



## **Respect the rights of ASEAN workers!**

### **ASEAN Social Charter Now!**

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Southeast Asia is home to 500 million people.

Economically, the region is trying to unite through the ASEAN or the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, now one of the fastest-growing economic blocs in the world. The original six ASEAN countries (Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore and Thailand) and the four new members (Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam) are at varying levels of development.



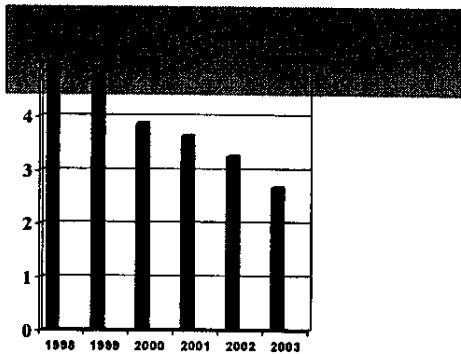
#### **ASEAN Members**

- ▶ Brunei
- ▶ Cambodia
- ▶ Indonesia
- ▶ Laos
- ▶ Malaysia
- ▶ Myanmar
- ▶ Philippines
- ▶ Singapore
- ▶ Thailand
- ▶ Vietnam

In 2001, the ten produced a total GDP of US\$ 700 billion and traded goods worth US\$ 737 billion. ASEAN is surrounded by the high-performing economies of Japan, the Asian NICs (Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea and Taiwan), China and India.

The ASEAN is forming an integrated economic bloc through the ASEAN Free Trade Agreement-Common Effective Preferential Tariff (AFTA-CEPT). As of 2003, the ASEAN 6 had lowered over 95 per cent of their tariff lines to 0-5 per cent tariff range, while the ASEAN 4 had 56 per cent of their tariff lines reduced to 0-5 per cent. Also in 2003, the ASEAN decided to deepen regional integration by building the so-called ASEAN Community, with three major components, namely: the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), the ASEAN Security Community (ASC) and the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC).

## Tariffs are falling under AFTA!



At the start of the program in 1993, average tariff rates were 12.76%. The average CEPT tariff rate has been brought down steadily, and as of January 1, 2003, stands at 2.68%.

### Status of tariff reduction

#### ASEAN - 6

➤ 98.4% products in the il

➤ 96.2% duties at 0-5%

#### ASEAN - 4

➤ 62% products in the il

➤ 56% duties at 0-5%

#### ASEAN - 10

➤ 86% products in the il

➤ 86.6% at duties 0-5%

### **But where is the place of the worker in the ASEAN community?**

Growth in the ASEAN is not possible without the ASEAN workers – those who boot the computers, reconcile the figures, track trade, move the goods, run the mills, crank the machines, bend the metal, build the towers, plow the land and keep the whole economy moving seven days a week, 24 hours a day.

And yet, no mention of the workers in the AFTA-CEPT! No Asean Labor Community!

When the bubbles burst in 1997, millions lost jobs in Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines and Thailand, and tens of millions more lost real incomes across the region. Displaced workers could not get any assistance. Lost incomes were lost forever. Migrant workers went home penniless. No safety nets. No social assistance.

In the best of times, ASEAN workers get a pittance. In bad times, they get nothing. In mergers and endless corporate restructuring taking place all over the region, jobs are readily sacrificed.

It is time for ASEAN society to recognize the contribution and role of the ASEAN worker! Support the ASEAN Social Charter!

## What is the ASEAN Social Charter?

The ASEAN Social Charter is a proposed bill of rights for the ASEAN workers.

It contains the commitment of the ASEAN to

- ✓ Recognize the universal core labor rights, namely, freedom of association and collective bargaining, non-discrimination at work, prohibition of forced labor and elimination of extreme forms of child labor;
- ✓ Extend social protection and safety nets to displaced workers and other vulnerable segments of society, especially in the course of corporate restructuring and regional and global integration; and
- ✓ Give unions a voice on how the regional and global integration process shall proceed.

The ASEAN Social Charter is in line with the global trend, where free-trade incorporators are made to recognize labor rights as part of economic integration agreements. Thus, in the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), a side agreement called the North American Agreement on Labor Cooperation (NAALC) was made requiring the United States, Canada and Mexico to enforce minimum labor standards.

The ideal is to approximate the Social Charter of the European Union, which has formally recognized the core labor rights as well as other workers' rights such as freedom of movement, right to vocational training, protection of elderly persons, protection of persons with disabilities, right to social protection, right to employment and remuneration, and the right to safety and health at the work place. In addition, the EU has acknowledged the right of workers to information, consultation and participation. Through the European Social Directive, EU unions are able to negotiate Framework Agreements (FAs) with transnational corporations operating in two or more EU countries and form European Works Councils (EWCs), where the affected unions are given a say on certain personnel and labor policies.

But whatever shape or form of the ASEAN Social Charter is acceptable to the ASEAN governments, the most important is that unions in the region – through their national unions, the global union federations and solidarity networks – are recognized. They should be given the opportunity to hold dialogues with the ASEAN and its varied instrumentalities on broad social and labor issues related to regional integration in particular and economic globalization in general.

As the ILO-supported World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalization (2004) put it, the idea is to build 'a process of globalization with a strong social dimension based on universally shared values, and respect for human rights and individual dignity; one that is fair, inclusive, democratically governed and provides opportunities and tangible benefits for all countries and people'. Through the ASEAN Social Charter, an inclusive, fair, humane and democratic ASEAN Community can be promoted for the benefit of all.

**If you believe in fairness, equity and democracy, support the ASEAN Social Charter initiative!**

- Fight for job security and employee rights in situations of mergers, acquisitions and consolidations (MACs); in corporate rationalization and reengineering exercises; in the outsourcing of work and services, and in the implementation of government programs on corporatization, privatization, deregulation and others affecting jobs.
- Ask both the transnationals and domestic firms to adhere to their corporate social responsibility by observing labor rights and labor laws and sitting down with the unions to thresh out personnel as well as competition and productivity issues to avoid a race to the bottom in the individual country and in the region.
- Demand governments and corporations to respect the political and labor rights of workers and citizens, ratify all the fundamental ILO Conventions and Recommendations on core labor rights (freedom of association and collective bargaining, non-discrimination, prohibition on forced labor and elimination of extreme forms of labor), and enact all the necessary enabling laws.
- Negotiate with the ASEAN on how social assistance, social protection and social insurance in the region can be strengthened (and developed where none exists) in support of the workers and disadvantaged sectors, especially the displaced workers such as the garments workers affected by the end of the quota system under the Multi-Fibre Arrangement (MFA).
- Join the broad solidarity movement for fairness, equity and democracy.

If you believe in the above calls, join the ASEAN unions in the campaign for the ASEAN Social Charter, in the struggle for jobs and justice under regional and global integration!

Join in the campaign for a labor seat at the ASEAN globalization table!