

EIR Strategic Studies

U.S. AID runs overthrow of Thailand's government

by an EIR Investigative Team

"Southeast Asia has had the most astonishing progress of all the regions. . . . Southeast Asia has, as far as the United States is concerned, governments that are neither allies nor are they—considered strictly—countries with which we have a very friendly relationship."

—Henry Kissinger
Hong Kong, October 1983

Twice, in the nine years since Kissinger declared that America's longstanding allies among the ASEAN nations were not considered friends of Washington, the U.S. government has acted to prove his startling words true. The first occasion was the February 1986 overthrow of longtime U.S. friend Ferdinand Marcos by a U.S.-ordered military coup, backed up by U.S.-backed "people's power." The second time is now—in Thailand.

EIR has learned that the U.S. Agency for International Development (AID) has been functioning as the financial angel for the entire so-called democracy movement, which erupted into violent action on May 18-19 in Bangkok, leading to confrontation with the Thai military and the killing of probably a few hundred people. That protesters' movement was organized on the ground by a plethora of "non-governmental organizations," which were legalized in Thailand three years ago. These "NGOs" are in turn funded, directed, and controlled both directly and indirectly by the Bush administration. The NGOs are effectively agencies of the U.S. government!

AID funnels the funds

In February 1991, when the Thai military overthrew the government of Prime Minister Chatichai Choonhavan in a

bloodless coup, the United States officially cut off all financial assistance to Thailand. However, according to documents received from the U.S. AID, millions of dollars continued to flow to Thailand from that agency—exclusively to the Thai "democracy movement."

AID has siphoned off nearly \$700,000 to Participating Agencies Collaborating Together (PACT) in Thailand. The money is to be used for the purpose of "NGO coalition building," according to the AID document. PACT formerly was merely the funding arm for AID, but is now its own autonomous organization, concentrating mostly in Asia, a spokesman said.

Another \$1 million in AID monies, to "strengthen provincial councils and strengthen elected government," was dispatched to Thai NGOs through the Asia Foundation.

According to Asia Foundation spokesman Catherine Delpino, the foundation is working "to direct the private NGOs to target the government for reform," and on human rights. The foundation also funds "advocacy groups" of environmentalists and slum-dwellers to "lobby" for change, although "we have to be careful not to appear as though we are lobbying foreign governments."

The Asia Foundation, which has penetrated nearly every layer of Thai society, is nominally a private foundation. However, according to its 1990 annual report, it received \$381,783 from private sources, against \$13.7 million in "grants from the U.S. government" for its operations in Asia. It is therefore presumed that the foundation is helping to carry out U.S. foreign-policy objectives.

AID also pitched in another \$40,000 for the Duang Pratheep Foundation, whose "slum angel" Pratheep was a founder of the Thai Confederation of Democracy.

The AID also forked over nearly \$500,000 in the same time period to the Asia-America Free Labor Institute (AFLI) of the AFL-CIO. This money, says the AID document, was provided to "promote worker participation in elections, advocacy, and promote worker rights."

According to Philip Fishman, the AFL-CIO representative in Bangkok until recently, "Most of these labor leaders who were playing a role in these pro-democracy demonstrations are people who were closest to us and received the most extensive training. I know for sure one was on the organizing committee with [opposition leader General] Chamlong. There was another labor leader from the labor movement who was basically in charge of erecting the barricades and was very well known. It's something I'm personally quite proud of."

The AFLI itself dishes out offices, money, and recreational weekends to bind workers to it. It organized a program on "democracy" for a core of trade union leaders, who then went out and taught a compact version of the course to 1,400 trade unionists. This, along with the Washington-funded NGOs, provided the base of the "democracy" protesters.

In total, for Thailand, the AID has earmarked over \$8.6 million to build non-governmental organizations and to environmental purposes for disbursement over an approximate three-year period. "There is no question but that voice and choice in government has become more effective" in Thailand, said AID administrator David Hagen, in explaining the allocations.

The AID is the prime funder in greasing the wheels for greenie revolution in Thailand, against an allied government. The operational command structure for the entire apparatus begins with Asia Foundation, operating from its offices in Washington, San Francisco, and Bangkok, and from the AFLI. These two organizations train the NGOs and other protest leaders. The Thai point-man for the operation is Sulak Sivaraksa, the Anglican-trained greenie who led the uprising against the Thai military in 1973. By his own account, Sulak and/or his followers have organized the NGOs to which the AID is channeling money (see article and interview on pages 50-53). Sulak and his NGOs are, in turn, supported logistically and protected by a plethora of apparently private "human rights support" operations in the United States that give the subversive movement publicity and credibility.

It is the completely foreign sponsorship of the so-called democracy protesters—not the demands of the rising middle class, as the Anglo-American press would have us believe—that accounts for the violence of May 18-20, which all observers admit is "uncharacteristic of the Thai."

As one U.S. controller of the operation remarked, the Thai military was "very surprised by the resolute civilian action and simply didn't understand the basis of this opposition to what they are doing. They were caught by surprise. When you see that kind of bloodshed, it is usually the

result of armed forces not knowing what they are doing and being caught by surprise, and that is what happened in this case."

Now it's 'democracy'

It would appear that since U.S. embassies, particularly in developing countries, have gained such notoriety for organizing coups, Washington is working hard to cover its tracks by overthrowing governments under the banner of "democracy." As of June 3, nearly two weeks after the NGO-led riots forced the resignation of Prime Minister Suchinda Kraprayoon, the Thai government still lacks a prime minister. The NGO movement is threatening more violence, if the duly elected ruling-party coalition does not name a prime minister it approves of.

The immediate target of the operation is the Thai military, which has been the key governing institution for an independent Thailand since it forced the creation of a constitutional monarchy in 1932. The Bush administration's similar attempts to dismantle the militaries of Ibero-America have now been transported to Asia. Even the same personnel are involved. The Asia Foundation is organizing a conference on "democratization" to be held in Bangkok in June (now postponed), which was to have featured Lewis Goodman, author of *The Military and Democracy: The Future of Civil-Military Relations in Latin America*—the famous "Bush manual" for the destruction of Ibero-America militaries. The book was in part funded by the U.S. Information Agency.

Admitting that the Thai military "has been a source of stability in the political panorama in Southeast Asia," Goodman asserted in an interview made available to *EIR* that the U.S. goal should be to reduce the military to its "proper role." Realizing this objective "will be quite a complex thing," he said. "It may end up with the destruction of the Armed Forces."

The royal family of Thailand, led by King Bhumipol Adulyadej, is another target of the "democracy" movement. Continuing instability forces the king to intervene directly into politics. Already (see interviews below), the protesters are agitating to overturn the amnesty, signed by the king, of former prime minister Suchinda, in a direct challenge to the king's authority. The objective is to force the king into a corner, so that he takes action that destroys his moral authority.

The bloody events in Thailand over May 18-20 are projected to be but the beginning of the destabilization of the ASEAN countries. Next on the hit list are Indonesia and Malaysia, according to James Clad, a member of the Carnegie Endowment for Peace, in comments to the *Washington Post*. It might be asked what the United States hopes to gain by destabilizing the Southeast Asian countries. Thai and Philippine soldiers fought by side by side with Americans in Korea and Vietnam. Henry Kissinger's 1983 statement

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

Documentation

AFLI representative: 'We trained them all'

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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