

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

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

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

Asia Foundation: Is Asia following Ibero-America?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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