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Violet Wurfel ASEAN Lecture Series: Social Movements in Thailand

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CLEMEN C. AQUINO (CHAIR, DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY, COLLEGE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES AND PHILOSOPHY [CSSP], UNIVERSITY OF THE PHILIPPINES [UP]-DILIMAN): The Office of the President, the Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs, the Third World Studies Center, and the Institute for Popular Democracy would like to welcome you all to the Third Public ASEAN Lecture Series in memory of Dr. Violet Wurfel, the first Fulbright Scholar to the Philippines and mother of Prof. David Wurfel, a former visiting professor of the Department of Political Science and one of the first Filipinists from Cornell University. Under the memorandum of agreement between former UP President Francisco Nemenzo Jr. and Prof. David Wurfel, the latter provides the grant that allows distinguished scholars in the Southeast Asian region to speak to the academic community with regard to political, economic, social, and cultural concerns confronting the respective countries. The University of the Philippines, on the other hand, hosts the scholars and arranges tthe series of lectures. For this year, we are honored to have Dr. Kasian Tejapira, associate professor of Political Science from the Thammasat University, who will speak on a very timely topic: social movements in Thailand. As you know, this is a subject matter that concerns political scientists, sociologists, anthropologists, development specialists,

psychologists, and host of other disciplines and perspectives. This afternoon's session is also an opportunity for comparative and cross-cultural dialogue with the distinguished scholar on, and most likely an active participant of, Thai politics, social movements, and modern radical cultures. This is Dr. Tejapira's fourth lecture in four days, the last in the series. Given the topic, he apparently saved the best for last. Once again a warm welcome and thank you.

ARNIE C. TRINIDAD (INSTRUCTOR, DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY, CSSP, UP-DILIMAN): Our distinguished speaker, Dr. Kasian Tejapira is an associate professor at the Thammasat University in Thailand. He earned his PhD at Cornell University, Ithaca, New York. His dissertation, entitled "Commodifying Marxism: The Formation of Modern Thai Radical Culture from 1927-1958," was later published by the Kyoto University Press and the Trans Pacific Press in 2001. He has also published his works in various journals, the latest of which is his article, "Toppling of Thaksin," published last year. Like many UP students in the First Quarter Storm, Dr. Tejapira was a student activist, political refugee, and guerrilla fighter. Friends and colleagues, let us all welcome Dr. Kasian Tejapira to give his lecture on social movements in Thailand.

KASIAN TEJAPIRA (ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR, FACULTY OF POLITICAL SCIENCE, THAMMASAT UNIVERSITY): Among the four topics on which I was invited to give the Violet Wurfel lecture, this one, social movements in Thailand, is what, academically speaking, I know the least. I have not done any serious collaborative research, although I did some studies on early communist and student movements for my doctoral dissertation. Nonetheless, I agreed to take on the challenge and I will do what I can.

I would like to talk about something based on my own experience and observations—from the perspective of a participant observer, so to speak, as a former student activist and guerrilla fighter and commentator on current affairs. The organizing principle of my talk would be the urban-rural divide, or the widening socioeconomic gap between the urban area in Thailand and the countryside, and the attempt to bridge the two politically through class alliance.

Every now and then, I would buy garlands of jasmine and offer these before the sculptures at Thammasat University erected in commemoration of key political incidents involving the university. In the uprising of October 14, 1973, in which students led mass demonstrations and toppled a military dictatorship, eighty people

were killed. Three years later, in the massacre of October 6, 1976, when fully armed police surrounded the university, two to three thousand demonstrators were bombarded. Forty people were killed, many of them students, some of whom were my friends.

As memorial for these two events, sculptures were erected at the university. I would buy garlands of jasmine and lay these at the foot of each sculpture. Why? When I stand in front of the sculpture for the October 14, 1973 uprising, I usually think of rights and freedom. When I stand in front of the October 6, 1976 massacre sculpture, I usually think of social justice, which, during that period was interpreted by the radical student movements as equal to socialism. For my generation, these two incidents represent the twin principles: rights and freedom, and social justice.

I call my generation the Octoberist generation because these two incidents happened in the month of October, although three years apart. We connect the two events and then we move from these ideas. On the one hand, without freedom, one cannot fight for social justice. On the other hand, without social justice, what is the point of having freedom in relation to the nation, society, and the disadvantaged in our society? We might as individuals think of freedom as good enough in itself, but if you think of other people, especially the disadvantaged, without social justice what is the point of being free?

The principles, social justice and freedom, have concrete manifestations in the 1970s. On the one hand, the student and intellectual movements that fought for rights and freedom in the '70s. On the other hand, the worker and farmer or peasant movements fought for their own version of social justice, which may be labor- or land-based. During that time, the idea of justice was called "a land of integrated three"—that is, to try to integrate these three forces (the students, intellectuals, and peasants and workers) into one alliance. We hoped that this alliance would unite and fight for rights and freedom, on the one hand, and social justice on, the other. In a way, that was the dream of the Thai social movement: a radical social change in Thailand. This is the key dream, the haunting dream, the dream that returns to us again and again.

There were times in modern Thai political history when we thought we could cross the urban-rural political divide. How could we build an urban-rural alliance for rights and freedom and at the same time achieve social justice? Before proceeding further to give you four different attempts in modern Thai political history to build social

alliance, let me give you some idea of the socioeconomic gap between the urban area and the countryside in Thailand. How has this gap evolved during the last forty years or so?

The economic formation of modern-day capitalist Thailand dates back to the early 1960s and the US war on Vietnam, when the Kingdom did duty as a front-line anticommunist state, servicing the eight major American military bases on its soil with "rest and recreation" facilities. Thailand was then a country of 26 million, with 80 percent of the population working in agriculture, the main source of exports. Bangkok was a government-dominated city of three million. Import-substitution development policies established under World Bank guidance, and with massive American aid, were inevitably skewed to US needs. The sex and tourist industries were the notable results. Over the next four decades, the Thai economy grew at an annual average of 7 percent; per capita GDP increased from USD 100 in 1961 to USD 2,750 in 1995. By the early 1980s, manufacturing had replaced agriculture as the main contributor to exports and GDP. Between 1980 and 1984, Gen. Prem Tinsulanond, then prime minister, pushed through a major structural adjustment program along World Bank lines, devaluing the baht and replacing the import-substitution model with a labor-intensive, export-oriented manufacturing sector, based in garments and textiles.

This growth that favored the urban areas reached its zenith in the spectacular decade-long boom from the mid-'80s to the mid-'90s. In the first half of the decade, the economy grew at dizzying double-digit rates, and by the end of the boom it had multiplied two-and-a-half times. With the urban middle class more than tripling in number, business employees came to outnumber government officials. With the yen strengthening in the wake of the 1985 Plaza Accord, Japan became the biggest source of foreign direct investments; manufacturing, real estate, trade, and services were the principal recipients. By the end of the century the population had reached 61 million and, with intensive urbanization, that of Greater Bangkok had quadrupled. But class and regional disparities had sharply intensified. By 1996, on the eve of the crash, the top quintile had increased its share of the national income to 57 percent, from 49 percent in 1976; the lowest quintile saw its share diminish from 6 percent to 4 percent in the same period. After four decades of high-speed capitalist development, Thailand had achieved one of the most unequal income distributions in the world, worse than those of its East and Southeast Asian neighbors, and comparable to the worst cases in Latin America. The vast bulk of

foreign investment had gone to Bangkok and its surrounding region, the central plain of the Chao Phraya River delta, starving the tropical forests of the mountainous North, the rolling savannah of the Northeast, and the densely forested Malay peninsula.

Let me give you some background concerning this disparity. Regional disparities saw a steady increase under the Thaksin government. In 2004, Bangkok, which had 17 percent of the country's population, accounted for 44 percent of GDP while the rest of the central region, excluding Bangkok, had 17 percent of the population and 27 percent of GDP. By contrast, the south had 14 percent of the population but 9 percent of GDP. The mountainous North had 18 percent of the population but 9 percent of the GDP. The Northeast had 34 percent of the population but only 11 percent of GDP.

An ideal situation would be an equivalent percentage of population and percentage of GDP, but in Thailand it is the other way around. The GDP concentrates in places with fewer people. Income disparities between economic sectors have also been severe, with agriculture accounting for 42 percent of employment but only 10 percent of GDP, whereas industry accounted for 21 percent of employment yet it accounts for 41 percent of GDP, and services for 37 percent of employment and 50 percent of GDP. That is, if you work in agriculture in Thailand, you will receive the least income, compared to working in the industry and service sectors. And majority of the population still work in agriculture.

Why has land ownership been increasingly concentrated in the hands of the upper and middle classes? This certainly has not been the traditional form of land ownership in Thailand. Historically, most Thai peasants were independent landholders until the 1950s. The onset of state-promoted capitalist development led to the large-scale commodification of rural land, which ceased to be a cheap and plentiful source of production in the tradition of a peasant economy and turned into an increasingly expensive object of speculation in the market economy. By the 1970s, landlessness had become a national problem. Massive peasant protests resulted in a land reform program enforced by the civilian government, which was installed following the 1973 uprising, in a move to appease the big landowners. In 1973, after a student-led uprising toppled the military government, there emerged a political opening for the mass movement. Before then, peasants who were critical of the system were helpless because the military could easily make them disappear, accusing them of being communists. The uprising gave them an opportunity to protest and call for government reforms.

But the peasants' campaign was not in the classical way of taking land from the rich to give to the poor, like Robin Hood did. They take it from the public and give it to the poor so the rich would not react. To appease the big landowners, however, the government did not touch private lands. Instead, forest and public lands that had been encroached upon and deforested over the years were allocated for distribution to landless peasants, in effect taking them from the public and giving them to the poor. In the following decade, the government, with the World Bank's support, initiated a landownership service to promote investments in farming. However, given widespread corruption among local officials, what actually happened was a wholesale privatization of community lands where tourist resorts, hotels, golf courses, and housing estates were built. The lands were also used to obtain bank loans which in turn were used to speculate on the stock market.

I will proceed to give you the attempts of four different political forces to bridge the gap between the urban-rural divide during the Thai modern political history. These political forces are the Communist Party of Thailand, the student movement, the monarchy, and the Thai Rak Thai party of former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra.

I will begin with the Communist Party in Thailand (CPT), which developed out of Chinese and Vietnamese immigrant communities. The communist movement was not an indigenous phenomenon; it was created by Chinese communists who fled China to seek shelter in Thailand in the late 1920s and early 1930s. And being the good communists that they were, they organized themselves and started engaging in political activities. But the main problem with the Thai Communist Party, which called itself the Chinese Communist Party of Siam, was that there was hardly any Thai representation. Almost all party members were Chinese and Middle Eastern who did not speak Thai. When they had to publish a political statement in Thai, they would draft it first in Chinese then had it translated to Thai before publication and distribution. They did not quite know how to break this ethnic and language barrier in the party.

The breakthrough came in 1941-1942 when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor in December 1941 and then invaded Thailand. Before the invasion, the Chinese communists in Thailand had already organized a lot of anti-Japanese activities. China had already been invaded by Japan, so the communists now in Thailand found themselves fighting the Japanese anew; but in Thailand they could not present themselves as an

alien communist party but, rather, as a good nationalist party that fought the invaders on behalf of Siam. The nationalists openly allowed the Thai Communist Party to really fight in the name of Thai independence and Thailand.

After the war, following Japanese defeat, the Thai Communist Party was legalized as a reward for its war efforts. It opened an office, published its own newspapers, and vigorously recruited Thais into its ranks. It succeeded in doing this at Thammasat University, but not at Chulalongkorn University, which at the time had already been a "closed university"—that is, you had to take an entrance exam. But Thammasat University was still an "open university" with no entrance tests and a relatively relaxed atmosphere, which attracted quite a lot of young people. The Thai Communist Party, the Chinese among them, used this opportunity to infiltrate Thammasat, enlisting around twenty students in their ranks. These students came from various rural areas in Thailand, so they had strong links with the Thai peasantry. It was through this link, through this new batch of cadres recruited from Thammasat, that the Thai Communist Party, which had for the longest time been composed mainly of Chinese and Middle Easterners, took on a Thai identity. They discovered that in order to nationalize the party, they had to recruit intellectuals. It was through these indigenous intellectuals that the party could go to the peasantry. Having done this, they started organizing the peasants in preparation for an armed struggle. Their strategy was based on classical Maoist thought: a national democratic revolution from the countryside to surround the urban army and the city, and in the end, take over the government .

A peasant revolution is the key ingredient for the party whose entire program included reforms that provided for a new flow of power. After a long period of gestation and preparation of sending urban cadres to implant themselves in the countryside for ten or twenty years, they looked to initiate an armed struggle in 1965, first in the northeast, then in the south, and finally in the north. In the end they were all over the country for about twenty years. In 1985 the party's armed struggle collapsed—and that's another story. In any case, this was the fullest attempt by the CPT to bridge the urban-rural divide through armed struggle.

The second political force that tried to bridge the urban-rural divide was the student movement, and it happened after the uprising in 1933. Of course, when the student movement fought against the military

dictatorship in 1933, they were not yet very keen on this issue. There were then a liberal democratic force and even a royalist one; they really loved the king. But after 1933, the movement underwent a period of rapid radicalization through various ideological forces. First and chief among these was the jungle Left, the CPT, which reached the student movement through its underground cadres in the city and also through the broadcast of the Voice of the People of Thailand in clandestine radio stations located in Yunnan. The Chinese comrades provided the protection, the technology, and the space to set up the station and broadcast in Thailand. The student movement learned about Thai society through the analysis of Maoist discourse through these sources, and in the process radicalized themselves. Second, there was this speculation of the rebirth of the old Left because back in the 1950s, when the first batch of Thammasat University students were recruited by the communist party and went into the jungle, they left behind a lot of radical literature representative of the best minds of the time, which included the best fictionists. This literature would be banned by the military for fifteen years so the people were not aware they existed. After 1933, they were brought out, republished, and distributed very widely. They became popular again. So it was the legacy of the old Left of the 1950s that also helped radicalize the student movement of the 1970s.

The third source of radicalization came from China: the great Chairman Mao. Have you ever heard of the song about Mao Zedong, which tells of China having given birth to the great son Mao Zedong? This became very popular. Selections from Mao's *Little Red Book* were translated in Thai. So Chairman Mao also became an inspiration. I think the Philippines shares a similar experience, which anyhow happened all over Southeast Asia. I met a Malaysian colleague who also said that he became radicalized by Chairman Mao. Incidentally, a comparative study of "Maoistization" in the 1970s would make a good research topic.

The fourth and last source, of course, was the new Left. The student movement became very strong, very active, in the west, in the United States (anti-Vietnam war movement, the civil rights movement, etc.), and even in Japan. One began to hear names like Che Guevara, Fidel Castro, and Herbert Marcuse. These foreign-sounding names became familiar among the Thai student movement.

So it was through these four ideological sources that the Thai student movement became radicalized and bought into the idea of helping the fight for social justice. They started going to the countryside and the factories, working with the workers, organizing the workers, and

organizing the farmers. This of course created a lot of unhappiness among the military and the police. This led eventually to the 1936 massacre, which, in one swoop caused 3,000 students to leave the urban area and join the communist movement in the jungle.

This afternoon, Joel Rocamora told me that this had never happened anywhere else in Southeast Asia. In a way, you could say that those 3,000 kids were the brains of the country. The state spent a lot in giving them education. And in one push, they all lefy the government to join the armed opposition. Three or four years later, they started fighting against the government. Fighting in the jungle with AK-47s in the name of the revolution. This no doubt attracted the adventurous spirit in communist comrades. But once they got to know one another, there emerged both cultural and political differences. There were two main reasons for this: first, the CPT was too dependent on the Chinese party and, second, the party's internal structure lacked democracy. In the end the movement split, precipitating the collapse of the armed communist movement. So the second attempt to bridge the urban-rural divide also failed.

The third attempt was done by the monarchy, starting in the 1960s. The king wanted to solve two things simultaneously because he believed these two problems were closely related. One was the problem of poverty, especially in the countryside, and the other was the problem of communist insurgency. Once one went to the root cause and solved the problem of poverty, one could also lessen the severity of the communist insurgency. The king discovered that the peasantry could be made into a base of counterrevolution in the countryside. If Chairman Mao wanted to turn the peasantry into a base of revolution forces in the countryside, the Thai king discovered that if you worked properly you could turn the peasantry into a base of counterrevolution against the communists in the countryside. So he started various royally initiated projects to create small-scale, quite self-sufficient cooperatives all over the country so that the peasants could withstand the onslaught of the capitalist market economy, keep their balance, and produce enough for their own consumption so that they could deal with the market on the basis of strength and independence rather than of dependence. This, in the end, developed into a doctrine of sufficiency economy.

In the 1980s, after the collapse of the communist movement and as the king went on with these royally initiated projects, it happened that those people who had left the jungle, not only the students and intellectuals but also some of the peasants who had been under communist

leadership, became associated with the monarchical network. Of course, this network had also undergone changes in the 1990s; before then, the king very much associated himself and the institution with right-wing forces, especially the military and the police. But in the 1990s there began to develop a group of liberal and humanitarian social activists and thinkers around the monarchical network, eventually becoming part of it. By "monarchical network" I mean a tie-up and an informal grouping in Thailand centered around the king and the Privy Council, extending to the ranks of the army, the military, the police, and the government officials down to those villages involved in the royally initiated projects—thousands of them around the country. These are all the king's men that the king can utilize and mobilize politically in times of need and crisis. In the 1990s there also developed certain groupings within this network. You could call it a liberal or a humanitarian wing of the monarchical network, which had managed to influence former student activists, ex-communists, and united them, bringing them one way or another under the umbrella of the monarchical network.

I would say that was the main trend of the social movement in the 1990s, including the assembly of the coup. The social movement in Thailand accepted two things that they had rejected under communist leadership: capitalism and the monarchy. In the 1990s, under the influence of this monarchical network, they accepted capitalism but with space for sufficiency economy and the monarchy. So in a way, the social movement turned in the 1990s into "royal extra-parliamentary opposition." In British politics one finds a "loyal parliamentary opposition," referring to the opposition party and the parliament when you can't call the social movement in Thailand in the 1990s royal extra-parliamentary opposition. They are radical in the sense that they want to reform the capitalist economy and that they are against the untrammeled capitalist globalization. But, to some extent, they became de-radicalized.

Finally, the fourth source was Thaksin and the Thai Rak Thai party, which represented big-business interests, which somehow survived the economic meltdown in 1997. And because they survived, they had a lot of money to burn in the elections whereas other capitalist factions had collapsed or were made poorer and thus could not afford to run in the elections anymore. And they want to wrest power because they learned a hard lesson in 1997 that if they let the government be run by those bureaucrats, technocrats, and politicians, they could really ruin business

and IMF tutelage. So they organized the Thai Rak Thai party, ran in elections and won. After they won, what did they do? They tried to create an alliance between big business, the government of big business, the party of big business, and the peasantry in the name of populist consumerism.

In my own understanding, Thaksinomics, the policy initiated by former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, consists mainly of two things: first, the neoliberal privatization for the politically well-connected rich and second, populist consumerism for the working poor. To placate the many inevitable losers in the state-led privatization spree and maintain an investment-friendly social peace, a series of populist policy initiatives were launched by the Thaksin government, which provided relatively easy credit, local employment opportunities, cheap health care, and other basic welfare benefits for the rural and urban poor, especially the fast-growing ranks of workers in the informal economy with irregular jobs not covered by social security provision, particularly those in the informal economy.

This populist policy did spur consumption at grassroots level and stimulated demand in the domestic market, thereby partly helping pull the economy out of recession. The much trumpeted productivist rationale—to create a new generation of market-smart and dynamic small- and medium-sized rural entrepreneurs out of the passive and lethargic peasantry—did not really materialize, and yet the policies were highly popular with the grassroots because for the first time ever the state openhandedly granted them the purchasing power to realize and enjoy the dream of a "normal" middle-class Thai life of consumerist bliss, convenience, and comfort after they have seen it lived out by the urban folks onscreen for a long time. Let me put it this way. If you ask me what the national dream of Thailand is, I would say look at TV advertising. That is Thailand's national dream. If you look at it and analyze it, it is upper-middle class life surrounded by necessary consumer products: DVD player, TV, home theater, refrigerator, washing machine, and many other things. And these become a part of "normal" Thailand. Anyone born a Thai should have this kind of life because it is very good. Everybody else has it, look at it on TV—although actually it is available only to a few, to the minority of the nation, not the majority. But it was represented as the normal life of the Thai nation.

So of course, the poor people bought into it too, and they asked Thai Rak Thai to have that life because they did not have the means. Before Thaksin, the only way they could get their hands on that kind of money

and buy into their dream was through drug trafficking. That is why drug trafficking had become such a big problem in Thailand. And if you read police reports, the police knew who the drug dealers in the village were when, all of a sudden, a family bought a new pickup truck, TV, DVD player, or refrigerator. They were very likely into drug dealing. To look at it another way, they wanted that money to live that dream, to live like the Thai middle class. So Thaksin came up with this program that allowed these urban and rural poor to realize their dream without having to sell drugs and risk their lives. This is why the average household indebtedness also rose markedly in tandem with Thaksin's popularity. He managed to achieve a new kind of political bridge between the urban-rural divide through this policy of populist consumerism.

For a while the palace project of sufficiency economy and Thaksin's project of populist consumerism worked alongside each other, but the two could not really go together. You could say that it hurt for someone who had spent his life trying to bring over the peasantry from the communists and succeeded, only to lose them to a telecom tycoon throwing away good government money. So in the end there was the inevitable split in 2006 between the urban middle-class movement led by the People Alliance for Democracy (PAD) who rose up against Thaksin, consisting of key civil society sector, nongovernment organizations, and people organizations; and the urban and rural poor who organized themselves into so-called Caravan of the Poor, which opposed PAD by trying to protect and defend the Thaksin policy. PAD felt it was not strong enough to topple Thaksin so in the end it asked for and got support from the military and the Palace. Eventually Thaksin was toppled in the coup.

For people of the Octoberist generation, this was something unbelievable. We found it incredible that some of our former comrades were now seeking rights and freedom from the very force that had taken rights and freedom from them in the past. To seek rights and freedom from the military, hoping that a military regime be installed, a rural democratic regime—isn't that a false consciousness of sorts?

But then if you tried to sympathize with them, this made sense because they had been pushed to this extreme by the Thaksin government, which, although elected into power, had engaged in a lot of unconstitutional trampling of civil rights and freedom. The regime eliminated a lot of drug dealers extrajudicially, around 2,500 of them. It killed a lot of suspected terrorist insurgents and Malay insurgents in the south. It was gruesome. These all happened under Thaksin's regime.

So, in a way, one could understand why in the first of the draconian and dictatorial measures exercised by Thaksin, these forces turned to the military and the Palace for rights and freedom. On the other hand, what were the urban and rural poor to do? They were seeking social justice from Thaksin, from the representative of the big business who cheated the nation. It also represents a false consciousness, doesn't it?

So it was very strange, and I think the whole Thai social movement fell into a false consciousness, seeking things they shouldn't from the very force that denied them in the past. But then, why did the urban and rural poor fall for Thaksin? There is also a good reason for that. To put it simply, it is not easy to practice sufficiency economy. It is not easy at all—it's tough. You have to starve yourself of the goodies. To be a good member of this Thai project requires nothing less than avoiding watching television (except perhaps the news). Otherwise you would be mesmerized by this middle-class dream from those TV ads. You need a lot of ideological devotion to the king to deprive yourself of that dream; kill your desire in order to follow in the footsteps of the king, follow the philosophy of sufficiency economy. That is why Thaksin came up with this: don't starve yourself too hard; borrow from us some government money, which you can also use to buy good things; just follow us and we'll continue this good policy.

We have come to the state of the Thai social movement, which is now in a pretty bad state. Supporters of the coup and those of Thaksin are deeply divided; they could not come up with any kind of united front. They could not even come up with any kind of alternative policy platform in place of those suggested by Thaksin.

I think I should end my talk here and answer whatever questions you may have. Thank you very much.

ARNIE TRINIDAD: We will now open the floor to comments and questions. Please state your name and institutional affiliations when you ask your question.

UNIDENTIFIED PERSON: Thank you very much for the very enlightening lecture. I cannot help but see parallelisms between Thailand and the Philippines from the talk of Dr. Tejapira. Like Thailand, the Philippines was under a dictatorship. Then we were able to boot out the dictatorship like Thailand did. And like Thailand we have had to deal with corrupt and inefficient officials, a mass of people who are manipulated by wily politicians, poverty and unequal income

distribution, rural and urban divide, consumerism-divided people, and the incursion of globalization. Finally, like Thailand we are also dreaming of rights and freedom and social justice. But what separates us from Thailand is that they have been able to boot out unpopular leader, and we have yet to boot out our very own unpopular leader, Gloria Macapagal Arroyo. Thank you very much.

TERESA S. ENCARNACION TADEM (DIRECTOR, THIRD WORLD STUDIES CENTER, UP DILIMAN): Dr. Kasian, for the social movements in the Philippines, the turning point is clearly the shift from authoritarianism to democracy. How did such shift from authoritarianism to democratization affect the social movements in Thailand? How about the NGOs? The reason I asked is that there are a lot of members of the Left who transformed themselves into NGOs, which was their means of linking the middle class to the movement.

KASIAN TEJAPIRA: After 1973, the movement in Thailand expanded exponentially. But one should not look at the transition from authoritarian to democracy in just one era. I would say that it actually lasted from 1973 to around 1985 when Prem came to town. It was settled among the elites that some compromise had to be made with the popular forces—semi-democracy—and I think that is a big divide. And before that period, any form of organized movement or organizations of popular sectors was banned by the military. But after 1973, there was a period of rapid growth, which then subsided after the coup attempt in 1976. But it was not easy to resurrect them after the overthrow of the rightist regime in 1977. As for NGOs, its elements started from itself back in the 1960s; reform also came from intellectuals. Prof. Puey Ungphakorn, our former rector from Thammasat University, was active in that. But the big break, I would say, came after the armed struggle's big collapse because NGOs became our Left, those former comrades who still wish to change society but have given up armed struggle, and instead joined the NGO movement.

FERDINAND QUIOCHO (BA POLITICAL SCIENCE STUDENT, UP DILIMAN): I want to inquire into the role played by the king, especially for the civil society, because that is the key difference between the Philippines and Thailand. In Thailand, you have a king. In the Philippines we don't have a king. What then is the role of the king and the media in framing civil society? I understand that the media in Thailand are strongly controlled by the government. In the Philippines it is a very free media.

KASIAN TEJAPIRA: The first has to do with education concerning the monarchy. It is something I have talked about in my previous lectures wherein I analyzed the role of the king in some detail; some of these are available in the Third World Studies Center. But to answer your question briefly, the king has to practice what we called game of balancing the different political powers/forces in Thai nation-state. The idea is try to make the administration a "monarchy" uncontrolled or not dependent on any single force. The trouble after 1932 was that the regime tried to control the administration, tried to make the monarchy dependent on them. It took the monarch, the current king, almost thirty-two years before he freed himself from the straitjacket of various military governments. And he did so by siding at the crucial moment with the student movements in 1973, and by siding with the student movement in 1973 against the military dictatorship; it shifted the balance of power. He did so again in 1992, with Chamlong (Srimuang) and Suchinda (Kraprayoon). He must appear neutral, but there are ways of appearing neutral by shifting the balance.

In 1992, the only card left in the hands of General Suchinda, the prime minister, was to use military force. He lost all legitimacy with his widely publicized killings of "stray people" in the streets of Bangkok. Without the use of military force it ended. Again in 1992, the King sided with the civil society, but the delicate balance maintained in 1976 had by now been upended, but I will not elaborate more on that. I would say that in the case of Thailand, what threatened the monarchy most was the strong executive balance. Whenever there is a strong executive balance of government, sooner or later, it will clash in terms of policy with a politically hegemonic king. If you are not a politically hegemonic king—if you are, say, the current emperor in Japan—then there is no problem with security. But if you are a politically hegemonic king, then there will be some problems with security.

As with the media, there is a big difference. Your understanding that the Thai media are less free than the Philippine media is correct. But there is a distinction. The government controls electronic media, TV and radio, but the press, the newspapers and magazines, are not under government control. By the way, in Thailand, print media predated the creation of the modern state. The first printing machine was brought into Thailand in the early nineteenth century by American missionaries that republished newspapers in English but never in Thai. The Thai kingdom could not control the missionaries because they were American subjects with extraterritorial rights. So rights and freedom are much more easily possible in Thailand when we do not have complete independence. Once we have complete independence,

it is really hard to have rights and freedom. It is an irony of history but true. So the press remained freer than the electronic media in terms of government intervention. But lately the press has begun to merge with the electronic media. You will now have certain media that publish not only newspapers but also controlled cable TV stations. And also, the press in Thailand controls big businesses, and big businesses also intervene in press freedom.

UNIDENTIFIED PERSON: In the Philippines, the middle class played a major role in the social movements and interest groups. I would like to know if this is also the case in Thailand because as I get it, the middle class only gained ground in the social movements during the formation of the anti-Thaksin movements. And I wonder if they also had prominence historically in other Thai social movements in the past.

GLENN SARTILLO (BA Political Science student, UP Diliman): You said that earlier in 1930s, the military banned the publication of radical publications. Then today the social movements sought the help of the military to overthrow the Thaksin government. How did the military regain that respect from the social movements? Before then, was the image of the military negative with respect to the social movements?

KASIAN TEJAPIRA: The middle class was active in 1992 and, to a certain extent, also in 1930. You could also consider the law-student movements and children of the middle class. But generally, my conclusion about the Thai middle class is that they are unreliable, as they can ally with democracy and dictatorship alike. Do not trust them.

As to the question about the military, I think the group that came to power in 1992 was pretty bad, especially when they started killing people in the street. I think that was the police. In 1992 people hated the military in the country very much. There is a story that when a soldier left the camp to buy certain things from ordinary tradesmen, they just refused to serve him. The degree of anger was that high, but that was fifteen years ago, and Thaksin was not really bad. I think it is a case of choosing the lesser evil. After fifteen years of being back in the barracks, a lot of bad things in the past were forgotten.

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