

Southeast Asia by Sophie Tanapura

Phuket ablaze: Thailand's Wackersdorf

Escalating Soviet "irregular warfare" is the framework in which a tantalum plant was burned by an angry mob on June 23.

With the escalation of irregular warfare, also called "low-intensity operations," in the Greenie-led assault on the Wackersdorf nuclear site in West Germany, the Soviet Union has chosen to move into another new phase of its global war plans. This is the strategic framework for the June 23 event in Thailand, when the Thailand Tantalum Factory—85% completed—was burned down by an angry mob.

Nobody thought that the beautiful island resort Phuket off the coast of Thailand in the Andaman Sea could overnight turn into an unprecedented scene of violence. A crowd of 40,000-60,000 gathered in front of the provincial community hall to protest against the establishment of Thailand Tantalum Industry Corp., Ltd. on Phuket, degenerated into an uncontrollable mob which burned down the Tantalum Factory and a couple of floors of the first-class Phuket Merlin Hotel. Police officers, insufficient in number, were taken by surprise and gripped with fear. There were no casualties.

The board of directors of the Thailand Tantalum Industry Corp., Ltd. has made it known that the firm will undertake a feasibility study to relocate the plant from Phuket.

The tantalum plant in Phuket was designed to become the world's most modern plant of its kind, according to Dr. Wilfried Rockenbauer, a top executive of the German-based Hermann C. Starck Berlin which sold the technology to Thailand Tantalum. Tantalum is found in tantalite, columbite, struverite, and tin slag. It is

used as an alloy for making metal cutting and drilling elements in machine tools; as a material for making capacitors; for aerospace engines because of its ability to withstand heat and its malleability; and for nuclear reactors and special lenses.

In Thailand, tantalum is obtained as a by-product of tin, and comes in the waste material of tin slag. The setting up of the tantalum factory would have been an exemplary attempt to introduce downstream advanced technology industries to Thailand. The plant was to become the world's largest tantalum producer, with a capacity of 300 tons of tantalum, representing 30-40% of the world's annual supply.

Given the strategic quality of tantalum, the real manipulators of the conflict are unlikely to be local. Reliable sources estimate that the whole scenario was mounted as a joint Anglo-Soviet operation. Sources also point to Singapore, since smuggled tin from Thailand is usually refined on the island nation, and Singapore stands to lose a cheap source of smuggled tin.

With Laos the headquarters of the Soviet KGB in Southeast Asia, it is not surprising that the official Laotian press is hailing the destruction of the Phuket tantalum plant. A wire issued by the Vientiane domestic service says: "This tantalum is used in the manufacture of weapons and space equipment and may cause radioactivity affecting the environment and human lives, thus damaging the tourist industry on this island . . . with high industry. It is necessary to resort to violence by setting ablaze many parts of the plant.

The Thai people's struggle in Phuket is just because it is to protect the environment and their own lives. This just struggle will continue," says Vientiane authoritatively, "despite the state of emergency declared by the Thai government."

One of the local operatives, however, who played a key role in organizing the anti-industry climate around the plant, is university environmentalist Prof. Dr. Suraphol Sudara, a leading member of the World Wildlife Fund of Thailand, where he joins the genocidal likes of Prince Philip and Thacratejchai Viravaidhya. Rumors have it that Royal Dutch Shell gives substantial support to his environmental club in the University of Chulalongkorn. A marine biologist posing as an expert in nuclear technology, Dr. Suraphol argued that the radioactive element in tantalum was going to contaminate the environment. Suraphol has been stirring up protests against the tantalum plant since its inception in 1982. He also vowed that he will protest other projects such as the Nam Jone Dam project and projects in the Eastern Seaboard Complex. Suraphol did his graduate work at the University of Hawaii.

Also significant is the arrest of New Force Party candidate Rewuth Chindapol and his younger brother. The New Force Party is an ultra-liberal party which enjoys links to the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, the German Social Democratic Party, and the Green Party.

Prior to the mob scene on June 23, Rewuth was known to have plotted a kamikaze assassination scheme. He declared that he was ready to die if necessary in order to eliminate both Industry Minister Chirayu Isarakura Na Ayuthaya and Thailand Tantalum Industry's main shareholder, Yeap Soon Arun.