Strategy Development for Labor Programs
Task Order #5

Report on Asia Research Trip
on Labor Programs
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Democracy and Governance IQC - Civil Society
United States Agency for International Development
Center for Democracy and Governance
Original Contract No. AEP-5468-1-00-6013-00
New Management System No. AEP 1-00-96-90013-00

Submitted to:
Center for Democracy and Governance, USAID/W

Initial Draft, June 9, 2000

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The goal of Task Order #5, "Strategy Development for Labor Programs" was to provide USAID's Center for Democracy and Governance with background information and policy concepts for use in USAID's subsequent preparation of a strategic framework for future labor projects.

Two workshops were held, one in Washington, D.C. and one in Costa Rica, at which development experts from USAID, the AFL-CIO's Solidarity Center, NGOs, academia, and developing-country labor movements discussed the lessons learned from USAID labor programs in the past, and what those lessons indicate as to how future labor programs should be designed to succeed in the present changed circumstances.

A study tour of three Asian countries was conducted in May, 2000, by Robert Senser, a World Learning consultant with extensive experience working with labor in Asia, and Michaela Meehan, the COTR on this project at the USAID/Wash Center on Democracy and Governance. They were supported by the field offices of the AFL-CIO's Center for International Labor Solidarity (ACILS).

The study team spent one week in each of the three countries selected: Thailand, Indonesia, and the Philippines. They interviewed USAID officers in each country in both the D&G and the Economic Growth units, the ACILS country directors, local trade-union leaders, and local academicians specializing in labor matters. The team also made field visits to observe activities in the areas of both labor education and social projects. This report, drafted by Mr. Senser, contains the team's findings, for use in devising the eventual USAID strategic framework for labor projects.

This project was carried out through a Task Order under World Learning’s Democracy and Governance Indefinite Quantity Contract No. AEP-5468-I-00-613-00: Strengthening Civil Society. Under this contract World Learning has provided rapid-response technical assistance to support the civil society programs of USAID Missions and Regional Bureaus.

Work contracted under this IQC has included the design, implementation, and evaluation of short-, medium-, and long-term activities in the areas of:

- strengthening the capacity of civil-society organizations to manage projects and engage in public-policy advocacy;
- enhancing networking and exchange of information among national, U.S., and international civil-society organizations; and
- improving the capacity of independent print and broadcast media to provide the information and policy discussion needed by civil society groups
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INTRODUCTION

A. Michaela Meehan, Senior Labor Advisor of the Agency for International Development, and the writer, Robert A. Senser, a consultant of World Learning Inc., made a study tour of three and a half weeks to Asia in late April and early May, 2000. We spent about a week each in Thailand, Indonesia, and the Philippines, after a brief visit in Hong Kong, China.

The study tour was an activity conducted as part of World Learning’s project for USAID entitled “Strategy Development for Labor Programs.” In fulfilling the objectives of that project, we collected information on labor programs in the four East Asian countries, largely through interviews with people from diverse walks of life: local labor leaders, ordinary working men and women, local academic specialists on labor, employers and employer representatives, USAID and U.S. Embassy personnel, representatives of the International Labor Organization, and staff members of the American Center for International Labor Solidarity (Solidarity Center, for short).

Our original plan was to have the study tour extend beyond Southeast Asia. Our visit to Sri Lanka, however, had to be canceled because of scheduling conflicts.

Each country we visited has many types of U.S.-funded programs in the labor sector. Obviously, we were not able to cover all of them in the limited time we had available, and so it is not possible for this report to provide a comprehensive picture of those activities. Instead, the chapters on individual countries offer snapshots of selected activities. Those snapshots are not as numerous as they could be, but they are a representative sample, focusing on the men and women involved, the contexts in which they operate, and the challenges they face.

Making evaluations was not part of our assignment, and so we did not assess activities by measuring how well they had achieved targets specified in project documents. Rather, we sought to gain insights into the kinds of programs that seemed to work well, in hopes of finding some clues that others might follow.

A logical question is: How much can one generalize from the contents of this report? After all, each of the countries we visited is different in ways not evident from the glimpses offered herein. Yet, even in our brief exposure to the area, we saw significant similarities across national boundaries, similarities covering much more than the labels of favorite drinks and the names of admired movie stars. Everywhere we went we found striking evidence of similar aspirations for a better and freer life, expressed in the same words even if in different languages. Particularly among ordinary working men and women, those aspirations - for a living wage, for decent working conditions, and for equal treatment - are not new, but have become not only much more vocal, but much more broadly amplified, thanks to globalization.

The words of an International Labor Organization expert in Jakarta apply here. Oktavianto Pasaribu, an ILO program officer, is grappling with an enormous task: helping devise a new set of labor laws for Indonesia, to replace repressive Suharto-era legislation with new laws complying with basic international standards. There is “no formula for 100% success,” he said in
an interview. But he was working pro-actively, in a spirit of optimism.

Like Oktavianto Pasaribu, the men and women we were privileged to meet on this study tour face their own kinds of enormous challenges. We were impressed with the optimism they expressed about meeting those challenges.

We are very grateful to them for all the assistance they gave us. Everywhere along the line, with the exception of Hong Kong, we relied heavily on the staff of the Solidarity Center for program information and for help in scheduling outside appointments and in providing interpreters when necessary. To the Solidarity Center staff, we express a special debt of gratitude, and apologies for being unable to describe all of their innovative programs in this report.

The information and insights gained in this study tour supplement findings from discussions of two USAID-sponsored workshops - one in Costa Rica and another in Washington, D.C. - on the roles of labor in economic and political development. The purpose of those two workshops was to gain insights and ideas to assist USAID in crafting a strategic framework for future USAID projects in developing countries. This report is submitted as a contribution to the same purpose.
Democracy's Pioneers

Traffic still moves on the left, as it did in colonial days. Peking Road, in the heart of Hong Kong, is still Peking Road, not Beijing Road. At least on the surface, not much has changed since Hong Kong was absorbed into China nearly three years ago.

The Hong Kong Christian Industrial Committee is still at 57 Peking Road, but on the seventh floor now instead of the third, and with more floor and window space than before. In my visit with Chan Ka Wai, the associate director, I told him: “You ought to put up a sign, down at the building entrance, saying Birthplace of the Hong Kong Democracy Movement.” He agreed, recalling a few of the people and organizations that have grown from its ranks over the years. Its director, Lau Chin Shek, for example, is now president of the Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions and a leader of the pro-democratic minority in the Hong Kong Legislative Council.

The Hong Kong Trade Union Education Center, once housed in the Committee’s third-floor offices, used to be the home of the transport workers union and dozens of other small struggling unions. In 1990 they and other unions formed the Confederation of Trade Unions, whose general secretary is Lee Cheuk Yan, formerly an Industrial Committee staffer.

It is a marvel that the committee and its sister organizations in Hong Kong’s civil society have survived after the 1997 turnover of sovereignty. But, still, there are many worries (“they’re watching us” is one). The future of democracy in Hong Kong is by no means secure, a point reflected in a series of conversations. In confirmation, an editorial in the April 22 issue of the Economist says that “coercion creeps in from Beijing,” mainly because Hong Kong’s chief executive, “elected by a mere 400 people,” ignores the views of the popularly-elected Legislative Council.

As sort of an advance man, I arrived in Hong Kong a day before Michaela Meehan, AID’s senior labor advisor, and I used the time to set up the April 28 schedule for both of us. On the 27th, I also stopped by the offices of another NGO, the Asian Monitor Resource Center, founded some 30 years ago, to chat with its director, Apo Leung, who, too, is a graduate of the Christian Industrial Committee. The Center, unlike the Christian Industrial Committee, has a regional focus extending beyond Hong Kong and neighboring China. For example, it publishes an annual “Asia-Pacific Labor Law Review,” and has run workshops in Indonesia and the Philippines.

While I was visiting the Center’s offices, Apo received a long distance call that illustrates this NGO’s reach. The call was from Bangkok to compare notes about labor developments in Cambodia, and the caller was Phil Robertson, the director of the Bangkok office of the American Center for International Labor Solidarity (ACILS). The sheer coincidence of my being at the Center at that time enabled Robertson to review with me the schedule he was preparing for our
visit starting three days later in Thailand.

A Free Trade Union Within China's Borders

A high point of Friday was a conversation with Lee Cheuk Yan, general secretary of the Confederation of Trade Unions (CTU), in his union office.

Now more than ever, the Confederation is in vigorous competition with a labor grouping long favored by Beijing, the Federation of Trade Unions, which claims a membership of 300,000, double that of the CTU. Various competitive advantages accrue to the pro-Beijing Federation. Helped by subsidies, including those from various businesses it owns, it keeps membership dues low (only 60 HK dollars per year), at least one half under those charged by various CTU affiliates. Hong Kong’s chief executive, Tung Chee Hwa, helps out too. He has appointed a Federation vice president to various jobs as part of a drive to give the Communist side favorable public exposure with the electorate, and “sadly so, it is succeeding.” In recent district board elections, pro-Beijing candidates have for the first time gained equal footing with pro-democracy representatives.

Lee expressed concern about an upcoming meeting of APEC in Beijing, since it may serve to enhance the status of the rival Communist organization in Hong Kong. As is now common during the course of APEC meetings, a delegation of union leaders from the Asia-Pacific region will meet with the Prime Minister of China. Who will represent Hong Kong? Only the CTU’s rival, the Federation of Trade Unions, thus enhancing its position, not just in Hong Kong but regionally. “The strategy is to isolate your enemy,” Lee said, “We are the enemy.”

However, Lee and his co-workers gave no sign of defeatism - far from it. Despite the absence of any legal basis for collective bargaining (a negative legacy of the colonial era), the CTU negotiates agreements with employers on specific issues. It also agitates in support of various public policy issues, including fair treatment of some 180,000 domestic helpers from the Philippines.
The CTU also operates a series of programs designed for jobless workers, who have limited opportunities now that Hong Kong has lost almost all of its manufacturing base. We visited one of its retraining centers well outside of Hong Kong, at Yuen Long in the New Territories. The young CTU organizer there, Winnie Tam, introduced us to three separate classes of women and some men engaged in various types of training, including computer skills.

Keeping Alive the Flame of Freedom in His Homeland

At the studios of Radio Free Asia on Hong Kong Island, we had a very friendly meeting with Han Dong Fang, co-founder of China's first free trade union during the 1989 pro-democracy movement, now editor of the China Labor Bulletin and a regular RFA contributor. His main interest is in keeping up on the actual situation of ordinary workers in China. The phone reports he gets from them add up to a grim picture, and he is able to publicize them freely, not only in his radio broadcasts, but also in the Bulletin, which is published both in English and Chinese. (The Bulletin also maintains a Website at www.china-labour.org.hk.) Worker resentment in the slowly-declining state enterprise sector is particularly bitter, he said, because in closing down those enterprises, Party and government officials involved at the management level are taking good care of their own (and the Party's) interests while ignoring the interests of workers.

Although Han participated in several demonstrations in Hong Kong before 1997, he now keeps a low profile. Surprisingly, his phone conversations with people in China proper are seldom interrupted. Later this year, he will have met Hong Kong residency requirements that should make him eligible for a Chinese passport, if all goes as it is supposed to. Because of his English fluency and other skills, he doubtless could have a useful career in the United States. His burning desire, however, is to live and work in China.
May Day in Bangkok

Two public holidays framed our visit to Thailand--May Day on Monday at the start and Coronation Day on Friday at the end. Both days provided learning opportunities.

Some 10,000 workers participated in this year’s May Day demonstration in the center of the capital. That was widely regarded as a good turnout. The workers and their trade unions kept their ranks in order even though buses, trucks, and automobiles repeatedly broke up the line of march. The Thai unions frequently get criticized for being highly fractured (they are grouped under nine separate “national” centers). But might the policies of the Thai government itself have something to do with this disunity? Police failure to control traffic along the agreed-upon parade route could be a clue.

During a colorful ceremony preceding the address of the Prime Minister, Chuan Leekpai, two young workers - a woman and a man - were permitted to hand him a petition of some sort, and they did so on their knees. A dozen photographers took pictures of this event, but there was neither a photo of it, nor an explanation, in the newspapers the next morning, at least not in the English-language press.

The Bangkok Post did have a front-page report on the Prime Minister’s speech. Its headline: “Low wages better than no wages, Chuan tells workers.” That message was part of his argument against a labor demand to raise the legally mandated minimum wage, which for the Bangkok area now stands at 162 baht (a little over US$4) a day. (In the provinces, the minimum wage is even less – 140 baht a day in the dozen or so provinces near Bangkok and 130 baht for the remaining 60 plus provinces. In a policy being driven by the Board of Investment, there is even talk about setting up a new zone 4 on Thailand’s borders with Cambodia and Burma. Only fears that new industries on the border will cause an even larger influx of illegal migrant workers from these surrounding countries keeps this move at bay.)

An Insiders’ Overview of Situation

In a wide-ranging joint interview with us, Biyachet Klaewklad, president of the Paper and Printing Federation of Thailand, and Somboon Subsarn, deputy secretary general of the State Enterprise Relations Confederation, made the following points:

• In Thailand the legally mandated minimum wage is not a pay floor but sets the actual wage for most workers. In fact, however, some workers get less than that minimum. For a third set of workers, those who are already earning above the minimum, an increase in the minimum translates into a demand for a percentage increase in their own
salaries.

• State enterprise workers endured a nine-year period when they were without a union. They finally (in April, 2000) won back their legal status, not just because of the pressure they themselves exerted, but also because of outside pressures. The AFL-CIO's petition to remove Thailand's trade benefits under the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) helped a lot since it highlighted how the law violated the rights of state-enterprise workers. So did the repeated interventions of the Brussels-based International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU), the Asia-Pacific regional offices of the various International Trade Secretariats (ITS), and various national labor centers in Europe and Asia. (The same military junta of General Suchinda Kraprayoon that abolished state-enterprise workers' rights to form unions was probably responsible for the disappearance and death of Tanong Po-arn, then President of the Labor Congress of Thailand, who was an outspoken critic of the military.)

• A major current issue is the need to adopt a new labor relations law. Many unions, even those in competition with each other, are rallying with much enthusiasm to a campaign to assure that the new legislation will benefit workers. The support given this initiative by the AFL-CIO Solidarity Center is widely appreciated.

Both union leaders said that, as never before, they understand the need to be active in the political process. They have long had close relations with the local AFL-CIO Solidarity Center office, and they both show a good deal of sophistication about public policy issues.

Introducing a Woman Leader of Metal Workers

Wanpen Premkaew, a woman in her mid-40s, is president of the Thai Metalworkers Federation, most of whose 7,000 workers are men. With 300 of her fellow members, she marched behind the Federation's banner in the May Day parade. We met her in the offices of the national center with which the Federation is affiliated, the Labor Congress of Thailand. (An attractive poster on the wall, issued by the International Confederation of Trade Unions, said: "Workers' Rights—a Global Demand.") Our interview with her provided a glimpse into Thai unionism at the local level and also into activism on the national level.

To Michaela's question, "Why do Thai workers join unions?", Ms. Wanpen responded that they do so mainly to get solutions to their on-the-job problems, such as:
-- Wages so low that they are under the legal minimum;
-- Overly long working hours: up to 13 hours a day even if a person is very tired; and
-- Failure to get paid vacations.

After a union is organized, she said, employers generally will respect the rights of workers as granted under the law. If they don't, and if a direct intervention fails, the union helps
get the case settled by the Labor Ministry. “Years ago workers didn’t know their rights,” she said. “Now they are no longer ignorant.” A strong union also gives workers protection against unfair terminations. Union activists, however, are at a great risk of being fired because many employers still oppose unionization.

Ms. Wanpen rates labor policies of her own company (a Japanese-owned auto parts plant) as good – even exceptional. She has been there for 28 years. She started as a production worker and is now classified as a trainer, but for eight years her employer has permitted her to work full-time for the union. Her employer deducts the monthly union dues (20 Baht) from members’ pay.

She volunteered the information that most leadership in Thai union posts have been held by men, and still are. The Federation’s general secretary is a man. He represents the union at meetings of the Geneva-headquartered International Metalworkers Federation. She’s taken on the task of promoting more participation by women (as have various Solidarity Center program activities), and “now quite a lot of women” are becoming involved. She heads an NGO called the Women Workers Unity Group, a support and counseling network in the Bangkok area. She is also involved in a child care center, the only one in her industrial community, which was established with AFL-CIO assistance 10 years ago and is now self-sustaining. (This child-care center is one of four child care centers run by unions that the Solidarity Center helped set up during the late 1980s and early 1990s, with USAID support. All are now self-sufficient, providing primarily women workers with economical child care options that would be unavailable save for this union program.)

Is there anyone in the parliament from her province who supports the interest of workers? "No". The interests of women? "No". Eighty percent of workers in that heavily industrialized province, she explained, come from different provinces. According to Thai law, in order to vote, they have to travel as far as 500 miles to their home voting districts, and most of them do not spend the time and money to do so.

(Note: The Solidarity Center is now supporting research by the Labor Congress of Thailand (LCT) to find solutions to the absentee ballot problem faced by so many of Thailand’s industrial workers for years. An ad hoc coalition led by the LCT and several labor federations (such as the Paperworkers, the Metalworkers, and the Garment Workers) has held meetings with Election Commission of Thailand officials to urge them to reform election laws and regulations to allow workers to vote where they live and work. Although it is not clear if the campaign will succeed, the unions are determined to make the strongest effort possible. They know that without the right to vote, workers lack a voice, and serious issues like dangerous and dirty factories, non-compliance with wage and labor laws, and union busting by employers will be ignored by their elected representatives.)
Wanpen's contacts with the local AFL-CIO office (then a part of the Asian-American Free Labor Institute, or AAFLI) began about 17 years ago, but remained rather intermittent until the time of Country Representative John Osolnick, about eight years ago. What has been the most important aspect of the training she has received under AFL-CIO programs? "Labor relations", she said.

Her personal development in that area has come not just through workshops, but above all through her active involvement over the past two years in lobbying for a modernized Labor Relations Act. She was among a small circle of union leaders who in 1998 managed to get their hands on a copy of the proposed revisions to national labor relations law prepared by the Ministry of Labor. She and the others found the draft wanting, and were dismayed to be told that almost all the issues had already been settled. The reaction that followed deserves to be described in some detail.

The Anatomy of Labor Law Reform

Phil Robertson, country representative of the American Center for International Labor Solidarity (ACILS) in Thailand, reads and speaks Thai like a native. That gives him a leg up in many ways. It meant that, two years ago, he could read the full text of a bill that the Ministry of Labor had developed to amend the Labor Relations Act of 1975. As a result, he got a headache, literally and figuratively, because many of its provisions seemed to be steps backward.

A major proposal in the draft would permit employers to establish employer-employee committees with the power to make and implement collective bargaining agreements. This could be a handy tool for eliminating the 1,087 existing enterprise-level and industrial unions in the private sector and for preempting the formation of new ones. Among the other objectionable provisions: new restrictions on the right to strike (adding banks, private universities, and cooperatives to the restricted sectors); continued denial of freedom of association to all government personnel, from clerks to university professors; and prohibiting union membership to anyone who does not have Thai nationality at birth.

The entire bill first came to light publicly at a Labor Ministry seminar in September 1998, at which various Thai labor experts and Robertson were members of a panel to discuss a special issue: how unions would be registered under the terms of an amended law. In fact, union registration was the sole topic of the entire two-day conference, because the Ministry was still working on this one section of the law. All other issues had already been decided, and the Ministry felt that it needed no input from the public.

Wanpen and the other Thai labor leaders attending the same seminar (many of whom were seeing the amendments for the first time) had the same reaction as Robertson's to the Ministry's inflexible position. Thus began a major public policy initiative, the first time that the labor movement has been actively engaged, at a very early stage, in the process of reforming any
law in Thailand. It is not a success story, at least not yet, since no amendments have yet been passed or even formally introduced. But there are already these achievements:

--Instead of being just "anti" the government position, union representatives met in a Solidarity-supported series of workshops and informal discussions, agreed on what they are for, and formulated their own draft of amendments. (This has also been done by both the employers' federation and the opposition New Aspiration Party.)

--A group of state enterprise and private sector leaders formed a Committee to Campaign to Reform the Labor Law, and started publicizing how "Labor's LRA" (the version drafted by the unions) differs from current law and from the Labor Ministry draft.

--At the Campaign Committee's urging, experts of the International Labor Organization's technical team for the Asia-Pacific region carefully examined the Ministry draft and returned highly critical comments, explaining article-by-article how the draft falls short of international labor standards.

--With financial support from the Solidarity Center, the Parliament's Labor and Social Welfare Committee, on November 26, 1999, held a combination seminar/public hearing on proposed labor law revisions. Highlighting the importance of the discussions, the Speaker of the Parliament, H.E. Wan Noor Mohammed Matha, opened the seminar. Altogether 362 persons participated, including employer representatives from the Industrial Council of Thailand, to discuss the pros and cons of each of the four drafts of a revised Labor Relations Act. Bills being considered by the Thai Parliament almost never get this kind of public scrutiny. A final report of the findings of four small working groups (set up in the afternoon of the seminar to discuss what reforms were most needed) was formulated into a report by the Committee itself as a guide for discussions during the up-coming second reading of the bill.

What effect this campaign will have on the final law remains unclear. Prospects for some improvements are good, in Robertson's personal view. "The times have changed in Thailand," he has written. "This a no longer a top-down, command control political system where edicts are issued and the citizenry must obey without question."

An Ally in the Academic Community

Lae Dilokvidhyarat is an associate professor of economics at Chulalongkorn University, and director of its Labor and Management Development Center. He has long worked with the AFL-CIO's Bangkok office--about 15 years--and he seemed proud of his role in training those whom he called labor's "rising stars." Most recently, under a contract with the Solidarity Center, he conducted a survey of the problems caused by the 1975 labor law and how they might be addressed. His report (not translated into English) was widely circulated.
In our conversation, he criticized the government for favoring the needs of foreign investors over the needs of Thailand's own people. The minimum wage is too low, with no increase in the past 28 months, a freeze wrongly justified by using consumer price data that doesn't reflect the living costs of ordinary workers. He called the CPI biased for not fully taking into the account the cost of such items as electricity, light bulbs, water, and loan interest rates in the expenses of the lower-income groups.

On the other hand, in the aftermath of the financial crisis and its social impact, the government is more tolerant toward labor protests, and somewhat more open to workers' demands, but "whether there are any results is another matter." The government has become more serious about combating child labor - an area in which it does not meet serious opposition from big corporate interests, because the problem exists chiefly in the small business sector.

Praise for Having the "Guts" to Promote Democracy When the Topic Was Unpopular

At a small luncheon he hosted, Professor Nikom Chandravithun, the first Director-General of the Department of Labor (in the Ministry of Interior, since the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare was only created in 1993) and a former law professor at Thammasat University, spoke of his long association with AAFLI/ACILS, and rattled off the names of past country representatives going back at least two decades. He called them "very devoted, hard working - not like your typical international civil servant coming to Asia." He remembered particularly the democracy workshops run by Phil Fishman when he was the country representative in Thailand: "AAFLI had the guts to hold democracy workshops even when the subject was unpopular here."

His view of the workers' situation is grim: they face low wages, job insecurity, and substandard working conditions. For the past few years, he said, unions have had "full freedom - but they idn't use it to organize." They grew more divided each year, but did show somewhat greater unity at the May Day ceremony this year.

Now in his mid-70s, Nikom is largely retired, but said that he has heard he might be appointed to a new Human Rights Commission. He wants to read up on the latest developments in guaranteeing worker rights in the global economy, and said he would welcome getting any new book on the subject that might be available in a Washington, D.C., bookstore.

Fighting the HIV/AIDS Virus in Burma

With the HIV/AIDS epidemic devastating the people of Burma while the ruling military junta does little about it, the Burma democracy movement has launched a program to address this humanitarian tragedy. The AIDS Initiative for Mobile and Border Populations (AIMBP) is a program initiative of the Solidarity Center with the Federation of Trade Unions - Burma (FTUB), a group that includes both local trade unions composed of migrant workers and also ethnic
nationality organizations working along the Thai-Burma border and inside Burma itself.

The project, led by two Burmese doctors experienced in epidemiology, and HIV/AIDS education and prevention, works with non-traditional partners to raise awareness about HIV/AIDS, provide basic primary health care to migrant workers, and build the capacity of Burmese organizations to implement HIV/AIDS prevention programs on their own.

Among the partners in this project are the Lahu National Development Organization, the Shan Women’s Action Network, the Federation of Trade Unions - Kawthoolei, the Karen Health Workers Union, cross-border medical teams of the Karenni people, the Migrant Karen Laborers Union, and other associations formed by the migrant workers residing illegally in Thailand. Other than input from Solidarity Center Country Representative Robertson, the entire project is planned, managed, and implemented by persons from Burma.

With language skills, cultural knowledge, and contacts unavailable to outside, expatriate organizations, the project’s staff workers are serving as the first line in the international response to HIV/AIDS in Burma. They face huge challenges, ranging from harassment by Thai government officials, the mobility of target migrant worker populations, and huge distances between project areas in the North, Central and Southern parts of the Thai-Burma border. Yet they are building awareness and capacity where none existed, and forming the future nucleus of those who will openly organize to fight against the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Burma when that country returns to democratic rule.

Perspectives of an Amcham Leader

A major concern of Thomas L. Payne, Director of Human Resources for the Asia/Pacific region of Kimberly-Clark and head of the human resources committee of the American Chamber of Commerce in Bangkok, is the quality of education in Thailand. Thailand’s ability to attract foreign direct investment will hinge in large part on having enough young people properly prepared for the world of work.

He spoke on that point at a February 25th meeting between representatives of the Labor Ministry and the Foreign Chambers of Commerce Coordinating Committee, which groups the 22 foreign chambers of commerce active in Bangkok. Part of his presentation dealt with ways Thailand can be a more attractive location for regional headquarters of business firms. Heading the list of his recommendations: “Improve the education system (teachers, curriculum, access, and availability)”.

According to Ukrish Kanchanaketu, director of human resources for Kimberly-Clark in Thailand, a paper plant of his company north of Bangkok has long been unionized, while another one of its plants, south of Bangkok, has had a joint worker-management consultative committee for many years. Both sides are free to bring up issues, he said. Meeting the government’s
minimum wage standards is no problem, he emphasized, because the company's pay scales already exceed those levels. Several thousand unskilled workers - those working in the company's distribution warehouses, who were once classified as "temporary" employees even though many of them worked regularly - are now hired through an outside contractor.

**A Crisis in Thailand's Education System?**

Forty-five leaders (seven of them women) of the National Thai Teachers Union were to participate in a four-day training program starting May 5th. Late in the afternoon the day before, several of them gathered around a cafeteria table for an interview. After presenting some statistics (e.g., 30,000 children aged 7 to 14 don't attend school; teacher salaries are low, starting at 6,360 baht a month), they brought up the problem that seemed uppermost in their minds: 20% of all teachers will be fired in the near future, they said, because of an Asian Development Bank loan requirement that will impose a pupil-teacher ratio of 25 to 1, instead of the present national average of 20 to 1. Even that national average is misleading, since many urban classes have 40 or 50 children in a class with a single teacher. Moreover, some three million youngsters in preschool will be affected by the end of a government subsidy, another ADB condition.

Altogether, they painted a picture of an educational system in crisis. If the situation is really that bad, can't they get some support from their brothers and sisters in other union sectors? "No", they said, because those unions are absorbed in their own problems. What about employers? I told them about the priority that at least one top business executive, Thomas Payne at Kimberly-Clark, places on improving the educational system.

**Getting a Hearing at the Asian Development Bank**

On the day of our departure from Bangkok, May 6th, the 14th annual meeting of the Asian Development Bank began in Chiang Mai, Thailand. Prior to that inter-governmental meeting, the ADB held consultative meetings with NGO groups. A Solidarity Center team composed of Phil Robertson, Beth Shannon (Representative for Cambodia & Malaysia) and Earl Brown (Regional Law Advisor) attended the sessions, and attempted to buttonhole ADB staff members for answers to a plethora of issues and concerns raised by Solidarity Center offices and trade union partners from Thailand, Indonesia, the Philippines, and South Asia.

Discussions with the NGO Liaison people proved largely fruitless, and so the Solidarity Center delegation met with staff members of two ADB departments (Strategic Planning, and Economic and Social Development) and with various national delegations, especially from the United States. The primary themes emphasized were access to information, a seat at the table for labor, increased recognition of labor standards in ADB plans and programs, and an end to harmful loan conditionality packages that exacerbate hardship for workers. In sum, the delegation sought to ensure that the ADB understands that labor is a legitimate representative of
civil society and that the unions will raise issues and demand accountability. These representations seemed to score some points.

(See the Philippine report, below, for more on the ADB.)
Continuity, Even in the Worst of Times

"Is it time to leave Indonesia?"

Staff members of the AFL-CIO Asian-American Free Labor Institute in Washington periodically debated that question during the repressive Suharto years. One program officer who favored shutting down the Institute’s labor program in Indonesia was Timothy Ryan, who is now the country representative in Indonesia for the Institute’s successor organization, the American Center for International Labor Solidarity.

Ryan is glad that his position did not prevail. “Being already on the ground gave us a tremendous advantage during Suharto’s final year and especially after he fell two years ago,” he told us. “Otherwise, we would have had to start almost from scratch.”

As it was, because the AFL-CIO did maintain a presence in Jakarta, the Solidarity Center was quickly able to work with reliable local partners in an array of worker-centered activities contributing to Indonesia’s democratic transition. Those long years of work with local plant-level leaders nurtured a budding progressive movement within the government-controlled union confederation (the old SPSI), which early in 1998 began to link up with Muchtar Pakpahan’s All-Indonesian Prosperity Trade Union (SBSI) and NGO labor activists, eventually finding common ground with the students in opposition to the Suharto dictatorship.

In early 1998 Ryan again faced the question - is it time to leave Indonesia? - but in a different and highly personal context. Sparked by an economic crisis that also became a political crisis, the streets of Jakarta became scenes of mass disorder, with race riots, looting, destruction of property, hundreds of dead, and violent clashes between the police and students. The International School enrollment dropped by 30% as Americans and other foreigners by the thousands left the country. Ryan stayed, but sent his wife and three children to the U.S. on advance home leave, joining them later in the year.

On May 25, 1998, four days after Suharto was forced to resign, the government released one of its most famous prisoners, Muchtar Pakpahan, a trade union leader whom Time magazine in 1994 had hailed as a member of “The Global 200--young leaders for the new millennium.” When Pakpahan and other political prisoners emerged from the gates of Cipinang prison in east Jakarta, the jubilant crowd of 3,000 that greeted them included Tim Ryan and colleagues from the Solidarity Center. Pakpahan’s All-Indonesian Prosperity Trade Union (SBSI), previously outlawed, became one of of the major partners in the Solidarity Center’s labor programs. It is now the fastest-growing union in Indonesia.
Victory at the Victory Long Age Factory

The Victory Long Age footwear plant, in an industrial area on the outskirts of Surabaya, Indonesia's second largest city, made headlines four years ago. On the road nearby, a young law school student turned worker activist, Dita Sari, addressed a huge rally composed mostly of women workers and urged them to stand up for their rights. Some 20,000 workers from Victory Long Age and ten other factories walked off the job that day, July 8, 1996. Security forces reacted by arresting Dita Sari, interrogating her for hours, beating her and throwing her into solitary confinement.

Life is peaceful these days at Victory Long Age factory. At least it was during our late morning visit on May 13th, when we talked separately with the manager and union leaders representing some 5,000 workers. The plant is now covered by a Textile Workers Union contract, as well as by the Reebok code of conduct.

Under the code, according to a change cited by the Taiwanese manager, Joe Lee, the company has adopted a safer water-based adhesive for the soles of Reebok shoes. “Sick days go down” as a result, he said. But, he added, “It all costs money,” and orders are decreasing, citing competition from China and Vietnam.

Sixteen plant-level leaders, all but one female, greeted us in the union office next to the plant's health clinic, just inside the plant gate. Why did they form a union? “Because as individuals we are weak,” one said. What are the main improvements in the eyes of the workers? The specific items they cited were better working hours, no forced overtime, and pregnancy leave (a month and a half before and after birth) on full pay. They also expressed concerns about job security.

They still remember well the 1996 demonstrations, the speech by Dita Sari, and her arrest—“right here,” one said, pointing toward the factory gate.

Late last year the Solidarity Center provided collective bargaining and shop steward training to 200 Victory Long Age workers, almost all women, to improve communication in a plant with a long history of labor unrest. The local union is an affiliate of the Indonesian Textile, Garment, and Leather Workers Union Federation, a major part of the country's labor movement.

Activist Dita Sari Returns to Action

Dita Sari, a 26-year-old former law school student at the University of Indonesia, walked out of the gates of the women's penitentiary near Jakarta at noon on July 5, 1999. TV newscasts heralded her unconditional release after serving three years of a five-year term. The front page of Kompas, Indonesia's most prestigious newspaper, carried a picture of her being greeted at the
penitentiary gate by relatives and friends, who included Tim Ryan and Solidarity Center colleagues.

In May, while Dita Sari was still behind bars, the newly organized Indonesia National Workers' Struggle Front (FNPBI), had named her its president. At a convention where she accepted the nomination, she spoke movingly about her three years in prison. "It is painful, it hurts to be in prison," she said. "But I know there is more pain, more hurt, outside of prison." She pledged to use her new freedom, not to go into politics, as some had urged, but to help organize workers to give them a voice for addressing the problems of Indonesia's working men and women.

The international "Free Dita Sari" campaign that won her freedom was proof of the "very universal character of worker solidarity," as she wrote in a letter to AFL-CIO President John Sweeney thanking him for the AFL-CIO's many efforts on her behalf. Even before her release, the Solidarity Center had helped get her transferred out of the intolerable conditions of a jail in distant East Java to the women's penitentiary closer to home in Jakarta.

A Labor Struggle Center in Surabaya

From the outside, the Surabaya Labor Struggle Center, located down a narrow street in a poor neighborhood where nobody has air-conditioning, looks like any other home in the area. But this unpretentious building is the nerve center of a group of young students and workers allied with Dita Sari's Indonesia National Workers' Struggle Front.

We were barefoot, as were the eleven young people, seven of them women, whom we were interviewing at the Center. And we were all sitting on the cold concrete floor, bracing our backs against a cold concrete wall.

How did the Center get established? It grew out of the student movement, we were told, when some of its activists began to see how workers are oppressed. Its worker members are employed in various factories: specific plants making bread, garments, and chocolate were cited as examples. Workers and students team up to agitate for better conditions, sometimes in small demonstrations. This year, a year after the Center was formed, it had 3,000 people at a May Day demonstration in Surabaya, even though May Day is not a public holiday in Indonesia.

So far the Center's activism has resulted in the registration of unions in four plants, but none of the four has yet been able to reach a collective bargaining agreement. One young man said that the ultimate goal was to have the Center withdraw from such activities when the trade union movement was better equipped to handle them. When might that happen? In two or three years.

At present workers still live in fear because so many workers were fired and blacklisted as a result of the May, 1966 strike wave and because police or military in civilian clothes still are
around to harass workers and even beat up workers. How many workers were fired in 1996? No number is available. Has anyone compiled a list of workers who were penalized after the 1996 strikes? No.

Dita Sari has visited the Center three times since her release. The last time was on April 27th for a seminar. The 150 people in attendance made plans for May Day and explored the problems caused by globalization--e.g., how the price of commodities has affected the Indonesian economy.

An Old-Line Union Far Down the Road of Reform

Rustam Aksam, president of the Indonesian Textile, Garment, and Leather Workers Union Federation, talked with us in the office of the Solidarity Center, with which he and his federation have had a long relationship. Thanks partly to that relationship, the federation, the largest in Indonesia, with a membership of 600,000 in 680 local unions, is by far the most reformed among the six or seven old-line unions that have broken away from the official union structure of the Suharto regime.

The federation, founded in 1973, started to move slowly away from the old top-down structure as early as 1995, Rustam said. The most radical step came at the federation’s congress in October 1999. Thanks to intense preparations, which included getting lessons from the Malaysian textile union in Penang, the 1999 congress for the first time drew two-thirds of its delegates from the plant level. Of the 650 delegates, 450 were local union leaders, whereas previously the delegates were all from district, provincial, and national levels. About 18% of the delegates were women, a small number, considering that most workers in the federation’s various sectors are women, but large compared to the tiny number of women delegates (under 1%) attending previous congresses.

About a fourth of the union leaders at the local level are women, according to Aksam’s estimates. An affirmative action program adopted at the 1999 congress is designed to increase their influence at the national level. Moreover, with Solidarity Center support, the federation is expanding its leadership training program for women.

The federation and the sectors whose workers it represents face serious challenges in the shifting global economy, Rustam said. The shoe sector is in decline because production is moving to China. He claimed that 4,600 workers lost their jobs last October when Reekok transferred orders to China. The firm also failed to make sure that the severance pay from its contractor met the labor code’s requirements. Meanwhile, the domestic market for garments and shoes has shrunk.

Later the Reebok contractor, the Kong Tai company, had its assets auctioned off and workers were being paid severance in sums between $361 and $36,000, based on length of service. The textile union (SPTSK) that represented them brokered this agreement. Still, it
required the Kong Tai workers demonstrating before the parliament several days and in front of the Ministry of Manpower in order to generate enough pressure to get this settlement. SPTSK would never have done this under the Suharto regime.

A British/ILO Contribution

Patrick Quinn, a British trade unionist, is the chief technical adviser for an ILO workers education project centered on factory-level union leaders in Jakarta and Surabaya area industries - among which are the chemical, metal, pharmaceutical, health, and food sectors. Of the 2,000 workers trained in the year-old project, about 30% are women, and 70% are below the age of 35. He complimented the work of the Solidarity Center, with which he coordinates activities.

For the ordinary working man and woman, Quinn pointed out, the most important union is the one at the plant level. That explains the focus of his project. Rank and file don’t care about the “moving of chairs at the national level,” and often may not know the national affiliation of their local union or the name of the national president. Among workers, the best-known national trade union leader is Muchtar Pakpahan, not because of any union title, but because of the suffering he has endured for defending the rights of workers. For the same reason, Quinn said, Dita Sari also rates high, close behind Muchtar Pakpahan.

He finds that more and more unions are demanding a living wage. “Sensible employers are agreeing it,” he said. “Labor is cheap, and a wage concession won’t break the company.”

Two Japanese Plants, Two Different Worlds

The Sony and the Matsushita electronics plants are only a few miles from each other in the Bekasi industrial area east of Jakarta. In the tenor of their labor relations, however, they are worlds apart. At least that was how it appeared on the afternoon of May 12th. The Sony factory was then in the midst of a bitter strike. At the very same time, the Matsushita factory projected a picture of harmonious union-management cooperation.

About 1,000 workers at the Sony television and stereo factory were in the 19th day of a sit-in strike. Six months ago the Sony management adopted a rule that production workers could no longer work sitting down - they had to stand up. That change, and management’s refusal to discuss it, was featured in press accounts. Yudi Winarno, an office worker who chairs the Sony union, cited other issues, such as the need to get written permission to go to the toilet. But the main problem, he indicated, was management’s tough contract-negotiating position “imposed from the top.” The firing of 100 union activists did nothing to calm the situation.

One consequence on May 12th was a dramatic scene under the blazing mid-day sun. Lined up behind the Sony factory fence - within factory grounds - were hundreds of Sony workers, the huge majority of them women. On the other side of the fence, the public side, were more than a hundred metal workers from other plants. They had come in buses to demonstrate
their support for the Sony strikers, most visually by kneeling and bowing down in Moslem prayer on a nearby field.

Workers on both sides of the fence participated in a joint ceremony targeting Sony. Inside the fence, Sony workers in grim costumes circled around a casket draped in black, to symbolize the death of labor-management relations at Sony. Outside the fence, metal workers from other plants took turns at a megaphone to express their solidarity. Tim Ryan, the Solidarity Center representative, declined an invitation to speak, but his friendly conversations with union people were captured by someone with a video camera.

Analyzing the situation for me, Ryan drew a contrast between this protest rally and what one would have been like during the Suharto years. In the past, there would almost never been a show of support from other unions. The police or military would be sure to break up a demonstration, even though peaceful, almost as soon as it started. On May 12th the demonstration took place uninhibited, though no doubt it was monitored (e.g., perhaps by the man with the video camera). A union representative explained that he had given the local police chief advance word.

At the Matsushita plant, just minutes away, we were welcomed by Keigo Watanabe, president and director of Matsushita Kotobuki Electronics Industries Indonesia, and in a separate ceremony by leaders and members of the plant’s union. The plant’s 5,000 workers, more than 3,500 of them women, make VCRs and TV/VCR combinations, all for export.

The union has an office of its own and a meeting room, where we watched a video presentation on Matsushita and its work force. The company president and Roni Febrianto, secretary of the union and also an assistant supervisor for quality assurance, both took us on a prolonged tour of the plant. As we passed assembly lines, the workers took brief notice of us. We noticed that many of them had the option of sitting or standing.

What explains the contrast between Sony and Matsushita? In-depth research of worker and management attitudes at the two plants would be necessary to go beyond the superficial impressions we got.

Garment Workers Get Ready for Negotiations

A banner, partially in English, told us exactly where we were: “A leadership workshop of the plant-level Textile Workers Union (SPTSK) at the Sarasa Ngraha Company, working together with the American Center for International Labor Solidarity. Tangerang, May 11, 2000.”

Sitting around a U-shaped arrangement of tables were twenty-one workers, nine of them women. In the center of the U was an Indonesian member of the Solidarity Center staff, Lina Sihombing, who with the help of a microphone, was leading the workshop. Even with the help of a skilled interpreter, it was possible to follow only some of the spirited discussion, but you could tell from the facial reactions that the workers were paying close attention to points like “don’t
start your negotiations with confrontation.” Ms. Sihombing emphasized the importance of doing research to get the facts: the rights to which they are entitled under the labor law, for example, and the actual financial condition of the company if it claims an inability to grant a wage increase.

In an interview on the sidelines of the workshop, we learned these details from a district representative of the union: The plant, owned jointly by Taiwanese and Indonesians, has 2,000 workers, mostly women, who make men’s shirts for a number of U.S. labels, including Perry Ellis, Tony Halper, and J.C. Penney. It takes 700 to 900 Rupiah of production labor to make a Perry Ellis shirt, taking into account all the steps in the process of assembling, sewing, ironing, and packaging.

A five-year collective bargaining contract is coming up for renewal within a year. A wage increase is the biggest issue. Another is the elimination of outsourcing to home workers. A policy team, drawn in large part from the workshop participants, will be formed to set the goals to be sought in the new contract. Management permission was necessary to have the workers participate in the leadership workshop.

Safeguarding Freedom of the Press

The Alliance of Independent Journalists, a professional association that aspires to become a trade union in the future, has units in fourteen of Jakarta’s amazing number of media companies, which total 160 now that a permit is no longer necessary to establish a newspaper. The Alliance also has chapters in eight other cities in Indonesia. The association’s secretary general, Didik Suprianto, explained that, contrary to the impression created by group’s name, its membership is not limited to self-employed or free-lance journalists, but also covers employed journalists.

The adjective “independent” is meant to stress the organization’s dedication to freedom of the press and freedom of expression, values that were brutally suppressed in the Suharto era. Didik recalled the visits that Tim Ryan’s predecessors made to the prison cells of journalists who had run afoul of the regime’s dictates, which included compulsory membership in an officially blessed journalist’s group.

The Solidarity Center is helping to staff the Alliance’s office, provide research support, and sponsor programs that spread the union message among new chapters around the country. Training in investigative journalism fills a gap on the media scene—a shortage of reporters with the skills to take advantage of the press freedom that now prevails in Indonesia.

The Association has 638 members, with the applications of 500 more in process. Applications have to be carefully screened to keep out people who use membership cards for “envelope journalism”—shaking down companies with promises to write favorable news articles. An evolution into a trade union is important, Didik said, to increase the low salaries now paid to
journalists. The other major issue being addressed by the Alliance is some form of profit-sharing or stock-ownership plans with the papers.

A New Umbrella for a Fresh Start

No longer are all Indonesian trade unions part of a single organization run from the top down. That Suharto-era labor monopoly dissolved after Suharto’s downfall in May 1998. Freedom of association and freedom to bargain collectively became official government policy, at first only in theory and then in practice. These freedoms quickly led to a proliferation of trade unions and trade-union-like organizations, especially because most of the old unions weren’t unions at all. They usually existed only in name and on paper, with little or no strength among the workers themselves.

Non-governmental organizations proliferated during the Suharto years. Unlike trade unions or religious organizations, they had no mass base. They engaged and activated an elite that Suharto couldn’t easily control, and in any case they seemed relatively non-threatening to the regime. Nonetheless, the NGOs were kept under constant surveillance by security forces and were routinely harassed, but because of their elite membership, and their international connections to embassies and aid organizations, it was harder to crack down on them. Some of these NGOs took up the cause of workers’ rights, often becoming militant advocates for workers. On both local and national levels, they bravely stepped into some of the roles that unions were not performing, or were not permitted to perform.

That void has now been gradually filled by newly-formed unions and reformed old ones. They have developed a sufficiently large grassroots base, a sufficiently common outlook, and sufficient self-confidence to assume their proper roles in voicing and representing workers’ interests.

Perhaps the most significant sign of this emerging maturity is that on July 16, 1999, a number of those groups came together to found the Forum Solidaritas Union, FSU for short (Union Solidarity Forum, in English). The Forum brings together under its umbrella seven unions from vastly different ideological backgrounds, including several reformed (suitably named SPSI-Reformasi) parts of the old Suharto monopoly, but excluding monopoly survivors that have not reformed (dubbed SPSI-Status Quo). Also included in the Forum are the FNPBI, as well as Sarbumusi and the PPMI, which are Muslim-oriented trade union organizations. Those who signed its founding document include Indonesia’s two best-known labor leaders - Muchtar Pakpahan and Dita Sari.

Although no longer restrained by a governmental straitjacket, these organizations are still seeking new ways of working together. The Forum facilitates communication across organizational lines. It is still a work in progress, representing most of the major players and also most of the Solidarity Center’s Indonesian partners. They are cooperating on a lobbying project which aims to impact in a significant way on four labor laws dealing with trade-union issues.
which are being, or will be deliberated, in the coming year(s) by the Parliament. These issues concern a trade union bill, a grievance dispute/resolution process, social security, migrant workers, and an omnibus bill that includes everything else.

**In Defense of Indonesia’s Migrant Workers**

The Ministry of Manpower has 2.5 million Indonesians registered as working overseas; and another 500,000 to one million, mostly workers in the palm oil plantations of Malaysia, are not registered, according to Wahyu, staff member of Women’s Solidarity (Solidaritas Perampuan), which is one of the 60 member organizations of the Consortium for Indonesian Migrant Workers [KOPBUMI]. Saudi Arabia, which has the lowest wages and worst conditions, has at least one million Indonesians, mostly women working as household workers. Abuse of various types is common. Still, the number of persons anxious to work abroad is huge. In Jakarta alone, there are 400 recruiting agencies for migrants, each with hundreds pleading to get on waiting lists limited to 200 each.

The Consortium is not opposed to migrant labor, but is working to end the gross exploitation and corruption built into the present system. Although the Consortium is doing some pre-departure training for migrants to inform them of their rights, the fact is that migrants have few rights, either under Indonesia law or the law of foreign country where they work. The Consortium is campaigning for Parliament to pass legislation to protect Indonesians overseas, and is urging the government to negotiate a bilateral agreement on migrant labor with Saudi Arabia, with which Indonesia now has no such accord, and to improve the existing agreements with other countries.

In its three years of work, supported substantially by the Solidarity Center, the Consortium has increased public awareness of the migrants’ plight, thereby prodding the government to pay more attention. One success is the bilateral agreement with Hong Kong, which has an innovation, perhaps a first anywhere: a provision guaranteeing Indonesian migrants the right to organize. Indonesians in Hong Kong have taken advantage of this right, according to Whayu.

Earlier this year an Indonesian Migrant Workers Union formally organized and declared itself and opened doors to all Indonesian workers in Hong Kong. The Solidarity Center, as part of its regional program on migrant workers operated out of Sri Lanka, will be conducting a networking/study tour in East Asia to connect Indonesian and Sri Lankan organizations with like-minded support groups in Hong Kong, Korea, and Taiwan by year’s end.

**Nurturing the Transition to Democracy**

One year ago more than 110 million Indonesians cast ballots to choose members of the country’s national, provincial, and municipal legislatures. It was the country’s first free and fair election in 44 years. It was also the first election in which the country’s civil society - unions,
human rights organizations, women’s groups, and other non-governmental organizations - fully participated. The two “firsts” are closely connected.

The Solidarity Center and its Indonesian partners played an instrumental role in that achievement. Shortly after the collapse of the Suharto regime in May, 1998, the Solidarity Center set in motion what turned out to be nation-wide program to facilitate a peaceful transition to a democratic Indonesia. That program had two elements: a large-scale voter education project prior to the June 7, 1999, election, and a monitoring project for the election itself.

The Solidarity Center’s credentials to undertake that crucial role included its 25-year history of work in Indonesia providing support and technical education to advance the rights of working men and women. This meant that the Solidarity Center was able to capitalize on in-country experience and relationships, without which it would have been impossible to create the broad coalitions necessary for carrying out the voter education and election monitoring projects.

During the three-month 1999 pre-election period, over 30 organizations in 20 of Indonesia’s 27 provinces were active in the voter education project. Their seminars, using local trainers, were held not in hotels, but in schools, work sites, and other places where ordinary citizens congregate, and reached some 60,000 eligible voters directly in both urban and rural areas. The organizations also created posters, pamphlets, stickers, and newsletters for mass distribution. Some material was designed for specific groups, such as plantation workers, migrants, and people in the informal sector. About 20,000 workers from all of Reebok’s factories also received basic voter education materials through the union networks and approximately 600 of the factories’ leaders attended voter education seminars.

Topics ranged from the specific to the general: e.g., technical aspects of the election process, democratic principles, the role of legislators as representatives of the people, a woman’s right to make her own choice in voting, accessing the platforms of political parties, and a citizen’s role in a democratic society. The emphasis was on the value of engaging rather than simply confronting authorities.

Four months before the June, 1999 election the Solidarity Center began supporting a non-partisan monitoring project with over eighty trade union groups and NGOs in eight provinces as partners. These partners in turn reached out to develop coalitions with a large number of other local groups. Together, they were among the first groups to conduct pre-election monitoring. They were able to spot early violations (including payoffs, and incompetence on the part of the local election commissions) and report them to the media to deter other violations. This project, conducted over nine months from February to October, 1999, in eight provinces, was the only long-term election project in the country. It serves as a useful model for work in future elections.
The project sponsored training in election monitoring methods for some 250 volunteers, (who now have the skills and experience to monitor future elections). A sister organization in the Philippines, the Trade Union Congress of the Philippines, provided a consultant, Luis Corral, to provide training and advice based on practical experience in three Philippine elections. The core volunteers from the dozens of organizations then recruited hundreds more volunteers who served the network on election day.

Communications centers equipped at least with telephones, and some with fax machines, in each of the eight provinces ensured a rapid exchange of information, especially in the distribution of weekly information packets from Solidarity Center’s Jakarta office. This communications system worked so well that oftentimes Solidarity Center partners received information faster than regional election officials, and those partners were able to update those officials about developments, including regulations newly adopted by the national election commission.

To keep in close touch with people and events, a full-time election team of four persons (two Americans, two Indonesians) on the Solidarity Center staff traveled frequently through most of Indonesia during the eight months prior to the election. In order to meet various critical deadlines, everyone on the staff would pitch in, for example, to write, duplicate, assemble, staple, and mail the latest election monitoring information bulletin. Many staff people worked up to 80 hours a week.

The Center’s four-page Bulletin dated June 2nd, five days before the election, included these practical topics: how a registered voter can vote outside his or her voting district; how voting hours can be extended if absolutely necessary; special instructions for getting answers to problems on election day; a reminder to photocopy all completed checklists on monitoring and vote counting; a warning not to be pressured into making press statements on election results before getting the necessary facts.

By all accounts, this two-pronged program contributed to a successful and peaceful election. Beyond the immediate results, the program’s long-term significance may be in how it was structured. Its roots were in the many local organizations that flowered anew after years of a stifling dictatorship: unions, women’s groups, legal aid societies, human rights organizations, and other NGOs. With moral and final support from the Solidarity Center, they worked together as never before. In a meeting with Solidarity Center staff from Washington D.C., the USAID Democracy & Governance manager who had served in South Africa during the transition in 1994, called the Solidarity Center effort “one of the best voter education and election programs” he had ever seen.

Those various activities have paid off for the organizations themselves. The growth of some unions in the past year is most likely attributable in part to the diligent work they did in assuring massive and informed voter participation in the election. Above all, the people’s network activated by that election remains a vital national asset, one that, like a powerful muscle, will wither unless it is exercised.
One huge danger is that the hopes created by the 1999 election will be disappointed. Signs of frustration already abound. The challenge for the citizenry is to make greater use of the opportunities they have to influence the new set of government officials they elected in 1999. Another challenge is for the Parliament: modernizing Indonesia's labor laws, specifically to bring outmoded labor legislation into compliance with the eight International Labor Organization conventions on core labor standards which the Indonesian government ratified in the last two years.

The Solidarity Center has programs focused on both challenges. One, a civic education project, builds on the 1999 voter education project. Another is a concerted lobbying campaign for labor law reforms. Both programs use and expand the human and organizational network that the Solidarity Center nurtured for the 1999 election.

Discussions between government and parliamentary officials in early June indicated a willingness to scrap compulsory registration procedures under which unions need government authorization in order to exist. Instead, a union would only have to report its formation and its officers to the government. If that reform is adopted, it will remove a threat to new and independent unions (such as SBSI and FNPBI), and will constitute a significant victory for the lobbying program that the unions are running.
THE PHILIPPINES

May 15th to 19th

Dialogue at the Asian Development Bank

The sign at the door of a meeting room of the Asian Development Bank in Manila said:

WORKERS’ RIGHTS
Brown Bag: 12:15 p.m.

Inside, more than two dozen Bank staff members, none with a brown bag and only few with sandwiches, were assembled on May 17th. They were devoting much of their lunch time to an unusual event: listening to and talking with five outsiders - three Philippine union leaders and two representatives of non-governmental organizations.

The five represented the Philippine branch of the Asian Labor Network on IFIs (ALNI), a network of trade unions, NGOs, and academics from four countries most impacted by the Asian financial crisis: Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Thailand. In a half-hour slide presentation the main speaker, Isidro Antonio Asper, vice president of the Federation of Free Workers, focused on how Bank-ordered policies affect ordinary people and why the Bank, as well as other international financial institutions (IFIs), must become more responsive to their needs. Instead of laying down loan conditions against increases in the legal minimum wage, for example, “the ADB should help our government understand that workers need a living wage”, Asper said, so that (among other reasons) child labor can be eliminated.

Asper, who co-chairs ALNI/Philippines, went into detail on how the recent privatization of the National Steel Corporation plant affected thousands of workers and had a domino effect on the wider community. That provoked a short discussion on the facts of the case, but Asper’s main point was that when taking such actions, both the Philippine government and the ADB needed to practice greater openness in two senses - making information available to the public, and negotiating with representatives of civil society about their plans. The term “negotiating” raised eyebrows and an objection that unions could not legitimately claim to represent all workers.

In the discussion period one staff member challenged Asper’s assertion that the ADB imposes labor-type conditions on some of its loans. Ayumi Konishi, who seemed to be the most senior Bank official present (the title on his card said “Programs Manager, Division 2”), spoke up from a seat near the door to say that the Bank has indeed imposed such conditions, and cited a specific case in Thailand in which he was personally involved.

Toward the end of the one-hour formal session, Hal Ponder, the Philippine country representative of the Solidarity Center, noted that the Asian Labor Network on IFIs had the administrative support of the Solidarity Center. (In fact, a brochure of the Philippine branch of the Network lists its secretariat as reachable through Ponder’s office.) Regarding how representative unions are of working people, he asked: “If trade unions can’t speak for workers,
who can?"

At the end of the formal program, Konishi said that the Bank could not get involved in "collective bargaining" (meaning, presumably, agreements negotiated with private sector groups). But he repeatedly emphasized that the Bank needs to engage in "dialogue on overall issues - we have not done this". He said that the Bank could benefit, for example, from input that "challenges our assumptions". Konishi stayed behind ten minutes longer to continue a friendly conversation with Asper and his colleagues in which he reemphasized that he looked forward to more exchanges of views.

Days afterward, a Bank participant in the meeting, when asked for comment, offered the following (not for attribution): "I thought the labor speaker (Asper of the Federation of Free Farmers) was very sharp. He knew more about the issues in question than virtually everyone in the room and he had a broader perspective, I think, than most ADB staff....This group [ALNI] has been very determined about (making contact with the ADB). They, of course, are interested in having some influence on what happens with ADB 'products'. However, getting through the door, and being taken seriously by the ranking hierarchy, are two entirely different matters."

Who Are These Very Determined People?

The Philippine branch of the Asian Labor Network on IFIs (ALNI), although only a year old, is in the vanguard of this regional movement, the Solidarity Center's Ponder said in a briefing for us. Over the years Philippine trade union leaders have acquired a great deal of sophistication (the 30-year-long involvement in AFL-CIO programs has had something to do with that), and ALNI has drawn on that strength to become involved in IFI matters. Still, some members became motivated and activated only after watching the televised activities before and during the World Trade Organization meeting in Seattle late last year. A strong statement, Engagement with the ADB, adopted by the group earlier, took on new meaning.

Even though the Philippine labor movement is divided, its competing groups do unite around some specific issues. Concerns that the ADB is "creating poverty" brings together not only many unions but also an array of non-governmental organizations. Six of the twelve organizations belonging to ALNI/Philippines are unions, the largest being the Trade Union Congress of the Philippines (TUCP). Beyond that, the coalition covers a broad range of non-governmental groups. One, the Informal Sector Coalition of the Philippines, is closely linked with the TUCP. Another is Focus on the Global South, headed by Walden Bello, a professor of sociology at the University of the Philippines, who is perhaps the region's most vigorous critic of globalization.

For years many groups who are now part of ALNI "angrily identified the Asian Development Bank, along with the IMF and the World Bank, as their sworn enemy", to quote from Engagement with the ADB. The statement asks: So what happened? Has the Bank changed or have unions and other groups "seen the light of neo-liberalism?" Answer: the Bank, shaken by the massive recent criticism from civil society, is "going to undertake consultations with civil society, through listening to its critics and, more importantly, working with them". That process
is still in its early stages.

Getting to Know the TUCP and a TUCP Leader

Cedric Bagtasi the deputy general secretary of the Trade Union Congress of the Philippines (TUCP), the largest union center in the country. Introduced to the world of labor by an American labor attache, he shifted from being an assistant professor of chemistry and statistics to working as a union researcher in 1976 and became deputy general secretary of the TUCP in 1983.

The TUCP claims a total membership of 1.5 million men and women, counting non-dues-paying members in various allied organizations, including groups in the informal sector. According to Bagtas’ estimates, more than 67,000 men and women participate in that nation-wide network as activists, most of them unpaid local union officers.

A major piece of unfinished business for the TUCP is to unionize the country’s Export Processing Zones (EPZs), sometimes called Free Trade Zones (FTZs), where the term "Free Trade" has also meant "union-free". In 1994-95, when the TUCP started a serious campaign to organize FTZ workers, it set a target of 100 unions by the year 2000. It has exceeded that target, founding about 127 unions in all. But attracting workers to form a union is one thing; getting it officially registered and certified is another. So far, only 66 of them are operating, the rest dormant because of a combination of what Bagtas calls "adverse forces", particularly employers and local government officials hostile to unionization, as well as an array of bureaucratic hurdles. The Cebu FTZ used to post pictures of union organizers as a warning that workers shouldn’t talk to them. Those posters are down now, but the attitude remains.

In the past three years TUCP organizers in the Zones have used corporate codes of conduct as tools to educate workers about their rights under the codes, to look at whether the treatment of workers varies from the codes’ standards, and to exert pressure on management to follow their own codes. Results have been mixed. A union at a Bataan Zone factory has a success story it attributes to knowing the Gap code of conduct: management there, faced with a strike because of contradictions between company practices and the code, recognized the union without retaliating against the strike leaders.

Workers’ Problems as Seen By Organizers and Workers

We were afforded two occasions to learn about workers’ problems directly from members of the TUCP organization staff and, on one of those occasions, also from Cavite Export Processing Zones workers themselves. Both occasions involved group interviews in two senses: the men and women interviewed were in a group (20 to 25); and the interviewers themselves numbered three
whenever the TUCP's Bagtas joined the interchange.

Here are the major issues identified in the two sessions:

- Investors' preference for a "union-free" and "strike-free" situation pervades the whole labor-management environment. Companies hire lawyers to erect obstacles that delay union recognition long enough to dampen the needed support among workers.

- Labor-management committees are being established as a substitute for unions. The Subic zone has three, all at American companies, two established a few days after a union sought recognition. The management argument: "We don't need the presence of third parties in our factory".

- Some managements enlist mayors and other government officials to caution workers against "dangers" of supporting a union: e.g., that their plant will be shut down, or that they face termination if they vote for a union.

- Up to about five years ago, union-busting tactics sometimes included physical violence, or the threat of violence, against workers. Now there is almost no reason to fear violence, but the fear of non-violent retribution remains strong. Some managers also resort to verbal abuse to humiliate women and make them docile.

- Access to drinking water and toilets are often unreasonably restricted, sometimes through use of passes doled out sparingly. In one plant the toilet is padlocked except for limited hours.

- Cases of sexual harassment get little attention because usually victims feel ashamed to complain. In one instance, the union requested the dismissal of a harasser, without success. The victim was promoted and transferred to another section.

- Korean-owned firms have an especially bad reputation among the workers. Verbal abuse is a common complaint in these plants.

- Excessive overtime occurs on a seasonal basis. In March this year, workers were locked into a factory for 32 hours straight to fill rush orders for overseas shipment. They did get a two-hour break to nap at their machines. Management tinkered with workers' time cards, punching them so that the long working hours would not be correctly recorded.

A sidelight on an exchange toward the end of the session that included rank and file members: a TUCP staffer who is a member of a tripartite board to recommend increases in the legal minimum wage was questioned at length and with some heat, apparently to pressure him to fight harder to raise the minimum wage.

A Talk with Management and Workers at a Jordache Plant

Jordache operates a unionized plant employing 1,000 people, two-thirds of them women,
in the Cavite Export Processing Zone, outside of Manila. The Wal-Mart code of labor standards, which does not include the right to join a union, hangs on a bulletin board at the entrance. It is in English only.

During a two-and-a-quarter hour visit to the plant one morning, we talked at length with management, toured the plant, and had a separate meeting with a group of 13 union representatives.

In briefing us Antonio Caballero, plant manager and president of J.R.A. Philippines (a wholly owned subsidiary of Jordache), twice praised the good relations his company has with the union ("we call it an association"). This praise, he emphasized, was not owing to the presence of Cedric Bagtas of the TUCP, who had arranged the visit and was escorting us. The company was in the fourth year of a collective bargaining agreement, which provides for wages above the legal minimum, adding up to a net take-home pay of 8,000 to 12,000 pesos a month for production workers. The company has a retirement plan, "one of the few" in the zone.

"Some Zone companies making pajamas hire workers at low wages under a six-month 'apprenticeship' term and discharge them after five months to avoid paying more", he said. "Our kind of workers, we need to train", and hence Jordache tries to keep turnover down.

"We try to make the lives of our people as easy as possible", he said. The founders of the company, three Jordache brothers, who once were "very poor", have a strong interest in worker welfare. A few years ago one of them told him, "Tony, let's air-condition". So now all parts of the plant, except the laundry section where the jeans are washed, are air-conditioned. Besides, for four years now, the plant has had filtered water in water coolers. The plant has also hired several handicapped workers.

The productivity of the Philippine plant shows up well in comparison with Jordache-owned plants in Jordan, Kenya, Mexico, and Morocco, he said. The total production cost of a pair of Jordache jeans comes to $6, compared to $8 in Morocco and $12 in Kenya, for example. How much of that $6 is for factory labor? "$1", he said. On the factory tour, he gave us a pre-printed Jordache label with a retail price of $16.98 for a pair of Novelty Flare blue jeans, destined for sale in Wal-Mart stores.

The most pressing bargaining issue currently on the table is a wage increase. "Our advantage is that we are working with the TUCP. They know what we can do."

After a tour of the whole plant led by Caballero and his human resources director, Fred Ramos, we were led to a room where a group of workers were assembling. These were 13 (9 female) of the 15 members of the union’s executive board, who also comprise the plant’s
labor-management committee. The union has no office of its own in the plant, but has been promised one.

Group members, in making comments, did not seem to intimidated by the fact that we were meeting on company property. Nor were the comments channeled through any one person (thus showing either a lack of strong leadership in the group or a healthy degree of participation - take your pick). Among the complaints they voiced: the need for a wage increase, favoritism in hiring, an electrical hazard in the laundry area (which caused the death of one worker), and the need for improving the retirement plan. The most interesting news was that the union president, a woman, was only acting, and has been acting for four years. The union president had been fired; his case is still in the labor courts.

On our way out, Cabellero invited us back to his office for a final session. We had to decline, because, as happened before during our heavy scheduled three-week trip, we were already late for our next appointment.

Overview of the Cavite Export Processing Zone

The Cavite EPZ, opened in 1986, currently has 221 foreign-owned companies, among which Japan (with 90 companies), Korea (70), and Taiwan (20) have the largest presence. Twelve plants are unionized, four of which have collective bargaining agreements; ten more union certifications are in process. Factory workers number around 56,000, of whom 40,635 are female, and 15,249 are male. Their average monthly earnings: 6,000 pesos. Most workers are single, and share housing costs, which run 900 to 1,200 pesos a month.

- from data provided by the Cavite EPZ Authority

An Introduction to Liz Claiborne in the Philippines

On our last day in the Philippines we were supposed to take a two-hour trip to visit a Liz Claiborne plant in Valenzuela, Metro Manila. A fierce tropical rainstorm had flooded highways enough to making travel to the plant impossible, at least for Manila-based visitors (as well as for professional staff living in Manila). So, instead of escorting us to the plant, Marie Parayno, Liz Claiborne country manager, came to our hotel to brief us.

She brought along a large bag stuffed with goods, most likely produced in Liz Claiborne plants, and started to offer us some as gifts. It took a while to persuade her that we could not accept them.

World-wide, she said, Liz Claiborne draws on more than 200 factories in 38 countries for its goods. Philippine factories have been making Liz Claiborne products, mainly women’s
wearing apparel, for about fifteen years. Now twelve plants do so (with an output relatively small compared to other countries). Unlike Jordache, Liz Claiborne owns none of those plants. In fact they produce for other companies too, but they are all carefully monitored for compliance with the company's labor standards. However, none of these plants have trade union representation.

Doesn't the existence of multiple codes of conduct cause confusion in plants that produce for different buyers? No, because all buyers are aware of the need to comply with decent standards. That awareness has intensified of late, because they "don't want to be another Saipan" (referring to the bad publicity and a lawsuit caused by sweatshop-plagued production on Saipan). Ms. Parayno and some of her thirteen Philippine colleagues have received training in code compliance at the Liz Claiborne regional office in Hong Kong. The San Francisco-based Business for Social Responsibility is training managers on the same subject, and she will be attending its upcoming two-day seminar (which has a fee of $295).

Has this greater awareness made a difference on the factory floor? "Yes", she said. The specifics she cited: canteens cleaner, adequate fire exits, all exits clearly marked, no exposed wiring, and improved safety and health standards generally. She audits the plant payroll and also checks pay slips to make sure that workers get at least the legally required minimum wage.

Liz Claiborne recently sent out a memo ordering its suppliers to stop the sourcing of leather products from China and India, because of publicity about the cruel treatment of animals in those countries. So was it stopped? Yes.

Ms. Parayno expressed fears that the Philippines - its factories and its workers - would suffer as China expanded its production for export. Global trade, she said, "should reward countries with a good human rights record, instead of favoring repressive regimes". At another point, she argued that the "deciding factor" in favor of production in the Philippines, rather than in China, should be that "we are abiding by fair labor practices".

Dinner With a Philippine Hero

On the eve of our departure, we had dinner with Ernesto Herrera, TUCP general secretary, and a national political leader who is currently a member of the House of Representatives. Herrera rose to national and international prominence by defying pressures of President Ferdinand Marcos and joining other members of a fact-finding commission in accusing the Marcos administration of complicity in the 1983 assassination of opposition leader Benigno Aquino. Herrera received the AFL-CIO George Meany Human Rights award in 1985.

In the dinner conversation, which included Hal Ponder of the Solidarity Center and U.S. Labor Attache Richard Nelson, Herrera made no secret of his disenchantment with the government of Philippine President Joseph Estrada. His views are strongly shared by the
Philippine labor movement, which again, despite all its divisions, in February formed a coalition to press jointly-held goals. Thirty-six labor leaders hailing from a broad spectrum of unions are now united under the name, "The Labor Solidarity Movement", LSM becoming the latest addition to a labor and political landscape already overpopulated with acronyms.

In a March press statement the coalition announced: "The labor sector is fed up with the Estrada government". Because of his political office, Herrera is not an LSM member, at least not formally. He says openly that Estrada, even though his term still has four years to go, should resign in favor of Vice President Gloria Macapagal, with whom Herrera has formed close ties.
At our dinner Herrera mused about memorable episodes in his lifetime of struggle, and recalled some of the American labor friends who had served in Manila over the course of thirty years. His reminiscences were not in the mood of someone tired and ready to retire to Cebu, where he was born and still maintains his home - far from it. At the age of 57, despite a polio-inflicted disability suffered since his childhood, Ernesto Herrera is still a man very much in motion.
INSIGHTS

It would be useful to have an international inventory of the various labor programs funded by various sources in the world. Ideally, it would be patterned after the classic 1984 study by Richard Freeman and James Medoff, *What Do Unions Do?*, except that this one would answer the question: *What Do Labor Programs Do?*

Of course, no such inventory exists for the world, not even for the East Asian region. Nor does this report come close to supplying such an inventory. By its nature, our study tour did probe the question of what some labor programs in East Asia do, but the contribution this report makes is based on only a limited sampling of some of the more interesting programs under way at present or completed in the recent past.

Still, during our inquiry we did observe two basic approaches inherent in labor programs, one that I call the *issue* approach and the other an *institutional* approach. A third, *dynamic* approach, blends the two. Understanding them can offer some lessons for the choice of future labor programs.

**The Issue Approach.** Under this approach, a labor program focuses on specific issues of concern to working men and women - minimum wages, unfair treatment on the job, excessively long working hours, health and safety problems, equal justice under the law, child labor, migrant labor, gender discrimination, and so on.

Such people-related issues have always been a part of traditional labor programs in East Asia, but they now have greater emphasis, and also a greater reach, to include subjects such as HIV/AIDS, migrant labor, the handicapped, and the policies of international financial institutions (IFIs). Globalization has contributed to a new dimension of concerns, through the massive entry of women into the labor force, for example.

**The Institutional Approach.** Under this approach, a labor program focuses on trade unions as the institutions through which workers can protect and advance their interests. Workshops and other educational activities for workers develop knowledge and skills to form and build trade unions, as well as an understanding of the legal system necessary for unions to exist and flourish.

This approach flows from the premise that unions are “the key worker institution” in the capitalist system, as Freeman and Medoff wrote in 1984. All the countries we visited, even the part of China called Hong Kong, are essentially capitalist, and so, not surprisingly, trade unions exist in all the countries we visited.
More recently, Joseph Stiglitz, former chief economist of the World Bank, updated the Freeman/Medoff formulation by making the case that "labor unions and other genuine forms of popular self-organization are key to democratic economic development." That concept is at the heart of most labor programs in East Asia.

These two approaches are not mutually exclusive, but it can be instructive to place them on a conceptual spectrum, with the issue approach at one end of the spectrum and the institutional approach at the other end. In practice, labor programs in East Asia have always been a mix of the two approaches, which conceptually would place them somewhere between the issue-institutional extremes. The contents of the mix varied from place to place and from time to time, depending on many factors, including the priorities of funding sources.

What has happened of late is that the mix has been more and more to the middle of the spectrum, with contents from both the issue and institutional sides joined in a new combination, the dynamism of which the spectrum model does not capture.

The Dynamic Approach. This approach does more than blend the two others. Simply put, it puts them into an interactive mode whereby each approach magnifies the impact of the other. On the one side, the trade unions and their allies work together in campaigns for popular support around specific issues. They thereby maximize their chances for success. On the other side, the unions as institutions gain strength by getting actively involved in broader issues, and by working together in formal and informal networks that put aside old rivalries. The benefits for the labor movement include:

--finding new allies for efforts to deal with their own special problems, such as getting rid of legislation that inhibits the right to organize and bargain collectively;
--an improved public image because of labor's proactive involvement in broader public concerns, such as assuring that elections for public office are free and fair;
--greater self-confidence in conducting organizing campaigns and in carrying out the unions' mission to defend the rights of ordinary working men and women; and
--greater access to authorities at both the national and international levels.

The dynamic approach also involves exploiting a huge asset: unions in other countries in the region and around the world. Almost all of the unions in East Asia are part of this international labor network. Although this network is little known by the general public, and little publicized in the media, union leaders in East Asia know it well and well are plugged into it.

This multi-layered network includes the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, whose 215 affiliates represent 125 million members in both the developing and developed world. The network also includes a set of nine "international trade secretariats" (ITSs)
that bring together unions according to industry groupings. One of the most active in combating sweatshops and child labor is the International Textile, Garment and Leather Workers’ Federation, which has 65 affiliates in 19 Asian countries, with a combined membership of 850,000 workers.

This network provides benefits that cannot be overestimated. For one thing, it helps get unionists out of jail - the freeing of Muchtar Pakpahan and Dita Sari in Indonesia are two conspicuous examples of why union leaders know they are not alone, but part of an international brotherhood and sisterhood. The AFL-CIO (the United Auto Workers in particular) and the Australian Council of Trade Unions have played the most active roles in pressing Indonesia to release imprisoned unionists and to adopt broader labor reforms.

Labor programs in Asia exploit not only this international network but also the country-to-country connections within it. For example, with help from the Solidarity Center, the Indonesian election monitoring campaign in 1999 drew on the experience of a trade unionist from the Philippines.

Globalization has given new impetus to cross-border cooperation. This is very apparent in the Solidarity Center-funded initiative involving four Asian countries - Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Thailand - in the Asian Labor Network on International Financial Institutions (ALNI).

Union participation in ALNI is significant for a number of reasons, but one especially needs to be highlighted. The primary role of unions in representing workers is to reach an agreement - a collective bargaining contract. Unions do engage in confrontation, not as a tool to destroy an employer to reach an agreement. So the involvement of unions in ALNI naturally affects its objectives and tactics. With very few exceptions, no Asian union leader calls for shutting down the Asian Development Bank. Rather, the purpose of ALNI is to engage in a dialogue with the ADB, and its larger peer IFIs, to make sure that they serve the public good.

Globalization, and the mounting pressures it creates, will increase the need for labor programs that "work". To work, they will need something like the framework outlined in this report. They will be much less effective if conducted on a one-shot basis - a local workshop here, a research activity there. To succeed, labor programs will need roots in local organizations representing workers and structured to meet the needs of workers. The programs will require the sustained presence of experienced and committed persons from an organization with the history and long-term relationships like those of the American Center for International Labor Solidarity.

The potential of labor programs for contributing to economic, social, and political development is enormous. One can easily lay out an attractive smorgasbord of program choices.
that might be presented to local partners. But the fundamental choice is much more difficult: how
to maximize the chances that specific programs are workable and will be reasonably successful?
The East Asian labor programs described above offer an impressive set of clues to find the
answer to that question.
### Glossary of Acronyms

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<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>AAFLI</td>
<td>Asian-American Free Labor Institute</td>
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<td>ACILS</td>
<td>American Center for International Labor Solidarity</td>
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<td>ADB</td>
<td>Asian Development Bank</td>
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<td>AFL-CIO</td>
<td>American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations</td>
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<td>AIMBP</td>
<td>AIDS Initiative for Mobile and Border Populations (Thailand-Burma)</td>
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<td>ALNI</td>
<td>Asian Labor Network on IFIs</td>
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<td>APEC</td>
<td>Asia-Pacific Economic Community</td>
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<td>CPI</td>
<td>Consumer Price Index</td>
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<td>CTU</td>
<td>Confederation of Trade Unions (Hong Kong)</td>
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<td>EPZs</td>
<td>Export processing zones</td>
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<td>FTUB</td>
<td>Federation of Trade Unions - Burma</td>
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<td>FTZs</td>
<td>Free trade zones</td>
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<td>GSP</td>
<td>Generalized System of Preferences</td>
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<td>HIV/AIDS</td>
<td>Human Immune-Deficiency Virus/Auto-Immune Deficiency Syndrome</td>
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<td>ICFTU</td>
<td>International Confederation of Free Trade Unions</td>
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<td>IFIs</td>
<td>International financial institutions</td>
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<td>ILO</td>
<td>International Labour Organization</td>
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<td>IMF</td>
<td>International Monetary Fund</td>
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<td>ITS</td>
<td>International Trade Secretariats</td>
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<td>Abbreviation</td>
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<tr>
<td>LCT</td>
<td>Labor Congress of Thailand</td>
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<td>Labor Relations Act (Thailand)</td>
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<td>Labor Solidarity Movement (The Philippines)</td>
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<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-governmental organization</td>
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<td>RFA</td>
<td>Radio Free Asia</td>
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<td>TUCP</td>
<td>Trade Union Congress of the Philippines</td>
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