

IF ONLY THEY DIDN'T MAKE THEMSELVES THE STANDARD

Hölderlin, Hyperion

Dear guests, dear friends of MAOTHAI,

The opening of a small Thai restaurant in Berlin's Mitte district by the end of 1996 is in sight, and once again chefs are being denied visas.

Under the auspices of the "Central Office for International Hotel and Restaurant Exchange (ZIHOGA)" in Frankfurt, a branch of the Federal Employment Agency, German civil servants have now set out to determine, even for other countries, who qualifies as a chef and is permitted to enter Germany. According to new directives, chefs from non-EU countries may in the future be required to obtain a German language certificate from the Goethe-Institut before they can serve their guests; furthermore, their selection is to be delicately carried out with the help of local bureaucracies according to the tastes of German officials. People for whom non-German living conditions certainly do deny access to such education are even required to have a vocational school diploma.

None of the chefs at MAOTHAI and KAMALA escape the elaborate obstructions set by the federal officials in Frankfurt. They come from the Northeast, the poor heart of Thailand, the region where poverty and the longing for a better life drive the country's children all the way even to the brothels of Frankfurt. They attended elementary school for a few years and then stood at the stove to earn a living; not to mention the lack of a vocational training system modelled on the German one. However, even without German certificates, the guests savour what they can.

The officials of ZIHOGA would be better off not measuring the world by German standards and to dictate down to the kitchen how the orchids of Thai culinary art are to grow, thus risking to destroy reputable and still tax-paying businesses. The herb-scented realms of MAOTHAI could easily wither away in Germany. The German state's coffers would then be missing a not insignificant sum in taxes and social security contributions, and Berliners would miss out on many a tasty bite.

In 1991, I returned to East Germany to make up for, through Thai cuisine, to my guests and to myself, what East Germans have been deprived of for forty years in terms of life and the world. Should I now, sooner or later, seek culinary asylum in another country?—I will not become a Kohlhaas.

For years, I have been besieging the Chinese walls of German high bureaucracy to keep my Thai restaurants alive. But just as I am responsible for my business as an entrepreneur, as a citizen I am also responsible for my country.

Our country needs a productive bureaucracy that stands by its residents. I quite rightly do expect help from people who live off my taxes. But if they, like paper bound stranglers, seek to destroy what I have painstakingly built while they ignore indifferently the needs of the people they sit upon protected by the red tape they created, then, I will fight back. I hope that responsible politicians will rein them in before it's too late. Even Chinese walls fall. Please help me. Write to: Federal Minister of Labor and Social Affairs Dr. Norbert Blüm, 53123 Bonn, Rochusstr. 1
Norbert Frankenstein Oct 3, 1996 East German, Japanologist, owner of Maothai