

The Betty Letters

My Dear Grandchild,

Prior to the Thai Army, taking control of Bangkok, forcing the 'Red Shirts' to surrender or die, the 'Red Shirts', said to be the supporters of former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, who was ousted from office in a coup d'etat in 2006 after serving 5 years as Head of State, I talked over the horrible situation with my froglike husband, Bo-Bo. What I wanted to know, long before the Thai Army attacked in force, killing some of the 'Red Shirts' and injuring countless others, was what would The Frog have done in such a situation if he had been Head of the Government of Thailand. According to The Frog, Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva, the present Head of State in Thailand, ought to be impeached, not because of that which he did, but for that which he failed to do in a timely fashion. 'It is only too clear to me,' The Frog pontificated, 'that as soon as there was an unlawful assembly of the "Red Shirts", for whatever reason, definitive action should have been taken for the sake of the entire country and of its human population. An unruly mob, no matter for whom the mob claims to be acting or not acting, cannot be expected to act in a rational, reasonable and intelligent fashion. A mob, you see, is ruled by passion or fervour. It is, rarely, ruled by logic. For the most part, an unruly mob is beyond reason. That, Betty, is the definition of the term, 'unruly' – difficult to control. And that is what happened in Bangkok with the "Red Shirts". The only way to engage an unruly mob is by overwhelming force. Having won the day, so to speak, then, it is the time enough to sit down to try to reason with the leaders of the mob.' 'That means that you endorse the killing of some of the "Red Shirts"?' 'In some cases, it is inevitable that blood must be spilled to cleanse society of unwanted elements in a lawful society. It is called collateral damage. Unfortunate, it may be, but it is, only too often, inevitable.' I, then, asked The Frog that, if he had been the Prime Minister of Thailand, would he have put down the 'Red Shirts' as soon as they started to congregate and were seen as being unruly. His answer was in the affirmative, saying: 'I would have sent in 10 soldiers for every "Red Shirt" in order to frighten the knickers of these idiots. In such a situation, the only rules which a government can enforce are those backed up by the strength of arms. Often, the mere sight of a large force of well-armed soldiers to an unruly mob is sufficient to send the message home.'

I pondered long and hard on the words of The Frog with regard to the horrors that had been Bangkok. Eventually, I came to the conclusion that there should have been another way to resolve the situation without reverting to sending in the troops with live ammunition, with orders to kill when it was necessary.

By the time that the troops and their armoured cars had driven to the centre of the melee, some of the 'Red Shirts' had armed themselves, too, with pistols and fire crackers. Against the disciplined soldiers of the Thai Army, of course, the 'Red Shirts' had not a ghost of a chance of winning the day and were forced to surrender. So, in a way, The Frog was correct: Faced with an overwhelming armed force, an unruly mob will capitulate. The trouble with The Frog's argument, of course, is that the use of force of arms against an unruly mob does not begin to attack the root cause that touched off the situation in the first place. Thailand used to be called 'The Land of Smiles.' Where were those smiles on the faces of the 'Red Shirts'? The Thais, like any other race, do not relish the idea of having to fight, but, when forced to take a stand, any man would prefer to die for a good and just cause than live under the aegis of an oppressive and unwanted political regime which has the ability to employ the force of arms against those with no protection save a concept,

not particularly well thought out.

Men die; good and just ideas live forever. The great Indian political and spiritual leader, Mahatma Gandhi, proved this to be true. This little man, pre-eminent in his day, led India, during its Independence Movement, by preaching resistance to tyranny through mass civil disobedience. Total non-violence was his creed; and, he led India to independence by the adoption of this creed. It inspired similar political movements for civil rights and freedom right round the world. Wars are, always, madness and, in the long run, wars settle nothing except that man discovers faster methods of killing his kind.

So, The Frog is proved wrong. The 'Red Shirts' are not defeated, but Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva has won a very small skirmish in Bangkok, Thailand. Until the Administration of Thailand can sit down, quietly and rationally, and come to a determination as to the root cause of the problem that led the 'Red Shirts' to riot and affray, and to encourage the leader(s) of the 'Red Shirts' to break bread at a table of reconciliation, there will be no end to the problems that is tearing this beautiful country apart.

I put this, all, to The Frog, after my dissertation on the Thailand situation, a dissertation that lasted a good 30 minutes. The Frog looked at me, long and hard. He clapped his hands in appreciation of my hard work and of the obvious intrepid workings of my fertile and perspicacious thought processes (which I say in all modesty, of course). He, then, said: 'I suppose you know what happened to that skinny hero of India in 1948? He was shot dead by a Hindu nationalist who, after respectfully bowing to him, shot him dead at a prayer meeting on January 30, 1948. Strangely, Hindus and Muslims of India had been engaged in fierce intercommunal struggle between 1946 and 1947 and Mahatma Gandhi, in an effort to put an end to the bloodshed, moved among the 2 warring factions, alone and without arms, and, by sheer force of his personality and humility, caused them to abandon their ways and to agree to resolve their differences without resorting to conflict. But, still, he was shot dead by one of the members of the selfsame group of religious people that he was trying to help. Since the death of Mahatma Gandhi in 1948, India has continued to have trouble among various factions of the one billion human inhabitants. The Untouchables are still the Untouchables. Little has changed. The class differences persist. From time to time, zealots of one religion take up arms against another religion.' 'Are you refuting my dissertation, then?' I asked. 'What I am saying, Betty, is that China seems to have a handle on such situations, as we witnessed in Thailand, and China knows, exactly, the best way to handle malcontents and those who would lead others to riot and affray. Yes, China has a definitive way to handle such matters.'

'Oh! God!' I heard myself say. 'A frog will, always, be a frog; and, a stubborn frog is impossible to understand. And I married one!'

Talk to you, next week.

Chief Lady

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