

# IMPERIALISM, MILITARIZATION, AND HUMAN RIGHTS IN ASIA\*

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When we think of Asia today, the three most prominent images that flash in our minds are those of thoroughly transnationalized societies, of nations crushed beneath the weight of militarized regimes, and of peoples struggling to recover their basic humanity against the habitual denial of the most basic of their rights as human beings.

Imperialist subjugation, militarization, and the gross violation of fundamental human rights — this triad of problems which has become the hallmark of Third World existence — has been the object of many analytical studies. Most discussions, however, have tended to treat the three problems in isolation from one another.

For example, when people speak of imperialism, they often think of an alien power imposing its will on an entire society from outside. What is systematically overlooked is that contemporary imperialist domination is very much facilitated by domestic classes and internal structures of dominance, so that today it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to complain against imperialism without at the same time challenging its domestic political enforcers — the local State and the domestic ruling classes that control it. In such a situation, the struggle against imperialism necessarily takes on both a national and a class character.

On the other hand, when people speak of the preponderant role of the military in a given society, there is sometimes a tendency to treat this as a purely domestic affair, and as a function perhaps of the political culture of the people. Little attention, if any, is given to the fact that the military in the Third World has grown phenomenally and has been nourished precisely under the auspices of imperialism. Thus, today, it is no longer ironic or contradictory, but simply logical, to come face-to-face with nations that starve their people while resources go to the purchase of more military hardware. Militarism, for many societies, is no longer an option; it is, rather, a way of life, called into being by imperialist control of these societies.

The same blindness to the interrelatedness of the three problems is manifested in many discussions of human rights violations in Third World countries. When these are not explained away as necessary trade-offs that nations must suffer in the pursuit of development, human rights violations are typically seen as isolated events resulting from the overzealousness of some members of the military who are seen as defending the nation's security against communism. Even among many critics of authoritarian regimes in the Third World, we often note a tendency to view human rights issues in isolation from imperialist domination. Hence, those who seek to democratize society may sometimes even make the mistake of soliciting the help of imperialist governments to rid a nation of its local tyrant. Such moves allow imperialism to distance itself from the activities of some local dictators who may possibly have become unpopular with the people precisely because of their subservience to imperialist interests.

The thesis of this paper centers on four basic points. These are:

1. The poor nations of the Third World, in general, and of Asia, in particular, are locked in a dependent or subordinate position in the world economy. The logic of this global economy is basically capitalist, i.e., it produces primarily in response to market demands rather than in response to human needs. (The simple distinction between "demands" and "needs" is that demands are those needs that are firmly backed up by the capacity to pay. Human needs that are not supported by purchasing power are ignored and therefore are not allowed to determine production.) Under this system, the demands of the advanced capitalist countries, being dominant, come to determine the economic priorities of the less developed countries. And within each respective country, whether rich or poor, the demands of the wealthy classes come to assume higher priority over those of the impoverished classes.

2. Militarization is a complex by-product of the global capitalist accumulation process. In the advanced capitalist countries, militarization, as manifested by the increasing amounts of resources allocated for defense and the development of new weapons, stems from the worldwide demand represented by the arms market. Arms, in short, are a steady source of profits. In the underdeveloped countries, on the

\* Paper read at the 9th General Conference of the Asian Students Association held in Khon Khaen University, Northeastern Thailand, 27 December 1984.

other hand, militarization, as expressed not only in increased defense spending but also in the greater role assumed by the military in civilian affairs, arises from the State's need to promote an atmosphere conducive to the expansion of monopoly capitalism — an atmosphere characterized by the control of dissenters and critics of the system, the repression of labor, the silencing of intellectuals and student activists, the suppression of peasant discontent, and the quick formulation and implementation of economic and political measures demanded by the system.

3. The gross violation of human rights occurs most frequently in those societies that have moved away from parliamentary democracy towards political authoritarianism and militarization. Usually the advent of these repressive-militarized regimes is justified in terms of national security considerations and the supposed prerequisites of development. The most important human rights very frequently violated are: the rights of labor to organize and to strike, the rights of peasants and of tribal peoples to remain in their lands, the right to due process of law, freedom of the press, freedom of assembly, and the right to life itself. Such violations of fundamental rights are systematic, meaning they do not simply arise from the particular cruelty or individual perversion of the military. Rather, they are unavoidable consequences of the form of development imposed on the Third World by global capitalism or imperialism.

4. Three forms of struggle are waged simultaneously in Third World Asia: the struggle for national liberation from foreign domination, the struggle for popular democracy against both elite parliamentarism and dictatorship, and lastly, the struggle to socialize economic opportunities and benefits, if not the ownership itself, of the basic means of production. Hand in hand with these three struggles is the daily struggle against poverty and degradation or, to put it in positive terms, the struggle for development.

While these struggles are not antagonistic to one another, nonetheless, the differential importance that various groups assign to each one of these tends to divide the various sectors that are opposed to existing regimes. For example, organized electoral parties that have been marginalized by the rise of emergency authoritarian governments tend to stress the goal of democratization. Big businessmen who see a large portion of their profits being appropriated by a parasitic military may join the bandwagon of democratization, but in addition, they may actively seek to postpone or derail the anti-imperialist struggle because of their close connections with transnational corporations. Peasant and labor groups may raise the banner of social justice, but may not comprehend the urgency of the struggle for national liberation. And intellectuals, writers, professionals, and student activists may be committed to national liberation and democratization as immediate goals, but may not be able to align themselves as easily and as meaningfully with the struggles of the working classes. These are not only possibilities; in truth, they are some of the fundamental dilemmas now already confronting militant movements all over the Third World. In such situations, intellectuals and militant student movements are in the best position to serve as the horizontal links that would connect these various forms of struggle to one another. To play this role effectively, we must under-

stand the concrete inter-relationships among the various phenomena that these struggles seek to confront in much of the Third World today.

To restate the basic argument that weaves these four points into a single picture: imperialist domination of underdeveloped countries encourages and supports the rise of authoritarian and militaristic regimes in these countries. These regimes exercise power either through the flagrant violation of human rights or the more sinister appeal to a temporary trade-off between rights and development. Such human rights violations breed popular resistance to these regimes which respond with even more repressive and militaristic acts. As a result, their need for more military assistance reinforces their dependence on the imperialist powers. And so goes this vicious cycle of dependence, militarization, and repression, at every turn producing greater prospects for revolution.

In the sections that follow, the paper discusses in greater detail the varied manifestations of imperialist domination, the different faces of political authoritarianism of which militarization is just one expression, and the consequences of these processes on human rights in Asia. The discussion ends with a consideration of the multiple forms that the struggle against these processes are taking in the contemporary period. Within the womb of these manifold struggles, the student movement will most certainly play a strategic role. I therefore attempt to analyze the implications of this complex developing situation for the student movement as a whole.

## IMPERIALISM

This refers to a higher stage in the development of capitalism. More specifically, it designates that particular phase in the development of capitalism where capitalists from the developed countries, confronted with the prospect of dwindling investment opportunities, decide to extend their operations beyond their home base. This penetration usually starts with the importation of cheap raw materials from the underdeveloped countries, coupled with the sale of manufactured commodities to the elites of these countries. Later, imperialist expansion takes the form of capital export, or the establishment of investment concerns in underdeveloped countries primarily to take advantage of cheap labor.

Imperialism is usually distinguished from colonialism. The latter is often equated with the forcible annexation of the territory and subjugation of a people by another, a political act that has now been outlawed by no less than the United Nations. In the case of imperialism, the autonomy and sovereignty of the host country is theoretically preserved, the assumption being that the presence of the foreigner is not something imposed on the native population.

In terms of consequences, however, we now see that there is little difference between colonialism and imperialism. Colonial plunder meant the seizure of resources that constituted the basis for the subsistence of the subject population. Imperialist exploitation has not been much different. While Marx welcomed the advent of capitalism in Europe as the harbinger of technological advance and greater productivity, this is not the role that imperial capitalism is playing in most Third World countries. Instead of serving as the vanguard

for new production technologies that would extend labor power and multiply productivity, imperial capital has basically preserved existing economic patterns, which are principally agricultural and extractive in nature. Its impact has been to accelerate and expand these extractive activities (like mining) on behalf of the accumulation process directed from developed countries. What we have here is what political economists term "primitive accumulation" in contrast to expanded reproduction.

What has been the impact of this type of imperialist penetration of Third World countries? Firstly, very little technological advance results from it. The capital that is accumulated is harnessed to further advance the economies of developed countries rather than placed in the service of an internal accumulation process. Secondly, the native population is further reduced to below subsistence levels, is marginalized, or totally excluded from further using the natural resources that previously sustained their lives. For example, ancestral farm lands are usually taken over, usually by the State, and placed at the disposal of transnational agribusiness corporations. Rich forests from which many upland communities traditionally drew everything they needed have been converted into timber concessions for the export market. Entire mountains have been appropriated by mining companies, throwing off entire communities. Mine tailings from these mining operations flow into rivers and streams, rendering these completely inhospitable to marine life on which fishing communities depend for their livelihood. The sophisticated trawler boats of fishing companies comb the shores of these countries, in the process dragging down corals which serve as sanctuaries for fish, leaving nothing to local fishermen. Regimes hospitable to foreign enterprises build gigantic dams to generate hydroelectric power to run factories and export-processing zones to house assembly plants of foreign corporations, totally unmindful of the destruction and dislocation that pre-existing communities have had to suffer in the process.

All these seem to tell us that the general impact of imperial capitalism on our countries has not been to develop technology or to raise the productivity of our people, but rather to take away the resource base on which our people have made their lives for centuries.

In the time of Marx, capitalism was just beginning to extend its reaches far beyond its original moorings. Marx saw in this the promise of progress for the peripheral countries, though he anticipated that the process of imperialist penetration was going to be painful since this entailed a destruction of old ways of life and their replacement by production systems that, in the final analysis, would constitute the basis for an advanced, progressive and productive economy. Marx's predictions have come true, except where he spoke of economies in the colonial countries being transformed into productive and modern structures patterned after the industrial structures of Europe. That promise has not been fulfilled. Yet all the dislocation, all the pain, the suffering and the impoverishment have come true. And Third World economies are nowhere near the type of progressive industrial structures that Marx associated with capitalism in Europe. What we have in our part of the world are economies that are unevenly developed, economies that have been fragmented or "disarticu-

lated", economies that fulfill peripheral roles within a global production system and people who have been displaced and marginalized instead of brought into the circuit of modern industrial systems as productive skilled labor.

Imperial capitalism has not fulfilled the expectations of Marx because capitalism has become increasingly parasitic instead of productive. Instead of innovating technologically to sustain its hunger for profit, the new capitalism has increasingly drawn its profits from super-exploitation, from the imposition of outmoded production systems made possible by political repression. It is significantly a return to primitive accumulation, the expropriation of wealth based on the use of political and military power. In a word, global capitalism has tried to solve its persistent crisis not so much by continuously innovating technologically, but by making Third World countries produce the wealth needed to sustain existing lifestyles in the First World.

The key actors in this game of contemporary imperialist plunder are the repressive authoritarian client regimes of the Third World which are abundantly equipped with modern arms to keep their populations quiet. And the mechanisms for Third World super-exploitations have become varied. More recently, the debt trap has occupied center stage. Through this mechanism, entire nations are being systematically starved by their governments in the name of national austerity in order to meet interest payments on foreign loans. Such regimes have dutifully complied with the harsh conditions for repayment imposed by the multilateral institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (WB) for the simple reason that they and the ruling classes associated with them have also become beneficiaries in this wholesale plunder of their own people.

The debt trap into which many Asian countries have fallen has provided imperialist nations — the United States in particular — an important leverage with which to whip indebted nations into line. Though these debts may be owed to different private banks and a number of governments, the central role played by the IMF (International Monetary Fund) in restructuring these debts allows the American government, because of the weight that its voice carries in the financial circles, to decisively control the whole process. It is in this light, for instance, that one may begin to understand Ronald Reagan's pronouncement concerning the Marcos government to the effect that, despite widespread reports of human rights violations under that government, America will likely continue to support it because the alternative would be a hostile "communist dictatorship".

It is becoming very clear that America will not allow another Cuba or another Vietnam to emerge in its backwaters. This is why it is frantically propping up the dictatorship in El Salvador and Chile; why it crushed the progressive government in Grenada; why it is threatening to invade Nicaragua, and why it is desperately supporting the beleaguered dictatorship of Marcos. Any political or economic initiative in the direction of greater autonomy from the American sphere of influence is at once seen as a hostile move that must be nipped in the bud.

It is not difficult to see why the United States, being the

most powerful country in the capitalist world, would seek to intervene in the internal affairs of other nations — especially of those in the Third World — just to preserve the system of global exploitation. The advanced capitalist countries have developed a way of life that is extremely dependent on Third World resources. Perhaps a few interesting facts would illustrate this point.

Human life is dependent on resources derived from 5 basic sources: oceanic fisheries, grasslands, forests, agricultural croplands, and minerals.<sup>1</sup>

1. *Tropical Forests.* It is said that it takes no less than 400 years to grow a primary forest, yet with modern logging equipment, it takes only a few days to clean up the same area of forest cover. This rich natural resource is being destroyed at the rate of 29,000 square miles every year.<sup>2</sup> Over 80% of the US hardwood imports come from the tropical areas of the Third World. Western Europe, Japan, Korea, and Taiwan are also massive users of tropical hardwood coming from West Africa, Malaysia, Borneo, Indonesia, and the Philippines. More than 70% of the international trade in tropical hardwood, in fact, comes only from Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines. We supply mainly the US and Japan. Europe obtains its supply of tropical hardwood mainly from the Ivory Coast, Gabon, Cameroon, and Liberia. Two-thirds of Asian forests are already gone.

Tropical wood has a variety of industrial uses. But a large amount of timber is also used to make matches, as well as to cure tobacco. One estimate places the amount of wood burned to cure tobacco at 12% of total forests cut. Two or three hectares of trees are usually felled to cure one ton of tobacco.

2. *Agricultural Lands.* In the past, native populations of Third World countries used all the lands to grow their staple food. Today, these same lands are used to grow coffee, tea, sugar, bananas, coconut, palm oil, pineapple, rubber, cocoa, and flowers for the markets of the industrial world. The natives grow these themselves in plantations controlled by agribusiness transnationals. As for the food they need, native populations now have to import these in increasing quantities. For example, about 55% of total farmlands in the Philippines are planted to export crops. Approximately 29,000 hectares of Mindanao's most fertile lands are planted to bananas alone, which are mostly sold to Japan. Meanwhile, the Philippines has begun to import rice from Indonesia and Thailand.

Central America and South America fare no better. They are the most important sources of cattle-beef, coffee, vegetables, and flowers for the US market. One-half of Central America's agricultural land is now devoted to export crops.

Africa presents the most appalling figures — in this continent of famine and starvation, land is used to grow rubber, tobacco, sugar, palm oil, cotton, and coffee. Twelve countries in Africa are dependent on just one main crop for over 70% of their national income.

Who control the growing or the marketing of these commodities? They are among the most powerful and the largest of the transnational corporations: United Brands (formerly United Fruit), R. J. Reynolds, which has taken over Del

Monte, Castle and Cooke (Dole), Brooke Bond, Cadbury, Schweppes, James Finlay and Co., Firestone Rubber, Inchcape & Co., Nestle, Tate & Lyle, and Unilever.

3. *Fisheries.* The sea has always sustained life everywhere because of the rich bounty it offers especially to communities that have settled on its shores. However, modern fishing vessels from the developed countries have virtually pre-empted fishing grounds all over the world. Japanese trawl boats, for example, are the bane of all fishermen throughout Asia. When a trawl boat lowers its nets, it destroys everything on its path, leaving nothing for the local fishermen. It is one of the particular tragedies of Third World nations like the Philippines that we are actually net fish importers in spite of living in an archipelago surrounded by oceans of fish. We supply Japan some of its biggest tuna and prawns, while we continue to import canned mackerel from Japan. And the price of canned fish has gone up considerably because of the demand by importers from the US and Europe where canned fish is also sold as pet food. Once we realize that fish is not only for human consumption but also for conversion to fish meal — a vital ingredient in poultry and livestock feed — then we will understand why control of fishing waters is so heavily protected by the developed countries.

4. *Grasslands.* Large amounts of former forest lands have been converted into pasture lands for beef cattle grown mainly for export. The conversion process — which in Latin America alone is responsible for 20,000 hectares of land every year — has moved a noted scientist, Dr. Norman Myers, to call this the "hamburgerization"<sup>3</sup> of Latin American tropical forests. This is a pointed reference to the fact that the cattle raised on these pasture lands supply the beef used by the US food chain transnationals like McDonald's and Wendy's.

This pattern of exporting high-protein foods to the developed countries takes place in other ways. Every year, the underdeveloped countries send to the developed world about 3.5 million tons of high quality protein foods like fish, beef, oil cakes, lentil, beans and peas, while in return the rich countries export to us something like 2.5 million tons of grain. It is an irony created by imperialism that while the economic activities of the Third World are structured to supply the vital food requirements of the First World, populations of the Third World must accept hunger as a fact of life. Nothing of course can be more irrational from a simple basic human needs perspective than the sight of peasants growing flowers for export to Europe and America while they and the rest of their fellowmen must import the basic staple food they need. Yet no one forces them to grow flowers, other than the circumstances surrounding their economy. Here lies the insidious character of imperialism — that it makes people perform things that directly contravene their long-term interests not by actually coercing them, but by entrapping them in an economic relationship that is totally controlled by multinational giants.

5. *Minerals.* Industrial activity is not possible without mineral ore. Indeed, the industrial economies of the US, Western Europe and Japan rest basically on such natural resources. We are told that these three industrial centers alone consume more than two-thirds of the annual supply of 9 leading minerals. The US is dependent on imports for more than 50% of its needs for about 23 vital minerals. Western Europe and Japan are even more dependent (75%) on imports for critical mine-

erals required by their industries, the most important of which are: iron, nickel, copper, bauxite, chromium, asbestos, manganese, cobalt, zinc, lead, and silver. Asia supplies a large amount of these industrial requirements. One only has to take a look at Southeast Asian export profiles to realize this: Malaysia and Thailand for tin, Philippines for copper, Indonesia for oil. All of these commodities are major foreign exchange earners.

Let me review the points I have made so far. The level of depletion of these vital resources has reached a dangerous point. Primary forests and minerals are virtually non-renewable. Fisheries, grasslands, and croplands are being destroyed beyond recognition by the short-sighted profit-orientation of those who exploit them. In the past, these natural resources permitted simple communities to weave viable lives around them. Today, most of these resources are exploited, abused, and consumed in the service of wasteful lifestyles and consumption patterns in the advanced capitalist countries.

Perhaps because we are quickly running out of these natural resources, or because the export prices of these commodities are declining in the long term, underdeveloped countries like the Philippines, Thailand, India, Sri Lanka, and Pakistan have been exporting a large amount of manpower to the Middle East, to Europe, and the United States. Sometimes called the "brain and brawn" drain, this exodus of labor from the underdeveloped to the advanced capitalist countries and the oil-rich countries can only have long-term negative effects on the economy and social structure of the manpower-exporting countries.

### AUTHORITARIANISM

In the foregoing section, we have tried to show how imperialism has snatched from the hands of native populations the same natural resources on which they have built their societies. This form of super-exploitation, which entails the displacement of communities from their ancestral moorings, can only be undertaken with the assistance of authoritarian political structures. This is why emergency governments or martial law regimes are set up. They are the local enforcers of the logic of global capitalist accumulation. Having said this, we must not commit the mistake of thinking that imperialism by itself is causing the repression. The repression is caused by Third World regimes operating within the exigencies of the imperialist accumulation process, but their interests are not necessarily identical with those of imperialism. This fact permits us to understand why in some instances, the imperialist powers may try to establish a distance between them and erstwhile client regimes and even to criticize their excessive human rights abuses.

Authoritarian regimes in the Third World have been assigned various labels. They are sometimes called "bureaucratic-authoritarian", or "modernizing autocracy" in obvious reference to their developmental goals, or "corporatist", "neofascist" or "technofascist" or "developmental-fascist" regimes. Herbert Feith, the Australian political scientist, refers to them simply as "repressive-developmental" regimes, which he characterizes as, "strong state regimes engaged in facilitating fast capitalist growth, some of it industrialization, in the era of the transnational corporation. Warmly hospitable to transnational business, and dependent on it in many ways, they nevertheless avoid becoming its comprador vassals. Their poli-

tical form is characterized by a heavy weight of power...and a strong drive to eliminate or subordinate all potential centers of countervailing power. Their ideological form has three elements: the developmentalist-technocratic, the nationalistic, and the militaristic. And they have a strong disposition to expand the capacities of their bureaucratic apparatus, using that expansion to facilitate school-based social mobility."<sup>4</sup>

Taking five Asian regimes as example, Herbert Feith proceeds to define the basic characteristics of these "repressive-developmental" regimes. The five Asian cases he discusses are: Iran under the Shah, South Korea, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Singapore. Five interrelated features of these regimes are discussed: (1) their dependent economic growth, (2) intensified political repression, (3) their statist and developmentalist ideology, (4) the bureaucratic streamlining or the ascendancy of "technocrats", and (5) the re-stratification of their class formations. Let us discuss these aspects briefly:

1. *Dependent Economic Growth.* The imposition of political authoritarianism has usually been followed by very high rates of growth in the economy. A large part of this is ascribable to the sudden massive inflow of foreign investments and loans which serve to fuel economic activity. In the case of Singapore and South Korea, the process led to phenomenal growth rates which served to promote the virtues of dictatorship. The same is true for Iran under the Shah, which became a kind of showcase for Third World modernization. The Philippines and Indonesia displayed lower growth rates, but the frenzy of economic activity that followed the inauguration of the dictatorship in these two countries somehow seemed to vindicate the dictators that had assumed power. Underneath the phenomenal growth rates, however, was the reality of a fragile and heavily dependent economy which could collapse anytime. The recent economic and financial crisis in the Philippines in the aftermath of the Aquino assassination demonstrates this vividly.

One other aspect highlighted by Feith in his discussion of economic growth under the auspices of authoritarianism is the growth of the State sector of the economy and the close alliance between the TNCs and State corporations. Apart from the services provided by the State in the form of roads, bridges, airports, harbors, telecommunication facilities, and industrial zones all mostly built with foreign loans, the State has also moved into areas of investment that entailed considerable amounts of capital. This too was provided by the State, using borrowed funds from abroad. The Philippine experience today abundantly shows that when these investments fail, the burden of paying back the debts incurred in the process must be totally absorbed by the entire nation in the form of higher taxes, higher prices, low wages, and reduced value of the local currency.

2. *Political Repression.* Perhaps this is the most notorious feature of the repressive-developmental regimes that have cropped up in the decade of the sixties and the seventies. Feith argues that the forms that this repression takes vary from stage to stage in the life of the dictatorship. The first stage is the total dismantling of the power centers of the defeated enemy: peasant organizations, militant trade unions, ethnic associations, and in the case of the Philippines, this included the disarming and imprisonment of the private

armies of landlords and politicians, whether friend or foe of the government. The second stage is the strengthening of the support groups of the regime notably the military. The military is usually expanded and provided with more modern weapons. Independent-minded officers are purged, while loyalists are placed in strategic positions. Sectors that participated actively or passively in the dismantling of the old system are consolidated, taking care to reduce the freedom of those that are capable of mass organizing. The third phase is the maintenance of a vigilant watch especially in the wake of new dissatisfactions that may arise as a result of the restructuring process. Instant elites, palace millionaires, or "crony capitalists" may surface overnight and become the object of envy and dissatisfaction. In addition, surveillance is kept on potential centers of opposition: religious organizations, universities or urban middle-class groupings.<sup>5</sup>

3. *Statist and Developmentalist Ideology.* The regimes we are dealing with buttress their military supremacy with periodic ideological calls to national unity and discipline. This form of nationalism which is inward-looking (in contrast to the external-oriented anti-imperialist nationalism) seeks to subsume politics beneath the moral claims of the State. To preserve the imagined integrity of the nation-state against all those who threaten it — secessionists, communists, recalcitrant politicians and businessmen, etc. — this is the standard call that is made from time to time. In addition to this, the doctrine of development is projected, and the whole nation is called upon to make sacrifices to hasten the attainment of development goals. Under the guidance of these twin goals of national security and national development, the military comes to assume enormous powers within civilian institutions. In countries like Thailand, Indonesia and South Korea, where the military constitutes an overt political presence, there is systematic cultivation of the image of the military as the unifier of the nation. History books are sometimes rewritten, as in Indonesia, to stress the centrality of the military's role in the formation of the nation.

4. *The Rise of a Technocracy.* A fascinating feature of the new authoritarian regimes of Third World Asia is the rise of young foreign-educated professional bureaucrats, better known as "technocrats", or problem-solvers who see themselves as beyond politics, but whose real function is to convert most public issues from objects of politics to objects of technical decision-making. One sees them all over Asia — MBAs and Ph.D.s from Berkeley or Cornell, Harvard, Cambridge or Sussex. A number of them are in fact former student militants sent abroad by the new dispensation on graduate fellowships. The entry of these technocrats into the socio-political structures of Asian nations has been a factor contributing to the further transnationalization of these societies. Trained in the same neo-classical economics or functionalist social science from America, this young breed of techno-fascists see themselves essentially as planners. They have no patience with popular politics. The language they speak is the same language that the IMF-WB technical consultants speak. It is the language of economic aggregates or performance targets, of GNP per capita or growth rates. They have no considerations for basic human needs because these are non-quantifiable in their view. And they do not question the basic assumptions of the global capitalist system, which they see as not only being natural, but also irreplaceable. One will note that

such orientation is the same ideological thinking we often encounter in the schools of economics and social science in Asia. This is not surprising. The technocrats also happen to be part-time faculty members, and the university is a source not only of intellectual aura, but also of fresh recruits to work as research assistants in their projects.

5. *Re-stratification.* This refers to the changes in the class formation of these societies laboring under authoritarian regimes. Usually, the advent of these modernizing authoritarian governments signals the decline of the political and economic power of the old classes such as the landlords and compradors, or in some cases, of the fledgling indigenous bourgeoisie who rose to power during a period of national economic protectionism. In the Philippines, the martial law regime of Marcos identified two enemy targets: the communists and the oligarchs, the latter referring to the landbased millionaires who dominated Philippine politics like feudal godfathers. Today, much of the old oligarchy has receded from power, though they have not really been dispossessed, except for a few families. Their commanding positions have been taken over by new millionaires: generals, relatives and friends of the palace or "cronies" as we call them, bureaucrats and ministers, investment and trading houses dealing in borrowed money and merchandise imports. It is a collection of parasitic classes whose fortunes have been built not from solid economic production but from corruption and influence-peddling. In the Philippines, the basis of this crony capitalist accumulation was the large foreign debt; in Indonesia, it was the large revenue from the sale of oil. The preponderance of accumulation by corruption all over Asia, with a few exceptions here and there like Singapore, constitutes one of the strategic vulnerable points of these regimes. Because of the moral revulsion that corruption evokes, in the future the struggle to combat corruption promises to be a leading theme of the overall democratic struggle.

## HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS

In the foregoing notes, I have chosen to discuss authoritarianism in its structural aspects. Beneath the academic language with which many theoreticians try to explain the phenomenon of political authoritarianism — whether in its civilian or overtly militaristic form — is a trail of human degradation and cruelty.

We have heard of summary executions in Indonesia and in the Philippines by the Gali, as they are called in Jakarta or "secret marshalls", as they are called in Manila. We have heard of arrests in Thailand for political offenses that are supposedly injurious to the monarchy. We have heard of attempts at genetic engineering in Singapore, of restrictions of associations in Malaysia, of the regulation of media everywhere. Violations of human dignity are rampant everywhere, so much so that it is easy for many of those who live in these countries to start regarding them as a fact of life. We should not get used to these. In the Philippines, we are fortunate to have organizations and groups that are constantly reminding us of what has happened to so many of our people in the hands of the regime. I want to share some of the facts that have been collected, as a way of illustrating what generally happens to human rights when society becomes militarized. I looked at the figures for 1983 alone, and this is what I saw: political arrests: 2088; salvaging or

summary executions: 369; disappearances: 145; massacres of entire villages, groups or communities: 30 incidents and 163 persons killed; and torture cases: 644.<sup>6</sup>

Of these reported cases of military atrocity, in my view, torture constitutes the biggest shame on humankind. We should, as David Hawk of Amnesty International implores us all, "Make torture as unthinkable as slavery." In the Philippines, torture follows the classic patterns set by the military in Latin America. The most common methods used were recently reported in the January–June 1984 issue of *TRENDS*,<sup>7</sup> a publication of Task Force Detainees of the Philippines. They are as follows:

1. *Water Cure*: Gallons of water are continuously poured on the victim's face, thus blocking the mouth and the nostrils. What the prisoner feels is suffocation or a sensation of drowning.

2. *The Telephone*: This is termed in other countries as *el telefono* or *golpes de campana* (ringing of the bell). One detainee, Marco Palo, arrested in February 1982, reported the experience of having his ears simultaneously hit from behind. If done with great force, this technique of torture could cause the rupture of one's eardrums.

3. *Wet Submarine*: Documented by *Time* magazine in 1976 as a method used in South America, the "wet submarine" has also been utilized by local torturers. The victim's head is submerged in water, or worse, a toilet bowl.

4. *Electrocution*: Electric cattle prods or electric wires attached to ordinary household current are attached to the victim's body, usually the genitals.

5. *Russian Roulette*: This psy-war trick is done by loading a single bullet, usually a blank, in the cylinder of a revolver. The torturer then spins the cylinder and pulls the trigger the moment it stops. The detainee comes near to losing his wits, wondering whether the gun will fire or not.

Hearing of such cases of inhumanity, President Reagan will most certainly dissociate himself from such atrocities, and will either deny that they occur frequently or insist that these are imperfections that can be forgiven in the fight against communism. Ordinary people in the advanced capitalist democracies will most likely view such violations as aberrations solely to be attributed to the peculiarities of Third World dictators. Most people rarely make the connection between the absence of democracy in the underdeveloped countries and the domination of these societies by global capitalism.

Such violations of human rights as we have noted here are probably the most scandalous, but these are not the only violations that should be brought to public notice. Perhaps more important because of their invisible quality are the systematic violations of human rights arising from the displacement of people, the exploitation of women and children, the siphoning of resources from the poor to the affluent countries, the dumping of dangerous products from the First World like pesticides and harmful drugs that are banned in the First World itself, and the relocation of pollution-generating factories and plants from developed countries to the underdeveloped regions.

All these violations of human rights are committed to

silence the population and to prop up repressive regimes — regimes that manage the systems of societies in the Third World to make them compliant to the demands of the global capitalist system. Thus, human rights violations are all direct consequences of the international division of labor that is enforced by the agencies of imperialist capital throughout the Third World.

## PEOPLE'S RESISTANCE

There is much despair in our part of the world, but the people's will has not been totally crushed. Popular movements are everywhere trying to educate and organize the basic masses not only to topple down the repressive-developmental regimes that have enslaved them, but more importantly, to create new social orders in which people can truly exercise political power. Thus, the movements for democratization that we are witnessing all over Asia are anti-dictatorial but are also very consciously anti-elitist and anti-imperialist. At the same time, from country to country, such movements bear the particular marks of every society's history and culture. Here, therefore, we can only indicate the general features that we can find in Asian popular movements:

1. These popular movements tend to cut across class lines in the sense that various groups and individuals belonging to different classes find themselves in the same position of antagonism to the existing authoritarian regime. In rhetoric at least, there is conscious affirmation of the goals of popular democracy, freedom from foreign domination and intervention, and social justice. The degree of unification varies from country to country. In some instances like Indonesia, Singapore and Malaysia, such initiatives towards the formation of a common front against dictatorship have remained subdued. In the Philippines, these have surfaced in a formidable way because of the crisis sparked by the Aquino assassination. But even in the Philippines, the tensions within the Opposition remain unresolved. They revolve principally around such questions as structure and leadership of the transitional society, methods for getting rid of the present regime, strategies for the short and medium-term, etc.

2. The ideas that animate broad sectoral participation in the democratic movements come from a variety of sources. These range from the religious (such as Islamic and Christian values) to the most secular (like Marxism). Even the political methodology offers a rich array ranging from Gandhian active non-violence to clandestine terrorism, from open pressure politics to underground armed struggle. The new combinations that are being tried are among the most fascinating contributions of the present movements to the methodology of revolution. Nationalism and religious fundamentalism have become the most powerful impetus for transformation.

3. The new popular movements are seldom strictly class-based. Most of the issues they raise go beyond narrow definitions of class interests. Racial parity, national sovereignty, the struggle against sexual oppression, consumer issues, environmental issues, community empowerment through popular legal education — these are among the current issues carried by emerging popular organizations. The novelty of some of these issues allows many groups to avoid falling under the scope of traditional anti-subversion laws which are addressed against Communist Party-led mass organizations.

4. The emerging protest movements all transcend electoral politics; they aim to politicize for active participation at all levels of society, regardless of whether there are elections or not. This form of awakening has served to project many organic leaders drawn from the people themselves, thus paving the way for a necessary transition from politics dominated by prominent personalities to politics constituted and led by the new leaders from the communities themselves.

5. With the possible exception of the Philippine situation where a Marxist party exerts important influence on a variety of mass organizations, people's organizations in most countries of Asia tend to have no coherent national strategies for bringing about change and for confronting the established authoritarian State at the national level. The majority of existing initiatives tend to be focused on the micro-community. Thus, we see a lot of community-based NGOs, but a paucity if not a total absence of national political movements.

6. Lastly, the various efforts to democratize Asian societies are occurring in the context of a global situation characterized by the aggressive determination of the US to discourage and even resist all attempts at establishing popular governments that take a line against transnationals and, which speak about non-alignment in world affairs. Hence, the coming collapse of the authoritarian regimes which were massively supported by the US during the early years of these regimes does not automatically pave the way for the formation of democratic popular governments. America is already actively intervening in the process of selecting the possible leadership of successor governments for it wants to make sure that their experimentation with popular politics does not lead them to a position hostile to American national interests.

#### ROLE OF THE STUDENT MOVEMENT

The question we should ask now is: how can the student movements in every country meaningfully participate in the national effort to create democratic institutions in their country and to prevent the interception of this process by imperialist governments?

1. Firstly, I believe that one must stress the crucial role that students can play in the present political ferment going on in most Asian countries. The open movements are preponderantly middle class-based, activating large numbers of people who have had no previous political involvement. The student movement, precisely because its members tend to be drawn from the same sectors, can work to deepen the political activism of the newly-awakened middle forces. More importantly, the student movement must consciously articulate a class-based bias in order to prevent the middle forces from becoming the harbingers of a new fascism.

2. Secondly, the student movement must seriously address the ideological battle being waged in all the universities. The conservative professors who promote elitist models of economic planning and political governance which assign crucial roles to technocrats and generals must be challenged and opposed. The universities constitute a crucial arena for the ideological and political struggle. Student movements must not abandon this arena to the apologists and problem-solvers of the authoritarian regimes.

3. Thirdly, by virtue of the transitory character of formal education, student organizations and student movements have tended to suffer from a lack of continuity and stability. Each year, a number of student militants graduate and join the ranks of professionals and bureaucrats. Each year, therefore, the process of training student cadres is repeated tediously. Such a situation militates against any form of sustained participation by the student movement in the transformation of society. This problem must be addressed urgently. Initiatives may be taken to forge stable relationships with student cadres even after they have left the universities. This entails evolving new forms through which alumni of the student movement can continue to play substantial roles in the movement while at the same time allowing them to practice their professions.

4. Lastly, as we have tried to show in the previous sections, the problems of militarization, of political dictatorship, and of the persistent violations of human rights have a decisive international dimension. At least two things are indicated by this: (a) the campaign for democratization and liberation of the underdeveloped countries must be supplemented by determined campaigns within the imperialist nations themselves to pressure home governments not to intervene in the political affairs of the societies and to freely allow democratic processes to function, and (b) active solidarity work can be mounted at the regional and global levels not only to lend moral support, but to actively protect the rights of national student organizations to get militantly involved in the affairs of their respective countries.

#### CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I want to say that this paper has tried to cover a wide terrain. Its message, however, is simple and straight-forward: we cannot begin to adequately repair our societies or place them on the democratic track unless we fully understand or realize that the dictators who have preempted national politics in our countries are not aberrations in our political history, but are rather part and parcel of the scenario of global imperialism. This being the case, we must be wary of the real prospect that the collapse of the present dictators may mean only the replacement of the personalities while the system itself is carefully preserved. I am completely convinced that the militant involvement of Asian students in these crucial events that are unfolding in their societies will prevent such cosmetic superficial changes from taking the place of substantive and meaningful social change which our people deserve.

#### NOTES:

1. See Lester Brown, *The 29th Day*, Norton, New York, 1978.
2. *The Observer*, March 1, 1984, as cited in Meenakshi Raman, "Third World Exhaustion of Resources By The First World - The Historical and Current Situation", paper presented at the Conference on Third World Development or Crisis, 9-14 November 1984, Penang, Malaysia.
3. Norman Myers, *The Sinking Ark*, and also "The Hamburger Connection: How Central America's Forests Become North America's Hamburgers", *AMBIO*, vol. 10, no. 1, 1981.
4. Herbert Feith, "Repressive Developmentalist Regimes in Asia", *Alternatives*, vol. 7, no. 4, 1981, p. 493.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 498.
6. As reported in *TRENDS*, A Task Force Detainees Philippines (TFDP) Report on Political Detention, Salvaging and Disappearances, January-June 1984, p. 11.
7. *Ibid.*