

labour.⁶⁵ In Malaysia, meanwhile, there is evidence that the treatment of women workers, and of many more men and women wrenched from their families and their rural homes, is promoting significant movements of political resistance.⁶⁶ And well before the present 'economic' crisis in Indonesia, this kind of exploitation on the part of indigenous and corporate elites, and deeper frustrations over political and economic disparities, were motivating forces behind the unparalleled rioting of August, 1996.⁶⁷

Beyond Malaysia, Vietnam and Indonesia, elites throughout the Asia-Pacific are facing similar problems, where movement of dissent and resistance are becoming increasingly militant, as impoverished women workers join the more general calls for labour rights, as students demand greater democracy, as slum dwellers demand the right to housing and as the urban poor express their discontent with the conditions of daily life. All of these groupings, in their different ways, reflect a growing disenchantment with the elitist, undemocratic and highly inequitable modes of development and governance across the region and the globe.

Another area of disenchantment, with an increasing potential for disorder and instability, concerns the huge upsurge in worker migration that has accompanied the breakdown of traditional rural life and the rise of a new urban industrial revolution throughout most of the region. In 1995 it was estimated that there were some 2.6 million migrants currently working throughout the Asia/Pacific region. In the construction industry, in particular, foreign workers are playing an increasingly important role in a context in which the proliferation of massive public works projects and serious labour shortages in many of Asia's booming economies are fuelling an ever growing need for the importation of foreign labour. In Malaysia's construction industry alone 80 % of the labour force consists of foreign workers.⁶⁸

The speed and complexity of these migrant flows has largely escaped the static cartographies of conventional analysis. Nevertheless, the daily reality is that thousands of Indonesian workers labour in Singapore, Malaysia and Japan, and Hong Kong is inundated with mainland Chinese workers. Meanwhile thousands of Thai construction workers have moved into Singapore, Malaysia, Hong Kong, Japan and Brunei, as Thailand itself has imported illegal labour from Burma. In similar fashion,

⁶⁵Reported in the Canberra Times July, 1997

⁶⁶On this issue see A. Ong, Spirits of Resistance op. cit. 1987

⁶⁷See I. Mackenzie, "Frustration Helps Fuel Jakarta Riots" in Reuters News Service, July 31, 1996

⁶⁸On the Worker Migration issue see M. Hiebert, "Building Asia: Give and Take" in Far Eastern Economic Review, No. 25, May 1995: 54; and J. Karp, "Migrant Workers: A New Kind of Hero" in Far Eastern Economic Review, No. 20, March 1995: 43