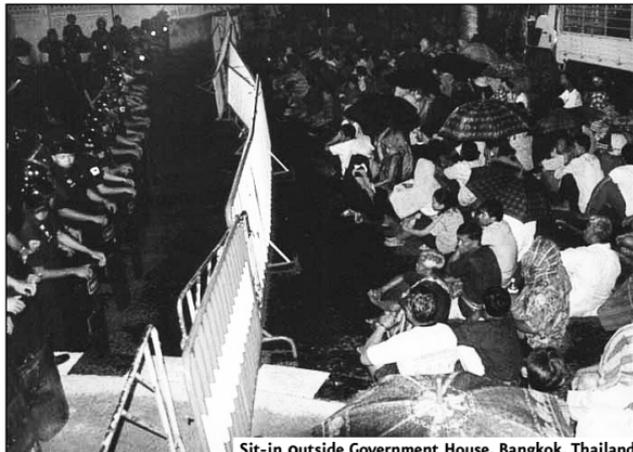


Peace Message to the Public

by the Assembly of the Poor

Formerly, we were not poor. We had farmlands and self-reliant livelihoods based on nature, land and the rivers. We were not rich, but never had we been hungry. When the governments built dams on the land where we had lived and farmed for generation after generation, we protested. The governments used legal measures to evict us and gave us chicken feed and futile land as 'compensation' for uprooting our lives. So we became poor, or to be more exact, the governments and their rural resources-exploiting



Sit-in outside Government House. Bangkok, Thailand

International Rivers Network archives

“For us, it’s a dam of tears.

We don’t have water to drink, nor rice to eat. And we can’t eat tear drops.”

– Paw Lert, a villager displaced by Bhumipol dam who helped to launch the Thai anti-dam movement. Two years later he was assassinated by an unknown gunman.

urban development approach impoverished us.

If ‘development’ means that thousands of households and abundant natural resources must be ruined in exchange for a few megawatts of electricity, then we’re not willing to sacrifice our sustainable resources and the future of our descendants for such worthless development. The Assembly of the Poor came to camp out in front of Government House, time and again. We didn’t come to ask for what’s not ours. Is it wrong to demand what has been robbed from us?

Over the past several days, the Assembly has asked ourselves, “What’s most important in our lives?” Houses and farmland; we’ve already lost them all. The most important thing for us now is our dignity. Physical assets such as houses, farmland and resources can be taken away from us. But we’ll never let ourselves be looked down upon. Though deprived of wealth, we’ll not let our human dignity be wrenched from us.

We’ve realized that to preserve our dignity is to fight for justice and righteousness; not to fight for personal gains.

We have to fight to keep our cherished local culture, our rivers, mountains, forests as well as wildlife and riverine animals for the future sake of our descendants. We carry on our hunger strike not to torture ourselves but to control our minds. We don't do it in protest of the government or the public at large. We refrain from taking food to maintain *dhamma*, to communicate the truth about the problems of poverty. Poverty is caused by the structural system of misdirected development and economic policies. There are at present a great number of hungry people. Our plight is just a mirror of structural hunger of millions of people in this country.

While we're fasting, we'll send our loving kindness and well wishes to the government and the policemen who have to be on duty. They are not our enemies. Our actual enemies are unjust economic and social structures, which we, the government, and every member of Thai society have to join hands to get rid of. For the government, if it still considers itself as the people's government, should treat the poor's problems as equally as they did with the economic ones. If the government had guts enough to

corporation. The verdict devastates the corporation. The judge rules that they exploit children with their advertising, produce misleading advertising, are culpably responsible for cruelty to animals, are antipathetic to unionization, and pay their workers low wages. But the judge also rules that the activists had libeled McDonald's and should pay close to \$98,000 damages. They refuse and McDonald's declines to

pursue it further, having already spent over \$16 million on the trial, unintentionally inspired a global solidarity campaign, and generated an enormous amount of negative exposure.

>> **June 20-22** >> The G8, having officially brought Russia into the group, meet in Denver, US. Several counter-summits take place, including a Women's Summit which features a 'hunger banquet' to show up

amend and change legislations, regulations and structural policies to solve problems for the business sector, it must do the same for the sake of the poor.

Excerpt translated by Friends of the People, Thailand

Resources:

» **Assembly of the Poor website: www.thai.to/aop/index.html**

the feasting going on inside. A trial is held of the eight most industrialized nations and their multinational corporations in front of an international panel of judges from eight indigenous nations. Unsurprisingly, the G8 are found guilty.

>> **July** >> Financial crisis hits Southeast Asia and reverberates across the world's markets. The IMF steps in to rescue the region with a \$100 billion restructuring