance to learn how to create similar modes of spiritually based activism in our own or other countries. At a time when it is all too easy to feel hopeless in the face of global forces of monoculture, the power of standing in solidarity with those different from ourselves gives courage and perspective to our own path of service.

## The Festival of Forest Communities, December 14-16

This year the Solidarity Walks will culminate with a unique Festival of Forest Communities dedicated to increasing dialogue and understanding among those directly concerned with the health of the forest and forest-based communities. The Governor of the province, the mayor of Chiang Mai, district commissioners, and representatives from the local and national media will be invited to the Festival, to join with Walk participants, village leaders, members

of indigenous communities, representatives from NGO's, interfaith religious leaders, academics and human rights activists. Together we will explore the crucial and much-debated question: "Can people and the forest live together?"

The Festival will create a number of opportunities for bearing witness and giving testimony - here are a few of them:

### Interfaith Tree Ordination.

The practice of ordaining trees as "monks" or "sacred beings" has spread throughout Thailand in recent years. In Buddhism the act of killing a monk is considered an extremely grave sin — consequently "ordained" trees have often escaped the logger's saw. The Interfaith Tree Ordination at the Festival will focus our intentions for nurturing sustainable forests and communities.

### Exhibition of Bioregional Maps of Forest Communities.

Following the Solidarity Walks last winter, SEM and the Boulder Institute conducted an intensive training in bioregional, community-based mapping for leaders and representatives from several Karen villages and NGO's. Unlike typical maps, bioregional maps reveal more than geo-

graphical information—they tell the story of a peoples' relation to the land. In 1998 the villages we visited were warned that they would be relocated out of the forest unless they can prove they have lived on the land for more than fifty years. Of course, since they are an oral culture they do not have this "proof". However, the multi-layered stories of people and the land that are expressed through bioregional maps bear witness to the fact that these lands are indeed their home and have been for many generations. An atlas of 40-50 maps of the several villages of Mae Lam is now being created by village members, and will be exhibited at the Festival and presented there to government officials and the press, and as a model for other community action.

### **The Declaration of the Rights and Responsibilities of Forest Communities.**

As in many countries around the world, indigenous people in Thailand are often looked upon with prejudice and disdain. Racism is just below the surface of Thai society, and tribes are accused of being destroyers of the forest by those who want to move them off the land to use it for their own purposes. In response to this prejudice, SEM proposed to indigenous and NGO leaders that a statement of their "land ethic" be created by the leaders and people of forest communities across northern Thailand. The making of such a land ethic would be an on-going educational process that would take place over several years, while its drafts will accompany the bioregional maps and together become a clear expression of land and community-based

values. The first drafts of this "Declaration of the Rights and Responsibilities of Forest Communities" will be presented and discussed at the Festival. Tribal stories, poetry, and music. Interspersed with the serious meetings, ritual and discussions at the Festival will be much sharing of cultural gifts - the Karèn especially are great storytellers and song-carriers.

### **Registration and Costs**

If you would like to join this year's Walks, please write to SEM at the address below, indicating your background and interest. Participants are asked to arrange their own travel to and from the starting point in Chiang Mai. The cost for participation for Asians is 3,900 baht. Approximately one-third of this fee will be contributed to community development funds in the areas we visit. The balance of the fee covers registration, on-ground transportation, food and lodging, and also helps to subsidize the participation of regional activists. We have applied for scholarship funds and a limited amount may be available. A 2,000-baht deposit is due with registration; the balance is due by November 15. After October 15 there will be no refunds for cancellations, unless a replacement participant is found.

**SEM (The Alliance for Sustainable Forests and Communities Project)**  
**72/83 Tippiant St., Haiya, Muang, Chiang Mai 50100**  
**Tel. (01)487-3347,**  
**(053)200-894, Pager**  
**(152)156-147**

**Email.**

**Hwater@chmai.loxinfo.co.th**

Contact persons: Nuttarote Wangwinyoo  
 Or Suwannee Hiranmaleelert

As in thousands of other villages and communities scattered in the diminishing roadless hills and secluded valleys of the planet, the indigenous people of northern Thailand — the Karen, Mon, Lahu, Lisu, Akha, and others — are engaged in a struggle for the continuance of their way of life in the face of short-sighted governmental policies and the expanding industrial-consumer culture. When we look deeply we can see that many of the issues concerning indigenous peoples are relevant to people everywhere. Here are a few of the many important questions that have arisen in discussions during previous Solidarity Walks:

- \* What community values are essential to preserve and nurture in the face of encroachment from the commercialized monoculture?
- \* What constitutes a sustainable culture and a sustainable relation with the land?
- \* How can the lineage of wisdom, customs and ceremonies be transferred to the young whose attentions are increasingly monopolized by compulsory state education and the mass media?
- \* How can indigenous communities be supported as the rightful guardians or stewards of forest lands?
- \* How can we understand the differences between simplicity and poverty, or between a high quality of life and a high material standard of living?

*N. Wangwinyoo*

## Money to the People

### *What are community currencies?*

Community currencies are interest-free exchange mediums that can only be used in the community in which they originate. The community currency economy exists in parallel with the mainstream economy; some trading is done in national currency, some in community currency, and some in a combination of the two. Community currency systems are based on either the LETS concept (Local Exchange and Trading Systems), popular in Canada, Europe and Australia or the HOURS model first established in Ithaca, New York.

It is estimated there are over 2000 LETS-type community currency systems, where total number of members vary from 50 in Guelph, Canada to more than 700 in the Talents system in Switzerland and over 2000 in the Blue Mountain LETS in Australia. Trade in these systems still happens mainly in the services sector, although many now also have small businesses participating. Currently about 50 'HOURS'-type systems operate in North America. In Ithaca New York, a monthly trade volume is estimated at 6,000 HOURS (60,000 US\$) between 1,500-2,000 people (Powell and Salverda, 1998). HOURS-based community currencies employ a piece of paper ('notes' or 'coupons') as the medium of exchange, while LETS systems use credits and debits in an account ledger (with no physical representation). The value of these currencies is determined by members of the community. Various, the value has been tied to the national currency; equated to an hour of

labour; or allowed to determine itself through members' exchanges. Community currency systems are backed by the resources within a community, including the labor of its members, and the trust the members have in each other.

Community currencies fulfill the two most essential functions of money (Lietaer, 1998). They provide:

- \* a **standard of measure**, to compare the value of goods and services, and
- \* a **medium of exchange**, to facilitate the exchange of goods and services along with the national currency.

Note that, in the case of national currency, this function conflicts with the desire to have money serve as a store of value. Money stored or hoarded, whether to earn interest or simply to safeguard it, is not available to exchange goods and services. This deprives others of economic activity, leading in the worst case scenario to a recession. Hoarding of money is stimulated through its commodity price—the interest rate. Because of the presence of interest rates, money in the bank today is worth more than any day in the future. Or, to put it in economic terms, the discounted present value of future income is negligible. Here is the link between positive interest rates and environmental degradation; cutting a tree today and depositing the earnings from its sale in a bank is more profitable than withdrawing money from the bank to plant trees in the hopes of earning income somewhere down the road.

Because community currencies bear no interest (money is

de-commoditised) hoarding is discouraged. Instead of storing the money in order to earn interest, there is an incentive to invest it in activities which will yield income over the long run (suddenly it would make economic sense to plant trees). To spur this incentive, some community currency advocates have proposed a 'charge' on the use of money. This is known as 'demurrage'. If money were to devalue over time, there would be an incentive to spend the money as quickly as possible, thereby increasing the speed at which the money circulates between members of the community (the 'velocity' of money). (Gesell, S., 1929).

In 1972 the gold standard was abandoned. Since that time, money has been created as mere fiat currency (not backed by anything material). This is propelled through the Fractional Reserve Banking mechanism. Through this mechanism, commercial banks have to keep only a certain percentage of the outstanding deposits as reserves. With a fractional reserve requirement of 10 percent, commercial banks can *continuously re-issue* 10 dollars for every dollar coming in as a deposit, as loans to customers. So, most of the money we see in our pockets, or in our bankbooks, exists as debt. It is not covered by gold or any other resource or value base. Its value is merely dependent on the trust people put in it. Nobody knows why people still do. These debts have to be serviced at some point—by the real sector! This requires the real economy to grow faster and faster, in order to keep up with these debts.

These boom and bust condi-

tions do not exist in community currency systems. Money in a community currency system is created by the members whenever they purchase or sell goods and services. It is therefore explicitly backed by those resources. On the other hand, systems which use notes as their medium of exchange, *must* carefully monitor the money supply in their community to avoid similar problems. The managers of the HOURS system spend a great deal of time adjusting the money flow to the resources available for trade.

While interest-bearing national currency is a powerful tool for the moneylenders to extract resources from a community, community currencies are a means for communities to reduce their dependence on it. The goal is to provide enough 'breathing space' for the creation of a sustainable economy with fair values and prices, which are decided by the local economic and social context.

Apart from the benefits on a local level, the concept of community currency provides a practical basis from which to begin reform of the current monetary system. Interest free currencies backed by goods and services relink the financial economy with the real economy, avoiding painful, and seemingly endless, swings from overheated growth to recessionary collapse.

### Luis Lopezllera and the PDP

Luis Lopezllera Méndez, originally an architect & university professor on design, has 40 years experience of continuous social work with grassroots level groups in urban and rural areas in Mexico. He is currently the president of Promoción del

Desarrollo Popular (Promotion of Popular Development, Civil Association). This NGO was created over 30 years ago, with the purpose of finding ways of self-organization and common progress for peasants, workers, suburban settlers, and indigenous people. The PDP has promoted many national micro-development projects (financial, educational, cultural, etc.), workshops and conferences. PDP is also involved with several international networks, like the IGRI

(International Group on Grassroots Initiatives) focused on grassroots efforts to find alternatives to the present crisis.

Luis is editor of "LA OTRA Bolsa de Valores" (THE OTHER Stock Exchange), representing a network of many grassroots organizations and NGOs in Mexico and abroad, exchanging knowledge related to self-reliance and sustainability. At the government level, the group is currently in dialogue with the office in charge of micro-enterprise promotion.



Outcomes of group activities are published in a magazine, which is distributed in Spanish, but with supplements in English, French and Portuguese, to almost 850 organizations in 70 countries.

Triggered by the Mexican crisis, with its persistent social and economic impacts at the grassroots level, the PDP and "LA OTRA Bolsa de Valores" created a platform in which causes and impacts of the financial crisis and its alternatives could be discussed. "We were deeply interested in the money issue, trying to understand why civil society and many NGOs, and, indeed, practically all individuals and communities, can not overcome their dependency on it. Money has caused frequent bubbles, it leads to various crises, we are all competing for it and are divided by it. The financial crisis caused a slump in economic activity, high unemployment and severe poverty, while people, their labor and capabilities, and local resources were still available." This might sound familiar for Thai participants.

Through TOES (The Other Economic Summit), Luis got in touch with individuals and groups who had started community currency systems. After visits from community currency systems practitioners in Canada and the United States, Luis visited France, where numerous communities had also started their own currency systems. Inspired by these experiences, and with the help of his friends in the NGO community, Luis started a community currency system called Tlaloc.

### Community Currencies in Mexico

Three years ago 'La Otra Bolsa de Valores' launched a community currency system,

known as 'Tianguis TLALOC' (in Aztec, Tianguis means 'market' while Tlaloc is taken from the name of one of the highest divinities in the Aztec cosmology, related to water, rain, thunder and life). In this system products and services are exchanged using an alternative currency called TLALOC, alongside the national currency. Members have accounts where local trades are recorded, but also may choose to use notes as the medium of exchange.

The TLALOC bill represents one hour of social work and by common convention it has an equivalent of 30 pesos (approximately \$3 US). There are several denominations:  $\frac{1}{2}$  Tlaloc, 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 Tlalocs. Every member of the network of producers, servers and consumers has signed a letter of agreement and has received 15 and a half Tlalocs to start trading products and services with other members of the Tianguis (social market and network). He or she also receives 50 Tequios (tokens) ('Tequio' is an Aztec word meaning 'communal effort'). One Tequio is equivalent to one Peso. While the Tlaloc plays the role of bills, the Tequio plays that of coins. It is recommended that members accept at least 30% of the price of a transaction in Tlalocs and Tequios. Pesos are accepted, but the policy is to increase the use of Tlaloc as much as possible. Every Tlaloc bill must be signed by the 'issuer' and the 'receiver'. The 'receiver' becomes an 'issuer' when the bill is next used by her to purchase goods or services. The bill can be endorsed ten times and then the "Eco-Bang" can exchange it for a new one. This process is called 'multi-bartering'.

Every member of the network is in a quarterly directory

where offers and demands for goods and services are publicized. Members are people living in Mexico City and its surroundings; the intention is to bridge urban and rural people. There are approximately 150 registered units (micro-enterprises) as members, which can consist of several individuals.

Perhaps more important than the economic benefits are the opportunities to strengthen the local social fabric. Monthly fairs are organized to allow producers and consumers to meet face to face, and to create solidarity through a new spirit of exchange—not just goods and services but also cultural and ecological values, like spiritual traditions, art, music, entertainment, bio-energetics, health and a sort of intergenerational party. Children take center stage.

The experience of Tlaloc has the interest of "**El Barzon Movement**". This movement has 1,000,000 members throughout Mexico. Most members are deeply indebted and many micro-enterprises are struggling after the 1995 crisis, as banks will not give them new loans. Various groups in the Yucatan peninsula want to start their own community currency system and PDP will assist them in their efforts. PDP have also just finished a proposal for creating a communal currency (or extending theirs) in Xochimilco, a famous bioregion on the outskirts of Mexico City.

*Luis L. Mendez  
and  
Menno Salverda*

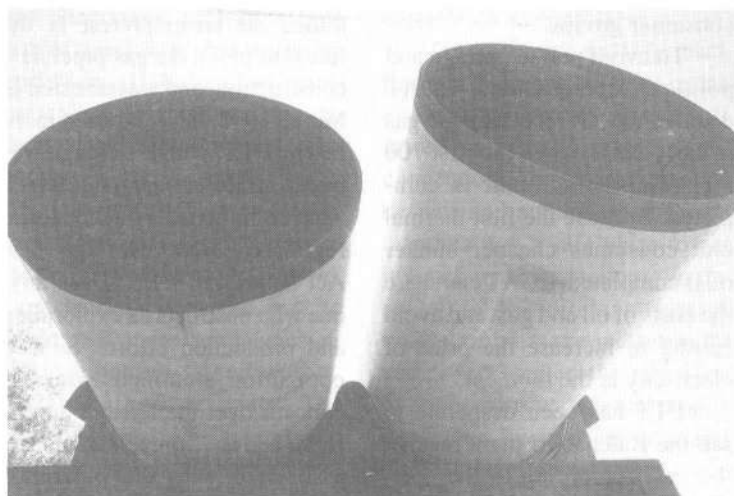
## Further Delay of Yadana Project: Expensive Yadana gas prompted EGAT to reschedule its gas consumption

Despite the completion of the construction of Yadana pipeline to bring natural gas from Burma to a Thai power plant at Ratchaburi, the delivery of the gas has again been rescheduled. The pipeline has been built amidst strong outcry from human rights activists and environmentalists.

The main reason for the rescheduling has been delays in the installation of the combined-cycle units at the Ratchaburi power plant of the financially strapped EGAT (Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand). Mitsui and General Electric, the two contractors of this mammoth 5,000 megawatts power plant, have failed to deliver the main parts of the combined-cycle units. The first unit was supposed to be completed in July 1998.

Fierce protests against the privatization of the plant have come from EGAT's union, which accused the government of selling national assets in order to pay its huge debts. These debts, coupled with the gloomy financial status of EGAT, have reportedly prompted the two contractors to delay installing gas turbines for the Ratchaburi plant. Since the financial crash took place two years ago, EGAT's debt servicing has been much hindered. It causes concerns over debt defaults among EGAT's construction contractors.

According to *Thai Post*, EGAT announced on 16 July 1999 that the delivery of the Yadana gas should take place in early 2000 despite the fact that the first combined-cycle unit is now 80%



completed. Reuters had earlier this month quoted the general director of natural gas section of PTT (Petroleum Authority of Thailand), owner of the controversial Yadana project as confirming that the first unit of the Ratchaburi plant would be ready to consume gas by August 1999.

EGAT cited the expensive price of the Burmese gas as the main hindrance to the commencement of the delivery. Since last year, EGAT has been subjected to strong criticisms from the local media and the public in general for its chronic increases of the price of electricity. These price hikes have occurred even though EGAT's exchange losses have significantly decreased, as the Baht has become somewhat stronger, and there has been a slight recovery in power consumption in 1998 and 1999 as compared to 1997, when the economic slump began. To begin receiving the gas from Burma now means an inevitable increase in the price of electricity.

EGAT has complained several times that the Yadana gas costs substantially more than the price of gas purchased from other local sources, and also that the gas is of lesser quality than what was initially claimed.

PTT (Petroleum Authority of Thailand), during the peak of the protest against its Yadana project, had always asserted that the gas from Burma was cheaper and of higher quality. The Yadana gas reportedly costs 3 USD per one million BTU at the point of delivery at the Thai-Burmese border, with the price rising to 3.48 USD at Ratchaburi plant in Thailand. According to EGAT, natural gas from local sources causes around 2 USD per one million BTU at the site of power plant.

Another hindrance to the delivery of the Yadana gas was the gloomy electricity consumption vis-a-vis the current oversupply of electricity. In early May, Price Water Coopers, a consultancy, said in its report after

evaluating EGAT's overall performance that power charges could be 7% lower if consumers did not have to pay for unused generating capacity in the system. (*Bangkok Post* 29 May 1999) The new caused uproar among consumer groups.

To avoid public outrage and political repercussions, EGAT decided to start receiving the gas in early 2000, when the first 700 megawatt-thermal-unit is completed. Because the first thermal unit consumes cheaper bunker oil is completed; EGAT can share the costs of oil and gas, and avoid having to increase the price of electricity at the moment.

PTT has been desperate to see the Ratchaburi plant receive the gas. According to the take-or-pay purchase contract signed with the Yadana consortium, PTT has to pay money in advance based on the agreed gas delivery schedule regardless of whether or not it actually takes the gas.

The first delivery should have taken place by the 1<sup>st</sup> of August 1998. Up to this February, PTT was supposed to pay about 62 millions USD to the consortium without receiving any gas, though so far it has still withheld the payment. PTT cited the delay of the completion of the power plant and the sudden economic slump as a *force majeure* (or circumstance beyond its control) upon which it can withhold payment, though this argument was rejected by the Yadana consortium. It was reported lately that the negotiation was made with the Yadana consortium in Rangoon to reduce the first payment of the gas from 62 million USD to 50 million USD. (*Bangkok Post*, 27 July 1999) The sudden economic slump was cited as a reason (*force majeure*) for the successful negotiation,

though it was previously claimed by PTT that the gas is also of low quality judging from the heat it gives.

In the meantime, the ongoing trials of Sulak Sivaraksa, a human rights campaigner who joined the sit-in protest in the forest to block the gas pipeline's construction, and was arrested in March 1998, have exposed more lies by PTT. Sulak's charge was based on the Petroleum Act, which was promulgated by a dictatorial regime over 20 years ago. The Act authorizes PTT to sue anyone who obstructs its exploration and production efforts. Sulak's opposition stemmed from his concern over the terrible human rights and environmental impacts associated with the pipeline's construction.

A great variety of plants and wildlife, including wild elephants and the hog-nosed bats, have been found to inhabit the pristine forests of Burma and Thailand along the pipeline route. A field survey last March by the Kanchanaburi Conservation Club, a local environmental group, revealed severe environmental destruction caused by the pipeline's construction including deforestation, soil erosion, and impacts of the living patterns of wild life.

With respect to human rights abuses, the Yadana project has involved the widespread use of forced labor of ethnic minorities who live along the 60 kilometer-route in Burma. These ethnic peoples have also suffered extrajudicial killing at the hand of Burma's army.

These abuses have been investigated and publicized by many groups including the ILO (International Labor Organization) and Earth Rights International, a non-governmental organization. The ILO recently is-

sued a resolution barring Burma from attending ILO forums, and condemning Burma's labor practices.

In front of the judge, Mr. Sompong Tantisuwanichkul, the chief engineer of PTT for the Yadana project, denied charges that PTT had often violated the mitigation requirements of the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) in order to speed up construction and cut costs. The chief engineer also denied the charge that PTT had extensively used explosive materials to entrench the ground, and that PTT worked at night, though a great deal of evidence has been induced to the contrary. It was stipulated in the EIA that no work was allowed at night because it would disturb wildlife. The EIA also said that explosive materials were not to be used or could be used when it is most necessary.

To provide stronger evidence of environmental damage associated with the pipeline's construction, the judge has allowed video presentation to be made in the next hearing.

Pipob Udomittipong  
Alternative Energy Project  
for Sustainability (AEPS),  
email: ksc@ffc.or.th

Sulak Sivaraksa is scheduled to appear at the Criminal Court in Bangkok as a defendant against the charge of obstructing the Yadana gas pipeline resulting from his arrest on March 7, 1998. His lawyers will carry on cross examining the plaintiff on September 13 and 14, 1999.

## The Council of All Beings

### Learning from Our Friends in Nature

Sometimes an event seems to be particularly significant as a part of a larger path. Perhaps this is so of all happenings in ones life but we are not usually open to see this. Recently I attended a workshop at the Talliaris Foundation in rural Wales that has had a profound effect on me. The central activity was the Council of All Beings where we let go of our human identification and become a channel for other life forms to speak through us. To do this we identified with an ally from the non-human world - an animal, plant, tree, rock or other natural form, then made a mask to depict our ally and then spoke from their perspective in the Council.

The workshop was led by John Seed a rain forest activist from Australia. He told us he had been leading these workshops for more than 10 years after creating the series of rituals with Deep Ecology teacher Joanna Macy. The workshop aim is to develop compassion and understanding of the interconnection of all things. These qualities are described as tools for the Shambala Warriors who it was prophesied in many ancient texts would challenge the crisis' at this time in the history of Mother Earth. Interpretations of these prophecies see the interconnection of the ecological, economic and cultural disasters around the world as manifestations of the predicted holocausts that could destroy the natural environment and annihilate the majority of the world species including humankind. The Shambala Warriors are emerging as spiritual champions to challenge

and understand the interconnection and implications of issues and phenomena such as extinction of species, global warming, pollution, globalisation, consumerism, monoculture and the decimation of indigenous populations.

The group of twenty or so participants all had great concern for the state of the modern world, most working in some way to counteract these tendencies as environmentalists, educators, therapists and activists. The workshop helped us get in touch with our deep feelings, reconnect with our planet and strengthen our inspiration to work and live for a more sustainable world. As John Seed writes, "Many people INTELLECTUALLY realize that we are inseparable from Nature and that the sense of separation that we feel is illusory. These rituals enable us to deeply EXPERIENCE our connection with Nature, in our hearts and our bodies".

The activities included personal stories, guided meditation, grief and despair work and ritual that enabled us to explore our deep concern and love for our planet in this time of crisis. We let go of our competitive and isolated self and experienced our interconnection with all beings. We started with a sharing circle each of us voicing why we were drawn to this workshop - it emerged that we had a great common concern for the state of the planet and were either searching for, training for or confirming our roles as Shambala Warriors. We joined together in many sharing circles over the

weekend and were amazed at the wisdom and knowledge that came from each of us.

One exercise took us back through the eons of time on an evolutionary journey that allowed us to see our place and connections in the universe. A despair and empowerment truth mandala was a safe place to get in touch with our feelings. In the center of the circle pieces of rushes, wood, stone and an empty vessel represented the emotions of anger, sorrow, fear and emptiness. One by one, bravely and eloquently, often with deep emotion we shared our concerns of the world today. A mother spoke of her fear that water is not safe for her child to drink and then allowed her anger about this to emerge, others spoke of their sorrow of the terrible cruelty and poor living conditions for animals in intensive farming, rage at the consequences of genetically modified plants. I was surprised at the amount of deep feelings and emotions expressed and felt my compassion raise for the individuals' and the circumstances they grieved about. It also opened my eyes further to the injustice in the modern world. When I entered the truth mandala I found myself unable to name the despair I felt for the systems of the modern world that seem so callous, alluring and sophisticated making simple and wholesome living out of the grasp of most people. Later, alone in the forest, I reflected on the despair I felt when I see the forces of greed and lust for recognition within me and wonder how much they are part of the evolutionary forces

and whether it is arrogant of humankind to have spiritual aspirations to overcome this.

John shared with us that these workshops were a spiritual practice and gave him strength to continue when many activists, often driven by strong emotion give way to burn out. I found this interesting as I have seen so many committed people with wonderful intentions and innovative projects lose steam and become unable to fully continue their work. Perhaps it is a necessary and spiritual practice to acknowledge and release the despair that we inevitable come in touch with when working as an environmental or social activist. The first night he told us how the intention of each of us was a very important component of the workshop and we were asked to meditate and reinforce our intention to heal the illusions of separation from the earth. He believes that if we all have this strong intention then the workshop will be a positive and empowering experience for all and we will be protected from any negative aspects. The workshop fee includes a donation to rain forest projects although the facilitators offer their services free of charge and this further contributes to the belief that the happenings in the workshop are protected.

When the time came to go in to the forest on a vision quest to meet my ally I was drawn to many exquisite things. We had been asked to allow our ally to choose us - my rational mind kept interrupting this process imagining how I could represent the ally I was drawn too - eventually a strong gust of wind rushed through the trees above me - my friend had arrived - the wild wind. Immediately my rational mind said how can I possibly speak for

the wind - it is such a huge task - it will be too hard - another quieter voice gently encouraged me just to let it happen. I returned to the house to begin working on my mask.

The mask that emerged was wild and dramatic - it seemed to come from deep inside me - I was not aware of designing it. When it was finished I had to keep looking at it in awe - where had it come from? That night as we sat around the fire and shared our journey to meet our allies it emerged there were four winds. I did not have to take sole responsibility to represent my ally.

We entered the Council through an arch and as we did so donned our masks and became the representative of our ally. There was a fungus, grass, birds,

fish, an otter and many others bright and colorful. During the ritual I felt myself become inseparable from my projection of the wild wind, I also came face to face with my ego as I observed my anthropocentric tendencies. Gradually it seemed that I became the wind and felt a connection deep into the mists of time. I tried to find words to express this. My interpretation of the wild wind was a strong force missing the huge forests and sweltering through man made concrete jungles where cold buildings resisted the call to dance and began to disintegrate. The wild wind became angry and an urge came to summon up other natural phenomena the volcanoes, the earthquakes and the tempests to raise havoc to the human species - our



Mother will call us when the time comes I heard myself say and as I observed this I observed my own dark side. The words I spoke attempted to acknowledge the dark sides of nature manifesting themselves in the destructive torrents of a wild wind. The wild wind taught me that the human race may not survive but the life force will and we are connected to this through the ions of time and the web of life.

There were three other winds that represented their allies as the nurturing wind that was the breath of all species, the gentle wind that played with the undergrowth of the forest and the cool wind that happily carried the seeds and sorrowfully the pollution. Other participants became entwined with their allies an otter spoke despairingly of how there were no fish left, a salmon of her brothers and sisters being caged in a fish farm and unable to leap up the streams, a loving bluebell spoke of how she was liked by humankind as she was gentle and pretty, a cat spoke of how she was in between the animal world and the human world. A honey fungus in a mask of grass and twigs spoke of her vital role in the digestion of rotting matter and

how old she was in comparison to the very young adolescent humans. Many spoke of the youth and immaturity of the human race. Gifts were offered to help humankind through the present crisis', the strength and flexibility of a salmon leaping, the clear sighted vision of a hawk, the tenacity of grass. The wild wind offered a reminder that Gaia has energy and resources to survive the crisis'.

After each ally had spoken we returned through the arch to become human again - I felt unready as I had much to learn from my ally - I sadly went through but the lessons have continued coming. Every visit to nature is a humbling experience, I find myself slipping behind my wild wind mask and the masks of other natural beings and absorbing the wisdom of nature.

That night around the fire we gave thanks to our allies, burning our masks and releasing their spirits.

The next day using sharing, meditation and a series of questions that reinforced our commitment to heal the earth - it felt like we were stepping on to the path of the Shambala Warrior.

Many of us aspire to bring

the spirit of the Council to our lives and work. Some have strong activist intentions, others wonderful dreams, several spoke of conducting the Council of All Beings for different groups including children. I hope to hold a Council in Thailand next year for activists working on forest issues but for the present time it seems that I need to further the tools of compassion and understanding of the interconnection of all things.

Many workshop participants commented on how wonderfully we had gelled as a group one even mentioning that he felt he had found his tribe. Whilst I felt comfortable with the group I wondered if this was a bit unrealistic as many of us would never see each other again. However the workshop seemed to have deep significance for all of us and was a strengthening of our intentions to work for healing the planet - however that may happen. For me a walk in the woods will never be quite the same again.

*Jane Rasbash, July 1999*

For more information on the Council of All Beings and Rainforest projects please visit the Rainforest Information Centre Website : [www.forests.org](http://www.forests.org)

## Wayang Update

Sawatdee and Greetings from Bangkok!

We hope this letter finds you in good health and spirit...

We are pleased to inform you that WAYANG's "Dolls and Dust" video (cf. synopsis below) has been used extensively by national and regional NGOs in many countries in Asia in their campaigns—particularly on resisting the negatives forces of

"globalization" and "neo-liberal economics". This week, the video is scheduled for broadcast in Japan on NHK's news program in relation to the UNDP's recent report—to present case studies of grassroots women who have not benefited and who are suffering from "globalization".

Commencing on July 24<sup>th</sup>, 1999 (perhaps a week or so earlier, if there's local reschedul-

ing), "Dolls and Dust" would also be cablecast and/or broadcast across 50 cities in the USA reaching over seven million homes. Please check the following website for the television program schedule in any particular city: <http://www.freepress.org> or e-mail: [programming@fstv.org](mailto:programming@fstv.org)

If you need us to confirm the program schedule in a specific

city for you, please e-mail us at: [wayang@i.am](mailto:wayang@i.am)

We hope you would inform all your friends and network (e.g., Alternatives to Consumerism, Spirit in Education Movement, Santi Pracha Dhamma) contacts in the USA about the broadcasting of WAYANG's "Dolls and Dust" video there. They are free, of course, to copy the video when it is transmitted on television for further use in their NGO activities and campaigns. Please also encourage them to send us their comments and feedback about the program in due course.

Since WAYANG prioritizes the distribution of "Dolls and Dust" as widely as possible and as soon as possible considering the current relevance of the theme of this video, this has almost invariably meant making the video available on a non-profit basis. Hence, in the televising of "Dolls and Dust" in the USA, WAYANG does not receive any "commercial" royalty payment. Also, the Colorado-based Free-Speech TV (which is cooperating with WAYANG in the transmission of the video in the USA) is not a "commercial" organization, and therefore, is not in any position to contribute financial resources generously to WAYANG! In fact, over the past three years in this "Dolls and Dust" project, besides the input of a lot of voluntary effort and time, WAYANG has also incurred a very substantial budget deficit! But then WAYANG cannot prioritize the objective of generating income to recover its financial deficit if this would mean neglecting the objective of distributing or broadcasting the "Dolls and Dust" video as widely and as soon as possible!

Yet, there is still much work to be completed in relation to the further distribution and utiliza-

tion of the video...

For your information, WAYANG has just completed our voluntary post-production work on three different Chinese language versions of "Dolls and Dust": i.e., Cantonese (Hong Kong & Macau), Mandarin (Taiwan) and Putonghua (China) -- each with its own particular narration and subtitles (in traditional or simplified Chinese texts). Through the kind efforts of the Hong Kong Women Workers Association (HKWWA), a group of unemployed and/or underemployed Chinese women workers participated actively in re-editing and narrating the Chinese scripts.

The Thai language version (with both Thai narration and subtitles) was completed by WAYANG in January 1999 -- also with the participation of unemployed Thai women workers. The Sinhala (Sri Lanka), Japanese and Korean language versions of "Dolls and Dust" are almost completed—by network contacts in the three respective countries. Other language versions currently being translated include Urdu (Pakistan), Bengali (Bangladesh), Hindi (India), Nepali (Nepal), Tagalog (Philippines) and Bahasa (Indonesia/Malaysia) -- the final versions would be released within the next few months.

With the availability of "Dolls and Dust" in these various Asian languages, we hope the process of alternative communication by the participating women workers could be facilitated further and with more impact.

Plans are also afoot to explore more distribution channels. Video "webcasting" and/or at least making the text, digital audio and digital stills from "Dolls and Dust" (in certain languages) available through the internet is perhaps something worth exploring—particularly to certain

places where it is very, very difficult to distribute videotapes or to broadcast. Video CDs are another possibility that is being explored since in certain places, VCDs are more popular than video tapes.

If you are able to assist WAYANG in accessing the necessary financial resource support to complement our existing human resources to implement this distribution plan or in other areas of our work, please advise us...

### Summary of "Dolls and Dust"

Dolls and Dust presents analyses and testimonies of women workers and activists in Sri Lanka, Thailand and South Korea on the impact of industrial restructuring, globalization and "mal(e)-development" on their lives, communities and the environment.

"Dolls and Dust" provides a timely forum for women workers in these three sub-regions of Asia to communicate—"bottom-up"—in their own voices and in their own languages from the reality of their communities at the grass-roots...

Under patriarchal socialization, girls play with dolls. Some grow out of it. Some become "dolls" themselves for others. Many women workers in Asia also have to make dolls for a living. Some, like the women workers in the Kader doll factory in Thailand, even have to die for it! When not so young, women workers become dispensable and disposable—when employers want to cut costs or when politicians and the IMF want to "free" or "liberalize" our economy. Many women workers all over Asia are being chained and trampled upon like dust. Many women worker leaders have been tortured and murdered—returning to the earth and becoming dust them-

selves...

In Sri Lanka, the impoverishment of the rural sector under the WB/IMF's "Structural Adjustment Program" has forced many young women to work in factories in the Free Trade Zones where they have to tolerate very exploitative work and living conditions. In Thailand, women workers are organizing themselves for better "occupational health and safety" and resisting the "bitter medicine" that the IMF and the present Thai government have imposed upon them. With the internationalization of labor and capital over the past decade in South Korea, many women workers have lost their jobs as Korean factories relocate to Indonesia, Vietnam, etc., in search of more "docile" and cheaper labor to exploit. The Korean women workers' movement which played a pivotal role in laying the foundation of the Korean labor movement now finds that women workers are the first to be retrenched on the basis of their gender as South Korea remains under the "intensive care unit" of the IMF "hospital".

Despite many difficulties, women workers in Asia are resisting and organizing for change...

This 60-minute video is structured in three parts (apx. 17 minutes each) to depict each of the sub-regions and is subtitled and narrated in English with the accompanying voices of the women in Sinhala, Tamil, Thai and Korean languages.

"Dolls and Dust" is produced by the Committee for Asian Women (CAW), a regional-level women's NGO that focuses on gender and labor issues in Asia. CAW works with 28 network groups consisting of women worker organizations, women committees of trade unions, women NGOs and those con-

cerned with women as well as women workers in 13 countries spanning the 3 sub-regions in Asia: Northeast (Hong Kong, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan); Southeast (Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand); and South Asia (Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Pakistan).

Researched, directed and videographed by WAYANG between August 1996 and June 1998 in Sri Lanka, Thailand and South Korea (with additional footage from Japan, Hong Kong and China), "Dolls and Dust" is perhaps the first video documentary to present "the other faces and voices" of women workers in Asia in relation to the ongoing crises in the region.

"Wayang" means image. However, in Malaysia and Indonesia, the term is more notably used together with another as "Wayang Kulit"—meaning a lively, musical, shadow play. In the Chinese language, "Waying" is closely associated with picture, image or shadow. Both WAYING and WAYANG, in essence, mean the same in these popular languages. As an alternative communication group, WAYANG seeks to visualize that which is "shadowed" or repressed—to communicate people's experiential knowledge and local wisdom; and to share moving images that seek to move people, in solidarity, towards more balance (yin and yang), justice and creativity in the existing communication disorder...

"Dolls and Dust" was selected as an award-winning entry from Asia during the 4<sup>th</sup> International VideOlympiade held at the auditorium of the South African Broadcasting Corporation in Cape Town, South Africa (September 18-21, 1998). Towards minimizing as much as possible the element of "competition" among the numerous en-

tries from 25 countries, no "first prize" was awarded—only the 10 best submissions were selected for the 1998 VideOlympiade awards. The theme of the 4<sup>th</sup> VideOlympiade was "The Right to Communicate and the Communication of Rights". The aim of the VideOlympiade is to promote equality and creativity in the field of local television and community video creation. The 1<sup>st</sup> Video and TV Olympiade was held in conjunction with the Winter Olympics in Albertville, France, in 1992, and attracted 250 delegates participating from 24 countries. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Olympiade took place in 1994 in Scandinavia aboard a ferry, the Kristina Regina, travelling between Denmark, Sweden and Norway with 250 delegates from 29 countries. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Olympiade took place at Paulo Freire's Instituto Cajamar in Sao Paulo, Brazil, in 1996.

The 4<sup>th</sup> VideOlympiade was held in conjunction with the International Conference and General Assembly of VIDEAZIMUT, an international NGO that is now present in over 45 countries and connects approximately 12,000 communication activists who work from their own communities, regional organizations or even global ones, to build diversity and promote the democratic practice of audiovisual communication for development.

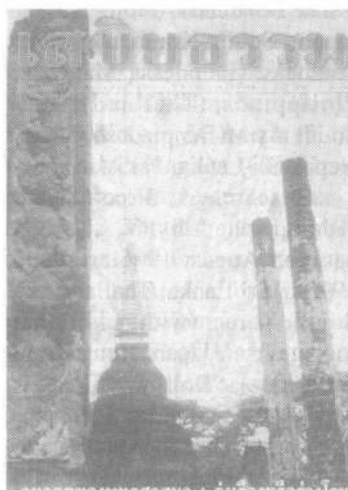
Limited copies of "Dolls and Dust" would be made available at a specially reduced price or even on a complimentary/exchange basis to certain impecunious groups in the South (and in exceptional cases, in the North as well). Please send details about your work and your organization when making any request. Copies in both PAL and NTSC Beta-cam SP broadcast format are also available where required. E-mail: wayang@i.am

*Wayang Video group*

# Sekhiya Dhamma Wittayalaya

*The previous decades of Thai modernization have been tainted with environmental havoc and social disintegration. Material values have preceded all other causes, and extensively dominated all aspects of the so called "development", about which some critics called "madness" according to its Latin root. The decreasing role of spirituality has been cited as a symptom and a root cause of all this malaise. Temples and Buddhist monks that used to play a central role in shaping the social and cultural landscape in ancient Siamese society have been designated and retained merely for a ceremonial purpose.*

In 1979, a group of concerned religious believers who believed in the cause to revive the socially engaged roles of Buddhist monks, nuns and its institutions established "Thai Inter-religious Commission for Development (TICD)" as an antidote to the present deteriorating roles of Buddhist domain. Monks and nuns, the religious and cultural heir of rural Thai society, come mainly from the grassroots, the poor and remote communities. Their ordination robes serve as a way through which they can educate themselves and become a spiritual refuge for rural folks. Their close relationships and respectable status among the majority poor affirm the possibility for their engaged role. Efforts have to be made on breaking the myth of the monks just living for ceremonial purpose, and equipping them with systematic ways to analyze more coherently social problems, and exploring solutions from the reinterpretation of the teaching.



As a result, TICD has been advocating, identifying, supporting and networking these monks and nuns who can become social change agents at their locality. A number of veteran "development monks" have been supported by TICD including Luang Por Nan who had initiated the "rice bank, the buffalo bank, and the commune farming, which brought back a sense of cooperation to address acute poverty in Surin, his poor and arid hometown. All of the activities have spiritual training as their basis. In the last decade whence environmental concern has predominated, TICD has organized a series of workshops to raise the awareness of Buddhist monks and nuns and equip them with knowledge and managerial skills useful in running their successful campaign.

A loosely knitted network of Buddhist monks and nuns who were involved in different rural and environmental projects was formed in 1990. Its name "Sekhiya Dhamma", was coined by Phra Dhammapitaka, one of the most scholastic monks in Siam. Sulak Sivaraksa, founder of TICD explained "*Sekhiya means the*

*monks discipline. However, as the traditional discipline which monks practice nowadays does not benefit people in our changing society, naming the group as such would remind monks of their duty to make their discipline more socially relevant.*" The forming of the network has greatly inspired more monks and nuns to take the cause, and has helped to strengthen their individual work.

One of the resolutions adopted in the founding meeting was the creation of a mobile training unit to equip monks and nuns with necessary awareness, knowledge and skills in their social and environmental involvement. Starting from the issues surrounding mal-development and the environment, the themes of these workshops have shifted to address a wide range of problems including AIDS and prostitution, and other common problems in both rural and urban communities. Another underlying objective of these workshops is to recruit and inspire more young monks and nuns into this movement. Besides the instillation of concepts, techniques are employed to solicit participation from the participants in these workshops as well.

From a number of years in organizing training, we have come to a conclusion that any change at the local, regional or societal level starts from a shift in our paradigm. The paradigm shift is made possible by a new learning process, which replaces the conventional ones with a reductionist worldview and the herald of scientific and economic values over the intrinsic values of nature. In a Buddhist point of

view, it is an attempt to address the problems caused by our clinging to materialistically induced happiness, and transcend us to the non-materialistically induced happiness, which is total peacefulness. This kind of learning should encompass the learners with commitment, wisdom and love, which are truly fundamental for true social changes.

But conventional education has fail to offer this kind of learning process. It mainly indulges students with the temptations to yearn for a more materialistically developed society, in which their consuming passions will be endlessly encouraged. Many scholars in Siam have conceded that we need an educational reform, which will bring us liberation at the physical and spiritual level.

This holistic learning was in fact put in place when the Spirit in Education Movement (SEM) was established in 1995. In the past three years, SEM has offered training courses with challenging ideas to people from all walks of life including Buddhist monks and nuns. It attempts to bridge the gap between our heed and heart through contemplative learning atmosphere. But due to its certain limitations, their courses cannot fully respond to the needs of holistic education, which should inspire the younger generation with commitment, wisdom and love.

As a result, TICD and the Sekhiya Dhamma network have established the "Sekhiya Dhamma Wittayalaya" as an alternative for Buddhist monks and nuns. It is hoped that the SDW will help the students understand themselves and society in a systematic way, and to be able to combine Buddhist wisdom with other knowledge in order to tackle their own

problems and those of society at large. The learning process of SDW is designed to integrate all sciences, at the physical and spiritual level, to empower these rural monks and nuns so that they do not feel inferior.

## The Operation

Our target groups can be divided into two as follows;

**1. Regular Students:** The group will be served with a series of training for one and a half years, comprising nine courses, each of which lasts for 5-7 days. TICD and representatives from the Sekhiya Dhamma network will be responsible for exploring the potential students (monks and nuns) in their rural setting. These students have to commit themselves for the whole series of training. We need about 25 regular students. Their basic qualifications are for example, 2-10 years in monkhood (nuns-hood) and being interested, or being involved already in community work.

The training process is designed to solicit their participation. Study trips and apprenticeship are available for them as well. There will also be evaluation and follow-up attempts to help them out when they start to implement their projects.

The main contents of the courses are;

- \* Getting the message across: Efficient Teaching Level I
- \* Getting the message across: Efficient Teaching Level II
- \* Buddhist Discipline and a Celibate Life: Meditation Retreat
- \* Community Analysis (Micro level)
- \* Community Analysis (Macro level)
- \* The Understanding of

Monk's and Nun's Roles in Creating a More Righteous Society

- \* Efficient Management
- \* Buddhist Teaching Techniques: Advance Level
- \* The meetings of students from different years

**2. Periodic Students:** These courses are suitable for monks and nuns who have been trained by us before, and find it inconvenient to commit themselves for the whole series. This also caters to those interested in certain subjects as well. The workshops will be designed in response to the changing needs of the potential participants with cooperation from an existing training organization such as SEM.

Besides empowering monks and nuns with these training courses, TICD will also undertake the coordinating role by helping the Sekhiya Dhamma network to organize their meetings and seminars in order to exchange their knowledge and experience in development work. TICD's periodical, the *Sekhiya Dhamma Newsletter*, is launched every four months as a means of communication among networks and individuals, and to provide monks and nuns with news and relevant information. We also have followed and supported a few grassroots networks of development monks.

We hope this gives you a brief background of an alternative for the poor and rural young monks and nuns who want to engage themselves more meaningfully and knowledgeably in different community work. Your comments and advice for the improvement of our services are most welcome, as well as your support to make possible this education through the Sekhiya Dhamma Wittayalai for the

disadvantaged groups of monks and nuns.

#### Donation Information

You can support the Sekhiya Dhamma Wittayalaya's training programmes and sponsor the Sekhiya Dhamma's periodical for monks and nuns by contacting

the Thai Inter-religious Commission for Development (TICD) 124 Soi Wat Thong Nopphakhun, Somdej Chaopya Rd., Klongsan, Bangkok 10600, tel. +662-437-9445, fax 4379450. Please make your cheque payable to the Thai Inter-religious Commission for

Development, or wire your money to the savings account of TICD, no. 068-2-58583-8 at the Thai Farmers' Bank, Klongsan Branch.

*Preeda Ruengwichadhorn  
TICD's coordinator*

## Christian Responsibility and Buddhist Wisdom

### I

This title, like many titles, is misleading. It could suggested that Christians lack wisdom and that Buddhists are not responsible. This is not the case on either side. The Christian tradition has accumulated a great deal of wisdom, and Buddhists certainly behave responsibly.

Nevertheless, there are real differences. The Christian scriptures, like the Jewish and Muslim ones, place a great deal of emphasis on God's call to human beings, individually and collectively, and on the human capacity for response. Further, people are called to assume responsibility for themselves, for one another, and for other creatures. This leads to an emphasis on justice and righteousness and to attention to the concrete historical circumstances in which we are to respond to God's call. In this context, a strong focus appears on human sinfulness, as we fail to respond as we should, and on God's forgiveness. This overall pattern is hardly discernible in the Buddhist scriptures.

Buddhism understands our problem as ignorant striving and attachment. It shows that so often our efforts to improve matters only make them worse. Our struggles for justice often blind

us to the fullness of what is going on. They lead us to clash with others who are equally sure that their struggle is also for justice. As we work for righteousness, our ego-needs to lead and to be recognized distort our efforts and give rise to new, unproductive conflicts. Often we demonize those who resist our programs. Describing our failures as sins is likely to misguide us, since it leads us to seek forgiveness instead of deeper understanding.

Buddhists teach that our real need is to understand our true situation. At bottom this situation is the same everywhere and at all times. In reality we are moment by moment the outcome of innumerable forces or relations. But we overlay this reality with a view of ourselves as self-existent entities that endure through time. This erroneous interpretation of what we truly are leads us to shame and pride about past actions and to anxiety about what will happen to us in the future. It prevents us from living fully in the moment, open to all that is, just as it is.

Buddhists show that there are many other ways in which we overlay the reality and fail to see it for what it is. That reality is that all things are as we are, ephem-

eral outcomes of what everything else is at that point in space-time. Nothing is substantial. There is nothing to cling to. Everything is coming into being and passing away. We overlay this reality with concepts of things that endure through time unchanged, things that may be possessed and exploited. We overlay it also with dualistic valuations. That which threatens our goals and purposes we call bad; that which supports them, good.

As long as we overlay reality with distorted ideas, we are caught up in suffering. We cannot accept life as it is, and so we attempt to impose our wills on others. We cause them suffering and suffer ourselves as well. We perceive others only very selectively in terms of our narrow purposes. We judge them and ourselves by imposed norms. Again we suffer ourselves and cause suffering to others.

The only escape from suffering is to realize what reality truly is. This realization is not merely cognitive. It is quite possible to be persuaded for example that the theory of "no-self" is true but to continue to experience the world as if one were a substantial being, retaining self-identity through time. It is the lived experience that must be

changed. The whole body of Buddhist analysis and theory exists for the sake of helping people to free themselves from the distortions involved in ordinary experience. It is supplemented, and in some traditions replaced, by meditational exercises that break ordinary habits of experience.

Hence, Buddhist wisdom does not consist so much in understanding of many and diverse aspects of human experience and the environing world, as of a mode of awareness that is free of distortion. Of course, when one sees things as they are, free from the overlays that normally blind us, one sees much that is otherwise missed. Hence, wisdom can express itself in concrete content. But Buddhist wisdom is of quite a different kind from that which is expressed in the biblical proverbs. It is not the cumulative fruit of personal and collective experience of the diverse exigencies of life. It is the understanding, at a fundamental level, of what characterizes all such exigencies.

The goal of Buddhism is awakening to reality as it is or the attainment of enlightenment. All else is subordinate to this, because all lesser goals leave one, and one's world, in a fundamentally unsatisfactory condition. But this goal is a very difficult one to attain. Some Buddhists believe that, at best, it takes many lifetimes to attain it. Others teach that enlightenment in this life is possible. Still others have held that the compassion of those who have attained enlightenment offers a way for us to be included in the attainment, so that faith in their gracious offer is our means of attainment.

When we compare Christian responsibility and Buddhist wisdom at a practical, historical level, we cannot limit ourselves to outstanding examples of the former

or to the wisdom of the totally enlightened Buddhist. We should compare, also, the effects of the ideals on serious Christians and Buddhists who are always on the way. In this case, we can see that Buddhists are not entirely free from the distortion of egoism and anxiety. But we can also see that the practice of meditation, and the theories to which Buddhists subscribe, do cut against some of the tensions and conflicts that characterize much Christian effort. They do lead to a measure of serenity that is qualitatively different from what equally serious Christians are likely to experience.

## II

I write as a Christian deeply impressed and moved by Buddhist teaching and practice and by its results among devout Buddhists. I am moved because in general I find the teaching convincing and the results of the practice impressive. I covet for Christians much of this achievement.

On the other hand, I am not drawn to convert. I am so deeply shaped by my Christian heritage that I could not convert to a community and tradition that lacks much of what I find true and important in my own. Jesus Christ is at the center of my world, and I could experience the loss of that center only as a profound impoverishment. In my self-understanding, it is because of my faith in Jesus Christ that I am drawn to Buddhism.

Perhaps the feature of my Christian heritage that I find most ineradicable is its orientation to history. Of course, what we usually call "the historical consciousness" today cannot be found in the Bible, and it came into full flower only in the nineteenth century. Yet that con-

sciousness is a deepening and broadening of habits of thought that are pervasive of the Bible and of Christian teaching from the beginning.

The Bible does not provide instructions about how to attain to a transformed state of consciousness. It does not develop a systematic statement of how we should think or understand reality. Overwhelmingly, it tells stories and recounts events. In the context of such stories it also offers laws about behavior and reports the teachings of its heroes. It also includes poems, proverbs, letters, reports of visions, and much else besides. In the canon, the whole is organized chronologically, and the temporal sequence itself gives meaning to the events.

It is quite accurate, therefore, to speak of the emergence of historical thinking and understanding in Israel. The relation of humanity and God is depicted as changing from creation to fall and through a succession of covenants. Israel understands itself as bound to the Mosaic covenant through the Exodus. The people are repeatedly called to remember the events through which they were formed into a nation and given land, and they interpret current events in light of past ones. They also look forward to new ways in which God will relate to them in the future.

Christians have understood their originating events in relation both to Israel's past and to its expectations. The church extended this story, interpreting later events as a continuation and further development of the Biblical story. The secularization of historical thinking in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries introduced new categories and periodizations, but it did not question the centrality of histori-



Seated in the middle is Judith Simmer-Brown. On her left is Professor Masao Abe and on her right is Sulak

cal thinking.

No doubt **our** historical consciousness undercuts any direct acceptance of the Biblical account. We reconstruct the events through historical research and, as a result, we tell the story quite differently. We try to understand through such research how Israel came to interpret events as it did and, indeed, why successive events loomed so much larger in Israel's religious thinking than in that of its neighbors. But in all of this historicalcritical activity we show ourselves heirs of the Biblical tradition.

This deep orientation to history leads to attention to the specific situation in each time and place. This does not contradict the Buddhist insight that every event comes into being as the coming together of relations with other events. But instead of focusing on that universal truth, Christians (and post-Christians) have focused on the particularity

of each situation. To understand what happened in the past is to understand the many specific factors that shaped each event.

This process is infinitely complex and never completed. Historians wear different glasses and highlight different factors. Some emphasize economic factors, some, cultural-religious and intellectual ones, some gender. All are right, and all tend, almost inevitably, to exaggerate the role of some factors at the expense of others. Buddhists are correct to see our conceptualities and our interests as distorting. But for us the recognition of distortion is a challenge to reduce it, not to give up historical analysis and interpretation.

Each story has implications for how we understand the present. For most Christians and post-Christians, the meaning and purpose of our lives is informed by some story we are told and that we tell ourselves. When I was a

student the story I was taught was of the rise of civilization especially in Egypt and Mesopotamia; how the torch was passed to Greece and Rome; and how Western Europe advanced beyond its forebears and drew the whole world into its orbit. In this scenario it was basically the values of the eighteenth century Enlightenment that were to inform and enlighten the whole planet. The world would be saved by Western education, medicine, democracy, and human rights.

But there are many other versions of this story and some quite different ones as well. Some Westerners live by a story of how scientific method has freed our culture of the superstitious darkness in which it long languished and brought forth technological wonders that promise peace, long life, and happiness for our descendants. Some live by a story of how liberating the market from governmental interfer-

ence and national boundaries is, for the first time, making possible the overcoming of poverty and the prosperity of all.

All of these stories are essentially optimistic, seeing history as progress. But there are others which form those who live by them in quite different ways. Some live by a story of how patriarchy arose ten thousand years ago to drain women's energies into the fulfilment of men's purposes, how it led to war and slavery, ethnic hostilities, religious exclusivism, alienation from nature, and emotional damage even for the dominant male elite. Those—who live by this story hope that the exposure of patriarchy is now opening the door to change, and they call for a transformation of all our institutions, including the family, at the deepest psychological and social levels. Only so can there come into being a just and healthy society.

Some live by a story that shows how for hundreds of thousands of years our ancestors lived in a healthy and sustainable relation to their natural environments. They trace the breakdown of this relationship through the domestication of plants and animals, the rise of civilization, industrialization, and now the globaleconomy. They see the resulting pattern as fundamentally unsustainable. They call for a profound reversal of trends that have been dominant for many thousands of years.

The choice among stories is not between the true and the false. No story would gain widespread credence and shape the course of events that did not have historical evidence in its favor. Of course, all are selective of their evidence and in this sense also distorted. We should prefer those that take account of more evidence to those that take account of less. Never-

theless, the fact that many stories are in some sense "true" shows that the choice must be largely in terms of their contemporary importance and the merits of being guided by them. As a Christian, it is my opinion that very rarely do these post-Christian stories do justice to the actual historical importance of Israel's history and of Jesus Christ. When the supernaturalistic versions of the Christian story were rejected, the tendency was to trivialize the story as a whole. The history books I studied in high school gave only a few paragraphs to Israel whereas they gave many pages to Greece. But in fact, Israel has played and continues to play a more fundamental role in shaping our history than does Greece, important as the influence of Hellenism has been. It is the influence of Israel rather than that of Greece that makes the selection of stories today so decisive for our lives and our future. And for us, that influence is mediated through Jesus Christ.

### III

This long excursus is intended to represent an important feature of Christian influence that is not to be found, to any comparable extent, in Buddhist cultures. Of course, one can find some interest in historical events and some sense that past events shape the present. But this is not what the sutras are about. Immersion in the sutras does not support the idea that how we tell the story of the world's past is of utmost importance for who we are and for the direction we should be going. On the contrary, it tends to withdraw attention from the changing course of events and the effort to determine in what categories they are best studied. It focuses instead on their ephemerality and how all of

them are instances of dependent origination.

On the other hand, the Buddhist analysis does not contradict any of the above stories. It can allow the relative truth of any and all. It can also explain how the truth of each is inevitably relative. It can warn against attachment to any such story. It can show how much suffering is caused by such attachment. In all this, it, too, is correct. In this critique of ideology, Buddhism makes contact with a growing mood in the Christian and post-Christian world.

Many who have been formed by the historical consciousness have grown weary of history. The effort to orient ourselves to a meaningful course of world events has had truly horrific results in our century: Naziism and Communism are the most dramatic examples, but nationalisms of many sorts, Christianity of various forms, and other ideologies have contributed their share. Ridding ourselves of ideologies, being pragmatic in our approach to problems, and treating one another with compassion together constitute a lifestyle that appeals to many.

Nevertheless, some of those who give up attachment to ideologies continue to experience anxiety and meaninglessness, and a generalized dissatisfaction with life even when, or perhaps especially when, their basic needs are met and they have reasonable economic security. In this context, Buddhism has great appeal. It offers a way toward serenity that is not based on adopting any ideology or solving the world's problems as defined by such ideologies. Hence there is a remarkable match between what many Westerners seek and what Buddhism offers.

I share the conviction that Buddhism can offer us much that we Christians (and post-Christians) urgently need. But for me this does not supersede historical thinking. Even the value and importance of Buddhism for us today I interpret historically, that is, in terms of my story about the Christian and post-Christian world. But the story that shows our need for Buddhism is for me only part of a larger story, one that also shows, for example, that the course on which we are now leading the whole world heads for disaster. This is a story that requires detailed analysis of the particulars of our situation and critical engagement with the optimistic stories that still dominate public events on the planet. Furthermore, the story that shapes my evaluation of all the other stories centers in Jesus Christ. That is to say, I am a Christian. Of course, my Christian story is today deeply affected by my encounter with Buddhism. But it is clear to me that my enthusiastic evaluation of Buddhism is a Christian one. It is because Buddhism can contribute so much to the *ba-sileia theou* for which Jesus taught us to pray, that I seek its help.

#### IV

I have emphasized a difference between Buddhism and Christianity in most of their manifestations. One can, of course, find Christians who are more like what I have described as Buddhist, and Buddhists who are more like what I have described as Christian. There are also Christians who have already assimilated much of what Buddhism distinctively contributes within a Christian context, and Buddhists who have assimilated much of what Christians have to offer within a Buddhist con-

text. Some Buddhists who have converted to Christianity have brought their Buddhism with them, and some Christians who have converted to Buddhism have brought much of their Christianity with them.

This blurring of lines in the real world is not something to be feared and opposed but something to be celebrated. It means that in the meeting of Christians and Buddhists both can be enriched, indeed, transformed. One might argue, accordingly, that the effort to describe them in terms of profound differences is already anachronistic.

I should relativize my comments in one other way. My formative encounters with Buddhism have been with Japanese Buddhists. These are somewhat typical of Buddhists from countries in which public affairs have been governed by Confucian rather than Buddhist principles. In those countries Buddhists have not developed the kind of social and political responsibility and accompanying insight that has characterized Buddhists in Sri Lanka, Burma, Siam, and Tibet, where Buddhists have held such responsibilities, historical understanding has loomed larger. The differences on which I have played may be considerably reduced.

Despite all this, I continue to see the differences as important. I will illustrate by discussing two Asian Buddhists whom I greatly admire and count as friends. Both are extremely well informed about Christianity and keenly interested in social analysis.

The first is Masao Abe. Abe was my first real teacher of Buddhism. He studied at Union Theological Seminary in New York with Paul Tillich and Reinhold Niebuhr, and to this day is an active member of the

Tillich society. He is deeply committed to the Zen version of Buddhism, and I recognize that his teaching shapes many of my generalizations about Buddhism.

Abe has divided his time between teaching in Japan and serving as a Buddhist missionary in the United States. He has taught at many American universities unabashedly promoting the Buddhist understanding of reality. Like the great Japanese philosopher Nishida, he presents this understanding in the context of, or as a response to, the history of Western thought. In this sense he locates it historically. But this seems to be simply a concession to his students.

Because I agree with him that Japanese Buddhism, and especially its Zen form, has been weak in social analysis and responsibility, I have been gratified to hear him state repeatedly that this is an area in which Buddhists have much to learn from Christians. What I have missed is a clear statement of what is learned and how it is expressed in Buddhist terms. For this reason, I was particularly pleased when he wrote an essay that dealt somewhat extensively with the Holocaust. It was the first time that I found him engaged in the interpretation of an historical event. He asked me to collect responses to his essay from Jews and Christians. Together with one of his disciples, Christopher Ives, I gladly did so, and the resulting book, including his responses, is published as **The Emptying God**. He has continued to seek Jewish and Christian responses to this essay and to publish them. I say this to indicate that he, also, considers this essay an important one, offering new possibilities for dialogue.

Pleased as I am to find him engaging current issues as a

Buddhist, I find the results disappointing. There is very little concrete analysis. He never mentions the fact that Japan was allied with Germany during the time that the Holocaust was taking place and that it made no serious protest. There is no analysis of the large responsibility for the Holocaust borne by historic Christian theology. In the end, the analysis of the Holocaust is identical with the analysis of every other event. It is an instance of dependent origination. And only when we perceive it—and of course ourselves—in that light will we be able to move on. One can find analogous explanations by Christians. There are some who regard the Holocaust as simply one more expression of universal human sinfulness. For them, only as we acknowledge our sinfulness and accept God's gracious forgiveness in Jesus Christ can we move on.

But that kind of account of the Holocaust is rare among Christians. We are accustomed to focus on the more specific factors involved in this particular manifestation of human sinfulness. We may expect that even under the best of circumstances Christians will continue to sin, but we do not regard it as inevitable that such sinfulness will express itself in genocide! We want to find ways to make sure that this will not occur again. That requires *historical* repentance, and such repentance involves realistic changes, such as ceasing to depict Jews as villains in our telling of the Christian story.

As noted, Japanese Buddhism, and especially Zen, may be expected to have more difficulty in moving into historical analysis than does Buddhism in countries whose governments have long been Buddhist. Certainly, it has been my experience

that the Asian Buddhists who are most astutely engaged in social analysis and action are from such countries. One such Buddhist is Sulak Sivaraksa from Siam. Even his insistence on 'Siam' as the name of his country shows his social analytical sensitivity. The more common name, of course, is Thailand, which means land of the Thais. The Thais are the majority ethnic group in the nation. But to name the whole nation for them implies that members of other ethnic groups are second class citizens. The name 'Siam' is free from such connotations.

This is only one of very many ways in which Sulak has shown his social ethical sensitivity and his social analytical skills. Furthermore, he views events in Siam in socio-historical perspective and illumines them accordingly. I trust his analysis implicitly, and I share his evaluations. I see him as far more effectively engaged in the public affairs of Siam than I can ever hope to be in those of the United States.

Furthermore, I see in him personally and in the programs he institutes a use of Buddhist insight and wisdom to respond to the evils of modernization there that I can only admire from a distance. Would that Christianity could be directed in such effective movements in the United States! Would that Christians could engage in such vigorous and costly action with similar serenity!

In short, I see Sulak as one who has already embodied most of what I have claimed Christianity can offer to Buddhists. Whether some of this has come to him through Christian influences, or whether he has found it all in Buddhist sources that are not as available to the Japanese Buddhists I have known, I do not know. In any case, my comments

about the continuing Buddhist character of his work and thought will require a much subtler differentiation than my comments about Abe.

Both of us have come through different life histories to great distress about the dominance in our time of the economic order. The values of the market differ from those of both Christians and Buddhists. Yet they have been raised to the highest place in our societies with relatively little protest from either Christians or Buddhists.

This change has been in the making in the West for at least two centuries. "Traditional" society has virtually disappeared there. We Christians have adjusted to the different values of modernity gradually. This does not excuse our acquiescence to the ever greater hegemony of the market mentality, but it may explain the lack of sharp contrast between life in our countries now and thirty years ago.

In Siam the changes in this thirty year period have been enormous. The displacement of the values of traditional rural Buddhist society by the aim at individual wealth has been dramatic. Yet enough of the traditional society still remains to be a launching pad for critical response. Sulak has built upon this.

I say this to indicate that even the difference between us to which I am going to point may be a function of our different socio-historical locations rather than expressive of our religious traditions. Yet I do not think this is the whole story. Although Sulak certainly has a clear socio-historical understanding of his situation, his response is in terms of encouraging the inculcation of Buddhist values in individuals and communities, so that they may resist the spiritual destruction ac-

companying modernization.

My response, which I attribute to my Christian heritage, has been to examine and criticize the theoretical justification of current programs of economic development. Since I find this theoretical justification weak, I feel impelled to indicate what would follow from better theory. I also feel the need to project a hopeful future in light of which present efforts can be ordered.

The difference between us comes to expression in the ways we name the enemy. Sulak names it "consumerism". I name it "economism". Consumerism identifies the ideology and life style of individuals in a market economy that has subordinated all other institutions to its service. Economism is the idolatry that shapes public policy and that reformulates the functions of all institutions from the state, through education, health care, and even religion.

## V

I trust you will understand that I intend no polemic whatsoever here. I deeply appreciate and admire what Sulak is doing to combat consumerism. But I recognize that I may hope for less from this than does he. I see us as individuals as so shaped by our institutions that if we continue to operate in the context formed by economism, only a few heroes will succeed in separating themselves from its degrading consequences. Sulak, I think, is more hopeful that resistance of individuals and communities can turn the tide.

Even here, our difference is not too great. Without individuals and communities who refuse to live by the values of consumerism, economism cannot be overthrown. But I see no way to overthrow it by the values that

have shaped traditional society in the past. My historical sense is that we cannot return to an earlier situation. We must look for the places where new values are arising and challenging economism in fresh ways. I see these in the NGO movement and in the manifesto that came out of its meeting at Rio. I call the religious spirit that animates this movement, its love of the Earth including especially the common people who inhabit it, Earthism. As nationalism has given way to economism, it is my hope that in the decades to come, before it is too late, economism will give way to Earthism.

Earthism, I believe, has deep roots in both Christianity and Buddhism. When it is cut off from these roots, it can be dangerous and destructive in new ways. The values of traditional rural Buddhism in Siam, their rejection of consumerism, support and inform a healthy Earthism.

The contributions of Christianity and Buddhism to the only spiritual force that now has a chance of checking and supplanting economism differ. At this point I return to the beginning. Christians can offer a radical sense of history, relativizing thereby the theoretical principles now taken as self-evident in the circles that control world affairs. We can engage in theoretical critique to expose the errors in these principles and point toward other options. We can describe a hopeful future that requires drastic changes in relation to current directions. We can repent of the many contributions we have made in the past to the wrong choices that have brought the world so close to catastrophe, and invite the world to join with us in that repentance. This will be an expression of Christian responsibility.

Buddhists can show that the desiring and clinging that undergird the entire economic system of the planet are expressions of error. They can help us withdraw from participation in that system precisely for the sake of truth and our own serenity. They can show us the deep error of seeking happiness through having more than others or indeed through any form of possession and consumption. They can open us to a nondualistic view of humanity and nature, our minds and bodies, our selves and our worlds. By freeing us of our ego needs they can enable us to participate in social action for the sake of what needs to happen instead of recognition and self-approval.

In terms of the most urgent needs of the world, one cannot in fact always count on either Christians or Buddhists for help. Too often our priorities have blocked us from attending to what matters most. Many of those who are most committed to responding to the real needs have abandoned both communities. Yet there are many today, even those who are not personally a part of us, who now see that without us the necessary changes will not occur.

We have complementary contributions to make. Or perhaps we can both so learn from the other that both can make more inclusive contributions. In either case, we have every reason to embrace one another in our struggles and direct ourselves to those efforts to which we Christians believe we are called by God.

*John Cobb*

## The Voyage to Europe: The play and the life of our beloved forgotten hero

Undeniably, *The 1932 Revolutionist* troops to three-nation tour in Europe was a success. It greatly impressed the expatriate Thai audiences residing in Paris, Amsterdam, and Stockholm. Performed by Crescent Moon Theatre, this tour will be remembered as another important feat in the history of Thai theatre primarily because it has introduced European audiences to (and reminded Thai ones about) the country and its social and political history, especially concerning Pridi Banomyong and the 1932 Revolution. Spearheaded by Acharn Sulak Sivaraksa, the tour was part of the activities, which have been ongoing for three years, of the Committees on the Project for the National Celebration on the Occasion of the Centennial Anniversary of Pridi Banomyong, Senior Statesman (private sector).

The 19 members of the troop were comprised of Acharn Sulak Sivaraksa (the leader), Professor Panom Eamprayoon, members of Spirit in Education Movement, and the Crescent Moon performers. The tour enabled us to further our understanding of Pridi and, in so doing, we were duly inspired. It eventually dawned upon us that not infrequently those who worked or tried the hardest to help their fellow human beings are forgotten. Pridi was thus not different from the orphan in the opening scene of the play who tried to disperse the perpetual darkness from the world, but only to fail and be left alone sulking on a pile of garbage



heap.

Our first performance was in Paris. 74 years separate the Paris of Pridi's time from ours, and therefore we found it rather difficult to surmise how he must have felt while living in this major metropolitan. The zestful beat of the French national anthem "La Marseillaise" which was used in the play, initially served as our only point of connection to Pridi and Paris. At the end of the performance, many Thai audiences looked for books on Pridi and on the 1932 Revolution at the front counter. Many expressed their impression and said that overall the play was very educational and inspiring.

An interesting point is that Pridi and other important individuals who worked to promote democracy in Siam between 1932 and 1947 are now largely forgotten as if their names have been deliberately erased from Thai history. Despite their numerous highly beneficial contributions,

most Thais, whether living in or outside of the country, have only scant knowledge of Pridi and even less of, for example, Tiang Sirikan and Chamlong Daorueng. Therefore, *The 1932 Revolutionist* has played a vital role in filling the memory hole and in trumpeting the upcoming centennial anniversary of Pridi.

While in Paris we attempted to tour the residence that Pridi lived and died during his exile, yearning to have a glimpse of his life. Unfortunately, its new owner turned us down, citing the need for privacy. But we visited Cafe de la Paix (Cafe of Peace), allegedly one of Pridi's favorites. However today the Cafe is nothing about peace.

Our next stop was Amsterdam. The play was organized as part of the International Conference on Thai Studies that was held there. Prior to the performance, Archan Sulak gave a short introductory speech, stressing how the Thai ruling elites have

coarsely shown contempt for Pridi and how they have ridiculed the latter's vital contributions. After the play, a discussion on Pridi and Thai history was held with Dr. Theerayuth Boonmee, Dr. Prawes Wasi and Acharn Sulak serving among the panelists. Like in Paris, after the performance, many wanted to buy books on Pridi and the 1932 Revolution.

Stockholm was our final destination. We were lucky to perform there in the summer for many of us would have found the winter chill intolerable. We had a rare opportunity to hold three performances there: the first one for news reporters and the remaining for ticket holders. Before each performance, Acharn Sulak delivered a short introductory note and about the project for the commemoration of the centennial anniversary of Pridi. Three local newspapers reviewed the play in a very complimentary tone.

It is interesting that in all three countries although the European audiences did not understand the dialogues of the play since the performance was in Thai, they attentively watched it. Perhaps the movement, acting and the energy of all the actors

and the actresses were very strong. Also the play wisely exploited the use of lighting, sound, music, allusions to other literary works, and dramatic gestures to captivate them.

The director, Nimit Pipitkul, chose to dress all his performers in gray except for the Pridi character whose costume was white. In other words, the director wanted the audience to judge for themselves the personality of each character in the history and the history itself for the gray colour. The white costume of the Pridi character resembles the purity and nobility of his intentions and actions, a fact that is buttressed by historical evidence; for example, he created and led the Free Thai movement that helped liberate the country from Japanese occupation during the Second World War; he legislated numerous decrees to help the poor and farmers, he was the founder of Thammasart University and he played a crucial role in abolishing absolute monarchy and its excesses, replacing them with constitutional monarchy and democratic practices. The Pridi era of democracy was short-lived. But once awakened by his democratic vision, the Thai people have always nurtured democracy in

their hearts. For example, they had risen on several occasions demanding for liberty and democratic rights such as in 1973 and 1992. Thus it will be difficult not to perceive Pridi as the hero in the play.

If life were but a stage, then Pridi would be a tragic hero. As in Greek tragedies, fate was not kind to Pridi: in spite of his noble heart, he had to face and endure countless predicaments and sufferings. However, the primary difference is that while Greek tragic heroes have become legendary, Pridi remains by and large in oblivion. *The 1932 Revolutionist* is thus an attempt to resurrect the legend of Pridi, hoping that the Thai people will use him as a model of moral righteousness and a source of benevolent ideals and principles. As Acharn Sulak once said, in this century Acharn Pridi was a special phenomenon in Thai society. This then is the objective of the European tour and the commemoration of the centennial anniversary of Pridi. Hopefully with the power and inspiration received from the play, a form of artistic beauty, we may achieve a spirit of ethics, righteousness and truth in our voyage of life.

Wallapa

## International Seminar on Curriculum Development in "Alternative Education"

Towards a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the World 10-14 November 1999 --MOO BAN DEK Childrens' Village School, Kanchanaburi, SIAM (Thailand)

After the successful first International Seminar on "Alternative Education" held in December 1997, the Spirit in Educa-

tion Movement (SEM) is now offering a second seminar of its kind. The central theme will be Curriculum Development, while

other aspects of "Alternative Education" will be dealt with in a variety of workshops during the seminar. The seminar can be

combined with excursions to educational projects and initiatives in Thailand.

The International Seminar is offered as an interactive effort in the perspective of the UN Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the World. The aim of the seminar is to bring together pioneers of "Alternative Education" in Asia, and colleagues from other continents, in order to exchange experiences and to make arrangements for a co-operative decade program "Alternative Education". The purpose of the decade program will be to strengthen the development of "Alternative Education" as well as to transfer experiences to the mainstream education systems in order to promote change.

"Alternative Education" encompasses new approaches to formal and non-formal education addressing the person as a whole (child, adult, elder) in her/his social, natural and cultural environment. "Alternative Education" celebrates diversity, creativity, social responsibility and freedom resulting in transformation towards self reliance in a sustainable world.

Most education systems still follow practices and procedures derived from industrialization and colonialization. This makes education an effective tool for oppressive states and mass commercialization. Democracies at present are striving more and more for sustainable economies and social justice. This transformation process is pioneered by the NGO-movement and experimented in small scale projects. In order to fulfill common aspirations of genuine sustainability and social justice at a larger scale, the responsibility of free individuals in a creative community

context seems to become the central focus of contemporary and future oriented education policies.

From this point of view of policy development, in which states, NGO's, the business sector and education systems play their distinctive role, the exchange of experiences and communication between the actual pioneering groups is of ultimate importance. They make "Alternative Education" happen in reality and their efforts (successes and failures) create the opportunities for transformation at a larger scale.

The UN Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-violence for the Children of the World provides a challenge to create a global platform for these exchanges between local pioneers and add value and strength to the movement. The Alliance for Freedom in Education in Thailand already shows an example of co-operation at the national level and we are keen to receive reports about other Asian countries, and other continents. Proposals for common action are most welcome.

The first seminar/workshop was organized in conjunction to the "Alternatives to Consumerism" gathering in Buddhamonthon in December 1997. During the gathering much interest in new approaches to education was expressed and the "post-gathering" meeting in Moo Ban Dek was attended by an extremely interesting group of educators and innovators from a diversity of corners. They formulated 5 area's of common interest:

1. Education for underprivileged children
2. Environmental education
3. Methodology and curriculum development
4. Peace and conflict

5. Concept of 'holistic approach' (including spirituality in education and interreligious co-operation).

We intend to concentrate the seminar in November 1999 on 'Methodology and curriculum development' while other aspects defined will be discussed and worked out for the decade program from that perspective.

Some of the resource persons of the meeting in 1997 already confirmed their contribution to the "second seminar" in 1999. John Thomson of Emerson College U.K., author of *Natural Childhood* (now translated in more than 10 languages) and his wife Marie Claire, both Waldorf teachers and activists, will be among the speakers and workshop leaders, as well as Sulak Sivaraksa. We expect major resource persons and participants from Nepal (Stella Tamang intends to contribute as a resource person again), Korea, India, Sri Lanka and Japan. Also our friends from the Creative Learning Center in Nairobi, Kenya (Africa) hope to be present and contribute, from their experience in street theater, to the communication games and creative exchanges.

The second International Seminar on "Alternative Education" will be held in Moo Ban Dek Childrens' Village School, extraordinary example of an alternative approach to education in itself. The seminar will coincide with the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Moo Ban Dek. We hope to make it a great pleasure for both the participants and the Moo Ban Dek community to celebrate this achievement together. And make local action and global communication meet.

Please contact us and con-

nect us with relevant partners! Also it will be very helpful to identify agencies who are willing to sponsor foreign resource per-

sons and participants. We hope the international seminar will result in setting up a modest longer term support unit to organize the

interactive decade program on "Alternative Education".

*Hans*

### SEM & Santi Pracha Dhamma Institute

Have asked Dr. Sem Pringpuangkeow to open a new library in honour of the late Dr. Puey Ungphakorn on 19<sup>th</sup> August 1999.

The library is housed in a new premise with a meditation room, a conference hall and offices for various NGO activities.

It is located at 666 Chareon Nakorn Road, Klongsarn, Bangkok 10600  
Tel. 437 4318, 438 0353-4, 438 9331-2.

## SVN Asian Forum Meeting in Thailand "Balancing Profit with Social Responsibility" November 15-20, 1999

### Introduction

Previously, industrial developments have in many ways damaged our social stability, local cultural identity, and our environment. In return, we face economic collapse and unhappy societies in every part of the world. Individuals are affected, as is evidenced by the increase in the suicide rate. There are environmental problems, especially pollution. Factories in underdeveloped countries are abandoned, with workers having to return to agricultural land where they have no skill of this kind. Many are jobless, leading to mental illness and family problems.

These disastrous developments have led to a group of business people banding together to establish Social Venture Network (SVN) who would like to reconsider the way to do business, its practices, its paradigm, mission and objectives. The SVN's view is that evaluating

success in business needs a new meaning and direction. Success should not be based on achieving the highest profit or other material wealth. The quality of the local communities and those far away must be taken into consideration as well.

SVN advocates a policy of preserving a good environment, with clean water, air and social. Happy societies and fairness towards customers and employees must all be taken into account. SVN also focuses on living together in a just society without taking advantage of each other.

It is true that there are some multinational companies who dominate the politics in various countries through leaders and politicians in those countries. Many of these do not practice a free and fair trade. And if we are not careful these giant companies will get together to monopolize the whole world. We will be dominated and live in a dependant culture. Therefore

one of SVN's role is serving as a **watchdog** for our community.

Last year in November, Acharn Sulak Sivaraksa has played a vital role in helping organize the SVN. Meeting among a group of business people both east and west as an initiative step to be the bridge for all business people around the globe to look into SVN philosophy. So this year SVN Asia Forum is a mature step for the group of east and west business individuals and organizations who wish to work together to achieve a better society and environment. The purpose of the seminar is to share ideas and experiences aimed at promoting good business practices to prevent the destruction of environment and our society, and to meet with like-minded individuals to plan for a better tomorrow.

*Wallapa*

## Puey Ungphakorn: An appreciation

There is a Buddhist saying that the lotus was born out of mud and grew within water, despite fishes and turtles which could eat the plant. And yet some manage to appear above water. Once the lotus is above the water, its leaves and flowers do not cling to the water, even when water drops on them. Likewise a man or woman who was born from a poor family, with bad social circumstances, temptation etc, who does not succumb to any vice, shines above the rest as a symbol of virtue and goodness.

This saying could really be applied to Dr. Puey Ungphakorn, who was born in the poor neighborhood of Chinatown in Bangkok on 9<sup>th</sup> March 1916. His mother was a woman of strong character, honesty and integrity who would have liked to have her son educated in the best private school nearby, yet she was in debt that she nearly committed suicide. Only a lucky lottery result saved her. Hence this influenced Puey to dedicate his life and work for the poor and to eradicate poverty of the Thai. Eighty-five percent of them are indeed very poor. There is also a strong trace of his mother's character on him. Indeed as most Siamese mothers, she had much more to contribute to character building of her children than the father did.

Dr. Puey was a bright student and a generous person. He was much liked by his teachers and admired by his peers at all educational institutions: be it at the Assumption College, where he also became a teacher, or at the University of Moral and Po-



litical Sciences, where he was one of the first crops to enter in 1934 and ended up with a first class honors. Then he won the State scholarship for an MA and Ph.D. at the London School of Economics, which made him an honorary fellow.

While he was in England the Second World War broke out. Siam was occupied by the Japanese troops and our dictator declared war against the allies. This was against the wishes of the Thai people. Previously the government had declared that we would be neutral and if invaded we would fight for our survival and our independence until the last Siamese. Unlike most Thai students in the UK, he refused to return home but was instrumental to form a Free Thai Movement in that country. While his former teacher and rector of his former university, Dr. Pridi Banomyong, then Regent for King Rama VIII, had already started a similar venture within the Kingdom. Later Dr. Puey was sent by the

British to enter Siam clandestinely, a mission in which he nearly lost his life. Yet he managed to join the movement in the country and to work for Dr. Pridi until the end of the war. Then, on 16th August 1948, the Regent declared in the name of H.M. the King and the Thai people that the war was void and the declaration of war against the Allies was unconstitutional and against the wishes of the Thai people, most of whom joined the Free Thai movement.

After the war, Puey returned to London to get his higher degree. Meanwhile Dr. Pridi and all of the Free Thai leaders were eliminated, many were even assassinated by the former dictator who was a war criminal but came back to power with a military coup in 1947. Dr. Pridi himself spent 21 years in exile in China and 18 years in France where he died in 1983.

Puey returned to Siam with a Ph.D. and had a distinguished career in the Ministry of Finance.

He eventually became the governor of the central bank, the Bank of Thailand, which was created by his former mentor, Pridi Banomyong.

Although the country was ruled by one dictator after another, Puey helped to create the central bank to be an independent financial institution steering away from political interference. Even the army generals and politicians respected him and did not dare to interfere with the management of the bank. He was governor for 12 years, the longest ever, and he created a team of able technocrats, not only at the central bank and the Ministry of Finance, but at the National Commission of Economic and Social Development. Many of the bright young officials were sent abroad for further education. Unfortunately a great number of them do not possess his character of honesty and many were tempted by money, glory and prestige, without caring to dedicate their lives for social justice and environmental balance. About these two elements Puey cared so much. He also cared for beauty and goodness as well as conserving national resources. He helped Professor Silpa Bhirasri who inspired so many young creative artists at Silpakorn University. Puey was in fact chairman of the Silpa Bhirasri Institute of modern art, the first one in the country, unfortunately it is now defunct. He also created awareness that banks should help artists and the poor. Indeed his inspiration for social welfare and for cultural activities was much appreciated by the rich and the middle classes. Puey did not stop there. He wanted fundamental change for civic society and participatory democracy—which he coined the word *Santi* (peace) *Pracha*

(real participation by the people) *Dhamma* (with an ethical force for righteousness) — the dream which did not come true for his mentor, Pridi Banomyong, and Puey too followed the path of Pridi but the dream is still not a reality.

Had Puey remained at the central bank, with his various activities for the government to improve the country without including a democratic element, he would have been much admired by all including the most reactionaries in the feudal court who wished to maintain the status quo of structural violence, which helps the rich and the privileged at the expense of the poor and the degradation of the natural resources. But Puey set his heart to educate the young for moral courage, for social justice and for the spirit of real democracy—not formal democracy, which is in fact a window dressing for tyranny and to serve the transnational cooperations.

When he started the Thailand Rural Reconstruction Movement in the late 1960s, this was tolerated because it linked with the anticommunist ideology and capitalistic tendency in the like of those in the Philippines and Taiwan. And when he became dean of the Economics Faculty at Thammasart (the former University of Moral and Political Sciences), the army, which was and is a state within the state, still approved of his role because they thought that he would only train economists to serve the status quo. Even when he started the Graduate Volunteer Service, in imitation of the British VSO, which was open to every university, he cautiously worked with the Ministry of Education which is a very conservative institution. He allowed students to be in the

provincial towns only when the local governors and district officers could keep their eyes on the volunteers, who could not go out to the remote areas, some of which were dominated by the Communist Party of Thailand. He took great care of visiting most of the volunteer posts and he asked all volunteers to write their observations in the area as a kind of thesis. This really helped change graduates, mostly from the middle classes background, to understand the poor and to appreciate local wisdom.

By late 1960s, the then dictator wanted to experiment with the mild form of democracy, with a limited constitution and general election, which had been destroyed in 1947. Even the appearance of democracy was eliminated in 1957, with all intellectuals or dissidents silenced either by putting them in gaol without trial, or by assassination. Many of them had to be abroad or joined the Communist party in the jungle. But after less than four years of this experiment with democracy, the dictators again abolished parliament and the constitution in November 1971.

Meanwhile Puey was a visiting Professor at Cambridge University where he wrote a mild protest to the then dictator, which not only upset the dictator, but it also disturbed many bureaucrats and bankers, most of whom preferred the stability under totalitarianism rather than democracy. For the first time that Puey became a *persona non grata* to the Thai establishment. Yet the mild letter in February 1972 which he signed with a *nom de plume* which he had used in the Free Thai Movement created such a stir that it led to the great demonstration with over one hundred

thousand participants in October 1973, the result of which was that the three dictators fled the country.

It appeared that democracy had returned once again to Siam, but it was not real, as the army was still a state within the state. However Puey was recalled and became President of Thammasat University. Yet he was not able to guide his alma mater in the line of the dream of Dr. Pridi, the founder, because Maoism and the communist party influenced the students. They accused him of being a liberal who followed the American imperialism. The faculty was too conservative to welcome any change from the ivory tower to an open university for the poor and underprivileged.

When the coup came about on 6 October 1976 it was the bloodiest one in Siamese history and a total eradication of any form of democracy whatsoever. Puey himself had to resign his post at the University and go into exile in London. At least he had his wonderful English wife who understood him and cared for him, as she also cared for the poor and the under privileged. His three sons were also with him in England. And he helped created Mitra Thai Trust there to help those who fled to the jungle or abroad as well as to promote freedom of expression by smuggling free publications into the country. In the early 1971 he also helped create the Komol Keemthong Foundation whose objectives are to promote youth's idealism for social change non-violently.

Yet in October 1976 both the KKF and the TRRM were branded communist organizations. A group photograph taken at a seminar in Loey organized by the KKF and the AFSC (an

American Quaker organization) with Puey and some of us in it was also regarded as evidence of a meeting of the Communist Party of Thailand.

As an exile Puey worked hard to raise consciousness among the Thai abroad to dedicate their lives for democracy. He was invited by the American Congress to testify against the abuse of human rights by the Thai authoritarian regime in 1976.

Unfortunately he had a stroke in 1977. Hence he could not speak or write. Yet he could read and enjoyed listening to traditional Thai music, as he used to play flute beautifully, to welcome friends at his humble home in Southfield, near Wimbledon, where he sometimes walked to the Thai temple. Puey claimed to be an agnostic, but was much influenced by the teaching of the Buddha. His contented life, his loving kindness and compassion as well as his lack of envy and his equanimity exemplify a life of a dedicated lay Buddhist, who does not care for rites and rituals but for the essence of Buddhism. He once told me "Sulak, we Buddhists are agnostic are we not?" I think it is indeed true, since Buddhists are not required to have faith in the unknown. What we learn from the Buddha or from any other scriptures, if we put them into practice to eradicate or reduce greed, hatred and delusion, we are on the right path.

From Puey's life and work it is clear to me that he dedicated his life against the three causes of suffering — not only for himself and his family, but also for all sentient beings. He led a simple life and a life with dedication. He had an aspiration for truth, beauty and goodness that could be clearly seen by those who wish

to learn from the example of his life and his works.

Although he lived an inactive life for 22 years, he was contented and happy. He died peacefully on 28 July 1999. The news of his death was kept within the family until the day of his cremation outside London on 6<sup>th</sup> August. His wife wanted the last rites to be purely private, with only 8 members of the family attending the funeral service.

We formal Buddhists who spent so much money for many religious ceremonies should learn even from the last rite for Puey Ungphakorn. Indeed if we understand the way he lived for the welfare of others more than himself and his family, our lives will be much richer. If we want to honor him, we do not need any monument or glorified words of praise in print or in speeches. We need to put his practice in our thoughts and in our work. We should tackle the social system, which is full of violence and is controlled by the transnational corporations, including the World Bank, the IMF etc. Though many of us think we are elite, and clever, unlike Puey, we never spent our lives with the poor, nor do we understand the poor. In this way we could imitate Puey indeed. Although his body is no longer with us, his name is above both mud and polluted water. Whether we praise him or not, Puey is still the lotus, clinging not to praise or blame

*Sulak Sivaraksa*

ສຸລັກ ສີວາຣັກສາ

## Centennial Anniversary Pridi Banomyong—Architect of Democracy in Thailand

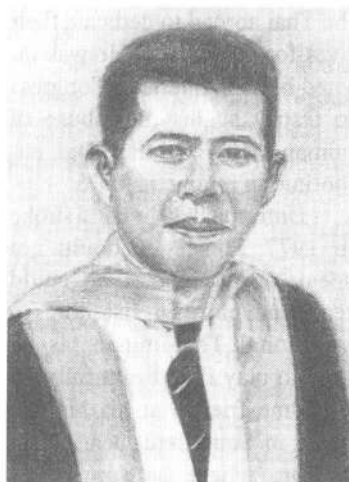
**M**ay 11<sup>th</sup>, 2000 will be the centennial anniversary of the birth of Pridi Banomyong, the great Thai senior statesman (Luang Pradit Manudharm). This event should not pass without a dignified and festive celebration on a national level.

For political considerations the Thai government apparently does not want to be the official organizer of such an event on a nation-wide basis. Still, by a cabinet resolution it was decided on May 13, 1997 that, pursuant to a proposal submitted by the Ministry of Education and Thammasat University, the name of Pridi Banomyong be entered on the calendar of UNESCO for events of great historic importance and the commemoration of outstanding personalities.

The Thai NGOs under the leadership of Sulak Sivaraksa has formed a committee to prepare a nation-wide non-government celebration of the event. In order to pave the way for the anniversary the committee supports the project by issuing pamphlets about the life and work of Pridi.

During his studies in France, in 1927, Pridi founded the People's party with a view to changing the Thai absolute monarchy into a constitutional and democratic one. In a bloodless revolution, the People's Party took control in June 1932 and promulgated a provisional constitution worked out by Pridi Banomyong.

From the beginning Pridi was aware that mere political de-



mocracy would not be sufficient to create a truly democratic society. The economy should likewise be run on democratic lines and principles. In March 1933 he submitted to the cabinet presided over by Prime Minister Phraya Mano a plan for the democratic restructuring of the economy. The plan provided inter alia the establishment of full employment and the organization of commerce and trade on a cooperative basis. In the course of lengthy discussions the aristocracy and the conservatives accused Pridi of communist tendencies and refused to accept the plan. Pridi was forced to leave the country and live in Paris in exile.

After the overthrow of Prime Minister Phraya Mano, Pridi was called back by Mano's successor Phraya Phahon and made Minister of Interior. In 1945 Pridi took over the government as Prime Minister.

After Thailand's entry into the war on the side of Japan in

1942 Pridi assumed the leadership of the Seri Thai Movement and recruited a guerilla force of some 10,000 men to fight the Japanese. In Washington the Movement was headed by the then Thai Minister, Seni Pramoj.

In July 1946 King Ananda Mahidol (Rama VIII) was found dead in his bed with a bullet in his head. The death could not be sufficiently explained and the government was held responsible. As a consequence, Pridi resigned. His anti-democratic opponents accused him of regicide although Pridi's innocence was later proven beyond doubt by high Thai law courts.

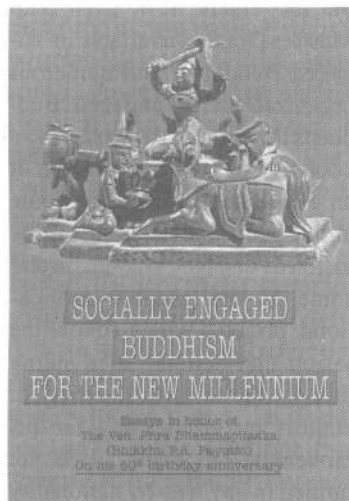
Armed forces and civilians staged a coup in November 1947 with a view to topple Pridi. However, Pridi managed to escape and flee to Singapore. A counter-coup staged by Pridi in February 1949 in order to reestablish democracy was unsuccessful and Pridi went into exile in Peking until the year 1970. Thereafter he lived in Paris until his death in 1983.

Pridi Banomyong has laid the foundations for building a democratic state and society in Thailand. The further development of democracy in Thailand depends in large measure on how well Thais heed and implement the guidelines Pridi has laid down and the legacy he left.

*Erich Reinhold*

### ***Socially Engaged Buddhism for the New Millennium***

A collection of essays in honor of the Venerable Phra Dhammapitaka (Bhikku P.A. Payutto) Sivaraksa, Sulak ed.  
Suksit Siam: Bangkok, 1999



This volume deals with the many facets of engaged Buddhism which run from the philosophical to the very practical, even at times political, but always intensely relevant to the situation in which Siam, Asia and indeed the world finds itself in this dawning new millennium.

Ven. Bhikku Payutto himself contributed his wisdom to a wide range of topics but always with the intention that his intellectual feedback would result in beneficial action for people. That also is the aspiration of this book. Bringing together the wisdom of many different authors under one banner it hopes to be a rough sketch of the arena that is engaged Buddhism and the ideas and aspirations of the many bodhisattvas who devote their lives to try and help lead the way to a saner existence for people in Asia and the world over.

In this book you will find articles by such noted authors as

A.T. Ariyaratne who discusses the interaction of modern paradigms of development and Buddhism as a state religion in Sri Lanka. Ariyaratne and his Sarvodaya movement is actively incorporating the premises of engaged Buddhism into a community-based model for social fairness. This model draws on the traditional Buddhist sangha as a community but also incorporates the realities of economics in today's world. This truly represents what engaged Buddhism is about and demonstrates its potential relevance and effectiveness in addressing social ills. His article both highlights the desperate need for engaged Buddhists to step up to the challenges faced in these times and the encouragement provided by some of those who are and have been working to create a balanced society.

Many aspects of Buddhism in Thai society are discussed including the role of the sangha in modern Thailand, the role of feminism and Buddhism in Thailand. Phra Paisan presents a very intelligent and lucid discussion of the great positive potential for renewing Thai society if the sangha is strong and wise enough to be self-critical and make the necessary reforms.

One of the prominent issues is that of education. In light of the problems facing the world today, how much is attributable to a lack of education or to education which fosters defective values? The issue of education is looked at from several perspectives. One perspective is the first person, a personal experience with an influential teacher or educational system. Another is a more analytical approach, identifying differences and similarities in various educational para-

digms. Yet another perspective is that of the teacher, who interacts and senses the changes in ideals and moods among contemporary students. In *Socially Engaged Buddhism for a New Millennium* all of these facets of Buddhism and education are addressed. Christopher Titmuss writes about what came of his encounter with the great Siamese monk and teacher, Buddhadasa. He became a teacher himself, of Vipassana meditation and his reflections on western education values draws heavily on his deep study of the Dharma with Ajan Buddhadasa. He notes that the primary values in western society are ego centered while the core of the Dharma is the threefold trainings of ethics, meditation and wisdom that is simple and pure, not rooted in dogma or in self-interest. The Buddhist teachings have been passed down from teacher to student over thousands of years. Now, in the west, the Buddhist teachings are being taught and applied. Among the various traditions, which have made their way to the west, is Vipassana, or Insight Meditation. Titmuss gives a good overview of the view and practice of Vipassana.

Johan Galtung writes a wonderful and moving essay about his experience as a professor. He expounds on the two types of student he sees in the classroom, those who go to "school" to be passively fed information leading to a job as a cog in the corporate sector. Then he describes the students who go for an education, a challenge to expand their minds and spirits. They join the 4-4-4 club he writes, four members in the family, four wheels on the car and a four-room apartment. What's wrong with this? His rejoinder is simple, being a

student is a privilege and especially now, with the world in crisis, students have a responsibility to themselves and others to use their education to help their fellow beings. He contrasts what education would be like if it followed a Buddhist paradigm. "Buddhism is co-creative, meditative, active, aiming at reducing *dukkha* (suffering) and increasing *sukkhā* (happiness)." This type of education he writes, "is a way of filling our giant schooling institutions with spirit."

*Socially Engaged Buddhism for a New Millennium* is also full of thoughtful reflections on the difficult situations faced by people in many places and the road to resolving our crisis in the world, violence, intolerance, and poverty.

Engaged nonviolence by Graeme McQueen uses the path of the bodhisattva and other Buddhist teaching to inform a discussion of engaged nonviolence. He stresses the need for creative solutions, those which don't stop at declaring our rights but seek solutions to conflict which are sustainable and fair.

Sallie B. King writes about the issue of self immolation brought again to the world's at-

tention by Thubten Ngodrup in his act of sacrifice for the Tibetan cause. Brian Muldoon describes positive ways in which confrontation, when approached with wisdom and compassion, can bring understanding and reconciliation.

Many interesting and provocative articles appear in this volume. It is a mosaic of the color of suffering in the world and the strokes of those who try their best to confront it and relieve what is unjust or unnecessary. The skillful means of wisdom and compassion is a two edged sword however. It calls for awareness of injustice in the world at large and sensitivity to suffering. It also calls for critical self-awareness and a willingness to look at our own flaws and contribution to the suffering around us. This book has both elements and will be an eye opener for all that wish to explore ways to engage the struggles we face at the dawn of a new millennium.

*Engaged Buddhism for the New Millennium* seeks to articulate the vision and the application of engaged Buddhism. Since the word engaged Buddhism was first used by Thich Nhat Hanh over 30 years ago it has grown

from a simple call for monks and all Buddhists to be more responsive to suffering in the world created by social structures and patterns to a vision for linking Buddhists and other religions together in a network of activists. It has evolved into a very tangible movement now, even with Masters Degrees available in engaged Buddhism and numerous organizations of engaged Buddhists throughout the world. So a book like this is a culmination of an evolutionary process. Some article are more focused on the vision of engaged Buddhism and some on the tangible applications, projects which follow the vision into action. It is telling though, in the sheer diversity of authors and articles how far this movement has come. It is not limited in any way by nationality or religion, engaged Buddhism is not strictly speaking, "a Buddhist thing". Nor is it solely theoretical or solely action based. It is an integration of all of the above, and *Socially Engaged Buddhism for a New Millennium* is an integration of the many ways in which we may choose to confront the suffering in the world around us.

Laura Robertson

***Powers That Be: Pridi Banomyong through the rise and fall of Thai democracy.*** Sulak Sivaraksa  
Suksit Siam, 1999

One fine June evening Sulak Sivaraksa asked me to his Baan Thai house in Soi Santiparp. He handed me a manuscript. "This is my new book," he said. "I want you to review it for me." I took the book home. It had not yet been published at that time. I

delved into the book, as soon as I got home. The subject interested me greatly. Apparently, as far as I could divine from the title, the book was about Pridi Banomyong, the leader of the 1932 revolution, which overthrew the absolute monarchy in Siam. I got through the book fairly quickly. My interest in the subject and the fact that it was barely 81 pages long, helped.

At first glance, the book appears to be about Pridi Banom-

yong. After all the front cover read, *Powers That Be: Pridi Banomyong through the rise and fall of Thai democracy*. If so it is a remarkably, brief biography of Pridi. But early into the book Sulak quickly disabuses the reader's biographical expectations, if the latter has any:

*"Let it be clear from the outset that I do not attempt to write a biography of Pridi."*

If the book is not about Pridi,

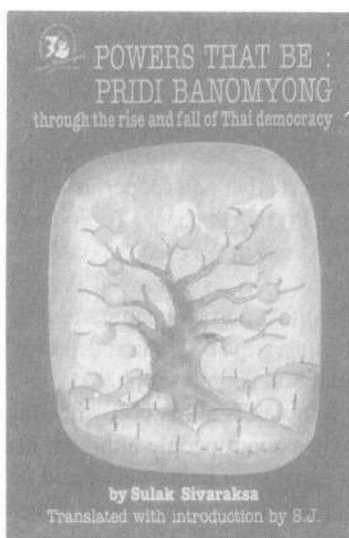
what is it about? Sulak tells, sentially about himself:

*"this essay charts my arduous and tumultuous intellectual journey from... conservative elitism...to participatory democracy."*

Sulak conceded, for the benefit of the puzzled reader whose expectations to find Pridi have been let down that, "Pridi played a central role in this journey." Actually, it is more than that. The book is surprisingly, about many things woven together into a rich Siamese tapestry seen through the eyes of the writer as witness. It is a tribute to Sulak's skill as a writer that by holding up Pridi's political fall from grace, as a rhetorical mirror, he could manage to reflect within the compass of his narrative various interwoven links between events and individuals to create a panoramic vision of contemporary Siamese history.

The title enables Sulak to build up the reader's expectation, in the manner of a detective story by planting a misleading clue, only to disappoint the latter with a false discovery and then subsequently, salvaging the reader's interest through redirecting the latter's curiosity and suspicion towards a rewarding revelation. Are historians permitted such rhetorical liberties? Is Sulak writing conventional history or recording the transformations of his soul and seeking to ground it in, characteristically contemporary Siamese, historical events?

The main character of Sulak's narrative is not Pridi but Sulak himself. Pridi served as the mirror reflecting Sulak's journey out of the darkness of ignorance and prejudice into the light of knowledge and truth. Although the book provides substantial in-



formation, including interesting personal details about Pridi, it is the latter's supporting role, as a literary device for Sulak to anchor the story of his intellectual evolution, that is more important. In this book Sulak intimately reveals himself—his ethnic Chinese ancestry, class background, social aspirations, moral struggles, doubts, instinctive empathy for the underdog, thirst for approbation of the aristocracy, innate aggressiveness when provoked, genuine idealism, capacity for compassion and contrition, as well as, his occasional unspeakable arrogance, as when he attacked Pridi in the pages of *The Social Science Review*.

The technique of oblique autobiography is well established. In the Asian cultural milieu, with its deference towards elders, it is sometimes considered as bad form for an upstart young writer to make his literary debut by unabashedly writing about himself. Many Asian intellectuals become known through writing about others, including Sulak himself:

*"I have commented on various personalities in numerous essays and books."*

Among his earlier writings

was Krom Muen Pityalarp (1985). In that book Sulak wrote about Prince Dhani, in a manner which characteristically celebrated the master-apprentice relationship which existed between them.

At no time did Sulak's relationship with Pridi conform to the master-apprentice model, although, in many respects, both characters have served as mirrors reflecting the former's own life and views. Sulak's translator S.J. went a step further to suggest, in the introduction to the book, that the former's contributions, to Siamese society, should perhaps be ranked on equal terms with Pridi's. The initial tension in their relationship, which later developed into mutual respect, understanding and affection, seems to resemble the pattern, in Jane Austen's novel *Pride and Prejudice*, between Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy, and the new box office movie *You Got Mail*, between Meg Ryan and Tom Hanks, rather than between master and apprentice.

The narrative is also informed by the presence of a dark secret which permeates the realm, poisons the atmosphere of Siamese politics, corrupts the protagonists and eventually destroys Pridi. At the heart of contemporary Siamese history lies the dark secret surrounding the alleged regicide of the young king Ananda on 9<sup>th</sup> June 1946, which casts its ugly shadow up to the present day. Sulak's metaphorical journey also represents an inward spiritual struggle to exorcise the spell cast over him by the country's deeply corrupting secret which divides families and friends against one another and ultimately destroys the individual himself by creating a deep personal conflict within the lat-

ter's own breast. The secret of the regicide stands between Sulak and Pridi, casts its spell over Sulak and almost corrupts him. Only after Sulak has exorcised the regicide's insidious spell over him could he become reconciled with Pridi. In the end the secret of the regicide was not revealed. It remained locked up in the black box but its destructive spell over the mind of Siamese politics has apparently been tamed.

Sulak attempts to recount the mysterious circumstances surrounding the alleged regicide. He cites the vague, conflicting and questionable authenticity of the witnesses' accounts. He suggests that Pridi's political enemies sought to capitalize on the vagueness and ambiguity of the evidence and the aristocracy's fear of the former's political radicalism to hang the albatross of a conspiracy theory around his neck and make it stick. An orchestrated campaign of lies, rumours and innuendoes was unleashed to link Pridi with an alleged regicide, culminating in the notorious disembodied voice, which tore through the darkness of a crowded movie theatre in Bangkok, charging:

*"Pridi had murdered the king!"*

Sulak sought to reconstruct

the scene of the crime against Pridi by identifying the suspects, exposing their motives and producing the metaphorical murder weapon, in the form of a leading conservative newspaper, used to stab Pridi in the back. To find out who, in Sulak's eyes, are the villains who masterminded Pridi's downfall and condemnation to lifetime exile in China and France read Sulak's new book.

Sulak is at his best when he writes about people although he is capable of being very lucid in discussing economic and philosophical issues. His strong and cutting prose is made to order for unmasking hypocrisy, double standards, pretensions, bad faith, externally imposed taboos and moral weaknesses of the high and mighty. *Powers That Be* does not shrink from naming names and cutting the high and mighty, in Sulak's eyes, down to size. The late M.R. Kukrit Pramoj comprises one of the book's immediate targets, as Sulak reveals the former's alleged guilt in the character assassination of Pridi. Even Pridi was not spared Sulak's biting criticism although the latter subsequently admitted that the fault was his and not Pridi's.

Sulak turned the same critical spotlight that he had used on others, also, upon himself. The

foibles and prejudices of his family and social class were also put under the knife. Not all of his attacks were fair as in the case of Pridi. If anything *Powers That Be* is a confession to a grievous and colossal mistake, in his judgement of Pridi, rather than a celebration of his moral triumph. Perhaps, this is the only book written by Sulak, that is dedicated to his errors.

Much of the interest of the book stems from its topicality. Its publication this year coincides with the festival to celebrate the centenary of Pridi Banomyong's birth held in Paris. It came off the press just in time for Sulak's departure for the Festival in Paris, with a dramatic group to stage the play *The 1932 Revolutionist* by Kamron Gunatilaka based on the life of Pridi, on Wednesday June 30<sup>th</sup> 1999. The credibility of the book stems from Sulak's reputation for being the kind of social critic that he chose and dared to be. Despite his controversial and provocative stance his persuasiveness stems from his immersion in Siamese reality and his unerring sense of characteristically Siamese patterns of subtlety, depravity and integrity.

Jeffrey Sng

### ***The 1932 Revolutionist:***

**By Kamron Gunatilaka and published by the committee for the national celebration on the occasion of the centennial anniversary of Pridi Banomyong.**

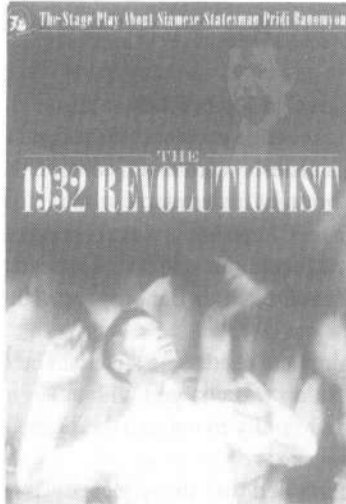
This is the English edition of the stage play about the Siamese statesman Pridi Banomyong who served his country in a variety of eminent posts during a crucial time in the nation's history. He

served as regent to King Ananda Mahidol (Rama VIII), was named Elder Statesman, Prime Minister, Minister of the Interior, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Minister of Finance, and as the first Secretary of Parliament. The translation of the play into English is by an accomplished literary person who identifies himself simply by the initials, S.J.

Kamron Gunatilaka, the playwright, was a member of the

Crescent Moon Theater, which began in 1969 with a group of Thammasat University literature students. Its performances, which go back over a quarter of a century, have covered social, cultural and political themes. By publishing the English translation of this play, a significant service is rendered to the interested readers in the world at large as the information on the life and labors of a unique Siamese na-

tional leader is now open to their perusal. The playwright himself is a noteworthy academic with the ability to bring out the salient facts and events surrounding the contributions that Dr. Pridi Banomyong made toward the democratic transition in the country. He nurtured democracy in Siam at great personal risk and an enormous personal cost to himself. The sudden switch on June 24<sup>th</sup>, 1932 from a system of absolute monarchy to a constitutional monarchy caught both royalty and commoners by surprise. Uncertainty, suspicion and anxiety were thick in the air at the time. The playwright has incorporated relevant scenes from other contemporary historical drama's e.g. M.R. Kukrit Pramoj's novel on the *Four Reigns* and *The Devil* in Seni Saowapong's novel. The sincere hopes of the planners for change



particularly Dr. Pridi to develop participatory democracy and social justice in their homeland can be clearly appreciated by readers of this play or members of the theater audience. It is thought provoking and causes the observer to reflect on the positive and negative develop-

ments which came out of those turbulent times. They will be able to appreciate the sincerity of the revolutionaries who braved those days of change, the wise response of King Prajadhipok and the subsequent endeavors of Dr. Pridi as the chief architect of democracy in Siam.

The place and the role of this distinguished Siamese will continue to be a subject of debate for years to come. Some wonder was he a communist, or any number of other accusations, which have been leveled at Dr. Pridi in spite of court verdicts which, cleared him of such charges. This play will wet the appetite of students of Siamese history as well as interest the casual reader for its pathos and portrayals of the central characters. This is a gem that should not be overlooked.

U K. Than

#### Books Received

1. Cobb, John B. Jr. *The Earthist Challenge to Economism*. St. Martin's P.: New York, 1999

In John Cobb's new book he examines economism, which he proposes is, in many ways becoming the dominant religion of our time. Economism though has proven to be a negative force on the spiritual well being of mankind and on the environment. Dr. Cobb looks at the negative effects of economism from a Christian perspective, which includes a healthy appreciation of the earth as a partner to opening the possibilities for spiritual growth and for rejuvenating our society.

2. Nhat Hanh, Thich. *Call Me by My True Names, the collected poems of Thich Nhat Hanh* (paperback edition). Parallax Press: Berkeley, 1999

3. Kraft, Kenneth, *The Wheel of Engaged Buddhism, A new map of the path*. Weatherhill: New York, 1999

4. Maguire, Mairead Corrigan. *The Vision of Peace*. Orbis Books, 1999

(A review of *Vision of Peace* by Pipop Udomittipong may be found in the *Bangkok Post* : ([www.Bangkokpost.co.th](http://www.Bangkokpost.co.th))

#### Synthesis in Dharamsala—1999

Convened by: The Association for Global New Thought

The Association for Global New Thought has been invited by His Holiness the Dalai Lama to inaugurate the Synthesis Dialogs at a small symposium in Dharamsala, India, September 11-16, 1999.

The basic objective of the Synthesis project is to evolve awareness of the interdependent and essentially spiritual nature of understanding in all areas of human life. We wish to encourage the emergence of knowledge of the value and function of synthesis in individuals from all areas of our cultures, especially the domains of practical compassionate service.

We would like to see the reality and value of synthesis become a gift to the Earth Community for the third millennium, and a tool to evolve consciousness of our commitments to education, spirituality, science, economics, international relations, commerce, the arts, media, and in all social action, as the foundation for an enlightened universal civilization.

(*Seeds of Peace* will have a report on the Synthesis dialogs in the next issue)

## Prime Minister Chuan respects statesman Pridi

Inside Politics ("Agreeing to disagree", May 6, 1999) said social critic Sulak Sivaraksa has criticized prime minister Chuan Leekpai for doing too little to celebrate the centenary of the birth of Pridi Banomyong.

I would like to convey the prime minister's word on this charge that he has long honored and treasured Pridi Banomyong as a statesman who brought in democracy, and laid down a political foundation wherein the people can participate. Prime minister Chuan has always respected his ideology, which has contributed to the country's development in political, economic and social aspects. Accepting the position as chairman of the committee to mark the "Celebration of Pridi Banomyong, 100 years" proves the prime minister's intentions in this regard.

As for Mr. Sulak, I feel that certain facts need to be stated. The truth is that when the prime minister assumed office for the first time, Mr. Sulak was charged with a *lèse majesté* case and was afraid to return home to Thailand. He asked friends and family to contact the prime minister for help. Mr. Sulak did not want to be detained, based on the seriousness of the case.

The prime minister thoughtfully complied with the request by assigning the late Dr. Thawat Wichaidit, former secretary-general to the prime minister, to coordinate with officers in charge of the case in order to enable him to be released on bail without detention.

Later on Mr. Sulak went one step further by requesting the prime minister to order the director-general of the attorney's office to withdraw the case of *lèse majesté*. Mr. Sulak in fact submitted his draft letter to the director-general of attorneys for Mr. Chuan to sign. The prime minister informed Mr. Sulak that he could not do so, and reasoned that it was the sole authority of the attorney, who has to be totally independent and must not be pressured, even by the prime minister.

This probably caused Mr. Sulak to be dissatisfied and resulted eventually in bringing about his ill feelings toward the prime minister.

Akapol Sorasuchart  
Government spokesman

Date: June 17, 1999  
To: Bangkok Post  
From: Sulak Sivaraksa

Dear Sir,

I should like to reply to Mr. Akapol Sorasuchart's letter published in the *Bangkok Post* on June 2. As the government spokesman he has every right to defend his boss, the Prime Minister. Indeed I have known the P.M. since he was first elected to Parliament almost thirty years ago. He also knew that when the military coup dissolved Parliament in 1971, I recommended that Friedrich Naumann Stiftung invite him to see how democracy was working in Germany and England. I too know that he admires the late Senior Statesman, Pridi Banomyong. Indeed his government has helped so much in preparing for the centenary of Mr. Pridi in the year 2000. I also serve under him in the national committee preparing for the big celebration.

Yet, as a citizen in the democratic country, I have the right to air my dissent with any politician, and the government as well as the P.M. always refer to my anger in Mr. Chuan's failure in resolving my court case of *lèse majesté* since 1992! In fact I won the case triumphantly in 1995—the first time in recent history that a defendant in such a serious case has not been convicted. Further, the presiding judge even praised me for protecting the monarchy, and raising the conscience of the young to be aware of dictatorship and consumerism. As a result of the case I even received the Right Livelihood Award, the so-called Alternative Nobel Prize, in Sweden, by the end of that year.

Indeed I have every reason to be grateful to Mr. Chuan for not ordering the public prosecution to withdraw the case. But to say that the Prime Minister has no authority to withdraw the case is not true. In

1984 I was involved with a similar charge of *lèse majesté* brought about by General Arthit Kamlangek, who was then commander-in-chief of the army (the 1991 case was also instigated by the then commander-in-chief Suchinda Kraprayoon). Obviously army generals in power usually trumped up a case like this, for political reasons, and sought the maximum punishment of 15 years imprisonment. In 1984 General Prem Tinsulanond was Prime Minister and my case had already gone to the court, yet Prem had enough guts to ask H.M. the king to have the case withdrawn. And that was not unique. Earlier when Kukrit Pramoj was Prime Minister, he too had ordered the public prosecutor to have a criminal case withdrawn. Both were Prime Ministers in democratic regime.

Any prime minister serving under any constitutional monarchy should be aware that the law on *lèse majesté* is dangerous for royalists and monarchists who want to air their constructive criticisms against the role played by the politicians or generals who use the monarchy as a political tool for their ambitions. One could see this clearly in the case of Arthit and Suchinanda. In the long run the law is also harmful to the monarchy itself. For the monarchy or any institution to exist meaningfully, it needs constructive criticism. This is illustrated clearly in the Dr. David Stickney's thesis on the subject, part of which was published in *Modern Monarchy and Cultural Politics*.

As a government spokesman, Mr. Akapol should know a little bit of history and political awareness before airing his opinions. Indeed, if he has courage, he would advise the Prime Minister to consult his cabinet and parliament to have the law of *lèse majesté* withdrawn. In fact before 1976 the maximum penalty for violation of this law was 3 years imprisonment. Mr. Thanin Kraivician used dictatorial means to increase the punishment to 15 years. If this law is not abolished, it means that we only have a democracy as a formality, under the shadow of an absolutist regime.

Dear Sulak,

I read your letter in the *Bangkok Post* (June 17) concerning the *lèse-majesté* legislation.

I must confess that I have not read everything you have written on this subject, so my reaction may have no meaning for you. If so, pardon me.

I think that if you really want the Thai legislators to do something about it, you should not just ask them to abolish the current legislation. After 60 years in this land, you should know that this hardly works. You'd better propose some "positive" legislation instead of fill the vacuum left by the law you think is bad even for H.M. the King. This "positive" legislation should be about the protection of individual rights and of private life in a more detailed manner than the Constitution already formulates it. This protection would cover H.M. the King as well as any individual. It would not be a *lèse-majesté* legislation but a *lèse-personal honour* legislation, and this honour is that of any human being, be he king or beggar. This would prevent people from thinking that "now there is no *lèse-majesté* law and one can say anything". The press is already lacking respect for victims, prostitutes and so on. The law should make it clear that a newspaper has no right to print words or pictures which "kill" others' lives better than knives. In other words, the new law should be presented not as an abolition of the one you do not like but as a condition for the protection of personal dignity.

I even think that you should have law people launch the idea and make possible and realistic suggestions while you wait in constructive (public) silence. Just because if you word it yourself, many people will smell sulphur or will interpret it just as a ploy to allow you to "bark" freely on and on.

In France, although I do not know the details, we have such a legislation which prevents the press for example to dig into intimate revelations or personal criticisms if they are not justified by public interest. What else do kings or Sulaks need?

I do hope you will succeed in this "skill in means" operation.

Yours sincerely,

L.G., Chiang Mai

# A Word of Thanks

(A speech by Lama Doboom Tulku, director of the Tibet House on the occasion of his receiving an honorary doctorate from Mahachulalongkorn University)

You have been gracious enough to confer on me this honor for my devotion to the study, practice and propagation of the Dharma and all that it signifies to individual human beings, and to humanity itself. I lay no claims to scholarship or high realizations, but I constantly recall the dedication to excellence and the need for regular practice that my own monastic university and my teachers instilled in me. In the years that followed our exodus from Tibet, I have tried to continue in this tradition, and to follow the light that His Holiness the Dalai Lama is shedding on the need for integrating the meaning of Dharma with the responsibility that we have to enable ourselves and all humanity to grapple with the problems of suffering and spiritual endeavor that we face today, the need for universal responsibility and socially engaged Buddhism, for a Dharma that is constantly aware of the consequences of individual karma as well as social karma.

The intensity of the suffering that humanity is undergoing today is too apparent to need words. The relation between our responsibility for generating these causes and the suffering we are undergoing was never greater than today. The Four Truths that the Tathagata set before us has never been more clearly evident than today. It is my earnest determination to continue to contribute to this awakening and the discharge of the responsibility that follows from the Tathagata's Dharma. I hope I will continue to receive the good wishes and blessings of His Holiness the Most Venerable Sangharaja and all of you members of the Spiritual Community, and distinguished scholars and students. I thank you once again.



## NUCLEAR PROTEST

About 30 villagers from Nakhon Nayok rallied outside the parliament building August 25 demanding an end to the budget to finance construction of a nuclear research centre in Ong Kharak district.

— APICHITJINAKUL

This nuclear reactor is set to be built near the Ashram which serves a training facility and retreat for SEM and TICD.

## Announcement

An international conference will be held at the Gandhi Peace Foundation in New Delhi, October 5-13. The title of the conference is: Nonviolent struggles of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and their lessons for the 21<sup>st</sup>. Scholars and social activists from around Asia will meet to discuss the nonviolent struggles in the region and share their experience in an effort to bring in a new era of peace through nonviolent struggle. Look for a report on the proceedings in the next issue of *Seeds of Peace*.

"The disadvantages with which women are forced to cope have to be offset through solidarity and endeavour"

— Daw Aung San suu Kyi

