

Southeast Asia by Sophie Tanapura

'Peace movement' emerges in Thailand

The questions are: Why? Who is behind it? and What does this portend for Thai domestic and foreign policy?

T rue to their announced plan for expanded activities, the peace movement in Thailand kicked off the year 1986 with a 300-person rally in front of both the U.S. and Soviet embassies on Jan. 26. Students from the locally prestigious Chulalong-Korn and Thammasart universities were seen carrying banners reading "Star Wars Go to Hell." An open letter was handed to embassy officials of both super-powers.

Thailand has neither nuclear weapons nor missiles stationed on its territory. What then could be the purpose of creating a peace movement in Thailand? What could ostensibly be their aim? Who are the people behind this mobilization?

Previously, in 1985, using the pretext of the 40th anniversary of Hiroshima-Nagasaki, the peace movement became visible and took on an ecumenical profile again in Thailand. An outgrowth of Bertrand Russell's Peace Tribunal and the Stockholm ban-the-bomb call, the Thai peace movement saw its inception in the 1950s, and is now being run by shared Soviet and Chinese assets. Last year's peace movement activities drew significant sponsorship from the World Council of Churches (WCC), the principal "ecumenical" institution linking major Western Protestant churches with Eastern Orthodoxy, and the Protestant Church of Christ of Thailand.

The driving forces behind last year's mobilization were Dr. Kothom Areeya of the Coordinating Group for Religion in Society and Dr. Chaiwat

Satha-Anand of the subcommittee on peace and human rights. Dr. Kothom, one of the leading members of the Church of Christ in Thailand, turns out to be a key operative for Amnesty International. As for Dr. Chaiwat, known to be a fervent human rights advocate, he used his assistant professorship at the political science faculty of Thammasat University to recruit followers through courses such as "Violence and Non-violence in Politics." Regarded as a leading figure in the Thai Muslim community, Dr. Chaiwat is known for his sympathies with Iran's Ayatollah Khomeini.

The aim of the movement is three-fold: 1) develop a leverage in the already volatile domestic economic and political situation, 2) prepare to mobilize against an eventual option of the Thai government's electricity generating authority of Thailand (Egat) to go for a national nuclear program, and 3) to create a public opinion in favor of a nuclear free zone, i.e., a zone in Southeast Asia free of American presence.

In this light, it is of significant interest that the Geneva-based World Council of Churches (WCC) organized a closed meeting in Bangkok between Feb. 4 and 8. The objective of the exclusive working session was to discuss the state of the Indochina conflict and formulate the group's policy on the question. Among some 20 or more participants that attended the closed session were Indian international staff member of the WCC Ninan Koshy, *Jakarta Post* editor Sabam

Sihgian, Prince Dr. Sukhumbhand, *Jakarta Post* editor Sabam Sihgian, M. R. Sukhumbhand Paribatra of Chulalongkorn University of Thailand and So Xuan Oanh, secretary-general of Vietnam's committee for the defense of world peace. Representatives of the Hong Kong-based Christian Conference of Asia and the local Church of Christ of Thailand were also among the selected attendees. The exclusive get-together was organized by Kim Su Park, a leading member of Korean origin from the WCC Geneva headquarters.

Discussed were topics such as "geopolitical considerations for the major powers in the Kampuchean situation" presented by Ninan Koshy, and relations between "ASEAN and Indochina" by Sabam Sihgian. Such contacts have been frequent in the recent period among intellectuals from Vietnam and the ASEAN states, most of them sponsored by the Indonesian Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) and the Malaysian Institute for Strategic and International Studies (ISIS). That such a meeting should occur in Bangkok, Thailand, however, is somewhat unusual, given the present Thai government's hard-line approach to the Kampuchea problem. Could this be a sign indicating that a new Thai foreign policy is in the making and about to emerge and that the Soviet lobby via the WCC and the local Protestant Church of Christ are positioning themselves to put their fingers in the pie?

Meanwhile, China is vowing to teach Vietnam a second lesson, and promises of military help for Thailand have so far only turned out to be delivery of second-rate pick-up trucks. It is generally feared that an aggravated Thai-Khmer border situation would merely serve to enhance China's position in Thailand.