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"Nobody is producing enough grain. No farmer has enough to eat. This is what I know from my own experiences and what I myself have seen."

— A farmer from Ngamoyeik irrigated area, north of Rangoon.



Painting by Thein Lwin, Mawker Refugee Camp

Burma Issues, the monthly newsletter of Burma Issues, highlights current information related to the struggle for peace and justice in Burma. It is distributed internationally on a free-subscription basis to individuals and groups concerned about the state of affairs in Burma.

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DAM LIES: ILLUSIONS, INSULTS & INJURIES

"When the opportunities offered by Ngamoeyeik irrigated area are fully realized, local farm incomes will rise due to multiple cropping and increased productivity..."

— Former State Law and Order Restoration Council [SLORC] Agriculture and Irrigation Minister, 2nd Lt. Gen. Myint Aung, 26 March 1995.

"When people wanted water, they didn't give it, when they no longer wanted water, they gave it!... After the paddy was flooded they didn't come and see... it was all flooded and there was nothing more to be done. The paddy was dead, dead."

— N.K., a 60-year-old farmer from the Ngamoeyeik irrigated area, August 1997.

Fundamental to the Burmese military regime's ongoing claim to legitimacy has been a strong emphasis on agriculture and infrastructure development. Government media takes every available opportunity to remind us that the first of the nation's four economic objectives is: "Development of agriculture as the base... of the economy..." This program stresses development of multiple paddy rice crops annually, in conjunction with secondary cash crops for domestic use and export, supported in turn by improved agricultural techniques, irrigation and transport infrastructure development. The state also places stress on its determination to maintain a dominant role in shaping agrarian policy, regardless of what Burma's largely agrarian population might have in mind.

Can a militarist autocracy design and implement a truly effective program for agricultural transformation? The construction of a reservoir on the Ngamoeyeik River, north of Rangoon, offers a good example for consideration. The dam was opened amid the usual fanfare of ribbon cutting and balloon releasing on 26 March 1995, and the state-run *New Light of Myanmar* gave the inevitable account of the proceedings' minutiae. Following is an edited extract from the report:

The Golden Jubilee of the Armed Forces Day, which falls on 27 March 1995, was hailed with the inauguration of Ngamoeyeik Reservoir, Yangon [Rangoon] Division, this morning [26 March].

The Minister for Agriculture delivered an address. He said:

"Since the construction of irrigation works and ponds constitutes a basic investment in agricultural production to benefit following generations, the state is establishing large, medium or small irrigation works according to priority requirements. In 1994 a total of 67 works were completed.

"Ngamoeyeik Dam is so far the largest irrigation project [undertaken by the now defunct SLORC regime.] It is 75 feet [22.8 m] high and 15,500 feet [4712 m] long with a storage capacity of 180,000 acre-feet. The length of the distribution canals is 242 miles [389 km] and for this 120 million cubic feet [36.5 million cubic m] of earth were dug.

"Work was begun on 3rd November, 1992. The dam was completed in record time due to the powerful contribution of 100,000 man days labor by Tatmadaw [Armed Forces] personnel, who contributed labor together with the public in the main tasks of the project.

"Ngamoeyeik Dam can irrigate 70,000 acres of land and 126,000 acres of crop land in Yangon Division. A further 3,000 acres can be protected from flooding.

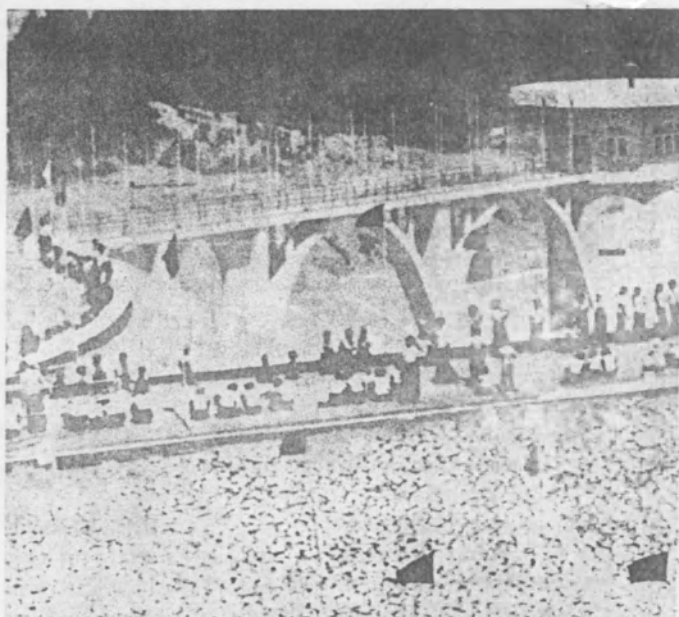
"I urge the local people to cooperate in maintaining this big dam for the perpetual benefit of generations to come, and to coordinate the utilization of the gathered waters for the greatest benefit to agriculture."

About ten miles downstream from the dam is Sabutaung town. In contrast to the preceding ministerial superlatives, a more sobering assessment of the dam's impact was given recently by N.K., a 60-year-old farmer from Sabutaung. Her home lies among open agricultural land, populated by farming communities who for decades have put up with a miscellany of awkward policies imposed by successive regimes. Traditionally, people in this area produced a single paddy rice crop followed by a subsidiary crop of beans, or some other produce requiring substantially less water and fertilization. With the dam's completion, the authorities instructed the local farmers to double-crop paddy, as adequate water supply would now be available for a second harvest. (N.K. knows only "the authorities", devoid of their official titles, reflecting the relationship between local people and the administration. In this instance, those in charge of dam construction and implementation were from the Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation, and those supervising the collection of grain quotas, Township Law and Order Restoration Council officials.)

According to N.K., the irrigation program has to date been less effective than the officials would have us believe. In August 1997, out of desperation she left both her family and homeland to come and find work in Thailand. Extracts from her statement portray the Ngamoeyeik irrigated area from a ground-level perspective:

Last year the authorities did things one way and this year it's another. For two years they've chopped and changed like that and so the paddy crop has failed.

The villagers had to dig the dam and canals [without pay or other support]. I also had to go and hoe the ground. The work was eno...



mously tiring. Then, after we returned home in the evenings, they went and took video footage of the work [for propaganda purposes – minus the unpaid civilian workforce]. People had to go and do this work throughout the hot season, in March/April, when it was really hot.

The government made us construct the Ngamoeyeik Dam, then told everybody to grow dry season paddy rice [the second crop]. At that time, some people were still growing wet season paddy. Others had already finished the wet season paddy and had planted beans and peanuts. The [Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation] officials ordered that all the beans and peanuts be ripped up [to make way for the second paddy crop]. So what can you do? That was just about the last straw.

The dry season paddy program started in the beginning of 1996. They didn't provide seeds – we had to go and buy them. At first they didn't release water [from the dam], as some people hadn't finished all of their wet season crop. Then they announced that people had to begin sowing the dry season paddy. For people to grow dry season paddy, they needed water, so the government opened up the dam and way too much water poured out. The people who hadn't finished their first crop had to rush out and gather it all up quickly. Some called on the authorities to stop the water, saying, "What are you doing? We can't even stay here any more" [as the area was made uninhabitable by floods]. The authorities answered, "If you can't stay, then get out. As for us, we're just following orders."

My son-in-law's land was flooded, and we had to hire a pump to get the water out. The paddy went bad, and a lot died. My son-in-law has to give 80 baskets of paddy to the government [a quota based upon the land area sown, for which about 50 percent of market value is paid]. He has about six acres of fields, and if he could work the paddy problem-free he could get at least 200 baskets out of that area. This year [1997], the yield was only over one hundred baskets. After all of his expenses, he had only about 60 baskets left, which we took to the administration – the entire lot, and not a single basket was left over. But the officials said, "This paddy grain is no good. We don't want it," and they made us take it all back. He couldn't think about this any more, and went to get the whole lot milled. After about another month, the government announced over loudspeakers [on cars] that people who hadn't brought in grain of bad quality should go and give it after all, but [by that time] we didn't have anything to go and give back to them,

[and so had to negotiate a standing debt to be made up in the next year]. They came and took video footage of areas where the crop was good. The stuff that didn't grow, they don't show – you can't say anything about that.

Later, they cut off the water and the people who had begun growing the dry season paddy saw it was drying up, so they complained to the authorities. The officials said, "You farmers are hypocrites. When you request something from us [for the water to be stopped] we give it to you, and then you protest. We can't follow your whims any more." They said it's the farmers who are inconsistent and don't do things right. So some villagers went to break open [the stone and earth-fill wall of] the dam themselves. Then the officials became angry and said "You must all relocate your villages" [as punishment]. The villagers replied, "We can't plant paddy, so what will we do?" The village heads [acting as community representatives] outlined their case step-by-step, and eventually reached an understanding with the officials. Anyway, we had to go and help repair the [damage the villagers had done to the] dam – we nearly died doing that in the stinking hot weather!

Nobody is producing enough grain. No farmer has enough to eat. This is what I know from my own experiences and what I myself have seen.

N.K. identified a host of problems faced by the farmers. Different varieties of apparently identical seeds had been mixed together in stocks purchased from the government, so that once sown, plants began to grow at different speeds and to different heights. The fertilizers available are overpriced and poor-quality, so weeds and grasses are endemic. Different levels of the administrative hierarchy issue contradictory orders. Many township authorities cheat and manipulate farmers when collecting quotas, for instance by reducing the weight, claiming that the grain is too heavily laden with trash (gravel, grass, etc.) The list goes on. Such a panoply of abuses doesn't suggest effective implementation of agricultural development policies.

N.K.'s words speak louder than the official line. At Ngamoeyeik, the powers-that-be gave speeches about development and progress. For farmers there it has spelled despair. However, the regime has placed much of its credibility on these projects, and is very sensitive to any criticism. Success is mandatory. In September 1997, a friend observed that one end of a bridge across the Sittaung River, Pegu Division, had

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"Regional people rejoice at the inauguration of Ngamoeyeik Reservoir which will irrigate and prevent floods." – NLM, 27 March '95.

PIPE DREAMS: FREE TRADE ZONE IN BURMA

Transnational corporations (TNCs) are among the world's biggest economic institutions. A rough estimate suggests that the 300 largest TNCs own or control at least one-quarter of the entire world's productive assets, worth about US\$5 trillion. TNCs' total annual sales are comparable to or greater than the yearly gross domestic product (GDP) of most countries. Together, the sales of Mitsui and General Motors are US\$50 billion more than the combined GDPs of the countries in sub-Saharan Africa.¹

It is essential that some very careful analysis of the present economic trends in Burma be done immediately if the country's people and resources are to be preserved. The economic situation in Burma is changing rapidly as efforts are made by the ruling generals to encourage international investment in infrastructure and industry; economic changes which will affect the future of Burma's people regardless of the government in power.

Some of the most powerful interests in the world, the transnational corporations (TNCs), are at the center of an increasing number of critical projects in Burma; the most infamous examples include the Total and Unocal gas companies. TNCs investing in Burma are providing money directly to a military regime which has been documented as one of the worst violators of human rights in the world today. This article will not reiterate these violations in any detail. Rather, it will explore a more sinister aspect of the project – the possibility of the area along and around the pipeline being developed into a Free Trade Zone (FTZ) in which TNCs will be free to establish their factories and make use of cheap and unorganized labor created by the Burma Army's harsh campaigns throughout rural areas of the country. Various events of the past nine years point to this conclusion: an increasingly open-market economy throughout Burma; the displacement of thousands of people living in the pipeline areas; and the creation of hundreds of thousands of internally displaced persons and refugees in civil war areas.

1. Transnational corporations (TNCs)

TNCs are giant corporations with a central base in one country, but with industrial activities scattered throughout the world. They have become an intricate part of the globalization process sweeping the world today. With such tremendous financial power, and with bases and interests in many nations, TNCs can influence the direction of global economic and political changes. With profit as their primary mandate, TNCs can and do operate internationally with fewer restraints than governments can. Through the World Trade Organization (WTO) TNCs are pushing for the development of a global map which continues to define countries by political boundaries, but which eliminates economic boundaries such as trade and investment barriers, allowing them unrestricted access to any country's pool of cheap labor for production, and to a nation's resources for exploitation. This is the open-market economy at its extreme and is the economic world Burma, desperate for foreign currency, is rapidly advancing towards.

Setting the stage for even deeper TNC involvement in Burma, a gas field in the Gulf of Martaban is to be connected by a gas pipeline which runs through, Karen and Mon traditional lands and on into Thailand. In July 1992, an agreement to develop Burma's Martaban Gulf natural gas field was signed between the state-run Myanmar Oil & Gas Enterprise (MOGE) and the giant French oil company, Total. The U.S. company, Unocal, soon joined the project, and the plan was finalized to build a 500-kilometer pipeline from the gulf to Thailand, which would purchase most of the gas.² There was an immediate negative reaction from indigenous groups in the areas through which the pipeline is to pass. Total and Unocal had made their agreement for the project directly with the Burmese military junta, and no discussions were held with the traditional inhabitants of the area. Opposition groups also pointed out that Total and Unocal would be providing money directly to a military regime famous for its brutal suppression of the pro-democracy movement, and for human rights violations throughout the country.

The change from a centrally-controlled economic system to an open-market economy came about in 1988, following the September military coup of that year. At the time, criticism of the policy change focused more on the fact that a more open market would enrich the military regime, which urgently needed money to build up and modernize its armed forces for more efficient suppression of dissenting factions in the country. Few attempts were made to look more critically at how an open-market economy might negatively effect a large number of the country's rural people, nor were there many debates on what other types of economic structures might be developed in Burma to provide more economic justice to the people.

Along with some positive elements, the open-market economy also brings with it potentially devastating problems which need to be guarded against. China, which recently opened its doors to foreign companies, can serve as a good example. A recent survey indicates that Japanese TNCs began to advance into China at a quick pace immediately after the country started to lower trade barriers. The main reason for this move was the much lower wages companies are required to pay workers, and the absence of labor unions in China which might interfere with TNC operations or provide protection for the workers.³ Consequently, workers are often poorly paid and receive no compensation for work-related injuries. This is espe-

cially true where TNCs sub-contract parts of their operations to smaller companies, as was the case in a toy factory in Shenzhen, China where a fire claimed the lives of 87 women workers in 1993. The European mother-company refused to pay compensation saying they were not responsible, and the Hong Kong-based sub-contractor has been able to avoid responsibility as well, through various legal wrangling.⁴ In the end, the workers remained the victims.

Job creation is one of the factors often cited as a major contribution TNCs make to a poor and underdeveloped country. They do generate many jobs in countries where poor economic development planning has reduced large portions of the rural population to poverty, but the question of economic justice needs to be addressed. In Indonesia, the giant shoe company, Nike, has established a joint venture with a Taiwanese company called Feng Tay. The cheap labor provided by poverty-stricken rural Indonesians has profited Nike greatly. Nike is able to pay Michael Jordan US\$21 million a year to help advertise their shoes, while a worker in their Indonesia factory receives a salary of only US\$594 a year. Most of the factory workers are young, poorly educated rural women. The pay they receive is minimal for bare survival.⁵

To lure TNCs, host countries usually provide very lucrative income tax breaks or reduction of export/import tariffs. This severely limits the actual benefits which the TNCs bring into the country. Add to this the negative impact TNCs and their operations can have on local culture, life-styles and values, and the positive contribution TNCs make to a country becomes highly questionable. Other forms of economic development need to be explored in order to ensure true justice for the people.

2. Military campaigns

In recent years, the Burmese military has carried out many military campaigns throughout Burma, resulting in the displacement of hundreds of thousands of people, and the total destruction of rural economies. On 7 February 1997, one such campaign was launched throughout the Mergui/Tavoy District of Karen State, which lies west of Thailand's Kanchanaburi Province. On this day, the Burmese Army began its offensive under the code name Operation *Thu Ya* (meaning bravery). It took 19 days to overrun the district headquarters of the Karen National Union (KNU) and the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA). The immediate result was the creation of approximately 23,000 new refugees who fled into Thailand. In addition, local KNU officials were able to identify 2,274 families, a total number of 11,877 people, who had become internally displaced due to the campaign and were hiding in the thick jungles between the Thai/Burma border and the Andaman Sea.⁶ Villagers fleeing areas occupied by the Burmese military following this campaign report that virtually all food supplies, both plant and animal, have either been confiscated by soldiers or destroyed, leaving the rural economy devastated. Villagers, both young and old, often walk for days without food, seeking shelter and assistance across the border inside Thailand. Their means of survival inside Burma has been eliminated.

3. The pipeline area

It is no coincidence that Operation *Thu Ya* took place near the area of the Total/Unocal gas pipeline. Most likely, the Burmese military consider it a priority to exterminate any insurgency movements in the area as well as any civilian support for that insurgency in order to guarantee security for construction work on what is an extremely important project for them. However, other projects being planned for the area suggest that far more than mere security for construction of a pipeline is being strategized.

For several years, a rail line linking the coastal towns of Ye and Tavoy has been under construction using forced labor. This rail line will facilitate the flow, not only of military personnel into the area for security purposes, but also of goods and supplies between the area and Burma's capital of Rangoon. An 80-kilometer road being constructed along the Total/Unocal pipeline route has also been proposed to link Tavoy with the Thai trading town of Kanchanaburi, and the Italian-Thai Company is planning a 2 billion baht (about US\$39 million) deep seaport in Tavoy.⁷

The highlight of these construction schemes is the plan to develop an industrial zone of approximately 500,000 acres near Tavoy. This industrial zone would become an immediate attraction to TNCs which are facing problems in other Asian countries with labor unrest and rising costs. The pipeline and its affiliated infrastructure will help prepare the area to become a FTZ at the expense of traditional agriculture which has been the lifeblood of the indigenous people for many generations already.

The Tavoy region of Burma is rapidly being developed into an industrial zone where TNCs will be able to freely set up factories to improve their profits.

4. Conclusions

The Tavoy region of Burma is rapidly being developed into an industrial zone where TNCs will be able to freely set up factories to improve their profits. The Total/Unocal pipeline project has given the Burmese military the excuse it needs to move into the area and dislocate hundreds of thousands of people, many of them ethnic Karen, Mon and Tavoyan. With the agricultural base of the area destroyed by the military, these homeless and jobless people will provide a large pool of unorganized and poorly-educated labor willing to work for very low wages. Under strict military control, they will not be allowed to organize or to create other job opportunities for themselves. The traditional life-styles of these people, their cultures and their values will rapidly be eroded by this process. Years of civil war have taken a heavy toll on the traditional lives of Burma's indigenous people. Now it looks as if many of them will find themselves standing in long assembly lines, piecing together goods for export rather than producing food which they can

use and share among themselves.

5. What can be done?

Several things need to be done immediately if this process is to be controlled. First, all opposition groups in Burma must study these economic trends and develop an alternative plan which will preserve and protect the lives, values and cultures of people in Burma. This can be achieved by developing the traditional agricultural base of the rural areas so that the people can enjoy the benefits of an improved life. Industrialization may not in itself be a bad thing for Burma, but it may not be the best direction for the country at this time. An open-market economy may also not necessarily be the best economic development trend for Burma, as it is so contradictory to the traditional values of the indigenous people that many could be victimized in providing benefits for a small handful. This question of cultural preservation needs attention, for once TNCs move in, they hold tremendous power over economic and political developments and are not dislodged or controlled easily.

People victimized by government and/or military policies which destroy their homes, farms and families, are vulnerable to a development process which uses their desperation to gain cheap labor earning huge profits for the mother companies and countries. Grassroots villagers can resist this type of exploitation if they have information. The more they know about the realities of industrialization, open market eco-

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THAILAND: VIOLATING THE RIGHT TO NON-REFOULEMENT (2)

In November 1997, Burma Issues reported on a group of refugees who managed to cross into Umphang district, Thailand, and were facing impending refoulement. At that time, it was still unclear what measures would be taken to enforce an order by the Thai military that the group return to Burma. Later in November, members of the group were forcibly repatriated to an unsecure site on the Burma side of the border and many have since dispersed into the jungle. The people who have dispersed are probably seeking or have found work inside Thailand in order to survive. Their plight is of utmost concern, in terms of health and security, as the Thai government is being called on by its advisory bodies to repatriate all illegal immigrant workers in the midst of Thailand's economic recession. As recent events in the border area of Umphang have shown, the current strategy of repatriation is solving no problems for the Thais, and certainly not for the refugees seeking shelter in Thailand.

The new arrivals in Umphang district, numbering approximately 2,000, cited forced labor, forced portering, harsh taxation, village relocation and consolidation, and instances of arbitrary arrest and summary execution as reasons for their flight to Thailand. However, Thai military authorities insisted that these new arrivals were "illegal immigrants" since "there is no fighting" in the area they came from, and denied them entry into nearby Noh Pho, an established camp where more than 10,500 refugees are currently sheltered. The group was instead allowed to stay near three points close to the border: Thay Phu Law Hsgoo, Htee Saw Hsgee and Lay Htaw Khoh. Food and medical supplies were received from non-government organizations. Thai military authorities repeatedly insisted that the refugees return to Burma.

According to local witnesses, around 5 am on Saturday, November 15, troops of the Thai Army 3rd Division went to Thay Phu Law Hsgoo, where around 1,000 people were taking shelter, and fired shots in the air for about 20 minutes. M16 assault rifles and M79 rocket launchers were used. A 3-day-old baby died, dropped by his mother and trampled in the ensuing confusion and panic. Two elderly people suffered shrapnel wounds and were later moved to Noh Pho camp for treatment. The soldiers, who were described as wearing dark uniforms, faces covered with red scarves and balaclavas,

returned again at 9 am, and intimidated the population by dragging people out of their shelters, beating them, and setting fire to shelters along with the possessions inside. There are reports that three leaders who passively resisted the orders of the troops to move were tied up, beaten and kicked in front of the people. The group was then physically moved by armed guards to a location near the border, and the following morning were pushed across to the Burma side, to a site called Baw Ner Htah. The Thai military maintained a presence at the new site, which was within 300-400 yards of a Burma Army camp – close enough for the residents to hear the sound of the voices of the Burma soldiers. Night is the time when people feel most vulnerable to attack. However, the people believed the Thai soldiers were not interested in taking care of their security as each day the sol-

diers moved around among the residents, withdrawing to their campsite each night as evening fell. Members of the group began fleeing from this location into the jungle at night, and by November 20, five days later, the site was completely deserted.

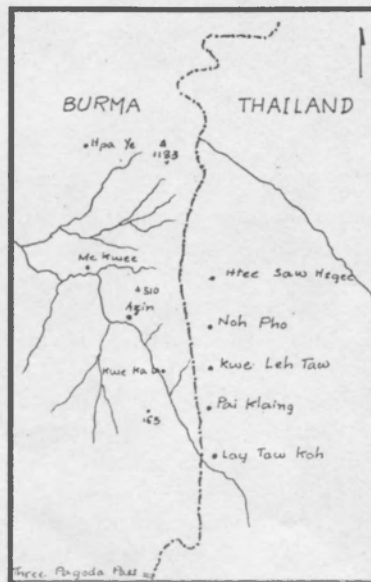
Following reports of the incident, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) conducted their own fact-finding mission in the area and confirmed that some 1,100 refugees had been forcibly relocated to an unsafe place straddling the border. On November 18, the UNHCR expressed concern about the incident in a letter from its representative in Bangkok to the Thai National Security Council (a body comprised of Thai military leaders answerable to the prime minister). On November 20, the director of the UNHCR Asia-Pacific Department and the Thai Ambassador to the United Nations mission met in Geneva to discuss the incident. The initial reactions from the Thai authorities were disbelief and/or denial. By November 24, Thailand had acknowledged that a repatriation *did* take place and had given assurances that this type of incident "will never happen again." However, they have continued to restrict access to

the area where the repatriation occurred.

Ironically, on November 18, the day of the meeting in Geneva, the 800 residents of Htee Saw Hsgee temporary camp were ordered by local Thai authorities to return to Burma within three days or face the same treatment as those at Thay Phu Law Hsgoo. The people were understandably afraid, and the entire group fled into the jungle. The Thai military permitted only a few of the seriously ill who were unable to walk to move to Noh Pho camp, along with one caretaker each – about 30 people in total. (Since that time they have been allowed to take up residence in Noh Pho.) Those who fled to the jungle have been left without food besides what they were able to carry themselves, or any medical support. There have been reports of serious illnesses and deaths of those hiding in the jungle, resulting from low resistance to diseases such as malaria, cholera and diarrhea/dysentery. The coming cold season will increase the risk to the refugees' health.

The Thai soldiers searched for people in the jungle, but the refugees fled deeper each time the soldiers approached – the same reaction villagers in insurgent areas have when they sight Burma Army troops. Finally, Thai military authorities notified the Noh Pho camp committee that they would give permission for the refugees to wait in the area between Kwee Ler Taw and Kwee Tat villages, about a one-hour walk apart, quite close to the original Thay Phu Law Hsgoo camp site until a final decision was made about where they would be sent. The camp committee members were able to meet with members of the refugee group hiding out in the jungle to tell them of this arrangement.

With guarantees for their security given by the Noh Pho camp committee, some members of the group made their way back to the designated area between Kwee Ler Taw and Kwee Tat. To date, around 830 people from this location (out of the original group of around 2,000) have been allowed entry to Noh Pho; they are presently living in barrack-style conditions, awaiting permission to build proper shelters. The others remain unaccounted for – lost, inaccessible, or still dubious of the authorities' promises. AMI, a medical relief agency which been permitted to assist the people in this area, reported that there have been at least 50 serious cases of diarrhea/dys-



entery and cholera, resulting in the deaths of at least seven children.

Though the problem is not resolved, Thai policy seems to be moving in a more positive direction. Prime Minister Leekpai's new administration has publicly stated that Thailand's foreign policy will be guided by human rights principles, and acknowledged that Thai military action resulted in the forcible repatriation of a group of asylum seekers. At issue is whether military authorities will accept a policy that adheres to the international principles of granting sanctuary to asylum seekers and non-refoulement. This will be a test for the new administration's ability to hold the military accountable to government policy.

As Thai authorities battle the effects of an economic recession, official terminology being applied to the refugee population indicates that they are still very much at risk. Burmese nationals living along the border and new arrivals in Thailand are increasingly being referred to as "illegal immigrants" by Thai authorities and as potential "illegal immigrant workers," providing a rationale for repatriation. The government has been called upon by the House Committee on Labor and Social Welfare (a government advisory body), to repatriate all immigrant workers because they "were forcing a rising number of Thais out of work." Interior Ministry, armed forces and the police department are drafting measures to crack down on illegal immigrant workers, and already the immigration detention centers are overflowing with Burmese nationals waiting to be deported.

If these policies are not examined and changed, Thailand's economic crisis will only translate to a deeper crisis for refugees from Burma. The international community must remain vigilant demanding that the Thai government meet internationally accepted standards concerning asylum seekers. That is, Thailand must ensure adequate protection for the refugees, by allowing access for non-government organizations to provide relief provisions and medical care, and adhering to the principle of non-refoulement. Failing in its humanitarian obligations towards Burmese refugees will only increase fear and mistrust among the refugee population, exacerbating the problem of illegal workers, doing nothing to alleviate Thailand's own economic concerns.



V.J.C.

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nomics and TNCs, the more they can participate in seeking positive alternatives. For these people, an immediate education campaign about the present economic trends must be launched in refugee camps and among villagers inside Burma.

Internationally, groups can campaign corporations based in their country to establish policies which provide protection for indigenous people or any other high-risk groups living in areas where they plan to establish operations. The power of TNCs must be managed, and it is only through a united and aware population that pressure for such control can be mobilized.

A plan which will serve Burma and her numerous ethnic groups well cannot be developed without their participation. Economic development plans for Burma remain vague and rather obscure. With education, study, and collaboration, a economic plan can be developed which will preserve the various cultures and traditions of Burma, and also assure that the country's valuable natural resources are developed in a way which positively benefit all of the people of Burma.



Nyein Chan

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- 2 Bangkok Post, July 29, 1992.
- 3 Asian TNCs within the Region: Case Study of Japanese Companies by Miyoko Shiozawa, Asian Women Workers' Center.
- 4 Asia Monitor Resource Center, November 1997.
- 5 TNC Impact on Labors and Non-Metropolitan Areas, A Case Study of Indonesia, Indonesia Labor Center, November 1997.
- 6 The 1997 Offensives, Saw Moe Kyaw Tun, December 1, 1997.
- 7 Bangkok Post, 5 Sep 1996.

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collapsed into rising waters during the recent floods. Adjacent, a sign had been posted "Photographs Prohibited". In an environment where failure is not admitted in the first place, problems can never be adequately addressed.

Ngamoeyeik hints at fallacy beneath arguments that a strong, authoritarian regime will bring about socioeconomic progress. Inherent in an autocratic, military dominated structure and top-down approach to development lie endemic corruption, incompetence, and hierarchical bickering, regardless of intentions. Bludgeoning the population with blunt public relations tools serves no good purpose - reality is where the people are. They are acutely aware of their stifling conditions. The authorities could probably get a lot further by entering into dialogue and consultation with communities like N.K.'s, rather than waiting until they become desperate enough to try to demolish that which they themselves were forced to construct, as in this instance. Yet, the lack of accountability and transparency reinforce a rigid bureaucracy that seems neither capable of budging, nor willing to try.

The solutions to Burma's apparently intractable problems lie with the people, and only a truly participatory process for transformation can ultimately succeed. Genuine development, agrarian or otherwise, will occur if and when the population has a sense of some control over the process. Externally, pressure must be applied upon all parties involved to ensure a process of genuine dialogue with, and accountability to, the people. All else is mere propaganda.



nyah phay thwet



New refugees in Umphang District, Thailand.

The Last Word

What Others Have to Say About Burma

"Having gone to these [civil war] areas, I felt a sense of satisfaction. I saw that the villagers have to face a miscel-lany of restrictions, but they are strong and sturdy people. Why is this so? They have suffered the oppression of the Burma Army in many ways for decades, so it is not some-thing new for them – it is as if it has become normal. From the point of view of these people, there is no peace, nor free-dom, nor security anywhere in Burma. Among them, some recognize that if they don't bear this suffering in the name of peace and freedom in Burma then it will be as if they are strengthening the military regime [by no longer resisting them]." – *Information gatherer, after visiting a civil war region in Burma.*

"If we don't cut the trees there, then other countries will." – *A logging operator remarking on why her company has logging operations in areas on the Burmese side of the Thai-Burmese border.*

"In Samut Prakan [area of Thailand] there are 300,000 Burmese, mostly nonregistered workers. We must ur-gently push these workers back home as their presence here would cause social problems." – *Thai House Labor and Social Welfare Committee Vice Chairman.*

"Burma is the only country I am aware of where the mint is controlled by the Ministry of Defense rather than the Treasury." – *A foreign economist who recently visited Rangoon.*

"I will return after I can earn and save money for my family." – *Pae, an illegal Mon worker in Thailand, despite calls for a tougher government stance on illegal immigrants.*

"I would like to propose that if ex-president, retired Gen-eral Ne Win – who used to be able to do a lot in the past – will work, the entire country could become peaceful and pleasant" – *Thakin Chit speaking to a group of about 120 veteran politicians, democracy activists and diplomats at a ceremony to mark Burma's 50th anniversary of independence.*

"Burma was one of the original signatories [of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights] and I'm not aware that any Burmese at the time stood up and said, 'This is not Asian, this is not Burmese.'" – *Aung San Suu Kyi criti-cizing those who reject democracy and human rights as in-appropriate Western imports.*

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