



PRIDI BANOMYONG AND THE MAKING OF THAILAND'S MODERN HISTORY

VICHITVONG NA POMBHEJARA

Pridi Banomyong And The Making Of Thailand's Modern History



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Pridi Banomyong And The Making Of Thailand's Modern History

Dr Vichitvong Na Pombhejara



Committees on the Project for the National Celebration
on the Occasion of the Centennial Anniversary of
Pridi Banomyong, Senior Statesman (private sector)

To celebrate the centennial anniversary of Pridi Banomyong
(11 May 1900 - 11 May 2000)
and on the occasion that UNESCO has included
Pridi Banomyong in the calendar of Anniversaries
of great personalities and historic events (2000-2001)



Series to commemorate the centennial anniversary of the birth of Pridi Banomyong, Senior Statesman

Pridi Banomyong And The Making Of Thailand's Modern History

Dr Vichitvong Na Pombhejara

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The author wishes to respectfully acknowledge the kindness of His Excellency Dr Pridi and Than Phuying Phoonsuk Banomyong who, despite their old age, took pains in going through the entire manuscript and corrected mistakes wherever evident. Their clarifications of certain facts indeed have contributed much to the authoritativeness of the book. They are, however, by no means accountable for any historical interpretations of which the author alone takes full responsibility.

Many persons, both in Singapore and in Bangkok, have assisted in bringing the present work to its completeness at various stages, to whom the author is sincerely grateful. His own daughter, Dana, undertook the reading of the final draft and helped improve the language in order to make the book appear more readable.

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Vichitvong Na Pombhejara

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PREFACE TO THE REPRINT

This book was written in 1979, although its publication appeared in 1983, a few months after Pridi Banomyong passed away in Paris.

The mournful event significantly aroused public attention to the Senior Statesman's many historic and patriotic struggles for the cause of his nation's sovereignty and the Thai people's welfare.

Pridi Banomyong's prominent role in the 1932 Revolution that permanently established a constitutional monarchy in Thailand has been enthusiastically recalled along with his superb accomplishments in conducting public affairs while in charge of the Interior, Foreign Affairs, and Finance ministries, including the founding of a state university and the central bank.

His daring leadership endeavour to preserve Thailand's independence and sovereignty during the Second World War through the successful operation of the Free Thai Movement will always be cherished and eternally recorded in the history of the Thai nation.

Since his death, Pridi's noble accomplishments have been recognised in a wider circle. Pridi's memorial was created at Thammasat University (which he founded), in front of the "Dome Building" where he clandestinely led the Free Thai Movement. The Pridi Banomyong Foundation and Pridi Banomyong Institute were set up. Then there appear Pridi Banomyong Memorial at Ayudhya; Pridi Banomyong Library at Thammasat University; Pradist Manudharm Drive, Seri Thai Street, Seri Thai Park at Bueng Gum; and Peace Park (Suan Santipharb) at Rajvithi Road. As a significant symbol, in 1995 the Cabinet declared 16 August - Thai Peace Day.

In terms of publication, there have been many books, articles, and papers written on the late Senior Statesman in various aspects, some of which being published or reprinted under a project commemorating the "Centennial Anniversary of Pridi Banomyong" in the year 2000.

Being perhaps the only book on the late Senior Statesman in English, the author is pleased to see it reprinted under the above-mentioned project to provide an opportunity for worldwide distribution.

Although some accounts as told in the book ought to be revised or re-adjusted due to further fact-findings on the author's efforts, especially those on the Free Thai Movement, it is decided that they should be left untouched in order to save cost, time, and energy.

The author hopes that the present book will be able to portray the distinguished statesman, his role and contribution to the making of modern Thai history as precisely as he wishes.

Vichitvong Na Pombhejara
August 16, 1999

PUBLISHER'S PREFACE

The Project for the Celebration of the Centennial Anniversary of Prof Dr Pridi Banomyong is a government approved project that presents many activities to illustrate the reknown of the Senior Statesman, Pridi Banomyong, both in Thailand and around the world. One of its major project is the publishing of his own words and the works of others that are related to the interests of Pridi Banomyong.

This book "Pridi Banomyong and the Making of Thailand's Modern History", written by Dr Vichitvong Na Pombhejara, although first published in 1983, remains valuable for all Thais and the other students of Thai history and its legacies. Dr Vichitvong Na Pombhejara, a member of the Royal Academy, describes Pridi Banomyong's political struggle and his role in the modern history of Thailand since the 1932 Revolution to his escape from Thailand into an exile life in China. Although a rather long saga, we believe the readers will gain much benefit and a deeper understanding from this book.

Project to produce media materials,
for children and youths,
in honour of Pridi Banomyong,
Senior Statesman

CAST OF PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS

- H.M. King Prachathipok (1893-1941), King Rama VII of Thailand (1925-1935).
- H.M. King Ananda Mahidol (1925-1946), King Rama VIII of Thailand (1935-1946).
- H.R.H. Prince Boribhat of Nakornsawan (1881-1944), Field Marshal, Minister of Interior, President of Privy Council.
- H.R.H. Prince Athit-Thip-abha (1904-1945), Lt General, President of Regency Council.
- H.H. Prince Bovoradej (1881-1955), General, Minister of Defence, Leader of 1933 Rebellion.
- Bhahol-Bholpayuhasena (1888-1947), General, Prime Minister, Elder Statesman, Leader of June 24 Revolution.
- Song-Suradej (1892-1944), Colonel, Deputy Army's Commander-in-Chief, Leading Member of June 24 Revolution.
- Pridi Banomyong (1900-1983), Regent, Prime Minister, Leading Member of June 24 Revolution, Leader of Free Thai Movement, Senior Statesman.
- Pibul-Songgram (1897-1965), Field Marshal, Supreme Commander, Prime Minister, Leading Member of June 24 Revolution.
- Adul-Dejcharas (1896-1968), General, Police Chief, Deputy Prime Minister, Army's Commander-in-Chief, Member of June 24 Revolution, Deputy Leader of Free Thai Movement.
- Thamrong-Navasawat (1901-1988), Rear Admiral, Minister of Justice, Prime Minister, Member of June 24 Revolution, Leader of Constitutional Front Party.
- Subha-Chalasai (1895-1965), Captain RTN, Leading Member of June 24 Revolution, Minister of Interior, Minister of Industry, Leading Member of Free Thai Movement.
- Sindhu-Songgramchai (1902-1973), Admiral, Navy's Commander-in-Chief, Minister of Education, Minister of Agriculture, Leading Member of June 24 Revolution.
- Kwuang Abhaiwong (1902-1968), Major, Minister of Communications,

Prime Minister, Member of June 24 Revolution, Leader of Democratic Party.

Thawee Bunyakatu (1904-1970), Cabinet's Secretary-General, Prime Minister, Member of June 24 Revolution, Leading Member of Free Thai Movement.

Seni Pramroj (1905-1997), Minister to Washington, Leader of Free Thai Movement in the United States, Prime Minister, Leader of Democratic Party.

Direk Jayanama (1905-1967), Foreign Minister, Ambassador to Tokyo and London, Deputy Prime Minister, Member of June 24 Revolution, Leading Member of Free Thai Movement.

Sangvorn-Yuthakit (1901-1972), Rear-Admiral, Police Chief, Deputy Minister of Defence and Interior, Member of June 24 Revolution, Leading Member of Free Thai Movement.

Kaj-Songgram (1890-1967), Lt General, Army's Deputy Commander-in-Chief, Member of June 24 Revolution, Leading Member of 1947 Coup d'etat.

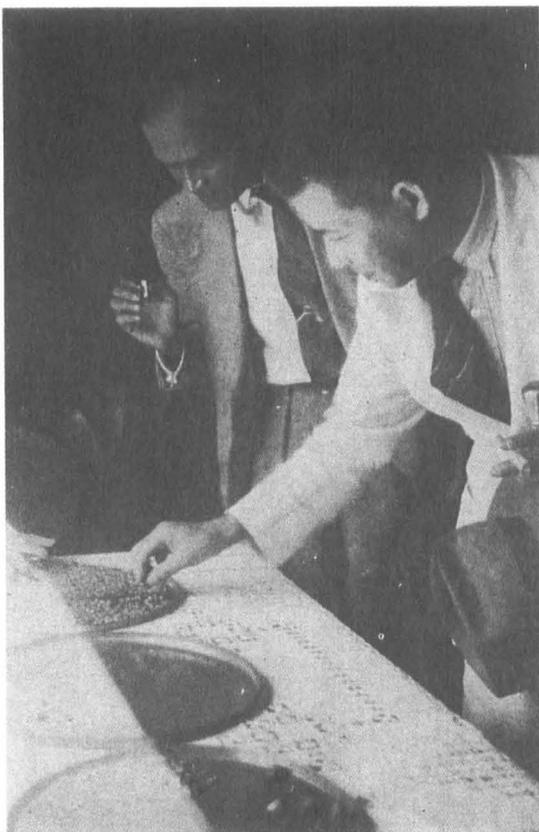
Prayoon Bhamornmontri (1897-1982) Lt General, Minister of Education, Member of June 24 Revolution.



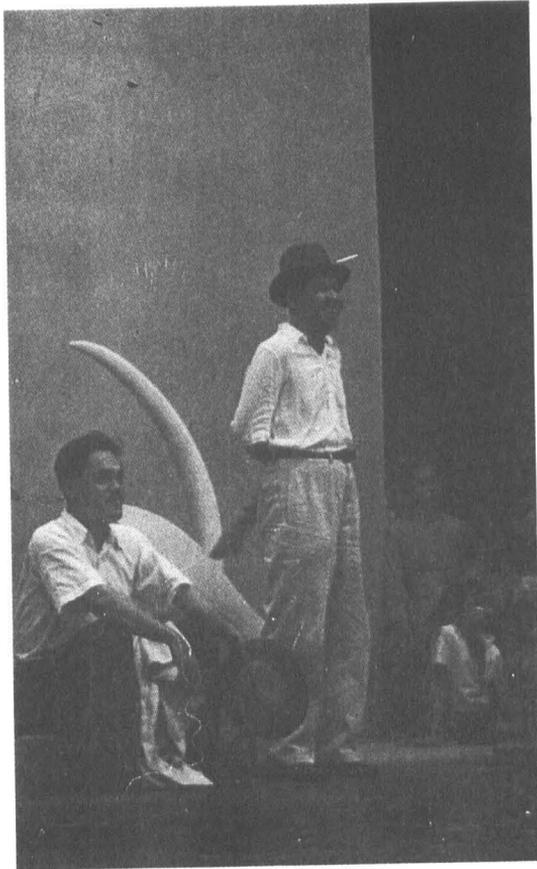
SENIOR STATESMAN PRIDI IN 1947.



SENIOR STATESMAN PRIDI UPON RETURNING FROM
WORLD TOUR ON A GOODWILL MISSION IN 1947.



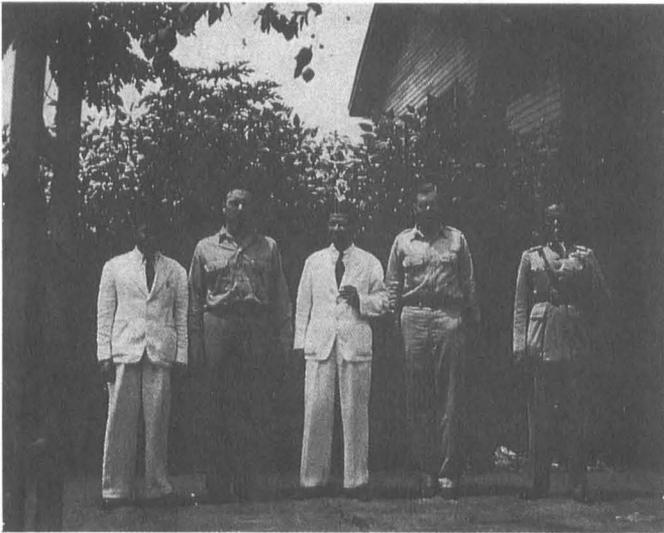
INTERIOR MINISTER PRIDI WITH
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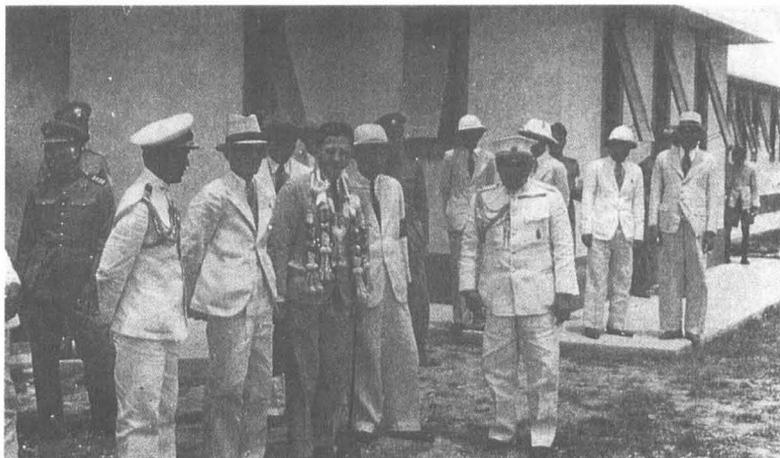
FILM PRODUCER PRIDI WATCHING A REHEARSAL OF
THE FILM "THE KING OF THE WHITE ELEPHANT"
BEFORE THE PACIFIC WAR.



SENIOR STATESMAN PRIDI IN A RELAXING MOOD
AT HIS RESIDENCE IN 1947.



REGENT PRIDI WITH PRIME MINISTER THAWEE BUNYAKATU
AND POLICE GENERAL ADUL-DEJCHARAS IN 1945.



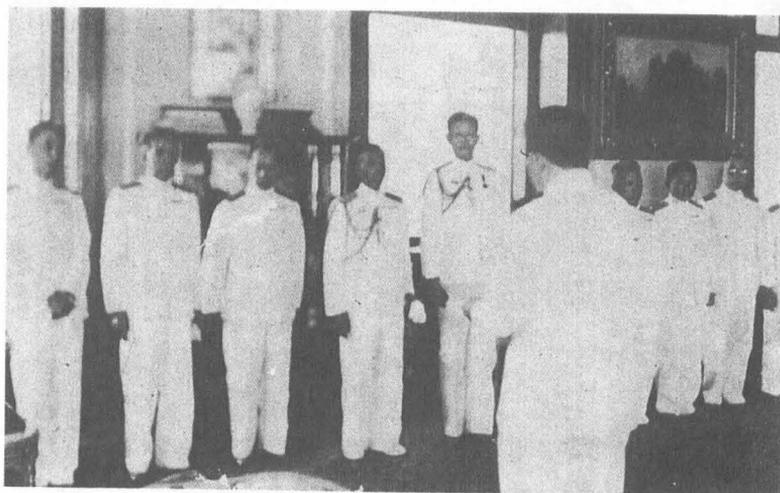
LEADERS OF THE PEOPLE'S PARTY IN 1936
 FROM LEFT TO RIGHT-COL PIBUL, COMMANDER THAMRONG, COL
 PRAYOON, DR PRIDI, AND COL BHAHOL.



INTERIOR MINISTER PRIDI AT UDORN THANI, ON JANUARY 27, 1936.
 KWUANG APHAIVONG SECOND FROM LEFT (FRONT ROW).



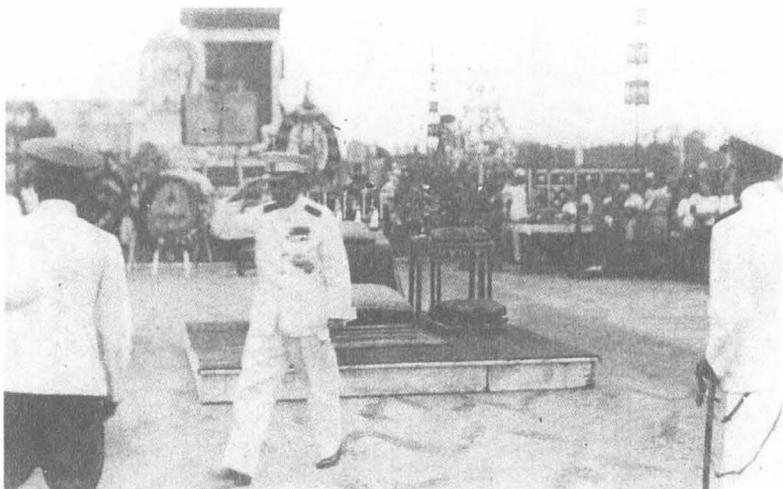
REGENT PRIDI WITH H.R.H. PRINCE ARTHIT IN 1943.



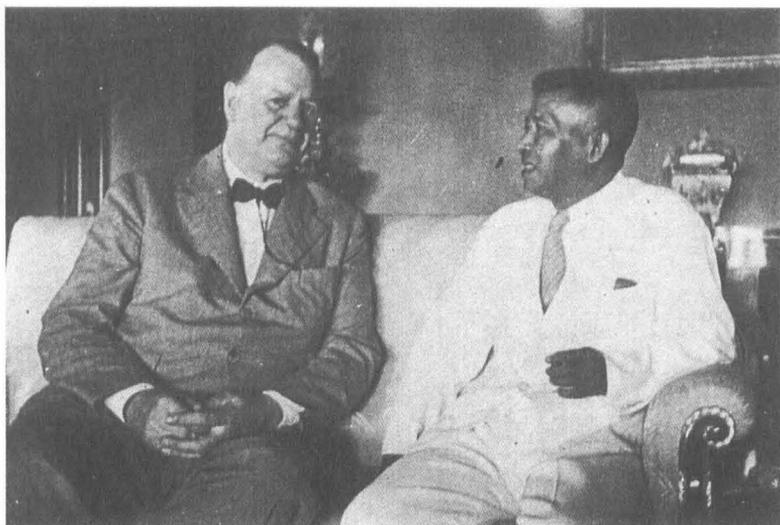
REGENT PRIDI RECEIVING THE FIRST KWUANG
APHAIVONG CABINET IN 1943.



REGENT PRIDI LEAVING ANANDA THRONE HALL IN 1945.



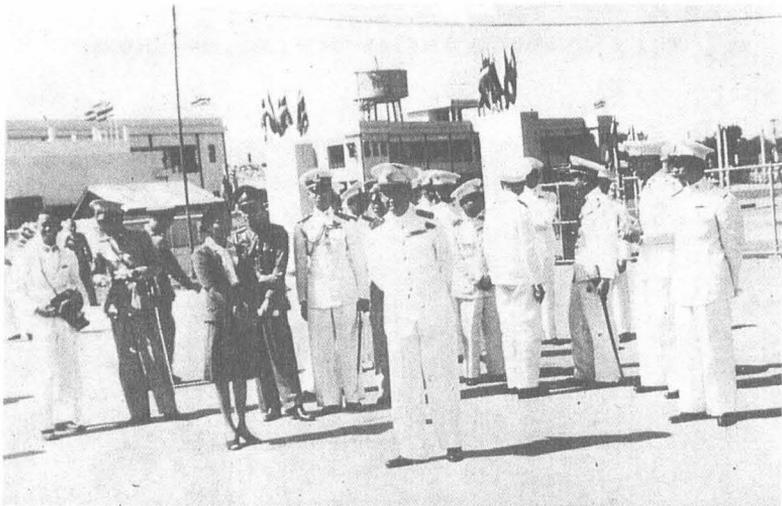
REGENT PRIDI AT ROYAL PLAZA IN 1945.



PRIME MINISTER PRIDI WITH LORD KILLERN IN APRIL 1946.



PRIME MINISTER PRIDI AT A PRESS CONFERENCE IN 1946.



REGENT PRIDI AT BANGKOK AIRPORT UPON THE ARRIVAL FROM EUROPE OF H.M. KING ANANDA MAHIDOL IN 1945. PRIME MINISTER SENI PRAMOJ AT FAR RIGHT.



MINISTER PRIDI WITH THE ROMAN CATHOLIC COMMUNITY IN 1936.



H.M. KING ANANDA MAHIDOL (RAMA VIII)
SIGNS THE CONSTITUTION OF 9 MAY 1946.



TRYING OUT A MACHINE WHILE VISITING AN AGRICULTURAL WORK
AT A PEOPLE COMMUNE, AT A SUBURB OF GUANGZHOU (1959).



DISCUSSION WITH PRIME MINISTER CHOU EN-LAI,
AT THE ZHONG NAN HAI PALACE, MAY 1963.



COURTESY CALL ON CHAIRMAN MAO ZE DONG,
AT THE ZHONG NAN HAI PALACE, OCTOBER 1965.



EXCHANGING VIEWS WITH THAI STUDENTS, PARIS, 1981.



IN THE STUDY AT ANTONY HOME,
ABOUT A WEEK BEFORE HIS DEATH (APRIL 1983).



CHAPTER 1

JUNE 24 REVOLUTION

It happened at dawn.

At 6.05 early that morning — June 24, 1932 — before the towering King Chulalongkorn’s equestrian statue in front of the Italian-designed Ananda Throne Hall, a plump colonel in the khaki uniform of the Royal Thai Army stepped onto a platform surrounded by a crowd of his revolutionary colleagues and declared with a loud, yet somewhat trembling, voice:

“We, the People’s Party, have already taken over the government from the absolute-monarchy regime. We beg all of you, the people of Thailand, for your support and cooperation with our cause. You may rest assured that Thailand will attain complete independence; her people will be given full protection; jobs will be provided for everyone; and subservience to the ruling monarch and his family will no longer be a condition of life.”

Amidst the cheering crowd of thousands of men in uniforms who, until that very moment, had not been aware of the purpose of their gathering at the Royal Plaza, let alone an anticipation of the possibility of political change, the forty-four-year-old colonel who assumed the leadership of the revolutionary group continued the speech that effectually put an end to the centuries-old absolute monarchy in the romantic kingdom of nine million people of Southeast Asia.

“When the present king succeeded his elder brother as the ruling monarch, the people were full of hope that his rule was to bring them happiness. Things, however, have not turned out as expected. The king



is still exercising his power above the law. He has appointed members of his family as well as unqualified persons to important government positions contrary to popular wishes ... granting members of his family privileges ... and arbitrarily administering the nation's affairs. It is proven that absolute monarchy as a form of government has failed to restore the country's economy. It is so because the regime has never treated the people as human beings..."

Using strong words as he did and somewhat exaggerating in order to create a psycho-political impact on the masses at the crucial moment, the revolutionary leader proceeded to lay down the six principles which were to serve as Thailand's basic policy objectives for the next 15 years:

- 1) To maintain absolute national independence in all aspects including political, judicial and economic;
- 2) To maintain national security both externally and internally;
- 3) To promote economic well-being by creating full employment and by launching a national economic plan;
- 4) To guarantee equality for all;
- 5) To grant complete liberty and freedom to the people provided that this does not contradict the above-mentioned principles; and
- 6) To provide education for the people.

The ten-minute declaration made in front of the combat troops brought to assemble by false orders and commands marked the first successful step of the coup d'état plan. It was also the significant point of no return for the revolutionary clique. The next step of the plan would have to be immediately taken.

Colonel Bhahol-Bholpayuhasena stepped down from the platform and confidently led his men to the front gate of the Throne Hall. Inside there stood the white-marble hall where the revolutionary headquarters was to be established, while the vast lawns, which up till then had been parts of the Royal Garden, were to be turned into the stronghold of combat-ready troops now tactically under the revolutionary officers' commands. Outside the Throne Hall proper, at the Royal Plaza and on the streets leading from it, armoured cars, field cannons, machine guns as well as rifle men from both the army and the navy were posted at all strategic positions, not only to symbolise the military take-over, but also to defend the headquarters should there be an attack from royalist troops.

The next step in accordance with the coup plan was to “invite” top-ranking military personnel of the old regime as well as some influential members of the royal family to the headquarters, to be kept there as hostages. This action was considered strategically important in view of the fact that if left free, these men could mobilise formidable resistance against the revolution, thus leading to unavoidable bloodshed. It was also considered necessary for bargaining with the king for his consent to the political change. King Prachathipok, Rama VII, was at that time on vacation at Hua Hin, a famous seaside resort some 200 kilometres south of Bangkok. Reading the king’s mind, the revolutionary planners were confident that Prachathipok would yield rather than resist change, at least for the safety of his family.

There were three important men whose arrests were given top priorities. The number-one person was obviously the king’s half-brother, Field Marshal His Royal Highness Prince Boribhat of Nakornsawan. The fifty-one-year-old Prince was at that time minister of the interior, but had been, during his long public service, minister of defence, minister of the navy and the army’s chief of staff. A foster son of Kaiser William II, Prince Boribhat was brought up and educated in Germany before the First World War, where he graduated from the Kaiser’s military academy and had served in the mighty German army. One of the most intelligent among King Chulalongkorn’s many sons, he had been entrusted with important positions both in the army and the navy since the reign of his father. Prince Boribhat was years senior to King Rama VII who, upon succeeding to the throne, also made his loyal half-brother the president of the privy council, the king’s most senior adviser.

Prince Boribhat’s palace, which is now the Bank of Thailand, was on the bank of the Chao Phya River less than two kilometres away from the Royal Plaza. Although the telephone lines in Bangkok had been put out of service by members of the revolutionary group at 4 a.m. that same morning, the minister of the interior who also controlled the police force could have already been informed of the coup. The problem, however, was not the prince’s possible armed resistance to his arrest, nor the possibility of his escape, but rather how colonels and captains were to enter the palace and arrest their field marshal. The difficulty was therefore not physical, but psychological.

Two prominent army officers of the revolutionary group were



chosen to undertake the unpleasant job. The more senior of the two was the forty-year-old German-educated staff officer, Lt Colonel Prasas-Bhithyayudh, who was then director of the army staff college. Prasas was one of the four colonels who led the June 24 Revolution. The younger man, a French-educated staff officer with an artillery background, was thirty-five-year-old Major Pibul-Songgram. These two men were to lead a company of military cadets and naval officers to Prince Boribhat's palace and bring the royal prince to the Ananda Throne Hall. After this, they were to carry out a similar mission by picking up two important men from their houses, namely Lt General Sriharaj-Dejochai, the army's chief of staff, and Major General Sena-Songgram, commanding general of the first division.

When the armoured car which led the revolutionary contingent arrived at the palace, it was obvious that the Prince must have been informed of what was happening. The chief of police and his men were on duty there, ready to give full protection to their superior. After an exchange of gunfire without casualties, the police retreated to the backyard of the palace. Colonel Prasas got off from his armoured car and led his men towards the bank of the river. There, the field marshal in his pyjamas was standing among guards and members of his household. With great courage, the colonel approached his field marshal and saluted him attentively. "Are you one of the rebels?" the prince asked his former staff officer bitterly. The colonel did not answer that question. Instead, he briefly informed the field marshal of his group's objective to replace absolute monarchy with constitutional monarchy and also the objective of his presence at the palace, which was to invite him to the Ananda Throne Hall. To overcome the prince's reluctance to comply with the request, Prasas finally was compelled to give an ultimatum. He managed to take the prince with him in a military lorry while Boribhat was still in his pyjamas. On the way, the revolutionary contingent dropped by General Sriharaj's residence and forced him to come along in a bath towel. As for the other general, another group of soldiers were sent to pick him at his house. The general was slightly wounded and had to be taken to the hospital instead.

Besides Prince Boribhat, there were a few other members of the royal family who were held as hostages. They included Prince Naris, the gifted artist, and Prince Damrong, the father of Thai history. All hostages

were treated reasonably well and with full respect. Later on the same day, Prince Boribhat was requested to make a public announcement that was to end possible danger from resistance and bloodshed. He said: "In view of the fact that the People's Party has, with the purpose to obtain for the country a constitution, successfully taken over the government, I hereby request all military personnel, civil servants and the general public to cooperate in peace-keeping in order to avoid unnecessary bloodshed among our Thai people."

It was about 8.00 a.m. when Prince Boribhat was taken into the Ananda Throne Hall. Outside his temporary quarters, there was an armed unit of naval personnel on guard duty. The revolutionary officer in attendance was Lieutenant Prayoon Bhamornmontri. Prayoon's mother was a German doctor married to a Thai army officer who had been trained in Germany. A classmate of Pibul-Songgram at the royal military academy in Bangkok, the German-born officer went to Europe for further education where he met some young Thai students with whom he helped to found the People's Party in Paris. Upon his return home, Prayoon was partly instrumental in getting the coup organised. Prince Boribhat had known Prayoon since his childhood and in fact, the name "Prayoon" was given by him. Naturally, the field marshal was furious when he discovered that Prayoon, too, was "one of them".

When the two men were by themselves inside the throne hall, the prince enquired from Prayoon about the revolutionary leader. Was it Prince Bovoradej who left the defence portfolio with discontent the year before? Prayoon denied that, but refused to reveal the names of his leaders. The prince then proceeded to ask about the coup objective, questioning the gains expected to be realised. The young officer replied that what his group wanted were parliament and constitution, and nothing else. The prince therefore reminded him that the biggest problem to be faced by the new political group was that concerning the people. "The Chakri Dynasty had ruled Thailand for 150 years," the prince said, "we know well how to govern the Thais but 'do you?'" He also asked, "Is your group prepared to undertake 'the rolling of a heavy stone to the top of the mountain'?" Having learned that the young lieutenant had studied politics in France, Boribhat further reminded him of the tragedy after the French Revolution. Prayoon replied that he was fully aware of the historical incidents and was well prepared to face them. At that moment, Lieutenant

Commander Sindhu-Songgramchai, the leader of the naval revolutionaries, stepped into the hall with leaflets of the coup announcement. The thirty-year-old naval officer was an honours graduate from the Danish naval academy. The prince read the leaflet and was stunned by the aggressive tone of the first blast against the absolute monarchy regime of which he had been an integral part.

Soon afterwards, Field Marshal Prince Boribhat was requested to leave Thailand. He took residence at Bandung, Indonesia, where he passed away in January 1944 at the age of 63. In 1950, his remains were brought to Bangkok for a royal cremation with full military honours. Two men were then specially active in the arrangement: Field Marshal Pibul-Songgram, prime minister and minister of defence, and Admiral Sindhu-Songgramchai, commander-in-chief of the Royal Thai Navy.

The task entrusted to another young naval officer on the very same day was perhaps sentimentally most difficult. Lt Commander Subha-Chalasai took command of the gunboat "Sukhothai" and sailed to a very important destination, Hua Hin, where King Prachathipok, Queen Rambhai, and a number of the royal family members as well as top-ranking court officials had been on vacation. Hua Hin is a lovely seaside resort with miles of white-sand beaches stretching across small fishing villages and with mountain ranges in the background. There stood the beautiful Klai Kangvon Palace on the beach facing the blue sea of the Gulf of Thailand. The palace had been built during the reign of the late King Vajiravudh, an elder brother of Prachathipok, although its construction was complete only in the early years of the new reign.

The Sukhothai was anchored right in front of the palace, some 2,500 metres from the shore, at 10.00 a.m. on Saturday June 25. By that time the King had already been informed of what had happened in his capital and the appearance of the gunboat drew the attention of the palace guards and village spectators along the beach. The ship commander held a brief meeting with his lieutenants telling them that if faced with danger upon his landing ashore, he would throw his cap into the air signalling the prompt salvo of the Klai Kangvon by the guns of the Sukhothai. If nothing happened at the landing and he was subsequently taken into the palace, the Sukhothai would then wait until noon. If by then he had not come out to the beach, the Sukhothai would also immediately bombard all military establishments on the shore, including the Klai Kangvon Palace,

to effect an annihilation regardless of his own or anyone else's safety. After the order had been clearly given, the revolutionary commander, followed by a few of his men, stepped into a lifeboat which was rowed towards the shore.

Upon landing, the young naval commander and his men were escorted to an open building adjacent to the palace. After a while, His Royal Highness Admiral Prince Vudhichai, then minister of defence, came down to meet Subha-Chalasai. The junior officer stood up in attention and gave his former superior the letter of the People's Party with the request that it was to be delivered to the king. Having received the letter, the prince turned back and walked into the palace.

The letter which was dated June 24 contained the following: "Your Majesty:

"The People's Party of civil and military officers has taken control of the government and is holding some members of the royal family such as His Royal Highness Prince Boribhat of Nakornsawan as hostages. Those being held hostage would be harmed should the People's Party, by any means, be attacked.

"The People's Party has no intention to take away the throne. Our main objective is nothing but to acquire a constitution. Your Majesty is therefore requested to return to the capital reigning under the constitution drafted by the People's Party. Should Your Majesty decline the request or give no response to it within one hour after receiving this letter, the People's Party will proceed to proclaim the constitution and select a suitable member of the royal family to succeed to the throne."

The letter delivered to the king was co-signed by three colonels: Bhahol-Bholpayuhasena, Song-Suradej and Ridhi-Arkanay, the three most senior army officers who had engineered the coup.

Commander Subha-Chalasai waited patiently for no more than 15 minutes before he was granted permission to enter the palace where he had an audience with the king in his living room upstairs. King Prachathipok was sitting at a sofa surrounded by members of the royal family such as Prince Sawat, the king's father-in-law, Prince Vudhichai, defence minister, and Prince Purachatr, commerce and communications minister, members of the royal household, as well as high-ranking officers.

Declining the offer to be seated, the young naval commander chose to stand in attention showing his full respect to the ruling monarch



and his supreme commander. When the king asked him to read the letter for him, Subha-Chalasai kneeled down to receive the letter from the king's hand. Listening quietly, the king kept his eyes on the commander's face.

"Please stop it," interrupted Prachathipok, "we'd better talk."

Commander Subha-Chalasai returned the letter to him and remained in attention. He was no stranger to the king. Subha-Chalasai once served as flag officer of Admiral Abhakorn of Chumporn, an English-educated royal prince who was a very popular naval commander during the previous reign. Prince Abhakorn, however, had passed away some years earlier.

"Don't you ever realise that I am your king?" It was Prachathipok's first question put forward to the trembling junior commander.

"Are you here to arrest me ... and take me with you in your ship?" — the second question which met with a negative response.

"Don't you realise that I have with me the queen and more than sixty of my people here? How can we travel in such a small ship?" The king paused, slowly shaking his head, and then continued, "Will you not give me some honour as the king? I have agreed to everything asked of me."

Subha-Chalasai later confessed that he was, at that moment, overwhelmed by commiseration. He immediately told the King that he would send a cable asking the new government in Bangkok to send the royal train down there to bring Prachathipok and his entourage back to the capital.

"Suppose they do not comply with your request, what're you going to do then?" the king asked.

"If that were the case," Subha-Chalasai told his king, "then I myself, together with all my men on board the Sukhothai, would sacrifice our lives in defence of Your Majesty's honour."

Prachathipok smiled. It was his very first smile. For those who were present there, it was a puzzle to have heard those words from a leading figure of the revolutionary party. The royal train however did arrive and the king returned to Bangkok on that very same day.

In making his final decision to return to the capital, King Prachathipok sought advice from his queen. There appeared to have been a suggestion that the king should leave the country, at least temporarily,

during the political turmoil. If he so wished, he could have done so by making a journey southwards across the Malayan border. It was the queen consort who positively insisted that no matter what happened they should remain in Thailand. King Prachathipok took his queen's courageous advice in making his final decision.

In his reply to the revolutionary leaders' letter, Prachathipok spoke every word from the bottom of his heart. His letter dated June 25 read as follows:

"The Military Commanders for the Capital:

"I have learnt from your letter delivered through the royal secretariat that you desire that I return to the capital and become a constitutional monarch. For the sake of peace and for the sake of effecting a smooth transition, and also for the fact that I myself have conceived a change to constitutional monarchy, I therefore agree to play the role of a puppet in order to help facilitate the establishment of a new government. Should I refuse, there could be some difficulties regarding recognition by foreign powers.

"It is well-known that my present state of health is ruinous and that I am childless. Therefore it is not likely that I shall be able to endure hardship for long. Besides, I am neither ambitious nor capable of leading our nation to progress. I have stated all these with earnest sincerity."

Back in Bangkok early on the morning of Sunday June 26, the king and his consort were quietly driven from the Royal Railway Station, passing the Ananda Throne Hall on their way to their private palace by the Chao Phya River. Later that same day, the king granted an audience to seven men including some leading figures of the People's Party. The king, on that occasion, signed the amnesty decree. He also listened to the draft provisional constitution read before him and agreed to study it thoroughly himself.

On Monday June 27, King Prachathipok signed the provisional constitution, marking the establishment of constitutional monarchy in the country. Although his granting of the constitution followed a coup d'état, King Prachathipok will always be remembered as an unselfish monarch whose decision during that moment of crisis rendered a smooth and bloodless political transition in Thailand. His granting of the constitution was, beyond doubt, a most sincere act and a clear indication of his



devotion to his country and the people.

Three days later, on June 30, five leaders of the new government were granted an audience with the king at his palace. On this occasion, the revolutionary leaders formally begged the royal pardon for their part in bringing about the political change. Colonel Bhahol, on behalf of his colleagues, reported to the king in a humble voice:

“Your Majesty:

“Our attempt in the political change has been motivated solely by patriotism. Since all other independent nations have constitutional governments, we feel that if Thailand also acquires one, there would be opportunity for the people to assist Your Majesty more fully in the management of the state’s affairs. Everything now has been accomplished smoothly because of Your Majesty’s good wishes for the people. Your Majesty has been very kind to render valuable assistance and furthermore, has kindly granted amnesty to us. Your Majesty’s kindness will be cherished by all of us.

“The reason for our aggressive wording against Your Majesty and the members of the royal family on the day we staged the coup was nothing more than our determination to achieve instant success. We are well aware that all the Chakri monarchs as well as many members of the royal family certainly have played their roles in bringing timely progress to Thailand. Since Your Majesty has so kindly granted us an audience, we wish to take this opportunity once again to express our deepest apology to Your Majesty for our improper use of those words.”

Moved by the revolutionaries’ apology on the matter which had brought him personal sorrow and bitterness, the king gave the following sentimental reply:

“I thank all of you for your formal apology addressed to me and to the Chakri Dynasty. Your act has given me great pleasure; that you have not made an apology to me personally. I have left behind a long time ago whatever ill-feeling I might have had because I very well understand you and your purpose. You have acted out of goodwill for the nation, and for that reason, I have tried my best to help you in fulfilling your purpose. What gives me great pleasure is that you mentioned the fact that the Chakri kings and members of the royal family have played their roles in bringing Thailand some progress. In your June 24 Announcement, there were phrases which were deeply regrettable to me

and to the Chakri members as they were made to understand that the Chakri Dynasty had not done anything useful for the country. However since today you have righted a wrong; I therefore hope that your present act would mend the mutual goodwill between the Chakri members, your party's members and the people as a whole. Actually every member of the House of Chakri has deemed it his responsibility to serve the nation in one capacity or another. But like any other large family, not all members possess the same ability and some mistakes from their acts have been unavoidable. I however believe that whatever mistakes have been made, they were not made purposely. I am therefore very pleased that you now have recognised the efforts that the House of Chakri's members have so far made to the progress of our country. Such a recognition on your part will remove bitterness from our hearts. Besides, you have come today of your own will, without my request, which by itself is an honourable and conscientious act on your part, ... and this will earn you popular confidence as well..."

The revolutionary leaders learnt on the occasion that Prachathipok himself had for some time commanded a constitution to be drafted. With tears in his eyes, the king pointed at Phya Srivisarn, his former under-secretary of state for foreign affairs, and said, "Srivisarn, I sent you the draft for your comment. You said that the time was not appropriate for it and you also attached Stevens' note which gave support to your view." (Remon Stevens was an American who served as foreign adviser.) It was disclosed later that it was not only Srivisarn who considered a democratic government untimely, but some senior members of the royal family also shared that view. Their opposition to the granting of the constitution was made on the grounds that a democratic system of government could never thrive in an illiterate society. Not only were most Thais at that time illiterate, but they also showed no sign of interest in politics. A counter-argument was, however, that should the system of government undergo no changes, a high rate of illiteracy would continue to prevail. An absolute monarchy tended to endorse perpetual monopoly of the state in the few hands of the privileged class and as such, the people would never be given the opportunity to participate in the country's politics and administration. An interesting fact is that with the exception of a few officials close to the king, no one else had ever seen the draft constitution. King Prachathipok however did reveal some of its

main elements to Colonel Bhahol and his colleagues. He said that he wished to see the political change take place by steps. Starting with his absence from the cabinet's meetings, he would then gradually transform the privy council into parliament.

It was also disclosed later that the king had been aware for some time of the possible coup d'état to overthrow his government. In fact the police had been reporting the names of some persons involved in the conspiracy, but owing to lack of legal evidence, no arrest had so far been made. Although there were about 100 men involved in the conspiracy, mostly military personnel, only a few actually participated in its operational planning.

Essentially a military operation, the planning of the coup was left primarily to the army faction of the revolutionary group. The small group of 5-8 revolutionaries held 7 meetings in the early part of 1932, sometimes at Prayoon's residence near Samsen Railway Station, not too far from the Chitlada Palace. Prayoon, of course, played the role of the group coordinator. The brilliant German-trained army strategist, Colonel Song-Suradej, was assigned the role of the principal planner for the coup. His first operation plan was to employ large troops to launch a surprise attack on the palace in the middle of the night and force the king to sign the constitution. This plan was rejected by his colleagues on the grounds of its violence. Later Song-Suradej came up with his second plan, which was to gather troops at the Royal Plaza on a Sunday morning and then the revolutionary leaders would request an audience with the king and ask him to grant the constitution. This plan was also dropped because on its implementation, bloodshed would be hardly avoidable. The revolutionary group wanted neither bloodshed nor anything that would unnecessarily affect the king's personal status.

On June 12, the 40-year-old colonel submitted his third and final operation plan. According to this new plan, the coup would be staged during the king's absence at Hua Hin. There were three alternatives as to how the operation would be launched. First, a gathering of military officers, perhaps at the ministry of defence, and informing them of the group's intention to change the political system. Those officers who were opposed to the change would be arrested. In the meanwhile, personnel in the naval and civilian factions of the revolutionary group would be sent to take key figures of the old regime into custody at the Ananda

Throne Hall or on board warships. The second alternative was to send revolutionary detachments to arrest those key personnel and to cut off all communication systems early in the morning, while troops would be brought to assemble at the Royal Plaza by false orders. The announcement of political change would then be made to the bewildered and stunned officers and men, and the revolutionary officers would take over the command. The third alternative, in addition to the steps taken in the second, was to launch a surprise attack on Prince Boribhat's palace and take the prince to the Ananda Throne Hall where he would be held as hostage. *The group agreed on the third alternative and fixed the D-Day as Sunday June 19, but later postponed it to Tuesday June 21 and finally to Friday June 24.*

The operation was launched at 4.00 a.m. when Bangkok residents were still spending the last hours of their sleep in the early rainy-season night. The first assignment was the taking over of the central telephone house near the Memorial Bridge across the Chao Phya River. The bridge had been just officially opened on April 6, the day which marked 150 years of the Chakri Dynasty. The operation group, consisting of naval and civilian personnel, was under the leadership of First Lieutenant Nites-Kolakit who was assisted by Prayoon Bhamornmontri and Kovit "Kwuang" Abhaivong, the French-trained engineer, both at that time officials of the post and telegraph department. The mission was completed within a quarter of an hour, by the end of which the whole telephone system was put out of order.

At 4.30 a.m., Colonel Bhahol and Colonel Song-Suradej met with about a dozen of their army colleagues in front of the army hospital on Rajvithi Road for final assignments and division of labour. The naval detachment under the leadership of Lt Commander Sindhu-Songgramchai with some 100-150 officers and men had earlier been instructed to line up at the Royal Plaza before 6.00, at which time the army units would arrive. *The most difficult task for the army leaders was to get troops to assemble at the Royal Plaza. Song-Suradej conceived a brilliant tactic. He was given barely one hour between 5.00 to 6.00 a.m. to accomplish the task.*

On Thursday June 23, Colonel Song-Suradej who was head of the military curriculum of the royal military academy dropped by to see the academy's commandant and asked him to take all the military cadets to the Royal Plaza, just one block away, at 6.00 a.m. on the next day, to



observe, as part of their training, “the tactical engagement between tanks and the infantry”. The commandant easily agreed to comply with the colonel’s request. Song-Suradej then proceeded to talk with two infantry battalions’ commanders and similarly asked them to take their officers and men to the Royal Plaza for the military exercise. Finally, he saw the commander of the army’s engineer battalion and requested that before dawn the next day he bring all his men for morning exercise in the field in front of the battalion’s headquarters. He told the battalion’s commander that he would need some help from those men for his training exercise. The relatively smooth persuasion was possible because Colonel Song-Suradej commanded the respect of most officers as a leading military strategist. At that time, three infantry regiments were stationed in Bangkok and the revolutionary colonel had planned to place all of them at his disposal.

At 5.00 a.m. on June 24, under the direction of Colonel Song-Suradej, Captain Tasanai-Niyomsuk, the French-trained cavalry officer, and his lieutenants were assigned the task of getting all the tanks and armoured cars on the street. Tasanai was then in command of an armoured unit within the first cavalry regiment. Just before 5.30 a.m. all the dozen army officers including Bhahol, Song-Suradej, Prasas-Bhithyayudh, Pibul-Songgram and Tasanai-Niyomsuk arrived at the first cavalry regiment. The senior officers approached the regiment’s guard unit and asked for the regiment commander. They told the officer-in-charge that there had been an uprising in the city and gave him the order to get all officers and men of the cavalry regiment ready for action. Being a junior officer and a former pupil of Song-Suradej, the guard officer woke up the whole regiment with the emergency signal. Amidst the confusion, Colonel Bhahol used force to open the ammunition storeroom. Colonel Prasas, with the help of Tasanai and his officers, took over the tanks and armoured cars and ordered all military lorries to get on the move. All these steps were completed within half an hour. The armoured unit followed by the cavalrymen then moved out to the street and proceeded straight to their destination, the Royal Plaza. The cavalrymen were packed into the artillery regiment’s lorries, and they were joined by the artillery men under the command of Colonel Ridhi-Arkanay, one of the revolutionary leaders. All troops were led to the Royal Plaza but not before loading on more men of the engineer battalion who had been on

their morning exercise in the field nearby.

By 6.05 a.m. all units had arrived at the Royal Plaza. They were joined by the naval unit, the military cadets and the infantrymen who were falsely brought to watch the tank-infantry exercise. It was at that moment, Colonel Bhahol-Bholpayuhasena stood firm in front of the assembling troops and told them that the People's Party had taken control of the land.

The main success of the coup must be credited to the brilliant tactics conceived and carefully planned by Colonel Song-Suradej. It also rested with the leadership of a determined mind, Colonel Bhahol, and his courageous followers, both military and civilian.

While the taking over of power was predominantly a military operation, the civilian side of the mission was also of equal importance. It included the drafting of the statements and the provisional constitution, the briefings given to the bureaucrats and the press, and the information made to foreign powers. In other words, it was the task of instantly establishing a new government under a brand-new political system. The performance of this complex task required a solid legal background, a vivid imagination, correct foresight and a profound understanding of the workings of a democratic system. It was the task that was entrusted to a thirty-two-year-old man, a doctor of law from the University of Paris. His name was Pridi Banomyong.



CHAPTER 2

1932 : THE LAST YEAR OF ABSOLUTE MONARCHY

Bangkok celebrated its 150th anniversary in 1932. In the year 1782, seven years after the American Independence and while Europe was on the eve of the Napoleonic wars there occurred also a significant change in Thai politics.

General Chakri, the commander-in-chief of the Thai army, upon his return from a triumphant campaign in Cambodia found Dhonburi, the national capital, being caught in political turmoil. King Taksin, the great warrior who had regained independence for his country from the Burmese some 15 years earlier, was suffering from mental instability, the result of which was administrative and political confusion. The eventual administrative collapse brought about a coup d'etat which disposed of the king. Faced with the crisis and being aware of his responsibility to the nation, Chakri decided to take over. Bringing the country back to peace once again, he removed the capital across the Chao Phya River to Bangkok and proclaimed himself Rama I. That happened on April 6, which was to be known as Chakri Day.

On the same day, exactly 150 years later, the people of Bangkok then numbering some 450,000 witnessed the grand and lively celebration of their "Angel City" presided over by Prachathipok, Rama VII, a direct descendant of General Chakri. The highlight of the event was the official opening of the first bridge linking Bangkok with Dhonburi, the Memorial Bridge, signifying the identification of the origin of Bangkok and the

Chakri Dynasty. At the Bangkok end of the bridge there stood the towering statue of the founder of the Chakri House, who was also the founder of the city of Bangkok.

While the capital moved one step further in progress, the Chakri's absolute rule had however shown signs of decay. There were then many indications that the old prophecy that the Chakri rule would last only 150 years was becoming more apparent. Economic hardship, social injustice, as well as political discontent which had gradually crept into the Thai society were now openly reflected. As the combined pressures mounted, it was generally felt that perhaps the existing system of government under which the king and he alone was solely responsible for the affairs of the State might not be appropriate in the changed circumstances. Prachathipok had sensed all these since his unexpected succession to the throne in late 1925.

The economic hardship which Thailand encountered in 1932 had been the result of both domestic and external phenomena. On the domestic front, the problem of heavy deficits in the government budgets which had prevailed since 1920, during Rama VI's reign, called for drastic restraints in government expenditure, including the royal allowances. King Vajiravudh, Prachathipok's elder brother, who reigned Thailand for 15 years from 1910 to 1925 was a scholar-cum-artist. A great poet and a powerful writer, he spent most of his time cultivating the national spirit and culture. During his colourful reign, the royal court was both extravagant and lavish. While many new ideas and institutions, as well as progressive social changes, originated from the king and his court, government expenditure also rose steadily. Inevitably, the deficits in the government budgets became chronic. To safeguard sound public finance, King Prachathipok and his financial advisers and staff took the elimination of the budgetary deficits as the top policy objective. A military man by profession, Rama VII had been compelled to play the role of a financial executive. His achievement in bringing the deficits to an end was remarkable but not without creating hardship for thousands of his officials who were forced to retire from the service.

Higher taxes to increase the government revenue, together with large-scale retirement of public servants, resulted in a shrinkage of internal purchasing power and subsequently to widespread unemployment. The king on several occasions publicly confessed that he had to carry out



this contractive policy out of sheer necessity. He said that he was most sympathetic with his people for their hardship, but in the meanwhile he requested the people to understand and sympathise with his government. He went so far as to suggest that it was time that everybody should try to help himself by going into private business to earn a living. Unfortunately by 1932, the world's economic conditions were not on his side. The great depression had already produced some spill-over effects on the rural economy of Thailand. The sharp fall in world market prices adversely affected the income of the Thai farmers who formed some 90 per cent of the total working force in the country. With the decline in the farmers' incomes, all economic activities became stagnant. Employment opportunities were further restricted; government revenues further declined; and economic hardship was aggravated. When Great Britain left the gold standard in September 1931, Thailand, whose monetary link with pound sterling dated back to 1902 when she adopted the gold-exchange standard, did not follow suit. Continuing on gold, the baht became over-valued, a condition which did not only retard exports, but also substantially reduced the farmers' baht incomes. Finally, in May 1932, the Prachathipok government decided to leave the gold-exchange standard, but it was too late as the attempt to overthrow the regime was already imminent.

What has been described above were rather short-term problems involving financial crisis and economic stagnation. The long-term problem of the nation, on the other hand, focused on a single phenomenon, that is poverty, or, following the modern terminology, economic underdevelopment. Like all other countries in Southeast Asia, the Thai economy was predominantly agricultural. The country's income was derived from a few agricultural commodities, namely rice, rubber, teak and tin. Teak and tin were operated mainly by foreign business. In fact even the export trade had begun only half a century earlier. With the opening of the country to foreign trade in the second half of the nineteenth century, the Thai economy was geared to produce rice for export and the foreign exchange earned was used to pay for imported manufactures. At times, it looked as if Thailand would continue on this economic pattern forever. The Bowring-type treaties signed with foreign powers in the nineteenth century permanently placed the Thai economy on a free trade basis: no export restrictions and three per cent ad valorem import

duties. Deprived of tariff policy and not equipped with other fiscal and monetary measures, the only economic policy instrument at the disposal of the Thai government until 1932 was the exchange rate policy. Even the exchange rate policy had been chained by the country's adherence to the gold-exchange standard, as well as to the conservative Currency Act of 1928.

Deeply committed to sound public finance, and politically oriented towards economic conservatism, the absolute-monarchy regime tended to be satisfied with stability rather than with growth and progress. Such an attitude was apparently motivated by the existing socio-political structure on the one hand and the apprehension of foreign interference on the other. The Chakri kings were devoutly patriotic. Encountered with Western imperialist threats, they were determined not to let any foreign power colonise their country. For this reason, economic development had to give way to national security whenever their implications were in conflict.

Perhaps the only evidence of some attempt to develop the economy was in the area of communications. The construction of railways which began in 1891 made continuous progress with the completion of some 3,193 kilometres within a period of forty years. The projects were mainly financed by foreign loans on a self-liquidating basis. By 1932, the railway network in Thailand was extensive enough for the people to travel some 2,000 kilometres from Chiangmai, the northern capital, to the Malayan border in the south, connecting at Butterworth right down to Singapore. There were, in addition, the northeastern line and the eastern line; the former reached as far as Ubol near the Mekong River, and the latter ended at the Cambodian border.

Apart from railway construction there was hardly anything in the category of a "development project", except for a few power houses, a few kilometres of roads, and Bangkok's public utilities, including the water supply, the telephone service and the country-wide telegraph service. Industrial establishments were very rare. "There are many rice and sawmills in Siam, a single cement factory, a few soap factories, some ice works, and a couple of docks with big repair shops, but there are no other important industries, the country being essentially an agricultural one," to quote the official guide book published in 1928.

The reasons for the lack of economic development were clear. In



the first place, the socio-political setup then was far from conducive to growth. Those who were equipped to undertake development efforts, that is, those in possession of savings, entrepreneurial skills and opportunities, almost lacked the necessary motivation to induce economic change. With the exception of Chinese migrants who out of sheer necessity were compelled to earn their living by trade and a few aristocrats who were fascinated by the art of money-making, the rest seemed to be content with the power, prestige and wealth accumulated in the traditional way. Secondly, should there be an effort to get the Thai economy off the ground, the task itself would not be easy. For one thing, there was no capital available for large-scale investment. This was not so much the question of no savings accumulated, as the question of their mobilisation and availability. Thailand in 1932 possessed neither a banking system nor a money market. The other factor which would have made any attempt a flop even before taking off, was the almost complete absence of scientific and technical manpower: the engineers, the scientists, the technicians, the accountants, etc. In 1932 there could not be more than a few hundred people in this category, and practically all of them were engaged in government service. The acute shortage of these personnel was to continue for many years, perhaps until the 1960's. Thailand was late in recognising the significance of science and technology for economic development.

There had been, nevertheless, tangible progress made in some social areas since the reign of King Chulalongkorn, particularly in education and in public health. That enlightened monarch who ruled Thailand for forty-two years from 1868 to 1910 was unequivocally convinced in the significance of education as the means to survive foreign domination, as well as to achieve progress. Chulalongkorn fully recognised that the knowledge of western thoughts and administrative science was a prerequisite for the successful conduct of his country's foreign relations, and he badly needed men of high quality in his administration. A modern school system was accordingly established and foreign teachers were imported to introduce western languages and western arts and sciences to Thai children. Moreover, a good number of young Thais, including his own children, were sent to Europe for their education. By the turn of the century, there were already in the Thai government service a number of European-educated officials, both military and civilian.

They were graduates from Oxford and Cambridge, as well as graduates from British, German, Russian, Danish and French military and naval academies.

King Vajiravudh himself was a Sandhurst graduate who later read history at Oxford. Prachathipok was an Etonian who had graduated from the British military college at Woolwich. Abhakorn and Vudhichai had spent years as midshipmen in the British navy while Mahidol had graduated from the German naval academy. Yukol, Kittiyakorn and Chutathuj had been sent to Cambridge, whereas Rapee graduated in law from Oxford. Prince Chakrabongs was brought up at Tsar Nicholas' court in St Petersburg and later became a Russian army officer. Rangsit attended the University of Heildenburg and Dilok held a doctorate in economics from Tübingen. To further strengthen his administration, a number of foreign experts were brought in as advisers in finance, law, irrigation, forestry, public works and others. The first "General Adviser" whose primary responsibility lay in the area of foreign relations was Roland Jacmynce, the Belgian lawyer. He was succeeded by a Harvard professor of international law, Edward Strobel, in 1898. The emphasis on education continued into the reigns of Rama VI and Rama VII. More schools were established in the country, while the former Page School founded by King Chulalongkorn gradually developed into Chulalongkorn University. At the same time, a greater number of students were sent abroad for education and training. Although predominantly members of the royal family and sons of aristocrats, many of those students sent abroad came from ordinary Thai families. Despite all these efforts, Thailand in 1932 still suffered from a relatively high rate of illiteracy. The educational expansion was still not adequately broad-based.

Along with education, some progress had also been made in public health. Hospitals had been established and western medical science and treatments were being introduced to Thai society. Although the task of persuading the nineteenth-century Thais to send their children to school was considered arduous, it proved to be even more difficult to impel their sick members to receive treatment at a hospital. Faced with traditional resistance and with limited funds available, public health evidently remained quite inadequate in those days.

Inadequacy in social services was, however, only part of Thailand's social problem. Its crux tended to be found in the structure of the



Thai society itself. For centuries, Thai society had been characterised by the special relationship between the king — the lord of life — and his submissive masses. The unwritten understanding between them was such that while the latter agreed to submit their total existence at the disposal of the ruler, the former was expected to provide peace, justice, happiness and full protection for his people. The Thais had had full confidence in their monarch and were prepared to accept his directives and commands as being final. Being aware of his role and responsibility, the king exercised his unlimited power with great care, always keeping in mind as the ultimate objective of his rule, the country's independence, the people's happiness and the society's stability. In peace time, the monarch was allowed a luxurious private life. But in times of war, he was expected to stand in front of his army, being the first to personally engage in combat. The Thai king therefore assumed a multiple role in his society: the field commander-in-chief, the legislator, the chief executive, the supreme judge, and the centre of national unity. He was, in every sense of the word, the lord of life.

During the times when society was still small and economic life simple, such a social contract worked smoothly and effectively. As partner to the unwritten contract, the monarch was able to see to it personally that no breaches ever occurred. In the Ayudhya Period, there were cases when kings neglected their duties, but their reigns then were not expected to last very long. Nevertheless, as society became more complex with the increased expectations in life and with government responsibilities expanded, the partnership agreement between the monarch and the masses became more impersonal. The king himself, although not quite a tutelar head of society, had to increasingly depend on the bureaucracy for discharging his state functions. This bureaucracy was composed of men surrounding him; members of his family as well as those of the aristocratic classes, who were loyal to the king, but not responsible to the people.

Naturally before long there developed a class distinction between the ordinary people and the aristocratic families. As the king's relatives or servants, the latter acquired power, prestige and wealth in the society and were reluctant to dispense with them. The distinction was so sharp that their relationship with the masses developed into one between "masters" and "servants".

During his long reign, King Chulalongkorn exerted great efforts to “liberate” his people from their servile conditions. In fact, his bold act of abolishing slavery has earned for him a lasting memory in the heart of the Thai people. More than anyone else, Chulalongkorn carried out social reforms which paved ways to modernisation. His sons, Vajiravudh and Prachathipok, also followed their father’s footsteps in their individual styles. At any rate, neither of them ever resisted social change. Nevertheless, servility had become deep-rooted in Thai society. Social change could not be effected by only reforms from above. It also needed strong pressure from below.

As the population continued to grow, education expanded and the people’s expectations tended to rise. The feeling of social injustice began to spread. Exposed to the knowledge of social conditions in the modern world, some Thais began to wonder if their own country was really a land of freedom and independence.

In possession of both economic and political powers, the ruling elite class dominated the whole spectrum of Thai social life. In the economic sphere, they were landlords who collected rent both in cash and in kind from their tenant-farmers whose hardship only guaranteed their subsistence living. Many of them earned incomes from the interests on the loans they gave to their subordinates. Most of the members of the elite class were given appointments in government service from which they drew handsome salaries and derived social prestige. They, in addition, also demanded absolute submission and respect from their socially inferior countrymen. As the ruling class, the elite had access to good education, including that obtained in foreign countries, whereas the ordinary citizens, due to limited funds and opportunities, had to prove their exceptional intellectual ability before having the same access. Equipped with better education and family connections, the privileged class had monopolised the bureaucracy and the State’s political apparatus primarily for their own interest, either directly or indirectly. Not infrequently, they tended to justify their privileges in society on the grounds of their intellectual superiority. According to their perception, the people of Thailand were illiterate and lazy. They could never govern themselves. They were born to be governed.

Political discontent which had mounted in the years preceding 1932 was mainly caused by the monopoly of political and administrative



powers in the hands of the elite class. It must, however, be noted that despite economic hardship and social injustice, the ordinary people, including most public servants, never showed even the slightest sign of political discontent. They seemed to accept the country's political structure as a lasting reality. The conduct of political and administrative affairs were unconditionally entrusted to the monarch whose power was both absolute and final. However a group of foreign-educated officials thought otherwise. These by-products of the old regime recognised that the slow progress of their country had been caused by the socio-political system under which an absolute power was vested in one man and the monopoly of government was granted to one social class. They also recognised that neither economic development nor social reform could make a step forward as long as absolute monarchy and its related socio-economic pattern continued to prevail. This group of men, moreover, had lost faith in the possibility that changes could take place within the existing system. It was so clear that both civil and military senior officials invariably adhered to the self-survival principle under which they pledged their loyalty to the king and to their superiors, rather than to the nation or to the people. The maintenance of their status quo in the society must come before anything else, including the national interests.

There were also some incidents of a political nature prior to the June 24 event. During the reign of King Rama VI, appointments for high offices in the government normally went to officials of humble origin. Even in the cabinet, presided over by the king himself, ministers of humble origin exceeded their royal-prince colleagues in proportion. This phenomenon could be explained by the fact that King Vajiravudh was a person who demanded absolute concurrence from his subordinates. His ideas, like those of his father, were far ahead of time. Under these circumstances, he naturally found officials of humble origin easier to work with. They just did what he told them to do without questioning. He could not expect such complete obedience from members of his own family, particularly from those experienced uncles or the stubborn half-brothers. When Prachathipok succeeded to the throne, there appeared a marked reverse in the trend. Most of the high offices now went to members of the royal family. Not infrequently, their promotions by-passed more senior men regardless of age, qualification and experience. Before blaming King Prachathipok, an important fact must be acknow-

ledged. The king was the youngest brother of his royal predecessor. Between them, there were four brothers who could have succeeded to the throne as Rama VII if all of them had not untimely passed away. Prachathipok never anticipated his becoming a king until almost the last year of his brother's reign. At first he refused to accept the throne, but later agreed to do so only after his uncles, elder half-brothers and all the senior members of the House of Chakri kneeled down before him and pledged their allegiance to him. Prachathipok, then thirty-two, naturally had to depend on his family. He needed their advice, assistance and guidance.

At any rate this caused discontent, particularly when some appointments were mistakes and malpractices were reported. The discontent increased with the government's economy drive resulting in the large-scale retirement of public servants. It was falsely rumoured that none of the officials who were forced to retire was a member of the royal family or anyone close to them.

Taking all this into account, there could be no denial that in many respects the conditions in the year 1932 were inviting some major political change. One rumour after another spread in the capital regarding a possible coup. The attention seemed to focus on the resignation of General Prince Bovoradej, the defence minister. The elegant cousin of the king tendered his resignation in protest at the government's retirement scheme and the army's budgetary cut. As for the possible date of the coup, Chakri Day on April 6 seemed to be the popular choice of speculators. As actually turned out, it was neither Bovoradej nor April 6.

The coup d'état was led by Colonel Bhahol and his long-time friend Colonel Song-Suradej. They were joined by a small group of army and naval officers, among them Colonel Ridhi-Arkanay, Lt Colonel Prasas-Bhithyayudh, Major Pibul-Songgram, Lt Commander Sindhu-Songgramchai, Lt Commander Subha-Chalasai, Captain Tasanai-Niyomsuk, First Lieutenant Thamrong-Navasawat, and First Lieutenant Sangvorn-Yuthakit. As for the civilians, the group headed by Dr Pridi Banomyong consisted of young and energetic followers, many of whom would make their names prominent in later Thai politics, including Kovit "Kwung" Abhaiwong, Thawee Bunyakatu and Direk Jayanama.

The date was June 24.



CHAPTER 3

THE YOUNG LAWYER FROM AYUDHYA

Ayudhya was a pride in the long history of the Thai nation.

For 417 years, it was the nation's capital, a significant trading port and the centre of Thai civilisation. Ayudhya was founded in 1350, replacing Sukhothai as the site of administration, and it was destroyed in the year 1767. During these long years, Ayudhya witnessed victories and defeats, the rise and fall of dynasties, prosperity and depression, as well as glory and humiliation. Ayudhya also produced a number of national heroes and heroines.

At its zenith, Ayudhya was a heaven on earth where unique Thai arts and architecture were at their best. The city's colourful and glittering ceramic roofs of palaces and temples could be seen from quite a distance down the Chao Phya River which flows into the Gulf of Thailand. It was from Ayudhya that the first Southeast Asian embassy was dispatched to the court of Louise XIV, and it was here that faraway adventurers always dreamt of paying a visit. The romance of Ayudhya will never be recovered.

By the turn of the twentieth century, the grand old city no longer showed signs of gaiety or glamour. Except for the ruins which occasionally attracted tourists and archaeologists, Ayudhya had very little to claim for its significance. Like other provinces in the central plain, it was characteristically rural where thousands of hectares of paddy fields formed the common scenery. Between September through November the seasonal flood would turn the whole province into a vast sea. But by

December and January, when a cold breeze rolled through the central plain from the north, the paddy fields turned golden, signalling the harvest time of the year. After the harvest season until May when the first rain reminded everyone that the next paddy crop was to be cultivated, the Ayudhya folks took time off to enjoy themselves, including paying visits to relatives and friends, many of whom had migrated to the new capital some 120 kilometres to the south. It took only two hours and twenty-six minutes even in those days to go to Bangkok by train.

Administratively, Ayudhya was one of the provincial towns, although it was the administrative centre for some satellite provinces. The city was governed by a senior official titled “the old-capital governor” as distinguished from an ordinary “governor” as in the other provinces. At that time, the Ayudhya governor was a former diplomat who had served at the Royal Thai Legation in London for many years. A true son of Ayudhya, Phya Chaivichit-Sidthisastra was sent back to his hometown, following his father’s footsteps in taking care of the old capital. Phya Chaivichit maintained close contacts with his Ayudhya folks, including one of his cousins, Kerd, who was engaged in rice farming supported by a small trading business in the province.

Kerd was married to an Ayudhya girl named Koom and had a son, Siang, who followed his father’s footsteps as a farmer. When Siang grew up, he married Lukchandra, daughter of a relatively well-to-do businessman. In the year 1900 they had their first son. The child was born on May 11 in their house on the outskirts of the city just opposite a Buddhist temple, Wat Banomyong. He was given the name Pridi.

Siang Banomyong was a man of great foresight. He saw in education an everlasting asset and was determined that all of his eight children, four sons and four daughters, must have the best education he could afford. His eldest son, Pridi, always showed his keenness for learning since childhood. At the age of 10, he completed Grade 7 which was the highest school grade available in Ayudhya at that time, but his father refused to see his son terminate his schooling at that level.

Bangkok was still mourning the death of the enlightened King Chulalongkorn when Pridi was first sent to further his education in the capital city. He was enrolled at the Benchamabopitra School attached to the Marble Temple for one academic year and returned to Ayudhya, by then having already schooling up to Grade 10, to complete his secondary



education in 1914. His parents were desirous that their son should have an advanced education. Pridi was sent to Bangkok again and after a period of preparation at the prestigious Suan Kulab College, he was admitted to the Ministry of Justice's Law School in 1917 at the age of 17.

Six years earlier when he first came down to Bangkok, Pridi stayed with a monk at the Marble Temple. On his second visit, he temporarily resided with his mother's relatives and after being admitted to the Law School, he moved to live with a leading lawyer from whom he acquired valuable legal knowledge. It took Pridi only two and a half years to complete his law curriculum and he was called to the bar in 1919, becoming one of the youngest barristers. During his law student days, Pridi is recalled as being very attentive to the lectures which specially pleased his French teacher, M. Laydeker. He was the kind of student who never took any lesson for granted. He always expressed doubts and requested for further clarifications from his teachers until he was fully satisfied. M. Laydeker was then the Ministry of Justice's adviser and also a lecturer at the Law School. It was from this fine gentleman that Pridi first acquired his French. Pridi's respect for Laydeker was shown when he dedicated his *docteur en droit*'s thesis submitted to the University of Paris in 1927 to his former teacher.

Not long after he had been called to the bar, Pridi Banomyong was given the opportunity to put his legal training into practice as a defence lawyer. The case involved an accident in which the boat of a southern businessman hit and damaged royal premises near the mouth of the Chao Phya River. Regarded as a sensitive legal case involving crown property, the accident itself was undeniable. The accused businessman, Mr Lim Soon Nguan, found it difficult to find a counsel for his case. At that time, the young lawyer was staying with Phya Chaivichit-Visidthamathada, the son of the late old-capital governor, whom Lim Soon Nguan respected. He heard of the case, made a deliberate study of it and then volunteered to act as Lim's counsel. At the court, Pridi fought his first and only case in his legal career proving that the accident was an act of God. He also cited an old case during the Ayudhya period involving the sinking of a seafaring ship because of a storm. The nineteen-year-old lawyer won the case which he represented in three courts in succession. His legal victory earned him a reputation in the legal circle of the day.

In the same year, he joined the department of corrections as a

clerk with the support of its director-general, Phya Chaivichit. Many years later, Pridi recalled that he had the opportunity to acquire a good deal of knowledge on public administration from that experienced administrator. His profound respect for Phya Chaivichit was to be everlasting.

In 1920, Pridi Banomyong won the Ministry of Justice's scholarship to further his law studies in France. Before his departure, the justice minister arranged for him to have an audience with King Vajiravudh, a normal practice for the king's scholarship winners. The king told his minister that he had heard about the boy. "Send him to further his studies abroad," the king said, "he would return as an asset to the country."

Accompanied by his teacher, M. Laydeker, the young lawyer sailed to France in the middle of 1920. When his ship was passing through the Suez, Pridi asked his teacher about the canal's history. He then recalled that during King Chulalongkorn's reign, the Thai government once conceived a project with regard to the Kra Isthmus in southern Thailand, but due to problems in international politics, the project never materialised. Laydeker suggested that if Pridi was keen to render some valuable service to his country, he should, while pursuing his study in France, make some study on the defunct Kra project and take into consideration the other similar canal projects such as Suez, Panama and Kiel. The idea of the Kra Isthmus continued to linger in his mind for many years to come.

Upon arriving in France, Pridi first took French lessons, together with Latin and English. Within one year, he passed the entrance examination and was admitted to the University of Caen's Faculty of Law. After three years at Caen, the young Thai scholar graduated with the degree of licencié en droit. In 1924, Pridi transferred from Caen to Paris where he first obtained his diplôme d'études supérieures both in law and in economics and then worked towards his doctorate in law, docteur en droit de la république (sciences juridiques). He completed his doctorate in the year 1927, after submitting a thesis entitled "Du Sort des Sociétés de Personnes en cas de Décès d'un Associé (Etude de droit Français et droit comparé)" which was related to the legal problems of partnership. It was a doctorate with the annotation, "Très bien" or "Very Good". Pridi was the second Thai who obtained a "docteur en droit". But he was the very first who ever took "Doctorat d'Etat", that is the "state's doctorate" as distinguished from the "docteur de l'université" or the "university's

doctorate". The difference is that "Doctorat d'Etat" is reserved only for those who have previously obtained "licencié en droit", France's basic law degree.

Seven years in France were not too long for a young man who was at all times searching for knowledge and experience. Despite his brilliant academic achievements, Pridi always found time to enrich his social life. He did travel a little in Europe, and made a lot of friends. For many years he got along very well with His Highness the Thai minister. Prince Charoon Kridakorn was once very fond of him, to the extent that he asked Pridi to accompany him to a conference at the Hague as his personal secretary. When His Royal Highness Prince Prachathipok of Sukhothai, then a major in the Thai army, and his princess came to France to attend the French staff college, it was Pridi who personally and loyally attended to them.

In 1924, with Prince Prachathipok as honorary president, a Thai students' association was founded in Paris with the official title, "association Siamoise d'intellectualite et d'assistance mutuelle" or "S.I.A.M." Pridi was elected by forty-six Thai students to serve in the association's executive committee as its secretary. In the following year, he was elected the association's president. While he served in that capacity, there occurred an incident which was much talked-about then and is still talked-about even now.

Under Pridi's leadership, the S.I.A.M. proceeded smoothly, fulfilling the objectives for which it was established. In July 1925, the annual meeting was held at Chatrettes for a fortnight during which about 50 members from all parts of the country attended. Cordiality, hospitality and friendship were blended to give the gathering a success. The activities included sports, music, theatre and debates, aiming at unity among all members. The meeting was honoured by the visit of His Royal Highness Prince Mahidol of Songkhla (father of King Rama VIII and King Rama IX) who remarked with pleasure that such unity among the students as shown at the meeting would constitute part of national strength in the future. When the meeting finally came to an end, the members departed deeply impressed promising that they would meet again the following year.

The 1926 annual meeting of S.I.A.M. was attended by a group of students from England. Impressed by the S.I.A.M.'s activities, they

extended an invitation on behalf of the students' association in the United Kingdom to the S.I.A.M. to send its representatives to participate in their annual meeting in England in the coming August of the same year. The letter of invitation was read to the members by Pridi, who was still S.I.A.M.'s president, and after a consensus, two students were elected to represent their association at the British meeting. The next day, Pridi wrote to the minister requesting his approval for the S.I.A.M.'s representatives to attend the meeting in England. He did so in recognition of the fact that the two nominees were junior members of the royal family, thus directly under the legation's supervision. Prince Charoon flatly refused to give his permission on the grounds that the students' association in Britain was known to possess an uncompromising character and as such S.I.A.M.'s delegates would be subject to humiliation while attending its meeting.

When the minister's negative reply was delivered to the S.I.A.M. meeting, then in session, there was an uproar of discontent. The London-based association's representatives, including His Royal Highness Prince Chumpot of Nakornsawan, Boribhat's eldest son, strongly denied the Paris minister's accusation of their association. The meeting was of the opinion that the minister had no right to prohibit S.I.A.M. sending delegates to Britain. It was also revealed that the reason behind Prince Charoon's refusal was that the minister in Paris did not get along well with Phya Bharata, the superintendent for Thai students in England. Pridi was designated by S.I.A.M.'s meeting to write to Prince Charoon once again. This time, the minister confirmed his jurisdiction over the two delegates chosen and also accused S.I.A.M. for its failure to preconsult him on the matter. In despair, the meeting, convinced of its rightful action, sought the way out by nominating private students instead of government scholarship holders as S.I.A.M.'s delegates to attend the meeting in England.

Prince Charoon found time to drop by at the students' meeting one day and took that opportunity to criticise the meeting's organisers. It was reported that the minister walked around outside the building in heavy rain, refusing to accept an umbrella offered by students. Next morning he clashed with one of his secretaries, Luang Vichitr-Vathakarn, whom the Prince accused of befriending S.I.A.M.'s president, to the extent that the secretary requested to be transferred back to Bangkok. The minister later

wrote a letter to S.I.A.M. accusing the students' association of behaving like the Bolsheviks. S.I.A.M. represented by Pridi denied the Prince's accusation and pointed out that the association had done nothing wrong to have caused the minister's anger. After Pridi and his executive committee had met with Charoon, both sides expressed regret over the misunderstanding. The truce was, however, a temporary one. Not long after that, the minister was informed that many government students led by Pridi were contemplating a petition for an increased monthly allowance following the franc's falling exchange value. The students argued that their allowances were fixed in pound sterling, and as such appropriate adjustments should be made on the amount of French francs they received from the legation.

The students' action was taken as a direct insult to the minister's integrity and on this account, Prince Charoon lost his patience. He at once made a report to Bangkok accusing S.I.A.M.'s members of conspiracy and disobedience, and as for S.I.A.M.'s president, he demanded that Pridi should be recalled immediately. Being aware of the minister's report, the students went forward submitting their petition to King Pra-chathipok. They in turn charged the minister with three serious accusations: corruption regarding the students' allowances, misconduct relating to adultery and improper actions in the League of Nations. The dispute which started from a small matter had now become widened.

On October 22, 1926, the legation in Paris received the following cable from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Bangkok.

"His Majesty, having examined all the documents submitted concerning Prince Charoon's dispute with the S.I.A.M. and students' petition, has come to the conclusion that the students' society had deviated from the purposes for which it was formed. The objective of the society should be entirely social among students under the care of the Paris legation. It seems that the society has now become a sort of syndicate of students, in which the students meet to discuss the actions of the minister and to form resolutions and take actions contrary to the wishes of the minister. The students have discussed and condemned the manner in which the minister has been paying out their allowances, they have sent representatives to England knowing that it was against the wishes of the minister. They have shown themselves to be thoroughly hostile to the minister and the actions of the president of the society have been on the

verge of insolence. Such a state of affairs cannot be tolerated for if students are allowed to form themselves into a syndicate (union) hostile to the minister. In this way, no minister can possibly accept the responsibility of looking after the students' welfare in the future. His Majesty, therefore, orders that the S.I.A.M. in its present form should be dissolved. If it is still desired that some society be formed that will afford the students some social intercourse among themselves, new statutes must be framed in which the students will be allowed to have a free hand as to social arrangements but it must otherwise be under the strict control of the legation. Moreover, junior students of the preparatory and public school class should not be full members and have votes. They can join the holiday camp under the special care of a person or persons chosen by the minister. They should live as much as possible apart from the elder students while joining in some of the sports and entertainment. His Majesty considers that Nai (Mr) Pridi Banomyong must be held chiefly responsible for the society's deviation from its original purpose and for inciting a feeling of indiscipline and mistrust of the minister among the students. His Majesty, therefore, commands that Nai Pridi Banomyong be immediately recalled.

"As to the second part of the students' petition asking for their allowances to be paid in pounds instead of francs, His Majesty is willing to consider the matter after having received explanations from the minister. If it has not already been done, a copy of the petition should be supplied to Prince Charoon and he is requested to submit explanations with reference to the said petition concerning allowances.

"His Majesty deeply regrets to learn of insubordination among students and wishes to call them to their sense of duty."

That cable arrived in Paris just before Pridi Banomyong took his final doctorate examination.

At that time back in Bangkok the news of his recall from Paris had reached his parents and relatives. Pridi's father, in deep concern about his son's misfortune, approached Phya Chaivichit and asked for the latter's assistance. Phya Chaivichit was the brother-in-law of Chao Phya Yomaraj, one of the country's most respected public servants who had served as a cabinet minister since the Chulalongkorn reign. Siang Banomyong was able to submit his petition to King Prachathipok, begging His Majesty's kindness to postpone his son's recall until after he

had taken the doctorate examination. A most understanding man, Prachathipok kindly granted the petition and as a result, the following cable was dispatched by the minister of foreign affairs to the minister in Paris on November 25, 1926.

“With regard to the question of recalling Pridi Banomyong as contained in my letter of 178, October 27, I am now commanded by HM the King to communicate to Pridi the following message. It begins: With reference to your recall, your father has now petitioned His Majesty that it may be postponed until you have passed the examination for the degree of doctor of law which will take place shortly. His Majesty has been most graciously pleased to grant that petition on the condition that you tender to the Siamese minister in Paris (a) written apology and the expression of regrets for your attitude in connection with the recent unfortunate incident.

“Please take note of the content of the above communication and act accordingly.”

Pridi did submit his thesis, sat for the examination and was awarded a *docteur en droit*. He left Europe for Thailand in March 1927.

Years later, in his reminiscence of the unfortunate event which took place in 1926, Pridi at the age of 72 admitted that King Prachathipok's judgement that he must be held responsible for S.I.A.M.'s deviation from its original purpose towards a union or a “syndicate” was perfectly correct. He and some of his friends were then desirous to instigate fellow students' political consciousness which could lead to a struggle for political changes in the future. Their economic discontent over the allowances helped form the basis for the development of such consciousness.

Upon his return to Bangkok in April that year, the young *docteur en droit* from Paris reported to the Ministry of Justice and was immediately appointed a judge. But six months later, he was transferred to the judicial department's secretariat whose responsibility was to draft bills to be passed into law. The job was excellent training ground for Pridi as a law-maker and he was particularly interested in civil and commercial law in the revisions of which he played a significant part. He also took the opportunity of compiling Thai laws from the distant past up till then and had them published in volumes entitled, “Collections of Thai Laws”, for the use of the legal practitioners. His book became a best-seller, the

fortune derived from which Pridi set aside for the establishment of a small printing house of his own.

Besides the official duty at the judicial department, Dr Pridi was also assigned a teaching job at the Law School where he taught a number of subjects. However, there was a course of his lectures, "Administrative Law", which attracted wide attention among law students. In his lectures, Pridi outlined constitutional principles and Thailand's administrative development, and then concluded with basic political economy and public finance. Although the course was meant to touch on the legal aspect of public administration, in reality it delved upon the principles and practices of modern government. It could therefore be said that Pridi was the first lecturer who delivered lectures on politics in Thailand whose impact on the minds of his students was far-reaching. There was, at that time, a growing awareness of the people's political rights and their participation in government affairs, as well as of the state's primary responsibility in the economic welfare of its citizens.

Pridi seemed to devote himself fully to his official duties both at the judicial department and at the Law School. He was an energetic and hard-working public servant, establishing himself as a leading figure in the European-educated elite group of his time. It was a rewarding effort for the young man. He rose rapidly in the civil service both in rank and in salary. By 1932, his salary was twice as much as the initial pay he had received when he first entered the service five years earlier. His civil service rank was equivalent to that of a major in the military. And, in accordance with the tradition of those days, he was conferred the title, Luang Pradist-Manudharm.

Pridi's remarkable record as a public servant confirmed King Prachathipok's earlier judgement of the man. On granting the petition of Pridi's father in 1926, the king made the following comment which was passed to the minister of justice, Chao Phya Bhichaiyati:

"This man is intelligent but inclined to be a little brash, as is common among the young. Once he enters the government in a responsible position he will probably work well, and I do not really believe that he will become a 'serious danger to the government' as Prince Charoon has reported. If the government does not use him in a manner commensurate with his knowledge, then things might develop in an undesirable way."

Apart from the accomplishment in his work, Pridi was also successful in his private life. The salary from the government, together with the income derived from his publications, had made him financially comfortable. In 1928, at the age of 28, he married the daughter of Phya Chaivichit and had two children before June 1932. Phoonsuk, who is some 12 years his junior, has proved to be his life-long companion. She has always been at his side throughout the long years of struggle. A very charming and intelligent woman, she has been an ideal statesman's wife: understanding, unselfish, and courageous. The couple have six children, two sons and four daughters. They celebrated their Jubilee anniversary on November 16, 1978, at their small house at Antony on the outskirts of Paris.

In the afternoon of Thursday June 23, 1932, Phoonsuk accompanied her husband to Bangkok's Central Railway Station to bid him a farewell on his journey to his hometown, Ayudhya. Pridi had told her that he desired to enter a temporary Buddhist monkhood as has always been customary for young Thai men, and his trip to Ayudhya was meant to prepare for the event. Pridi however did not make it. He jumped off the train at the first stop from the Central Railway Station. He was then already engaged in some other business which was more urgent than entering the monkhood. The urgent business was to overthrow the centuries-old absolute monarchy in Thailand which had been scheduled to take place at dawn the following day.



CHAPTER 4

FOUNDING THE PEOPLE'S PARTY

The idea that Thailand should change from absolute to constitutional monarchy was first conceived and proposed in 1885. On January 8 of that year, a group of young Thais in London, convinced of the necessity of political change, submitted a request in writing to King Chulalongkorn that the country's continued independence was decisively conditioned by her complete reorganisation of the existing system of government under which a constitution was to be granted and a representative government was to be gradually established. The man behind the most daring proposal in Thai history was a member of the royal family who had represented his country in Europe since 1880, Prince Prisdang.

The Prince was a grandson of King Rama III, King Mongkut's elder half-brother who reigned from 1824 to 1851. Born in 1851, he was one of the first Thai students who were ever sent to Europe for education. After about ten years of schooling in England during the 1870's, he returned briefly to Bangkok but once again was sent back to Europe, primarily to accompany one of Chulalongkorn's younger brothers to further his education there, and also to bring the King's wedding presents for Prince Wilhelm of Prussia and the Crown Prince of Austria. In 1882, Prisdang was appointed the first resident Thai minister to the Court of St James as the envoy extraordinary and minister plenipotentiary to all the courts of Europe and to the United States, the countries in treaty alliance with Thailand. A man of superb quality, the diplomat prince



managed, within the five years of his European assignment, to improve his country's relations with the West, to correct much of the unfair treatment and to lay down the groundwork for Thailand's diplomatic representation abroad. Moreover, he was entrusted with the responsibility of arrangement and supervision of the growing number of Thai students sent to Europe, among them His Royal Highness Prince Sawatsophon, who later was to become King Prachathipok's father-in-law, Prince Charoon, later the Thai minister in Paris, Prince Bovoradej, Charoon's younger brother, and many commoners including Prayoon Bhamornmontri's father whom Prince Prisdang arranged for training at the royal Prussian military academy.

Perhaps the most difficult task for Prince Prisdang as Thailand's representative in Europe was that of obstructing the European imperialist encroachments. By that time France had already installed her authority over Vietnam and was in the process of annexing Laos and Cambodia, in which she was eventually successful. Britain, on the other hand, had acquired Malaya and was also taking steps to annex Burma. In order to preserve her independence, Thailand found in the art of diplomacy the only means available of at least deterring the outward aggression of these colonial powers. Thai foreign policy at that time placed, as top priorities, cordiality with the European powers by which mutual respect and sympathetic understanding were expected to form the basis of the relations. Equally important was the strict adherence to international law which would at least serve as the cornerstone of justice and fairness. Lastly, it was the so-called "bend with the wind" approach which aimed at avoiding direct confrontation and conflict with the colonial powers so that the latter could find no cause to resort to outward aggression. Prince Prisdang, Thailand's envoy in Europe, did his best under the circumstances in seeing to it that his country's foreign policy was implemented to its utmost success.

The task was extremely arduous because the nineteenth century's colonialism was running high in European politics. Not that sympathy with Thailand was entirely lacking among statesmen and politicians in Paris, London, Berlin and other capitals, but it was a matter of course that colonial interests were placed above justice and conscience. The difference was only in degree and in ambition as some powers were more immediate as threats to Thailand's national security than others. The

most threatening power then was France and second to her was Great Britain.

In 1885, soon after the fall of Burma to the British, Prince Prisdang, at that time the resident minister in Paris, received the grieved Burmese ambassador who came to see him for advice and consolation. Burma had sent an embassy to France in order to request the latter for assistance against the British. But it was too late as France's interests were not best served by her interference with Britain's annexation of the helpless Southeast Asian nation. The Burmese ambassador revealed his sad story to Prince Prisdang that his embassy had been sent to Europe to ask for the assistance of Italy, Germany and France, but none came to rescue. He therefore tried to persuade the British government not to go to war with Burma, and also asked his own government to comply with the obligations that were at issue. None of his earnest attempts met with success. The Burmese government wrongly decided to resist the British and war broke out between the two countries. One of the most important points revealed by the Burmese ambassador was that his country's easy fall to the British had been attributed to the fact that the Burmese people had offered no resistance to the foreign aggressor. Having suffered for a long time from their own government's autocratic rule, they did not mind living under a foreign power if it meant a better government. Finally, the Burmese ambassador asked Prince Prisdang whether it would not now be the turn of Thailand to succumb to the same fate.

The Thai minister reported fully the conversation he had with the Burmese ambassador, together with news clippings on the Burmese affairs, to King Chulalongkorn. The King of Thailand took the event seriously and asked the prince to make an overall assessment of the situation and also his view on what Thailand should do in the event of encountering increasing pressure from the colonial powers. The prince had of course strong views on the matter, but instead of giving his personal opinion directly to the king as requested, he made it a collective proposal of three other princes and seven senior Thai diplomats at the legation in London. One of the three other princes who co-signed the 1885 proposal was Prince Nares, Chulalongkorn's half-brother who was at that time the resident minister in London. Prince Nares was the father of Prince Charoon and Prince Bovoradej. The other two were Prince Sawatsophon and Prince Bhidhyalap, also the king's half-brothers. Among the seven

senior diplomats co-signing the proposal to the King was Phya Chaivichit-Sidthisastra, who, after returning to Thailand, was to become Ayudhya's governor, and later a privy councillor.

The 1885 Proposal contained four crucial points:

1) that Thailand's diplomacy would not and could not save the country from colonisation in the long run. Not even the adherence to international law could do so, whereas the "bend with the wind" approach, at best, could only delay it;

2) that the colonial powers would justify their actions on the grounds of the need "to salvage decayed and disorganised societies so that people might achieve justice and better living conditions";

3) that it was imperative that Thailand must completely reorganise her system of government. Whatever reforms that had been undertaken such as the abolition of slavery, new palace manners, and certain western lifestyles were "either insufficient or superficial to the basic political, social and economic problems of the country"; the country "should have a constitution and the system of government should change from absolute to constitutional monarchy". Most importantly, the emphasis must be placed on the promotion of "the sense of equality and pride in all Thai citizens", as well as "the feeling that the country belonged to all so that in time of crisis everyone would be united" in defence of the nation; and

4) that the change in the political system should be accompanied amongst other things by gradual universal suffrage, an administrative system based on incentives and merits, and an efficient army.

King Chulalongkorn took the recommendations open-mindedly. He formally thanked the princes and the officials for their concern of the country and stated that he agreed with the proposals and in fact he had started governmental reforms in gradual steps. But as to how much they could accomplish under the circumstances still remained to be seen. The king, however, was displeased with Prince Prisdang for having involved others on this matter. The prince regretted his own action, but it was too late. In the same year, all the four princes and senior diplomats were recalled.

There was ample evidence to confirm the fact that King Chulalongkorn was at heart convinced of the democratic principles. Since his succession to the throne in 1868, he had earnestly and voluntarily carried

out many dramatic reforms both institutionally and intellectually which paved the way to democratisation. He had taken a very bold step by abolishing slavery once and for all from Thai society. He had reorganised the government administration so that it would effectively modernise the country. It was he also who introduced the system of mass education in Thailand. Chulalongkorn's numerous remarks, comments and viewpoints found in his personal correspondence and official papers unequivocally prove that he sincerely believed in equality of mankind, in the responsibility of the king and the state to the welfare and justice of the people, and in the social and political reforms based on western democracy. In his reply to the 1885 proposal, Chulalongkorn emphatically stated that "I am most desirous of carrying out the change successfully. There is no question whatsoever that I would resist the loss of my so-called 'absolute power'."

The fact was that the great king understood the limitations of his country and its people so profoundly. The obstacles to democracy in Thailand were found in the lack of public support on the one hand and in the shortage of essential personnel to fulfil the various functions on the other. Even seventy years after the king's death, these obstacles still remain to be seen. If democracy in present-day Thailand is not working perfectly, it is undoubtedly due to a lack of public support and to the shortage of qualified personnel.

Nevertheless, the king never took a "wait and see" attitude. Convinced in education as the means to overcome the obstacles, Chulalongkorn saw to it, as far as he could, that his people received education as widely as possible. The curriculum patterned on the western philosophy of education was introduced; foreign teachers were imported; and Thai youths, members of the royal family and commoners alike, were sent abroad, mostly to England — the world's model of democracy. He was quoted as stating that "... I will ask my son, Vajiravudh, to give a present to his people immediately upon his succession to the throne, that is parliament and the constitution."

King Rama VI, Vajiravudh, gave his people neither parliament nor constitution, but the fifteen years of his reign, from 1910-1925, saw the introduction of a number of democratic practices. Brought up in England and acquainted with British democracy at work, King Vajiravudh furthered his royal father's initiative in expanding education and made it

compulsory for all Thai children. It was also during his relatively short reign that the first university in Thailand was established — Chulalongkorn University — in 1913. A man of letters, King Vajiravudh encouraged public opinions in the press and he himself regularly contributed articles which aroused patriotism. When the First World War broke out, the king led his nation to join with the allies in the defeat of Germany, because of his belief that the allies were right and the Germans were wrong. The fact that the war was won, and that a thousand Thai troops had fought alongside with the winning armies on the continent provided Thailand with the opportunity to negotiate for the revisions of the unfair treaties imposed on her in the second half of the nineteenth century. The decade of the twenties' saw Thai diplomats and their foreign advisers busy with the task of restoring Thailand's sovereignty.

Expecting that King Vajiravudh would grant the constitution ending absolute monarchy, many well-educated Thais became disappointed when nothing of the sort ever happened. Although possessing a democratic spirit, the king did not feel that the change in the government system was a matter of urgency. Even if the king himself, like Prachathipok later, might conceive that it was time for the change, there were still powerful conservative elements in the hierarchy who could persuade him to postpone his decision indefinitely. Perhaps the social and economic interests explain why political changes could hardly be undertaken by those in power. Political changes have always been initiated and fought for by those under the rule.

In 1911, just one year after Vajiravudh's succession to the throne there occurred an incident of far-reaching political consequences. In that year, a group of about 100 young officers were arrested on charges of conspiracy to overthrow the government. Three of them were sentenced to death, but the king intervened to have their death sentences reduced to life imprisonments. Twenty of them were sentenced to twenty years imprisonment, although King Vajiravudh released them after 12½ years. Most of these army officers were freshly graduated from the royal military academy.

Two years earlier, the last year of the Chulalongkorn era, some of these young officers had witnessed the flogging of five officers and men on the lawn inside the ministry of defence which was carried out in front of Crown Prince Vajiravudh. The outdated savage punishment was

brought back specially for the occasion. What had happened was that the officers and their men had engaged in a brawl with the crown prince's courtiers in which they chased the latter right to the palace gate. Having been told of the incident, the crown prince commanded an investigation into the matter. The captain who led his officers and men in the brawl confessed, and all of them were detained pending disciplinary actions.

Considering the act a serious insult to his own status, the crown prince made a request to King Chulalongkorn that the five officers and men be flogged as in the past. The story goes as far as that Vajiravudh would give up his position if his request was not duly granted. The flogging incident was a shock to the army circles, particularly the military cadets who, in humiliation, refused to attend their class for a few days. They returned to the class only after the popular army chief of staff, Field Marshal Prince Chakrabongs, Vajiravudh's younger brother, had spent an hour consoling them. Many of these cadets were among the conspirators arrested two years later.

There was another incident which tended to humiliate the army. After having succeeded to the throne, King Vajiravudh created the civilian territorial force, the so-called "Wild Tiger Corp", whose activities and functions ran parallel to those of the professional army. What the king actually had in mind was to arouse patriotism among civilians, giving them a sense of defence responsibility in time of need. However, his objective was not well understood by the public. And also because of the king's personal attention to the "Wild Tiger Corp", many young army officers felt degraded by the corp's establishment.

The two incidents, although related by time sequence, were nevertheless not the cause of the abortive coup in 1911. The real cause lay in the eagerness on the part of new-generation Thais who wanted to see their country achieve social and economic development like other countries. The rapid progress of Japan after the Meiji Restoration was an example of what could be done. The young conspirators were convinced that Thailand would never progress as long as she was still under the obsolete system of absolute monarchy. The coup plan, however, leaked out to the authorities. Prince Chakrabongs who obtained the king's permission to make the arrest was deeply moved when he discovered that many of the conspirators were his own subordinates. In fact, the coup leader, Captain Leng Srichantra, was the personal physician to the chief



of staff.

The abortive coup of 1911, in effect, quelled any further attempt to overthrow the absolute-monarchy government for two decades. It did not, however, extinguish the fire of revolutionary thinking which continued to simmer throughout the Vajiravudh reign. As the educated class expanded its base, people began to be aware of the government's failure to develop the country. Gradually, there was almost a consensus that political change was imperative.

A consensus that Thailand must change her system of government to constitutional monarchy was reached in Paris.

Early in August 1925, two young Thai men who had become close friends for some time were having a stroll along Henri-Martin. The topic of their conversation, as usual, was Thailand's backwardness. They shared a critical view regarding the absolute-monarchy regime, the removal of which being prerequisite for Thailand's progress and full independence. Lieutenant Prayoon Bhamornmontri, formerly a royal guard officer, then proposed, "Let us do it!" His companion, Pridi Banomyong, grasped Prayoon's hands and asked with excitement, "Are you sure of what you have just said?" Prayoon replied, "Certainly." And that was it.

In his memoir, "My Life in Five Reigns", written some fifty years later, Lt General Prayoon Bhamornmontri recalled that a few days after that historic occasion, Pridi became suspicious that Prayoon could have been an agent of Thai police going after students in Paris. Pridi was aware that Prayoon had been a royal guard officer whom King Vajiravudh knew personally. It was therefore necessary for the lieutenant to point out to his friend that he conceived political change was not to overthrow the monarchy, but rather to acquire a constitution under which the king's responsibility in the state affairs was to be lessened. Monarchy was definitely to continue its glory in Thailand. On this clear understanding, the two men began to look for ways and means to implement their objective.

At that time, there were two young army officers who, like Prayoon, had recently arrived in Paris. One of them was Lieutenant Plaek Pibul-Songgram who was Prayoon's classmate since their cadet days in the royal military academy in Bangkok. Having graduated from the army staff college with the highest marks, Pibul-Songgram was sent by the

army to further his artillery training in France. The handsome twenty-seven-year-old officer was already married with a few children. He had both charm and persuasive power, and was well-liked by his friends. The other army officer who had arrived in France together with Pibul-Songgram was, like Prayoon, a private student. A son of a colonel, Second Lieutenant Tasanai-Niyomsuk was a cavalry officer who was known for his straightforwardness and boldness. Tasanai was then attending the French cavalry officers' school at Saumur. Pridi and Prayoon approached them and, without hesitation, the two officers agreed to join in the revolution plan. After that, three more men were brought in. One of them was Toua Labhanukrom, a science student in Switzerland. Another one was a law student in England, Nab Bhaholyothin. The seventh member was an attache at the Thai legation in Paris, Siri Raja-Maitri.

On February 5, 1927, the seven young Thai men convened their first formal meeting at Rue du Sommerard, No 5, in Paris. The meeting which lasted three days elected Pridi as its provisional chairman and leader of the People's Party. It was also at that historic meeting that the followings were unanimously agreed upon by the party's founding members:

- 1) The People's Party had as its objective the undertaking to change Thailand from absolute monarchy to constitutional monarchy with a view to acquire absolute national independence, to maintain law and order, to promote economic well-being, to guarantee equality for all, to grant complete liberty and freedom and to provide the people with education. These were to be known as the "Six Principles";

- 2) Coup d'etat or the instant taking over of power was to be adopted as the means to achieve the political change, *fait accompli*, so as to prevent foreign intervention;

- 3) The founding members were to serve as the party's provisional central committee, and each would act as the leader of his own group in the selection of new members. Initially, only two new members for each group were to be recruited and their acceptance to the party's membership had to be unanimously approved by the central committee;

- 4) New members were to be selected on the basis of their character, emphasising their dedication to the national cause, courage, and the ability to keep secrets. These members were to be classified under three categories, namely, those who joined the party before the coup d'etat



(D.1); those who joined at the time the coup d'état was being launched (D.2); and those who joined after the coup d'état had shown signs of success rather than of failure;

5) Pridi Banomyong was assigned the task of drafting the policies and programmes to be implemented after the successful coup, including a programme for national economic development; and finally

6) Nab Bhaholyothin, the most well-to-do member, was entrusted with the responsibility to take care of his friends' families in case of the coup failure. To keep his identity a top secret, Nab was required to lead a quiet life and to avoid frequent meetings with the party both in France and back in Thailand.

Thus the People's Party laid down its foundation stone, the solidarity of which was so crucial as to render the ambitious task undertaken seven years later a miraculous success. Pridi, having obtained his *docteur en droit* degree, returned home the following month. In October of the same year, Pibul-Songgram also left for Bangkok to become a staff officer attached to the army's inspector-general directorate under Colonel Bhahol. Prayoon, however, stayed on reading political science in Paris until 1929.

A few months after the People's Party had been founded, a handful of new members were admitted in Paris, including Thawee Bunyakatu, an agricultural science student; Banchong Sricharoon, a Thai Muslim student from Egypt; and Lt Sindhu-Songgramchai, a brilliant midshipman from the royal Danish naval academy. Back in Thailand, a few former students of Europe with whom Pridi and his original group had made acquaintance, such as Udom Sanidvong from Switzerland, Kree Dejativong, Saprang Debhasdin and Leng Srisomvong from England, were admitted to the party membership under the D.1 category. In the meanwhile, many others, both military and civilian, were also recruited in accordance with the 1927's founding principles. Most, if not all, of the party's members were young men in their twenties and almost all of them were relatively junior public servants or junior military and naval officers. Many of them were to play important roles in Thai politics and administration for many years to come.

Not all of the contemporary students in Paris were admitted to the People's Party. Some had nothing to do with either the party or the June 24 Revolution at all, while some were approached only a few months

before the event took place. Kwuang Abhaivong was in the latter category. In 1963, five years after Field Marshal Pibul-Songgram left the country and sixteen years since Pridi had been living in exile, Kwuang Abhaivong was reminiscing about the forgotten story of the People's Party in one of his public speeches. The three-time prime minister of Thailand revealed his active role, saying that he knew practically nothing about the founding of the People's Party in Paris. He told his audience about his close friendship with Pridi and Pibul-Songgram, the activities of the S.I.A.M. as well as the rift between students and the minister whose wife was Kwuang's elder sister. Back in Bangkok, Kwuang noticed that "Pridi, Pibul and Prayoon were apparently the nucleus of the activities." He knew of meetings which took place here and there but he absolutely had no part in the oath taking. Kwuang told a story of a meeting that took place in a boat about two months before June 24, 1932. At that meeting, Kwuang for the first time met Colonel Bhahol and Colonel Song-Suradej. "They would not tell me what they were up to," said the late prime minister jokingly, "and when we arrived at a place where birds were plentiful, Pridi told me to get a rifle and go out to shoot the birds in the paddy field." Some of the meetings held on the eve of the coup even took place at Kwuang's own house. "They, as usual, would not let me listen to the discussion." Kwuang said, "I was assigned guard duty at the front gate." It was 10.00 p.m. on June 23 that Prayoon called at his house and told him to get ready for his specific assignment in the first stage of the coup.

Kwuang's story was confirmed by Pridi in his booklet, "The Royal Family in World War II", published on his seventy-second birthday in 1972. Pridi referred to the established principle relating to the recruitment of the party's members. He stated that although he personally supported Kwuang's membership, some of his colleagues felt concerned about his "exaggeration tendency". They did not trust that Kwuang, for his personal character, was able to keep the party secrets. It was therefore decided to approach him just before the coup took place and assign him something like guard duty as described by Kwuang himself.

There was, in addition, clearly the need for senior men to lead the coup. The occasion arose when Colonel Song-Suradej and his colleague, Colonel Srisidhi-Songgram, came to Europe on a study tour. The two colonels were among the Thai army officers who had been educated and



trained in Kaiser's Germany. Prayoon had known them well, particularly Song-Suradej who had taken German lessons with his mother and also had been a frequent visitor to his house. Prayoon brought up the issue of political change during one of their conversations, and even asked Colonel Song to join him in overthrowing Thailand's absolute monarchy. The colonel was impressed with the idea and, without hesitation, gave a favourable response. He told Prayoon that they would discuss the matter in greater detail when both of them were back in Bangkok. A few years later, Prayoon got in touch with the colonel again in Bangkok and found Song-Suradej as determined as ever. He said that he was ready at any time, "as the illness of absolute monarchy had by then become unbearable."

In his memoir written while in exile in Cambodia, Colonel Song-Suradej recalled that his personal reasons for staging the coup in 1932 were, firstly, that the king with his absolute power was evidently incapable of leading the country to progress, and secondly, that almost all high-ranking officials, both military and civilian, concerned themselves solely only with ways and means to gain the king's favour. From his standpoint, as these two elements were leading the nation to doom, it was therefore necessary that absolute monarchy must give way to a representative government. Song-Suradej's emphasis was placed on using qualified men for administration. Apparently though, he also considered himself a qualified man, at least in the task of reorganising the Thai army. Song-Suradej was recognised as a brilliant strategist with a quick decisive mind. His major shortcomings consisted of the lack of deliberation and compromise. Because of these, Colonel Srisidhi-Songgram pointed out to Prayoon that although he agreed in principle, yet he could not work with his friend as Song-Suradej's strong self-confidence and uncompromising attitude would make future conflict between them unavoidable.

Colonel Song-Suradej had a still closer friend whose seniority in age he recognised, and whose courage and righteousness he respected. Born in 1888, Bhahol-Bholpayuhasena was more than four years older than Song-Suradej and in 1932 he was inspector-general of the artillery, a senior army post awaiting promotion to the rank of general. Bhahol had spent all his life in the army. He was sent to Germany at the age of 16 after having topped his class in the royal military academy. He spent almost

ten years in both Germany and Denmark and graduated in the same class with Nazi's Goering. At the age of 44, the artillery inspector-general was well respected by most of the progressive army officers including Major Pibul-Songgram. Apart from Song-Suradej, another close friend of Bhahol was Srisidhi-Songgram, also a German-trained army officer. In fact, Bhahol, Song and Srisidhi were then often referred to in the army as "The Three Musketeers".

Like Song-Suradej, Colonel Bhahol had felt for some time that the existing system of government was hopelessly disappointing. He had observed many irresponsible acts on the part of high-ranking officers and members of the royal family in decision-making and administrative-handling. In Bhahol's view, these people were both old-fashioned and narrow-minded, and had no respect for the viewpoints and opinions of their subordinates, no matter how sensible they seemed to be. The fact that the country could not be left under the monopoly of these few men forever was troubling the conscience of the colonel. Thailand definitely needed a drastic political change.

Bhahol quietly consulted his two closest friends on the matter and obtained agreement from them that the situation was such that the country would be saved only by some change. The question remained as how to change. Srisidhi's attitude was never clear to Bhahol, perhaps he had no confidence that the existing regime could be overthrown by force. On the contrary, Song-Suradej unhesitatingly agreed to collaborate with him. The two friends had held discussions on the matter for a few years. What was needed was a group of men who shared their feelings and who were ready to risk their lives for the common cause. Once or twice, however, Song told Bhahol about Prayoon's contact, but the senior colonel did not take it into consideration seriously.

It was Lt Colonel Suraridh-Prithikrai, Bhahol's younger brother, who approached the artillery inspector-general on behalf of the Prayoon-Pibul-Pridi group. Suraridh had been Prayoon's commanding officer in the royal guard regiment. A man of solitary character, he had left the army many years earlier and had been living a quiet life. Like his brother, though, he had been frustrated with the way the country was being run. And it was his patriotic conscience that made him agree to approach Bhahol on behalf of the Prayoon group. He told his brother that Thailand was being ruined and that the country needed a man like him to set it right



before it was too late. Bhahol was extremely glad to learn of his brother's viewpoint, which was identical to his own. He told Suraridh that it was a gigantic task, the success of which seemed to have a negligible probability, if it were carried out only by the two brothers. At this point, Suraridh quickly informed him that there were other people who were ready to collaborate and in fact, these people had requested that Bhahol was to become their leader. Later, there was a meeting between Bhahol and Prayoon at Bhahol's residence. On that occasion, Bhahol was told of the People's Party which had been formed in Paris and had now acquired a sizeable membership in Thailand. It was also disclosed to him that Major Pibul-Songgram and Captain Tasanai-Niyomsuk were the leading figures among the army group, while Lt Commander Sindhu-Songgramchai took charge of the navy side. As for the civilians, Pridi and Toua Labhanukrom had succeeded in gaining many new recruits. Prayoon also informed Bhahol that he had also approached Song-Suradej who had agreed to collaborate. As for Srisidhi and others, Prayoon said that he would rather leave them to Bhahol himself.

The crucial link between the Paris group and Colonel Bhahol set the transformation of ideals into action. It was no longer only a consensus among patriots that absolute monarchy was to be overthrown, but also their agreement on how and when it would be carried out. By this time, Bhahol and Song had managed to obtain collaboration from two other colonels, namely Ridhi-Arkanay, the artillery regiment commander, and Prasas-Bhithayudh, the army staff college director. One night early in 1932, the first meeting of the revolutionaries took place at Prayoon's residence, just across the street from the Chitlada Palace.

Almost seven years had gone by since what had taken place on Henri-Martin in August 1925. Throughout these long years, Pridi's mind was set upon one thing: how to bring democracy to the Thai people. Now his dream was coming true. With the collaboration of courageous and progressive senior army officers, and with the support of a number of young officers and civil servants, the realisation of the coup was imminent. Accepting the responsibility for political and administrative transformation after the coup had become a success, Pridi occupied himself with the drafting of the country's first constitution, a programme for administrative transition, as well as a sketch of Thailand's economic development plan.



CHAPTER 5

THE FIRST ROUND OF POLITICAL EXPERIENCE

By noon of June 24, 1932, the historic task of overthrowing Thailand's absolute monarchy was militarily complete.

The command of all armed forces was placed under the revolutionary officers under the leadership of Colonel Bhahol-Bholpayuhasena, Colonel Song-Suradej and Colonel Ridhi-Arkanay who assumed joint responsibility as "Military Governors of the Capital". There had been no resistance and no armed challenge on the part of the old regime. The whole military operation was carried out by surprise. It had been fast, efficient and impeccable. By that afternoon, the tri-colour national flag had replaced the yellow ensign of the king at the top of the Ananda Throne Hall.

Now the actual transformation of the political system began. At 4.00 p.m., cabinet ministers and under-secretaries of state of the old regime were invited to a briefing inside the Throne Hall which was then the headquarters of the People's Party. The eleven officials including four members of the royal family in Bangkok at that time were met by the three military governors. Bhahol presided over the meeting and passed the briefing task to his civilian chief of staff, Dr Pridi Banomyong.

The well-prepared briefing began with the coup objective and then went on to summarise what had been accomplished and what was in process:

- 1) The People's Party had now taken over absolute control of the



administration;

2) Military governors had been appointed to provisionally exercise political and administrative powers;

3) Members of the royal family, privy councillors, and certain high-ranking officials had been taken hostage at the Ananda Throne Hall to ensure the safety of the People's Party;

4) King Prachathipok had been requested to return to Bangkok and to continue as the head of the state under the constitution;

5) The constitution had been drafted and the People's Party was to request His Majesty the King to proclaim it as the basic law of the country; and

6) Pending the popular election of the House of Representatives, members of the People's Party and some qualified "outsiders" would, as soon as the constitution was proclaimed, constitute the provisional membership of such a house.

Pridi requested the ministers and the under-secretaries of state to pass on the information given at this briefing to their subordinates at their respective ministries. The government officials were asked to carry on their functions as usual. Only matters concerning policy required the consent of the military governors.

Before the briefing was over, Pridi made it clear that the Ministry of Interior was to be responsible for internal security, whereas the foreign minister was assigned to notify the foreign embassies in Bangkok of the coup objectives. Foreign governments were to be assured of the safety of the lives and properties of their subjects in Thailand and that the internal political change would have no effect on the treaties and relations Thailand maintained with them. The foreign minister was also specially requested to see to it that there would be no foreign intervention during the political transition.

In fact there was no foreign intervention whatsoever. The political change had been widely speculated by the foreign community in Bangkok for some time. When they first learned about the coup, some foreigners made a guess that its leader could be Prince Bovoradej, the former defence minister whose recent resignation had attracted a wide attention. Neither Bhahol nor Song-Suradej was much known in the foreign circle, not to mention Pridi, Pibul-Songgram or others who, at that time, remained relatively junior in both their rank and position.

In the same afternoon, Prince Boribhat, in his capacity as the king's representative in Bangkok, made a public statement recognising the People's Party's success in taking over the power as well as a plea to the officials and the people to maintain peace. Boribhat's public statement effected the return to the normal situation. What was then left to be carried out, from the legal point of view, was the submission of the draft amnesty decree and the draft provisional constitution, both of which were tasks assigned to Pridi Banomyong.

King Prachathipok and his entourage left Hua Hin by a special train sent from Bangkok at 7.45 p.m. on Saturday June 25 and got off at the Chitlada Royal Station at 0.37 a.m. on Sunday 26. By 11.00 a.m. of the same day, the king received Pridi and his revolutionary colleagues at the Sukhothai Palace. On this occasion Pridi, representing his Party, submitted two legal documents which required royal signatures to become law. The king signed the amnesty decree without delay, but as for the constitution, he asked for one day to study it before signing.

Based on Prachathipok's written response to the People's Party's request that he return to Bangkok as a constitutional monarch, Pridi drafted the following words in the preamble of the amnesty decree:

"The People's Party with a desire to correct the unsatisfactory state of affairs and to put Thailand on the road to progress, has taken over the government and requested me to remain the head of the state under the constitution. Their acts have caused displeasure to members of the royal family and members of the previous government although the present transition has been effected in a most peaceful manner.

"While some members of the royal family and certain officials have been taken hostage for an assurance of the coup success, they have been well cared for and accorded with appropriate honour.

"As I have conceived a constitutional system of government for some time, therefore, the acts of the People's Party conform with my wishes. They have been carried out with good intention for the country and the people."

On the following day, Monday June 27, King Prachathipok granted the provisional constitution.

Thailand's first constitution was a consensus of the views of the leaders of the People's Party which were reached before the coup, though much of the basic ideas originated from Pridi. The main characteristic



of this constitution was the upholding of monarchy in Thailand. The provisional constitution emphasised the supreme power of the legislature to which the executive branch was responsible. Three phases were set up with regard to the membership of the House of Representatives. During the initial phase, seventy temporary members were to be appointed by the military governors. The second phase, beginning after the general election in which each of the seventy provinces elected one representative for its population of 100,000, would retain the temporary members, forming the "second-category" membership of the house. After more than half of the population had attained their primary education, but not exceeding ten years, then all the members would be popularly elected.

On June 28, Colonel Bhahol, in the capacity of military governor, appointed seventy members of the national assembly, thirty-three of whom were members of the People's Party, the so-called "June 24 promoters". Pridi Banomyong, Pibul-Songgram, Kwuang Abhaiwong, Thamrong-Navasawat and Thawee Bunyakatu, who were to become Thailand's prime ministers in the following decades, found themselves among them. The rest of the house consisted mainly of government officials including three former ministers of the old regime whose progressive views had been known. The most notable personality was Phya Manopakorn, a former senior judge whose progressive attitude had impressed Pridi for some time.

Not all of the founding members of the People's Party were appointed to the national assembly. Among the missing names were Captain Tasanai-Niyomsuk and Siri Raja-Maitri, the latter being then on a diplomatic mission abroad. Later when the first cabinet was formed, Tasanai again missed the post on the grounds of his young age. He was at that time only 28. A true friend of both Pibul and Pridi, Major Tasanai died untimely within two years after the Revolution. It has often been speculated that should Tasanai-Niyomsuk have lived some ten years longer, there might not have been a rift between Pibul and Pridi, and as such, Thailand's democratic principles as laid down in 1932 would have been kept intact until the present time.

In fact, the most important name missing from the list was Bhahol himself. Not only did the colonel find self-appointment contrary to his conscience, but he was sincere that his task in bringing about the political change had been accomplished. At the first session of the House of

Representatives on June 28, Colonel Bhahol, in his capacity of military governor, made a statement handing over the political power to the national assembly and excused himself from further involvement in politics. It happened that one of the “outside” appointees was unable to accept his appointment due to illness. Bhahol’s name was therefore proposed as replacement.

Pridi was at his best in the role of “master of ceremonies” at the national assembly inaugural session. He told the house that the members, as the people’s representatives, had to pledge their loyalty to the people before taking up the office. He then led the house in declaring their allegiance to the People’s Party and their strict adherence to the party’s Six Principles. After the king’s opening speech had been delivered, the house unanimously elected Chao Phya Dhammasak-Montri, former minister of education, to be its temporary speaker. Dhammasak in turn sought the house’s endorsement of Pridi as the first secretary-general of the national assembly. Phya Srivisarn counter-proposed that Pridi’s appointment should be made on a temporary basis because there were also other important duties that he had to perform.

Next was the election of the chairman of the “people’s commissars”. Prior to that, the leading members of the People’s Party met privately to consider the appropriate candidates for the post. Bhahol was in favour of General Prince Bovoradej, whereas Dr Pridi expressed his preference for Phya Manopakorn. For various reasons including the fact that Phya Manopakorn had been a confidant of King Prachathipok and his late wife had served as Queen Rambhai’s lady-in-waiting, it was therefore the judge and not the general who was to become Thailand’s first prime minister. Colonel Bhahol proposed the English-trained lawyer for the chief executive post. Manopakorn, before accepting the nomination, asked for consultation with Bhahol and Pridi. Upon election, he submitted a list of fourteen “commissars” for the approval of the house consisting of: Phya Manopakorn, Admiral Pricha-Cholayudh, Phya Srivisarn, Colonel Bhahol, Colonel Song-Suradej, Colonel Ridhi-Arkanay, Phya Pramual-Vijapool, Lt Colonel Prasas-Bhithyayudh, Major Pibul-Songgram, Lt Commander Sindhu-Songgramchai, Dr Dej Snidvong, Dr Pridi Banomyong, Dr Toua Labhanukrom, Prayoon Bhamornmontri and Nab Bhaholyothin. The Six Principles of the People’s Party were adopted as the policy.



Pridi again made a proposal that since the existing constitution was a provisional one, having been drafted in a hurry and subject to certain shortcomings, it was therefore necessary that a working group of experts be formed to amend and revise it. The house acted on his advice by electing among its members seven men to the working group which was chaired by Manopakorn in his capacity as a legal expert. Four members were experienced lawyers who had served in high positions in the court of justice and one young army officer, Major Sinad-Yotharak, a non-member of the People's Party. The final and the only "June 24 promoter" in the working group was Dr Pridi Banomyong. Later Phya Srivisarn and Admiral Phya Rajawangsan were also added to the working group.

As the provisional constitution was basically his own draft, Pridi was again assigned the task of drafting its amendments and revisions that would lead to a permanent version. On this, he did not only work very closely with the working group of legal experts, including Phya Manopakorn and Phya Srivisarn, but also kept in constant touch with His Majesty the King. Pridi would clarify various points to Prachathipok and take note of the latter's advice, so that the king was thoroughly familiar with what was to be proclaimed by himself. On certain matters the working group formally requested the king's decision and judgement. For instance, on the question of the political status of members of the royal family, the working group sought the king's advice on whether they could accept political appointments or run for political offices. Prachathipok's ruling was that the princes and princesses should be placed above politics, although they could serve the country in technical and permanent service capacities.

The constitution draft was complete and submitted to the national assembly on November 16. It was pointed out by the working group's chairman, Phya Manopakorn, that although superficially the new draft might look much different from the provisional constitution, but in reality, they were basically the same. "I also have the pleasure to inform you," said Manopakorn, "that we have been in constant touch with His Majesty the King throughout the drafting process, to the extent that it is a product of our joint efforts. His Majesty has studied this draft and has given his full consent to it. Moreover, he is very pleased with it..."

The proclamation of the permanent constitution, scheduled on

December 10, 1932, was a memorable event. King Prachathipok, entering the Ananda Throne Hall for the first time since June 24, presided over the proclamation ceremony. After the constitution was read aloud by the court official, Phya Manopakorn, as prime minister, approached the king who was sitting on the throne, and gave him three copies of the constitution for the royal signature. After signing, the king handed them back to the prime minister to countersign, and then handed them to Chao Phya Bhichaiyati, his former minister of justice, then speaker of the house. Chao Phya Bhichaiyati then addressed the king on behalf of the Thai people. He expressed the nation's deep gratitude to His Majesty for the granting of the constitution. "Our request for the constitution was not the least an act of disloyalty to Your Majesty," said the house speaker, "it rather was a strong desire on our part to render our service in assisting Your Majesty's discharge of the responsibility to place Thailand on the road to progress.

"We are fully aware," continued Bhichaiyati, "that absolute monarchy was imperative as a political system at the time when the people were still uneducated. The monarchs were compelled to accept gigantic responsibility and because of their capability and authoritative power, the country had developed to the present stage." Finally, there was a statement of thanks for the king's support of the new regime in which the house speaker said: "It has been unmistakably clear to all of us that Your Majesty had best wishes for the people and does not regard the constitution as detrimental to your power... We are earnestly grateful to Your Majesty for the intellectual understanding, kindness and forbearance which you have demonstrated during the past months. We therefore pledge our allegiance to you and that we shall always be Your Majesty's loyal subjects."

After the ceremony, King Prachathipok appeared at the south balcony of the Throne Hall. Down on the lawn, the royal guards, the cabinet ministers, members of parliament, and thousands of people were standing at attention. The cheering echoed for miles.

The proclamation of the permanent constitution on December 10, 1932 marked the end of the first cabinet. A new cabinet was formed with Phya Manopakorn as prime minister. One half of the cabinet came from the leading members of the People's Party as ministers without portfolio, namely Bhahol, Song-Suradej, Ridhi-Arkanay, Prasas-



Bhithyayudh, Pridi Banomyong, Sindhu-Songgramchai, Pibul-Songgram, Prayoon Bhamornmontri, Nab Bhaholyothin and Toua Labhanukrom. Prayoon also continued to be the cabinet's secretary-general as well as the prime minister's private secretary. According to section 47 of the constitution, the prime minister and fourteen ministers must come from the House of Representatives, whereas the rest, altogether not exceeding twenty-four, could be appointed from outside.

On the surface, the political transition process seemed to be smoothly carried out. Each step was a success in itself, from the military coup which handed power to the People's Party to the proclamation of the permanent constitution which installed a new political framework and machinery. Manopakorn's appointment as prime minister, as well as the appointments of various respectable figures as senior ministers, including two former ministers of the absolute monarchy regime, namely Chao Phya Vongsanuprabhat (Queen Sirikit's grandfather) and Chao Phya Dhammasak, tended to assure a smooth transition from the old to the new system. Besides, the leading members of the People's Party also seemed to be united and they were packed in the same cabinet. But in reality, things were not quite as delightful as they seemed. At this stage, six months after the successful coup, the solid unity which had made the *historic overthrow of absolute monarchy* a success appeared to be already cracking. Some of the rifts, in fact, had shown signs even before June 24, *although they were put aside to give way to the more important task of the coup itself.*

The central figure involving the rifts within the People's Party was ironically the very person who was responsible for programming the brilliant military operation on June 24. Song-Suradej was sincere, devoted and brilliant. He was known to command an unconditional respect from his disciples and followers, a unique achievement for a man at forty. But there were, however, two distinct elements in his character which proved to be detrimental to his relations with friends and colleagues. In the first place, he lacked a sense of mutual respect particularly with those who were his juniors. Although he expected respect from them, he himself never showed a reciprocity. Even Bhahol, his good friend, was no exception. As a result of that, he failed to gain sincere respect from his friends and colleagues, particularly from those who did not approve of his ideas. Secondly, Colonel Song seemed to possess too

much self-confidence. He always believed that any idea of his was right and any divergence from it must be wrong. He was also determined to implement his "right" ideas at all costs.

Almost half a century later, Prayoon recalled an event that took place on the eve of the June 24 Revolution. While discussing with Pibul-Songgram his idea of how the Thai army ought to be strengthened, the German-trained strategist pointed out that its existing structure must be scrapped and replaced with a new one, based on functional responsibilities rather than field commands. He was also of the opinion that "colonel" should be the highest rank in the small Thai army. Song-Suradej even proposed that the army staff college be dissolved.

Pibul-Songgram expressed his disagreement on the grounds that the officers' morale should be taken into consideration and that any drastic change in the army's structure should be avoided as far as possible in the period immediately following a successful coup. After a heated discussion, Pibul told Prayoon that it had been a mistake to invite Song-Suradej to join the party, as the colonel's ideas could definitely lead to a turmoil. Although at a later meeting Song-Suradej agreed to withdraw his original proposal, Pibul remained sceptical about the colonel's attitude.

Pibul's suspicion turned out to be correct. As soon as Song-Suradej was appointed deputy commander-in-chief of the army, he began restructuring the army along the lines he had originally conceived, including the introduction of a system in which officers formed a committee to choose their own commanders. He also ordered unexpected transfers of officers and men which often led to chaos. Song-Suradej's drastic acts were closely watched by Pibul-Songgram in despair and with distrust.

Not very long after the proclamation of the permanent constitution, there arose a sharp conflict between Song-Suradej and Pridi Banomyong over the latter's "Draft Proposal of Economic Programme".

Pridi was not a professional economist, but his study of economic science had led him to a conviction that a revolution must also incorporate an attempt to restructure the political economy. He was convinced that democracy could not be successfully established as long as poverty remained and economic injustice prevailed in the society. The kind of revolution in his mind was a comprehensive revolution which covered

political and economic, as well as social aspects.

Pridi had worked on his economic plan, at least in principle, before the June 24 event and had managed to incorporate a broad economic policy in the Six Principles of the People's Party, namely "to promote economic well-being by creating full employment and launching a national economic plan". As there was no detailed elaboration on either how employment was to be created or how the national economy was to be restructured, such a policy statement easily met with his colleagues' full endorsement. In Pridi's economic proposal, the question of full employment was taken as the starting point. Pridi argued that the government was able to create employment for the people, which by itself was a basis for economic well-being. And it was the government alone that could undertake to guarantee freedom from want, and provide economic security for the people.

He then proceeded to propose a law under which the government would provide employment and income for each citizen which was at least sufficient for the latter to acquire the basic needs in life. Under his scheme, cash financing required was anticipated to be limited because many people would normally derive their income from the cooperatives to be set up by the government. In the case where there were savings, people would be encouraged to deposit them at the national bank and earn interest. Pridi made it clear that there was no need for the government to take away money from the well-to-do or to specially increase money supply. The point was that the government must assume primary responsibility in production and distribution through a cooperative mechanism. It was his assumption that most people did not have sufficient land or capital to undertake private farming. What they possessed was only labour. Besides, private farming often led to economic wastage, which resulted in low productivity. To increase productivity, farming must be mechanised, the financing of which was the government's responsibility. The government also could purchase land from private owners who were willing to sell, and pay for it with bonds with interest. Not all types of land were to be purchased by the government though. The purchase would be confined only to farmland. Pridi also questioned a correlation between land ownership and patriotism. He argued that those who did not own land could be as patriotic as landowners. The Pridi scheme, however, rejected the confiscation of private property. Indirect taxes,

internal loans, foreign credit and even a state lottery were contemplated as the sources of capital financing in the scheme. Pridi was confident that on assuming primary responsibility in production and distribution, the government would be able to maintain sound public finance and a satisfactory external balance.

The government, however, was not expected to directly operate the economy. Confining the government to the role of planner and prime mover, the actual economic activities would be left to various cooperatives controlled and run by their members with government assistance. In other words, the government would provide land and capital, whereas cooperative members contributed their labour. The activities of cooperatives would range from production to distribution, and from transportation to trading business. Cooperatives were also expected to provide their members with various social services such as education, health, housing and others. Pridi's preference for cooperatives was also based on expectation of smooth labour relations.

That was Pridi's economic programme in brief. It was drawn up against the Thai economic setting of the early 1930's when undiversified agriculture was the mainstay; manufacturing was non-existent; business was left largely to foreigners; and private initiative was very rare. Furthermore, the issue of economic colonialism was still very sensitive, and it was also a period of worldwide depression.

Apparently, the Pridi proposal had a socialistic tendency in its approach, including the government's direction of the economic affairs, socialisation of production and distribution, government ownership of land and capital and a national scheme of social welfare. But a socialist economic policy and communism are not one and the same thing. The fact that monarchy was upheld as the form of government was clear evidence of non-communist ideology. Moreover, Pridi repeatedly stressed throughout his economic programme that there would be no confiscation of property, no compulsory purchase of land, no forced labour and no interference with private life. What the programme sought to establish was the joint effort between the government and the people in economic development, with the former assuming primary responsibility and leadership.

Pridi's socio-economic logic was unfortunately unacceptable to Song-Suradej. Haunted by the tragic event of Russia in 1917 and the

subsequent adoption of economic planning in that country, Song-Suradej was sceptical of any radical idea outside the field of his competence. He could not conceive the economic reasoning behind the programme and could see no connection between economic planning and the nation's economic progress. He saw only some superficial similarities between the Pridi programme and the Russian plan. Pridi brought the matter to the attention of the prime minister in the presence of two other senior ministers, Phya Srivisarn and Admiral Phya Rajawangsan, and later to the king's attention on the occasion of an audience with him. Prachathipok was said to remark that he himself also had a taste for socialism. Pridi finally came up with his draft, known as the "Yellow Paper" which was printed for circulation among the members of the People's Party for their comments. After studying it, Phya Manopakorn told Pridi that he did not like the latter's scheme at all. He also said that he had had an audience with the king on this matter and found that Prachathipok also was displeased with it.

On March 10, 1933, Charoon Subseang, an MP, requested for government explanation in Parliament on the delay of the national economic plan. The prime minister replied that the government had already an economic scheme in hand which was now under deliberation. The MP further questioned if there was a truth in the rumour that the cabinet was divided over economic policy and that the Pridi scheme was prejudiced on ideological ground. Charoon said that whatever the ideological leaning tended to be, the most important thing was whether the people would benefit from it.

As pressure was mounting, the prime minister called a meeting at the Parus Palace on March 12. Those who were present included the prime minister himself, Colonel Song-Suradej, Foreign Minister Phya Srivisarn, Defence Minister Phya Rajawangsan, Pridi Banomyong, Prayoon Bhamornmontri, Nab Bhaholyothin, Thawee Bunyakatu and Prince Sakol Voravan, an economic expert of the day.

Pridi began his introduction by referring to the government's basic economic policy which touched on three elements, namely the people's economic well-being, full employment and national economic plan. He stressed that the implementation of economic policy would be carried out step by step, not all at once, and the figures contained in his booklet should be taken as provisional, subject to further adjustments.

Dr Pridi pointed out that his economic scheme was absolutely unrelated to communism. Rather it was a scheme which blended capitalism with socialism to the extent that they were applicable to the present conditions of the Thai economy. If accepted, the scheme would be referred to experts for detailed adjustments and proper presentation.

Thawee Bunyakatu, who was to become prime minister some twelve years later, was the first to express an unconditional endorsement of the scheme, stating that it was neither communistic nor socialistic because no coercion whatsoever was to be employed. The sole purpose was to insure the people against poverty and socio-economic distress through cooperative efforts. It was not intended that private enterprise was to be replaced by cooperatives. The government under the scheme would assist only those who could not help themselves and needed help. Even joining the cooperative was optional. "A cooperative," said Thawee, "was a business enterprise under which the members who worked for it collectively owned it and shared its profit."

In his subsequent statements, Pridi explained that his economic proposal was not based on any particular doctrine, but it was meant to apply to the Thai economy. He also stressed the acute unemployment problem, the idleness of national manpower resources, the seriousness of rural poverty and the need for the government to step in and take primary responsibility in launching economic development as well as in the correcting of socio-economic injustice.

The detailed record of the meeting clearly shows the overwhelming support given to Dr Pridi's programme outline. Prince Sakol asked many penetrating questions and made several valuable comments on the scheme and finally gave his full endorsement to it. All of Pridi's colleagues also expressed their acceptance of the scheme in principle, with reservations on certain minor points which Pridi promised to modify. Among the conservative ministers, it was Admiral Rajawangsan who showed some sympathetic attitude towards the scheme. The rest however refused to accept it, even in principle. Those who refused to accept the scheme were Manopakorn, Song-Suradej and Srivisarn.

The "principle" to which conservative ministers were opposed was not that the proposed scheme contained some socialistic elements. On this, Admiral Rajawangsan made it fairly clear that for Thailand to adopt some socialistic attitude was quite acceptable because after all,

most of the “capitalists” operating in the economy were aliens. What seemed to trouble the defence minister was the principle by which the scheme was to be implemented. Phya Srivisarn, the foreign minister, was of the opinion that the scheme as a whole was too socialistic to be accepted, although he would not have any objection if certain parts were to be implemented step by step. The most straightforward objection to the scheme, however, came from Colonel Song-Suradej. He bluntly stated that he could see no possibility of carrying out such a scheme successfully. “It might take fifty years or even a century for it to succeed,” he said, “then why should we have to make it known to the public?” Taking a pragmatic approach, Song-Suradej suggested that the government should do what it could, without disclosing the whole programme to the public as this might stir up unnecessary repercussions. In response to this, Pridi argued that by making the national economic programme publicly known, the people would be enthusiastically aware of their nation’s progress. “In that case,” said the colonel, “why not make it known as your personal programme, and not the programme of the government?” “That is fine with me,” replied Pridi, “people will understand the situation, and not blame me for doing nothing. I am prepared to take the full responsibility.”

That was the end of the debate. The prime minister stated in conclusion that he understood that the majority of those present at the meeting endorsed Pridi’s programme, but he himself was of a different opinion. “I am handicapped by two factors,” said Manopakorn. “First, I have never studied economics, and secondly, I have the responsibility. I am of the opinion that the proposed scheme cannot be implemented as a whole, and it will not be popularly supported. Therefore, its launching by the government would lead to disaster. Some people think that I am dictatorial and running the country under the ‘Manocracy’ principle. That is not the case. I just have no desire to lead the country to disaster.”

“I understand that, in the Prime Minister’s opinion, the Government will follow the old regime by doing what it can and when it pleases,” said Dr Pridi. “Anything new?”

Yes, there was something “new” in what the Manopakorn government would undertake as opportunities arose: expansion of farm credits through cooperatives; expansion of cooperatives stores; setting up of rice storage facilities in the countryside; setting up of rice mills for

export; and establishing land settlements for landless farmers equipped with storage and milling facilities.

The news about the conflict over the economic scheme was spread quickly. During the next fortnight, the situation in the capital was tense as Phya Manopakorn and his colleagues were under heavy criticism and the attacks on them were understandably made by Pridi's faction in the People's Party. The political emotion, at times, ran high to the extent that some members of the Pridi group in the House of Representatives carried revolvers into the meetings. Colonel Song-Suradej found it necessary to employ troops to search the members of parliament for firearms. This particular step led to a heated debate in the House of Representatives on Friday March 31.

"Who authorised all these things?" asked MP Kree Dejavong. "Why didn't they ask for the permission of the house before doing that?" Kree's opening attack on the prime minister was promptly seconded by another MP. "This is very wrong," stated Kwuang Abhainvong, "I have the feeling that the cabinet is going dictatorial way." It was Charoon Subseang, the hot-tempered MP who threatened Manopakorn with extremely strong words. He was the one who had been seen carrying a revolver into the meeting the previous day. "I want to assure you that I will never use force if not necessary. But if I were ever to use it, I will do it openly. For instance, if I want to shoot Phya Manopakorn, Phya Srivisarn or Prayoon Bhamornmontri, I will inform them beforehand that I will shoot them." Prayoon recalled in his memoir that one day during that crisis, Charoon dropped by his office and demanded that the troops be withdrawn from the parliament. Prayoon, then the cabinet's secretary-general, denied his responsibility. Charoon, in anger, pointed a revolver at him. At that crucial moment, Prayoon's assistant who was present quickly grasped Charoon's hand and the bullet accidentally went out through the ceiling. Charoon threatened to come back, if his request was not complied with.

Manopakorn must have felt for some time that the situation was getting out of hand. He was suspicious of Pridi and his radical disciples and their influence on the course of political events. Manopakorn was no revolutionary in spirit. He might have been found progressive among the conservative bureaucrats of his time, but he was definitely not prepared to accept any drastic change in the Thai society. No doubt, both the Pridi

economic scheme and the radical behaviour of Pridi's colleagues must have reminded him of the Russian experience a decade and a half earlier. His suspicion of Pridi as a communist-inspired intellectual grew stronger with the event. There were two alternatives for him: the government's resignation or the closure of parliament. His personal preference was of course the first alternative; but Song-Suradej insisted that the prime minister must set the house in good order before resignation. Manopakorn, after consultation with his confidants, decided to undertake a counterattack on Pridi and his faction. Prayoon Bhamornmontri in his memoir stated that the counterattack was, indeed, carried out on Song-Suradej's initiative and insistence.

After the parliamentary session on Friday March 31, the prime minister called an urgent cabinet meeting. Knowing that the meeting was primarily meant to criticise his economic scheme, Pridi chose not to attend it. At that meeting, Manopakorn stated his view that both the economic scheme and the man who was responsible for it possessed a communistic tendency. He emphasised that there was no need for Thailand to adopt the communist way of economic development. He then asked the cabinet to consider whether Parliament should be temporarily suspended pending the popular election. There were some disagreements to Manopakorn's proposal, one of which came from Major Pibul-Songgram who was getting nervous about Song-Suradej's tendency to take all the power in his hand. However the cabinet decided to go along with Manopakorn's proposal. A royal decree was immediately drafted and submitted to the king for his signature. On Saturday April 1, a royal decree was proclaimed, stating that Parliament consisting of appointed members was attempting to change the country's traditional economic policy, it was therefore appropriate to suspend its session until election to prevent the situation from further deterioration. Under the same decree, the existing cabinet was dismissed and a new one without Pridi was appointed. Moreover, it stated that any clause in the constitution which was contrary to the present decree was to be suspended. The decree was countersigned by fourteen ministers including Bhahol, Song-Suradej, Ridhi-Arkanay, Prasas-Bhithyayudh, Pibul-Songgram, Sindhu-Songgramchai and Prayoon Bhamornmontri.

It was possible that Pibul's countersigning in the infamous decree could leave some question in the mind of Pridi regarding the

former's attitude. Pibul, himself, must also have been aware of that. Twelve years later, in his personal letter to Pridi, then at the zenith of power, Pibul referred to the old incident in the following words: "... if you still, by misunderstanding, have some ill-feeling towards me regarding that incident, I want you now to know the truth. Perhaps you might think that I had a part in the closure of parliament and in sending you away on a communist charge. I can assure you that I had nothing to do with it. At that time, I was still very inexperienced in politics. Phya Mano sent for me and talked me into countersigning the decree. I found that other people had signed it, so if I refused, I might then get into trouble. ... " There was no question of Pibul-Songgram's sincerity because not only was the young major "talked into signing", even a more senior and more experienced man like Bhahol was also trapped in the same situation. Realising later that he was "tricked" by Song-Suradej into countersigning the decree, Bhahol, since then, lost whatever trust he might have had in his friend.

Following the decree, a new cabinet was formed with Manopakorn remaining the prime minister. His 18-man cabinet did not include the five former ministers who did not countersign the decree, namely Pridi Banomyong, Nab Baholyothin, Dr Toua Labhanukrom, Dej Snidvong and Pramual-Vijapool. The last name was a progressive educator, though non-member of the People's Party. In their place, Manopakorn appointed two senior officials of the old regime and Lt Commander Subha-Chalasai.

On the same occasion, Phya Mano made the following statement on behalf of the government explaining his reasons for the necessary step which had just been taken:

"... the former cabinet was divided into two factions whose viewpoints were beyond compromise. The minority expressed their wish to formulate an economic policy with a communistic tendency, whereas the majority considered such a policy contrary to the Thai tradition. It was clearly certain that such a policy would lead to disaster and present a threat to the national security. ... the present situation therefore proved to be absolutely unbearable. In the House of Representatives, there were many members who supported the new economic policy because of the belief and confidence they had in the minority group of the cabinet ... the rift which occurred between Parliament and the government placed

national security in a very precarious situation.”

In the meanwhile, Colonel Song-Suradej called a meeting of top-ranking army officers at his headquarters and told them that Pridi and his economic programme had a strong leaning towards communism, thus being dangerous to capitalism, the throne, the religion and whatever institutions and traditions Thailand had inherited from the past.

On April 6, Manopakorn sent for Pridi to discuss the latter's future. The conservative prime minister had been advised by his confidant, Song-Suradej, that as the protest against the government's closure of parliament and partial suspension of the constitution was getting tense, it was necessary that Pridi, who was the central figure in the controversy, be sent out of the country immediately. Song-Suradej suggested that Pridi should be sent to China, but the prime minister preferred to send him to Europe on a government-sponsored study tour. When he met with Pridi, Manopakorn requested Pridi to find it in the best interest of both the country and himself to leave Thailand. Pridi would have his own choice of the destination, whereas the government was prepared to pay for the expenses at £1,000 per annum. Having no alternative and being fully aware of the implications, Pridi agreed to leave for France.

On April 12, 1933, Pridi and his wife left Bangkok, first to Singapore and then for France. Hundreds of people were at the port to see them off, among whom were many cabinet ministers, members of parliament and members of the People's Party. Colonel Bhahol, Pibul-Songgram, Ridhi-Arkanay, Prasad-Bhithayudh, Subha-Chalasai, Thamrong-Navasawat, Thawee Bunyakatu, Toua Labhanukrom, Nab Bhaholyothin and Tasanai-Niyomsuk were there. Only one man was absent. It was Song-Suradej. Major Tasanai and two other friends accompanied Pridi as far as Singapore.

Just before the ship sailed from the port, Colonel Bhahol put flowers around his young colleague's neck and embraced him affectionately. The other friends shook his hand and wished him good luck. When the ship actually sailed from the port, there were uproars of "Chaiyo" from those who were waving hands to the young couple. It was a sentimental moment for all who loved and respected Dr Pridi Banomyong. As for the man himself, it was the end of the first round of his political bout.



CHAPTER 6

THE BATTLE FOR SELF-DEFENCE

The second round of political battle began as soon as Dr Pridi and his wife sailed away from Bangkok in the middle of the hot month of April 1933.

During the two months following that event, Bangkok witnessed a series of exciting political developments, as their tempo quickened. Contrary to Song-Suradej's anticipation of a calmer atmosphere once Pridi had been sent out of the country, the situation became so tense that everybody concerned was expecting a big storm that would wipe out whatever stood in its way.

On the very same day that Pridi left Bangkok, April 12, the Manopakorn government made public two important documents in the name of the king. Both of them were obviously aimed at destroying the political prestige and image of Pridi, to the extent that his departure from Thailand would be for good. No doubt, it was deliberately and skilfully planned by some brilliant strategist. It was also for the first time in modern Thai history that monarchy was made use of as a deadly weapon for political persecution.

One was the king's "Memorandum on the Pridi Economic Scheme", a document often referred to as the "White Paper" in contrast to Pridi's "Yellow Paper". In this document, King Prachathipok threw himself into a point-to-point debate with Pridi on the proposed economic scheme. His words were strong, sometime emotional, and the whole Memorandum was directed against the Soviet-type economic planning

to which the Pridi scheme was alleged to be similar. The king strongly argued that his people were not starving and their lives were not as miserable as claimed by Pridi. "Our people, including the beggars, never starve," wrote Prachathipok, "only the sick men who cannot swallow, and even the temple dogs are not starving." He then snapped. "Yet starvation could become a reality," said the king, "if the Russian system were to be implemented in this country."

Prachathipok in his Memorandum raised his doubts on the seemingly good intention to guarantee the people's economic well-being. "Any insurance scheme must ask for something in return," wrote the king, "in this case, perhaps what it asks for is the surrender of freedom on the part of the people." He then went on expressing his disagreement with Pridi on one point after another and repeatedly stated that following the Soviet model of economic development was tantamount to leading the nation and the people to slavery and disaster. In conclusion, Prachathipok stressed that the Pridi economic scheme must be given up, because not only would it never bring about economic well-being as claimed, but because it would bring on grievances across the land.

In later years, however, there have been some hints that the king might not be the real author of that Memorandum. In other words, the Memorandum could have been prepared for him by someone in the Manopakorn group. Who actually wrote that critical Memorandum is in fact beside the point. The point is that Prachathipok publicly gave his consent to the views expressed in his name. Moreover, there was nothing particularly unusual about those critical remarks. Any critic of central planning would say practically the same thing, even today. Such a critic is opposed to government interference in private economic life and he is sceptical about the success of such planning. Equating central planning with slavery is not uncommon in any liberal mind. What is significant here is whether the Memorandum's interpretation of the Pridi scheme was a correct one and also whether it was fair to brand the economic scheme and its author as communist only on their preliminary proposal of the principle and technique of central planning. What the author of the Memorandum sadly failed to accomplish was two-fold. One was that he failed to see economic planning as a neutral instrument of policy, not necessarily linked up to any particular ideology. Secondly, he failed to respect a viewpoint which was contrary to his own belief. Most deplorable

rable of all was the fact that both sides never attempted to seek a compromise, despite the fact that there was ample room for it. Under these circumstances, the conflict must have had much deeper roots than a debate on economic policy. It was a struggle between the desire to effect social change and the determination to resist it. It is a typical phenomenon found at any crossroads in the history of mankind.

The other document, not unrelated to the royal memorandum, also brought out by the Manopakorn government on April 12, 1933 was the Communist Act, the first of its kind for Thailand. Recognising publicly for the first time communism as a threat to national security, the law declared communist activities illegal and those who committed the crime were subject to both fines and imprisonment. As defined by the Act, communism meant “economic principle or method which aims at eliminating, partly or wholly, private property in favour of state or public ownership” and communist doctrine meant the doctrine which endorsed “nationalisation of land, or industry or capital or labour”. The punishments imposed on those committing the crime ranged from 5 years to 10 years imprisonment, together with fines from Bht 1,000 to Bht 5,000 (about US\$2,500-12,500 in the 1970’s).

Considering the two documents which came out on Pridi’s departure from the country, it is possible to piece together the following picture. Pridi and his economic scheme were accused as being communist-inclined. As long as the accusation remained, and the Communist Act was still in force, Pridi could be prosecuted if he attempted to return to Thailand. In other words, the two documents were designed to bar Dr Pridi from returning to his homeland indefinitely.

On the next day, April 13, Phya Manopakorn called a press conference at which he gave the reasons why his government had taken the drastic step on April 1. Manopakorn accused some newspapers of their sympathy with the Pridi economic scheme and suspended their publication temporarily. One of the papers was “Prachachart” or “The Nation” which was published under the auspices of Prince Wan Waithayakorn, a diplomat-cum-scholar of great distinction. The “Prachachart” was accused of supporting Pridi and his scheme. Manopakorn went on at the press conference to disclose that in the cabinet, Pridi always showed sympathy towards the Chinese who had been arrested on communist charges. According to the prime minister’s account, Pridi always argued

that believing in communism was no crime. Such people would be accused of violating the law only if and when they instigated or employed force to cause trouble. However, the situation became unbearable when Pridi's friends and disciples in Parliament violently urged the government to adopt the economic programme. Under these circumstances, it was deemed necessary for the government to close parliament and pass the Communist Act. Manopakorn stated that his government desired neither to impose dictatorship nor to return to absolute monarchy.

Pridi's departure and subsequent steps taken by Manopakorn with the support of Song-Suradej apparently created a feeling of uneasiness and insecurity among many "June 24 promoters". It was felt that perhaps they were being betrayed by the "outsiders" whom they had invited to take charge of the government. They also began to sense that there was an organised force aiming to eliminate them. In fact, Phya Manopakorn and his conservative colleagues were looking at Pridi's friends and members of the People's Party with suspicion. Pibul-Songgram himself, as a close friend of Pridi's, was also under suspicion. Manopakorn always referred to the Parus Palace where the June 24 promoters, both military and civilian, used as their gathering place the "Kremlin".

Colonel Bhahol himself was restless. He now realised that he was trapped in a political conspiracy which had a boomerang effect on himself and his own party. What troubled him most was the fact that the trap was set up by his old friend, Song-Suradej, with whom he risked his life just less than a year ago in the June 24 Revolution. One day, having learned that Song-Suradej had given orders contrary to his own, Bhahol lost his temper and chased Song-Suradej out of his house. Song-Suradej sent for Ridhi-Arkanay and Prasas-Bhithyayudh for a secret meeting at his own residence. Next day, Ridhi-Arkanay went to talk with Bhahol and got the latter's agreement that all four of them would "wash their hands" from politics and the army. Later, the four military leaders jointly tendered their resignations.

It is generally believed that the "resignation incident" was part of Song-Suradej's plot to get rid of Bhahol who was known to be Pridi's sympathiser. Prayoon has claimed that he was given this hint by Ridhi-Arkanay while he was driving the colonel home on the day he met with Song-Suradej and Prasas-Bhithyayudh. It is also believed that Bhahol was fully aware of the plot. The tough army commander also had a secret

plan of his own. During his interview with the “Prachachart” editor, Bhahol pointed at his chest and told the newsman that “my pain is right here!”

Phya Manopakorn consulted his colleagues on suitable replacements for Bhahol and Song-Suradej as commander and chief of staff of the army. Prayoon made a suggestion that the prime minister should check first with Lt Colonel Pibul-Songgram who was then the most senior army officer among the June 24 promoters. On this account, Pibul himself, in his personal letter to Pridi after World War Two, recalled, “when Phya Manopakorn asked my opinion, I recommended, from a purely military point of view, General Pichai-Songgram and Colonel Srisidhi-Songgram.” General Pichai-Songgram was formerly commander-in-chief of the first army who was dismissed after the revolution. Srisidhi-Songgram, formerly chief of the army’s military planning directorate, had been transferred to the Ministry of Education. These two men were highly respected by army officers. Prayoon arranged for a meeting between Srisidhi and Pibul and also took Pibul to call on Pichai at the latter’s residence. To complete the arrangement, Prayoon was sent to Hua Hin to inform the king of the resignations and the proposed replacements in the army. The next day, Phya Manopakorn escorted the four senior army officers to Hua Hin for an audience with Prachathipok. The king did not say much, except to express his regret that the four men were leaving the service in the midst of crisis. On the same day, Prachathipok officially appointed Pichai, commander-in-chief of the army; Srisidhi, chief of staff; and Pibul, assistant commander-in-chief.

Pibul knew well of danger he himself might have had to face. His appointment as assistant commander-in-chief was meant to put him off as an immediate threat to the security of the government. Not only was he a central personality among the revolutionary officers in the army, but he was also one of the founders of the People’s Party and Pridi’s close friend. According to Prayoon’s memoir, even King Prachathipok was reluctant to appoint him to that position.

As soon as Srisidhi had taken over from Song-Suradej as the army’s chief of staff, Pibul realised that his revolutionary colleagues’ security, and also his own, were at stake. The new chief of staff’s first act was to prepare an order transferring all of them from the command posts. To Pibul, the time had come for counteraction.

On the navy's side, Commander Subha-Chalasai was also feeling that something was going on behind his back. All gunboats under his command were given orders to join a naval exercise in the Gulf of Thailand. Sensing that danger was closing on him and his friends in the navy, Subha-Chalasai together with Thamrong-Navasawat, Sangvorn-Yuthakit and others rushed to confer with their army counterparts. It was decided that another coup d'état was imperative and that was to be undertaken without delay. They approached Bhahol and requested him to lead the second coup. Bhahol immediately agreed to do so. Pibul, Tasanai and their army officers were to back him from the army, whereas Subha-Chalasai, Thamrong and their naval colleagues would mobilise the strength of the navy.

Phya Manopakorn was informed about the coup during the night of June 19, 1933. The police reported to him that Lt Colonel Pibul-Songgram was assembling forces in the Parus Palace, ready to stage a coup the following morning. The prime minister decided that there should be no fighting whatsoever. Next morning, June 20, Phya Manopakorn received a group of army and naval officers from the Parus Palace under the leadership of Major Kaj-Songgram and Lt Commander Sangvorn-Yuthakit who informed him that the coup leader desired to reopen parliament and requested the government's resignation.

There were a number of public statements made by the June 20 coup leaders. The first one gave, as the reason for their act, the desire to bring back parliament and the constitution. It was followed by further statements that the new government had no intention to turn to communism and that there had not yet been a consideration regarding the recall of Dr Pridi Banomyong.

Chao Phya Bhichaiyati, the house speaker, and one-third of the members of the House of Representatives, upon the request of Bhahol and Pibul, boarded a special train for Hua Hin that night and were granted an audience at 3.00 a.m. the following morning. The house speaker informed the king that the sole purpose of the coup was to reopen parliament and bring the constitution back to work. No one ever experienced such an embarrassment as did King Prachathipok. Only two and a half months before, he had been convinced by his conservative ministers that the closure of parliament and the partial suspension of the constitution were imperative. Now he was being told by the house speaker who was

his former minister of justice that Phya Manopakorn's acts to which the king had given consent were totally wrong. Confused as he was, Prachathipok could do nothing but to sign the decree reopening the national assembly and appointing Bhahol as the new prime minister.

In the morning of June 22, 1933, the House of Representatives was re-convened. Four days later Colonel Bhahol and his cabinet took office. The fifteen-member cabinet was clear of Manopakorn's faction, although including some aristocrats of the old regime. There was also no Song-Suradej, no Ridhi-Arkanay, no Prasas-Bhithayudh and no Pra-noon Bhamornmontri. There were five members of the People's Party, apart from Bhahol himself, including Pibul-Songgram, Subha-Chalasai and Sindhu-Songgramchai as ministers without portfolio.

On the day he asked Parliament for a vote of confidence, Colonel Bhahol informed the house that he would serve as the head of government for about a fortnight, after which Parliament must look for a more suitable person to replace him. "I am concerned about the common good," stated Bhahol in parliament on June 26, "but I am also aware of my incompetence." Always keeping his promise, Bhahol, on July 2, submitted his resignation to the king. This time Prachathipok knew very well what he had to do. In his letter of July 3, dispatched from Hua Hin, the king wrote to his prime minister in his usual straightforward style:

"I have received your letter of July 2 tendering your resignation for a number of reasons. I wish to respond to it as follows:

"1. On your statement that you lack legal and political background which render you incompetent to lead the nation to progress, I consider it not quite important because you have advisers and highly qualified ministers to assist you in carrying out your duty. From my viewpoint, the most important qualification of a prime minister is the command of respect and confidence from the public, as well as the ability to unite the nation so that governmental functions could be smoothly performed for the benefit of the country. At present, there is hardly any one except you who possesses such qualifications.

"2. On your statement that you already carry a heavy responsibility as the army's commander-in-chief and now have also to be the prime minister, you have my sympathy. However, I reckon that you have many able assistants in your army job. They could alleviate your responsibility in that area.

“3. On your concern that your concurrent holding of both positions would lead to criticism that Thailand is being governed by the military, I think that you should not be concerned too much about it. In fact, there is so far no such criticism or suspicion on that account. Even the press which is now given more freedom than before has not voiced any criticism on the matter of your concern.

“4. On your explanation that you made it known in parliament and to the press that you would remain prime minister for only 10-15 days, there is nothing to worry. You have kept your promise by tendering your resignation. Therefore, if you would continue in the office upon my request, you will not, under the circumstances, be accused of not keeping your words.

“For all these reasons, I feel that there is not yet the necessity for you to resign. I therefore regret that I cannot accept and approve your resignation. And for the sake of our beloved country, I request you to stay on as my prime minister.”

Colonel Bhahol thus continued as Thailand's second prime minister and the era of the government by the People's Party finally had begun.

There was no secret that neither Pibul nor Bhahol favoured Pridi's departure from the country. But at that time they could do nothing. While Bhahol demonstrated his emotion when he saw Pridi off and his frustration afterwards, Pibul quietly asked Major Ádul-Dejcharas, one of his closest friends, to tell Pridi that he would somehow try to get him back sooner or later. Now after the June 20 Coup, the power was back to the People's Party. Bhahol and Pibul began to draw up the plan to recall Pridi from Paris. The move to recall Pridi was made known to the People's Party and it was given an overwhelming support by the members.

Soon after the June 20 Coup, Prime Minister Bhahol gave an interview to the press on the question concerning the return of Dr Pridi. “At this moment, I have not yet considered inviting Dr Pridi back because he was suspected a communist,” said Bhahol. “Since I am also a communist suspect therefore, if I recall Pridi now, I will be confirmed as a communist,” he said half-jokingly.

“As a matter of fact, Dr Pridi Banomyong is a very good and hard-working man,” the prime minister continued in his interview with the press, “he should be recalled after the election, not to be invited to

assume any position, but rather to be investigated by the popularly elected members of parliament. If he is cleared of the charge, he will be given responsibility in government. But if he is found guilty as a communist, then it will be a different matter.”

In Paris, Pridi was asked by Reuter how he felt about the coup in Bangkok. “The coup may help to prove my innocence of the charge,” stated Pridi. “However, I still do not wish to return to Thailand unless I am requested to do so.”

On September 3, 1933, two and a half months after the coup, the Bhahol government officially recalled Pridi. When the news of Pridi’s recall leaked out, the political atmosphere in Bangkok once again became tense. There was both criticism and blessing of the controversial personality. The Bhahol government was strongly criticised by its opponents for planning to turn Thailand to communism. In response to the criticism, the government issued a statement clarifying its position regarding the return of Dr Pridi. The statement said that “Pridi Banomyong had given assurance of his willingness to cooperate with the government in pursuing the following economic policy:

1. To protect the interests of all classes and groups and to blend these interests for economic development of the nation;
2. To increase economic utilisation of land which still remains unproductive;
3. To promote the opportunity for full employment;
4. To promote industrial activities with the government providing facilities, training, cooperation and control, as far as necessary, with the view to ensure success on the part of the proprietors and to increase their ability to repay debts;
5. To promote export trade; and
6. To gradually raise the people’s standard of living.

“In pursuing the above-mentioned policy, the government will not seek new ways and means to effect forced purchase of land and forced employment of labour.

“His Majesty the King therefore graciously recalls Dr Pridi Banomyong to serve as minister in the present cabinet.”

Pridi arrived back in Bangkok on September 29. On October 2, he was appointed minister without portfolio. It was understood that after the opening of the new parliament following the general election

scheduled on November 15, he would be subject to testimony before an investigating committee on the communist charges.

However, October turned out to be a month of bloodshed. The struggle between the old and the new social forces which first came out into the open on June 24, 1932 and kept on going ever since, took a new aspect in October 1933. On the eleventh of that month, General Prince Bovoradej led troops from Korat in the northeast to occupy Don Muang Air Base and Bangkean (near Kasetsart University today) on the outskirts of Bangkok and demanded an immediate resignation of the Bhahol government. The main reasons given by Bovoradej were that the government had not dealt seriously with the people who showed disrespect towards the king and that it had brought back Pridi to prepare for a communist regime. The following day, the detailed demands were delivered to Colonel Bhahol, containing six conditions as follows:

- “1. The government must take all necessary steps to ensure that constitutional monarchy was to be permanent institution in Thailand;
2. There must not be a change of government by force. Further change in government must be carried out by the majority vote in accordance with the constitution. Political parties should be legally allowed to function;
3. There must be a separation between political and permanent appointments in both the civilian and military services;
4. Government appointment must be based on merit, and not on political favouritism;
5. The selection and appointment of the “second category” members of parliament (the appointed half) must be the king’s prerogative; and
6. The structure of the army must be based on regional distribution and not on concentration of strength in any one area.”

Apparently the six points of the ultimatum meant nothing to either side. On the rebel’s side, the purpose of the military operation was nothing but to terminate the People’s Party, once and for all, by force. From the Bhahol government’s standpoint, regardless of what the rebel’s conditions were, there was no alternative but the immediate suppression of the rebellion.

It is interesting to identify the motives of Bovoradej and his collaborators in their attempt to take over the government by force.

There were three elements composing the rebel personalities: the first being the prince himself; the second his chief of staff, Colonel Srisidhi-Songgram; and the third composed of senior army officers who were dismissed after the June 24 Revolution.

The fifty-six-year-old prince was the second son of H.R.H. Prince Nares, Chulalongkorn's minister at the Court of St James in the 1880's and one of the signatories in the 1885 petition for political change (see Chapter 4). Bovoradej's educational background was quite distinguished. He accompanied his father to England at the age of six and went through Harrow. Later, he was trained both as artillery officer and engineer and came back to Thailand at the age of twenty-one. After some years in the army, he was appointed minister to France, Italy, Spain and Portugal. During that time, King Prachathipok was a student in England and Bovoradej served as his superintendent. During Rama VI's reign, the prince was recalled to Bangkok to serve as director of the army's arsenal, inspector-general of the artillery, commanding general of the third army and assistant to the defence minister respectively. His Paris assignment was taken over by his elder brother, Prince Charoon, the former minister of justice (see Chapter 3). Before the end of that reign, Bovoradej was made viceroy for the Northern Region, residing in Chiangmai. Perhaps, the civilian job had no appeal to his taste, the prince therefore asked for retirement from the service. Only when Prachathipok succeeded to the throne was Bovoradej again back in the army, first as assistant to the defence minister, later the army's chief of staff, and finally defence minister in 1928. He remained in the cabinet for almost three years before he resigned over the army's budget issue in November 1931.

Bovoradej was known for his good personality, immaculate dress and arrogance. Tall and handsome, the prince smoked a pipe and drove his own sports car. His earnest effort for improving the army's morale during the economic crisis and competence in military affairs earned him popularity among army officers, including Colonel Bhahol himself.

The prince was a democratically inclined general. After long years in Europe, both as student and as diplomat, Bovoradej was keen in democracy. In fact, he sent for Bhahol on several occasions and discussed with him the possible change to constitutional monarchy. His ambition to become prime minister was at least known to Bhahol who, after the June 24 Coup, did nominate him to the post. He was, of course,



disappointed when his appointment did not materialise, and from then he became sceptical about the attitude of the People's Party, particularly with regard to the June 20, 1933 Coup and Pridi's recall. When his political activities were reported to Pibul-Songgram and Subha-Chalasai, they sent him a note of warning which was taken by the prince as a direct challenge for a confrontation. Bovoradej therefore decided to assume leadership of the rebellion.

The case of Srisidhi was somewhat similar. A critic of absolute monarchy and the old bureaucratic regime, the German-educated officer had longed to see political change towards democracy. But he did not subscribe to a radical change the way it was brought about on June 24, 1932. He was also hurt when he was transferred out of the army, but again hopeful when appointed to the cabinet and to the post of army's chief of staff. He was about to begin implementing what he considered the best for the army, when Pibul staged the June 20 Coup ousting him. "I have been badly hurt by Pibul's act," he told Prayoon Bhamornmontri, both his eyes red with anger. "I want you to join with me whenever I am ready to take the necessary action against Pibul."

For most of the collaborators, the reason lay mainly with the fact that they had been unfairly treated by the new regime. Many of them had been dismissed from the service on the grounds of their close association with, and obviously of their loyalty to the royal family. After June 24, 1932, practically all senior officers were retired from active services, partly on political grounds, but also as part of the streamlining policy. Naturally, there was strong dissension among some of these retired officers.

Prayoon Bhamornmontri claimed that he was approached by Srisidhi to join with him in the rebellion against the Bhahol government. Apparently, he was for a while indecisive as to which side he would take. But he could not forget the fact that he himself was one of the founders of the People's Party and by all means, a June 24 promoter. He therefore found it difficult to desert his old friends. Besides, Prayoon was never certain which side would be the winner and to be branded a "betrayor" would not do him any good, regardless of the outcome of the armed conflict.

Early in October, Prayoon was sent for by Manopakorn who, after resigning, had gone to stay at Cha-um, some ten kilometres north of Hua

Hin. Prayoon informed Major Adul-Dejcharas, the deputy police chief, and a close friend of Pibul, about his trip, to protect himself just in case. At Cha-um, Prayoon found Manopakorn packing. The old gentleman told Prayoon that Prince Bovoradej was mobilising troops in the northeast to launch an attack on Bangkok. He said that the king was concerned about his safety and advised that the former prime minister should leave for Penang without delay. His Majesty also suggested that he took Prayoon along with him on the king's personal expenses, as his secretary. It was now the time for a decision. Prayoon finally made up his mind and declined Manopakorn's request on the grounds that in time of crisis like this, he had to stay with his old party. Manopakorn left for Penang as planned and never returned to his homeland. The first prime minister of Thailand ended his life on that little island some fifteen years later. Prayoon returned to Bangkok and made a full report to Adul-Dejcharas to prove his innocence in the Bovoradej's plot.

On October 11, the Bhahol government, having ignored Bovoradej's ultimatum, immediately went on for a counterattack. The thirty-six-year-old Lt Colonel Pibul-Songgram was placed in charge of the field command. His duty was to put down the rebellion as quickly as possible.

In deciding to fight back, the Bhahol government was fully aware that it was the underdog. Bovoradej's advance units were, at that time, only less than twenty kilometres north of Bangkok. The air base had been taken and it was not known to what extent provincial troops had joined with the rebels. The navy was, in the meanwhile, neutral, with the exception of the gunboat "Palee", under the command of Sangvorn-Yuthakit, which sailed up the river ready to bombard the advance rebel unit in support of Pibul-Songgram's artillery. Even the army units in Bangkok were split into two factions. Most of the infantry units favoured Song-Suradej, whereas the artillery, the cavalry and the signal corps backed up Pibul-Songgram. At that time, both Song-Suradej and Prasas-Bhithayudh had left Bangkok on a journey abroad. They had just arrived at Colombo when they received a cable asking them to come back to help fight the rebels. Song-Suradej replied, "For such a small matter you can handle it yourself."

Pibul-Songgram immediately organised his forces with many of his June 24 colleagues in the army taking command of the government



troops. At the time Pibul was ready to begin launching his counterattack, Bovoradej's troops had advanced to Bangsue, just on Bangkok's outskirts. Pibul opened his fierce attack with heavy artillery bombardment. As Bovoradej had failed to get artillery support, his infantry units could not resist Pibul's continuous bombardment very long. As the rebel troops began to retreat, Bhahol made a report to the king, who was still at Hua Hin, informing him of what had happened and pledging that his government would do its utmost to crush the rebellion.

The Battle of Bangkok which lasted from October 12 through October 16 ended with government troops recapturing Don Muang Air Base. The next day, the rebel troops at Petchburi in the south also surrendered to the government. From then until October 23, the rebels continued to retreat along the railways towards the northeast with government troops in hot pursuit. On October 23, Srisidhi-Songgram was killed near Pak Chong, the rebels' last stronghold. Having lost his chief of staff, Bovoradej decided to give up his attempt and left Korat by a small plane for Saigon where he asked for political asylum. The armed suppression of the Bovoradej Rebellion, though successfully complete within a fortnight, was not without any cost to the government. Seventeen officers and men under Pibul's field command had sacrificed their lives, the most senior of whom being Lt Colonel Amnuay-Songgram, who led his 8th infantry battalion for the frontline Battle of Bangkok. Amnuay-Songgram had been Pibul's classmate at the royal military academy and had remained loyal to his friend throughout the political crisis during the Manopakorn period. Today, on a visit to the army district in the northern section of Bangkok, one will find a long street name "Amnuay-Songgram" which ends with a bridge called "Kasakomol", Amnuay's family name. But for the whole group of national heroes, the Bhahol government erected a graceful statue in their memory at Lak See, some five kilometres south of Don Muang Airport.

With the exception of Colonel Srisidhi-Songgram who was killed at Hin Lab near Pak Chong, the rebel casualties were relatively light; only eight officers and men were killed in action. Nevertheless, a law was passed setting up a special court by which many officers were put on trial, most of whom were sentenced for long years imprisonment. Twenty-two of them, including Prince Bovoradej, managed to flee the country. The prince himself lived in exile in Saigon for 15½ years. When

he finally returned to Bangkok as a free man in 1949, he was already seventy-two.

When the rebellion broke out, King Prachathipok was at his favourite “Klai Kangvon” Palace at Hua Hin. At first, the royal private secretary suggested that he should move to the “Bang Pa-in” Palace in Ayudhya. The King refused to take the advice, knowing that Ayudhya had been in the hands of Bovoradej. Later hearing that the government was to send a special train to bring him back to Bangkok, Prachathipok let it be known that he would remain neutral in the armed struggle and immediately left for Songkhla, further down south. Together with Queen Rambhai and a few courtiers, Prachathipok left Hua Hin by his small motor boat in the middle of the night. The sea was very rough and, at times, it looked as if the small boat would not make it to Songkhla. Half way, the King and his entourage were given a lift by an East Asiatic freighter which landed them at Songkhla. The king did not return to Bangkok until two months later. From that time on until January 1934, while many arrests were made of senior officers and other known “royalists”, the relationship between the king and his government was very tense. According to Queen Rambhai who revealed the story some forty years later, “One night at the Chitlada Palace, the king, myself and our personal secretary were together at the Palace’s top floor. The king told us that if something ever happened, he would shoot himself and the secretary would shoot me. Nothing, however, happened to warrant such action as planned by the king.”

King Prachathipok’s anxiety over the incident was not groundless. The Bhahol government’s violent counterattack made on the rebels during the battle, and the subsequent harsh punishment given to those arrested clearly indicated the People’s Party’s readiness to face any consequences. In addition, it had also been rumoured that the king himself showed his sympathy towards the rebels, apart from his personal respect for Prince Bovoradej. Prachathipok’s neutral stand during the crisis and his refusal to return to Bangkok and give a solid backing to the government added to the suspicion. From the king’s point of view, the endless struggle between different opposed camps had convinced him more than ever that the People’s Party had taken the wrong road towards the country’s democratic future. To the King, the People’s Party should dissolve itself, once it had succeeded in establishing the constitutional



regime. After that, politics should be left open to the public. The leaders of the People's Party thought differently. To them, the experience subsequent to the Manopakorn reactions seemed to confirm that there were still tidal waves in the country with the aims either to return to absolute monarchy or just simply to exterminate the People's Party. Both for the defence of the constitutional regime which they had established and definitely for self-defence, the People's Party felt that they must be in control of the country for some time. They knew that their task was not only to acquire the constitution, but also to place Thailand on the road to progress.



CHAPTER 7

CLEARING THE COMMUNIST CHARGE

Pridi Banomyong was the first Thai intellectual to be accused of being a communist.

Although in decades to come, many thinking men in Thailand were to become politically indicted on the same charge, the Pridi case remains classic because of its sensation. It was because of his economic scheme that the first parliament was closed down followed by eventful consequences, including a coup d'état, an armed rebellion and finally the abdication of a monarch. It was because of Pridi and his followers that Thailand was given the first communist law which was to be followed one after another until the present time.

At Singapore in April 1933, Dr Pridi was asked a straightforward question by the "Straits Times" while on his way to Paris: "Are you a communist?"

"I categorically deny that charge," announced the Thai politician, "I am just a socialist."

Pridi continued to explain his position to the Straits Times. "My economic scheme which contains some socialistic elements is designed to improve the people's economic well-being."

To the "Singapore Free Press", the leader of the People's Party reconfirmed his belief. "I am not a communist and do not, in the least, favour communism. The most I can be is a radical with some socialistic inclination. But definitely never a communist."

When he arrived in Paris, he was again asked the same question,



and again and again he denied his association with the communists and communism.

“My economic scheme is not aimed at demolishing the wealthy classes. What I earnestly wish to see is the improvement in the economic status of the people by creating more economic activities including industrial development. Communism has a negligible influence in Thailand. If I may be allowed to say so, my economic policy is most similar to that of the British Labour Party.

“I have never had any contact with the Comintern. I took the advice to depart from Thailand because I do not want to see any trouble in the country.”

Pridi and his wife, Phoonsuk, had been in Europe barely two months when his close friend, Lt Colonel Pibul-Songgram, staged a successful coup in Bangkok which ousted the Manopakorn government and reopened the national assembly. After Bhahol had formed a new government Pridi was recalled. He arrived in Bangkok on September 29, 1933, and was welcomed by the Bovoradej Rebellion which included his return as one of its reasons.

After the rebellion had been crushed, the first general election by an indirect method took place on November 15 as promised. Seventy-eight representatives were returned, three each representing Bangkok and Ubol, two each representing Chiangmai, Korat, Mahasarakam, Roi-et, and one each representing the rest of the country. Among them were former government administrators, retired army officers, practising lawyers, school teachers, and journalists. It was an impressive list of people and it was giving an optimistic sign for future parliamentary system. On December 9, 1933, seventy-eight members of the “second-category” were appointed in accordance with the constitution, most of whom being in the rank and file of the People’s Party, including Bhahol, Pibul-Songgram, Pridi, Kwuang Abhaiwong, Thawee Bunyakatu, Sindhu-Songgramchai, Thamrong-Navasawat, Sangvorn-Yuthakit, Kaj-Songgram, Subha-Chalasai, Adul-Dejcharas, Siri Raja-Maitri, and Toua Labhanukrom. It was a clear indication that the People’s Party was determined to take full responsibility during the transition period. The members of the Manopakorn clique such as Rajawangsan, Srivisarn, Prayoon Bhamornmontri, including Song-Suradej, Ridhi-Arkanay and Prasas-Bhithyayudh were left out.

On December 10, the first anniversary of the constitution, King Prachathipok went to the Ananda Throne Hall and presided over the opening ceremony. Six days later, Colonel Bhahol was chosen to form a new government. His second cabinet consisted of nineteen members including some former senior bureaucrats of the absolute-monarchy regime, such as Chao Phya Sri Dharmmathibes, former minister of justice; Chao Phya Vorapong, former minister of the royal household; Phya Manavarajsevi, former attorney-general; Phya Komarakul, former under-secretary of state for finance; and Phya Suriyanuwat, former minister of finance and minister to Paris. Among the members of the People's Party, there were, apart from Bhahol himself, Pibul-Songgram, Thamrong-Navasawat, Narubesmanit, Subha-Chalasai and Sindhu-Songgramchai. Bhahol's second cabinet also included a close friend of Song-Suradej who was commander of the royal military academy at the time of the June 24 Revolution, Colonel Sidthi-Reangdejpol.

On December 25, Prime Minister Bhahol presented his government to the House of Representatives for a vote of confidence. After Parliament had expressed its confidence for the government, the MP for Utaradit province was given the floor to make a statement concerning the accusation of Dr Pridi being a communist. The MP said that the matter concerning Dr Pridi whom the government had recalled from Paris was still unclear. While serving in the Manopakorn cabinet, Pridi was accused of initiating a communist-inclined economic policy. It was on that account that Manopakorn took steps to close down parliament. Afterwards, there was a coup which effected its reopening, followed by the return of Dr Pridi. MP Fak na Songkhla expressed his concern about the lack of clarity on the question whether Pridi was in fact a communist. He then proposed that Parliament should appoint a committee of experts to make an investigation and submit its finding for consideration. The MP also suggested the names of three prominent experts who could constitute such an investigating committee, namely Prince Wan Waithayakorn, Phya Nolrajasuwat and Phya Srisankorn.

The prime minister gave a favourable response to the MP's proposal. He further suggested two foreign experts to be included in the committee. Parliament, on the same day, appointed a committee of five experts, with Prince Wan as chairman. The other committee members were Phya Nolrajasuwat, Phya Srisankorn, Sir Robert Holland and M.

Renon Guyon.

The committee met for the first time on January 4, 1934. In his opening remark, the chairman made it clear that the committee was not a court of justice, therefore it would not adopt legal procedures in dealing with the case. It, would, however, confine itself to the political arena, that is, to find out whether the political inclination of the accused indicated a communistic tendency. Prince Wan then requested the two foreign experts to produce a joint memorandum on the definition and meaning of communism against which, once agreed upon, would put to test political inclination of the accused. Prince Wan also reminded the committee that Parliament's resolution on this matter specifically centred on the question of whether Dr Pridi was a communist, and not on the question of whether his economic scheme was communistic. Therefore, the committee would not concentrate its deliberation on the economic scheme, but rather on the political viewpoints of the man himself.

Both Sir Robert and M. Guyon expressed their agreement to the proposal that the committee's deliberation should focus on Pridi's political thinking rather than on his economic scheme. This approach was therefore adopted by the committee in unanimity. The two experts also pointed out that while it was not so difficult to define "communism" in theory, it was not easy to judge whether the political system of a particular country was a communist system.

The second meeting which was held on February 12 was first devoted to the discussion on technical definitions concerning communism as prepared by Sir Robert Holland and Renon Guyon. Pridi Banomyong was invited to attend this meeting and was also allowed to express his views on the experts' memorandum.

Pridi informed the committee that he was prepared to accept the experts' overall technical description of communism. He, however, found their statement on the question of "compulsory work" not clear enough, and there were here and there wordings that warranted some improvement. On the question of "compulsory work", which was a matter of principle, Pridi felt that a policy of making work compulsory to all citizens was not exclusively a communist principle. He cited that in Germany, the Nazis also made work compulsory as well.

Pridi, afterwards, stated his views on various aspects concerning the charge raised against him.

On political institutions: "I never conceived the idea of establishing a Soviet government in Thailand. I believe in parliamentary democracy which I have a part in establishing in this country. Besides, the fact that I have taken part in the passing of the present electoral law should serve as evidence of my firm belief in parliamentary democracy."

On public finance: "I never conceived the idea of nationalising private banking institutions, or for that matter, of transferring their reserves, securities and deposits to the state. I do believe in the principle of private property and private ownership ... least of all, any idea to repudiate foreign debts, both internal and external."

On social structure: "I never conceived the idea of repudiating the existing social structure and restarting a new society. I have played a part in the drafting of the present civil laws on family and inheritance. My idea is to preserve the Thai way of life in all aspects compatible with the modern world. I also do not subscribe to 'class war', because it is not only useless, but will also lead to unnecessary bloodshed. I have always pointed out its fallacy to various people. I am also strongly opposed to dictatorship, proletariat or what have you."

On inheritance: "I never conceived the idea of abolishing inheritance. In fact, in drafting the Civil Code, I have insisted that inheritance be covered by the law."

On economic institutions: "I repeat that I never believed in the confiscation of private property. I fully respect the right to private ownership. Concerning the problem of employment, I think that at present, there are still many people without occupation or employment, a situation which has led to social disorder. It is therefore advisable that a law should be passed compelling every member in the work force to have occupation or employment. The same law should require the state to provide vocational education. I am concerned only with the working classes who are unemployed, as well as with disguised unemployment among farmers. As to what these people choose to do will be up to them. I am never bothered about the middle classes or those who are already occupied and employed. I also think that any existing law on forced labour should be repealed. Perhaps my idea is what you may call 'social welfare service' which aims at finding occupations and jobs for people who need them."

At the third session held on February 20, Pridi continued to reflect



on his views on other matters within the scope of the investigation. His reflections, which were thorough and unambiguous, seemed to satisfy the committee members. On this occasion, he reminded the committee that there was a clear distinction between means and ends. His employment policy was a means to achieving a specific end, namely employment. It had nothing to do with the question of private property or the right to choose occupation which were to be left entirely untouched. An employment policy, to Pridi, was a “neutral measure” that was found in any economic or political principle.

Asked about his view on the question of religion, Pridi responded that religion was a “must” in any society and religious belief should be a fundamental freedom and an individual right. “I never thought at any time of destroying any religion,” Pridi stated firmly and unequivocally.

He also informed the committee that he always adhered to these beliefs and there would be no change whatsoever.

On the question of land acquisition, Dr Pridi explained that before the April 1933 incident, he both stated in the cabinet and wrote to Song-Suradej emphasising that his scheme was only a preliminary proposal, subject to modification in any way deemed appropriate. He had unequivocally stated that his purpose was only to lay down a framework for land purchase by the government. It was not the purpose to force people to sell their land. The government would buy only from those who voluntarily wanted to sell land in their possession. Prince Wan disclosed that a copy of Pridi’s letter to Song-Suradej had been forwarded to the king for his information, before the government recalled Pridi from France.

The last session of the committee, which took place on February 27, concluded the interrogation. Prince Wan asked Pridi a straight question whether the latter was a member of or had anything to do with the Comintern. “Never, Your Highness,” replied Pridi, “I am neither a member of the Comintern, nor for that matter, have anything to do with it.”

One last question: “Are you contemplating the withdrawal of government subsidy from Buddhist Sankha Council?” “No Sir,” answered Pridi. “On the contrary, when the Manopakorn government was proposing to abolish the Royal Krathin charity with a view to economising the Royal Purse, it was I who was strongly opposed to it. I counter-

proposed that the religious contribution be made from the Ministry of Education budget.” On the question of the Buddhist Sankha Council collaboration with the government in educational affairs, Dr Pridi, himself a former temple boy, said that he would like to see the council extend more cooperation to the government in the national education scheme.

On March 10, 1934, the committee’s report, dated February 28, was submitted to Parliament. In the report, the committee had recorded in detail Pridi’s testimony with the conclusion that the committee was of the unanimous opinion that “Dr Pridi is absolutely clear of all communist charges against him.”

After the report had been read before Parliament, the house speaker asked the assembly if the report was acceptable or whether any member wished to express his contradiction.

The MP from Sakol province asked for the floor and debated that the committee had failed to include Pridi’s economic scheme into its deliberation, “despite the accusation originating from that scheme”.

Prince Wan Waithayakorn in his reply stated that the committee’s approach was, first of all, based on the unanimous view that the question under investigation was a “general-policy accusation”, and not a “legal indictment”. As for the economic scheme, the committee was of the opinion that its consideration was beside the point. Prince Wan further stated that he himself had publicly expressed his personal opinion that the scheme was not a communist one. As far as the committee was concerned, Dr Pridi’s political inclination had never been communist, not being communist and would not be communist. The Sakol MP further insisted to cover the economic scheme in its report. His proposal, however, failed to obtain secondment from the house. With the exception of only one vote, the national assembly unanimously approved the committee’s report which cleared Dr Pridi from the communist charge and expressed congratulations to its innocent member.

Pridi then stood up and made the following statement:

“I wish to state once again that I never subscribed to communism; that my economic scheme is not a communist scheme; and that I am not a communist. I need say no more. I thank you all and pledge myself to serve this House and the people for our prosperity.”

Now it was the turn of the prime minister. Colonel Bhahol, with

tears in his eyes, made one of his most frank statements before the House of Representatives.

“I have, up till now, remained neutral on this particular issue despite the fact that I know very well what the truth is. I simply did not want the public to sense that I was on Dr Pridi’s side or had a tendency towards that direction. I have therefore hidden my personal feelings, waiting for justice to bring out the truth. You may recall the day Dr Pridi departed from Bangkok and what I did as reported in the press. The reason why I behaved in such a manner was that I knew the whole thing was not right. I was prepared for any eventuality, regardless of what people would think of me, because I wanted them to know precisely how I felt. There were people who asked me if I was not afraid of danger. I definitely was not, because I knew that Dr Pridi was not guilty of the charge. He is really a good man. But I could not speak out then, because evidence was lacking to prove that a good man had been unjustly accused. I told Dr Pridi later that he was a learned man, but he had not yet learned about our bureaucratic mentality and behaviour. I myself have experienced this kind of thing many times before in my life, so I understand it well. Dr Pridi is a man of great knowledge but he has no experience in politics. And that is why he was hit hard. Since the committee has confirmed his innocence of the accusation, justice once again prevails.”

On March 29, 1934, Pridi Banomyong was offered his first position of high responsibility, the portfolio of the interior ministry.

For the next thirteen years during which he occupied some of the highest offices in Thailand, Pridi never showed the slightest inclination towards communism. Realising that the kind of economic scheme he once initiated could lead to a misunderstanding that would adversely affect his party’s political image and cause an embarrassment to the king, Pridi, throughout these long years, never attempted to implement it, nor even to talk about it. In fact there was ample chance for him to do so, if he had really wanted to do it. For many years during 1934-1947, he was the most popular and the most respected statesman in his country. Together with Pibul-Songgram and other friends, he led Thailand on the road to progress.

As minister of the interior in the Bhahol government, he laid the foundation for the country’s basic administrative law as well as for the municipality system, with the aim to strengthen the democratic mecha-

nism and to make democracy work.

On becoming foreign minister during the last years of the Bhabhol government, Pridi utilised his legal knowledge and diplomatic skills to obtain for Thailand complete sovereignty. All the unfair treaties signed with foreign powers in the past were replaced with new treaties based on equality and reciprocity. And this was accomplished without any adverse effect on foreign relations.

As minister of finance in the Pibul-Songgram government, Pridi proved to be the best man for the job. He managed to provide the country with sound public finance, a strong monetary system and solid external balance. It was also Pridi who laid the foundation for the Bank of Thailand as the nation's central bank. During his tenure of office, the country not only experienced economic growth, but it also enjoyed a high level of price stability. In fact the bank notes stamped with his signature as finance minister were as trustworthy as gold. He managed to accomplish all this without resorting to any communistic device.

As regent during the war years, he represented the young King Ananda Mahidol, then residing in Switzerland, with proven loyalty, honesty and integrity. In that prestigious capacity, Pridi was conservative, dignified and observant to every minute detail of the royal customs and traditions. He was well informed about Thailand's monarchy, particularly about the glorious Chakri Dynasty. His efforts in the protection of the throne were sincere and effective as would be expected from the king's devoted servant. Also, during the war years, he became leader of the Free Thai Movement and in that role he proved beyond doubt a great patriot who was always ready to sacrifice his life for righteousness and the democratic way of life. The Allied leaders during the War regarded "Ruth" as a true friend of democracy.

When he became prime minister after the war, Pridi once again demonstrated his deep attachment to constitutional monarchy. Finding the constitution that he drafted back in 1932 no longer compatible with the changed conditions, he arranged for a new constitution to be drafted. In his parliamentary speech just before the proclamation of the new constitution, Pridi repeatedly dedicated the successful establishment of the constitutional system of government to the late King Prachathipok and stressed that the royal graciousness should be forever cherished by the Thai people.



When his political career abruptly ended as a result of the military coup in 1947, Pridi fled Thailand and finally found himself living in exile in China for twenty-one years, before moving to Paris in 1970. Long years in exile have not changed his political views. While appreciative of the Chinese hospitality and the honours they promptly extended to him, Pridi remains devoted to parliamentary democracy. Although given the opportunity to observe communism at work, he still maintains that constitutional monarchy is the most appropriate political system for his own country.



CHAPTER 8

RESTRUCTURING GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATION

Few politicians have ever contributed so much to Thailand's independence, democracy and progress as did Pridi Banomyong when he was in the prime of his political life.

Before becoming minister of the interior on March 29, 1934, Pridi had served in the Manopakorn cabinet as minister without portfolio between June 28, 1932 through March 31, 1933, and also very briefly in the first Bhahol government between October 1 to December 15, 1934. In fact since the June 24 Revolution, he was absent from the cabinet on only two occasions. One was during his "exile" in Europe after the closing of parliament on April 1, 1933 and the other was during his communist testimony in January-February 1934 after the first general election.

His choice of the portfolio in the Ministry of the Interior was made due to the necessity for the new government to restructure the country's administration for the new political system. The existing administrative structure, reorganised in the 1890's during the reign of King Chulalongkorn, although modern in form, needed modification to incorporate democratic concepts and procedures, especially with regard to popular participation in government. This was a subject of Pridi's speciality and his deep interest in the matter could be traced to the pre-Revolution days when he was teaching administrative law at the Law School. Besides, since his recall from Europe in September, Pridi had



been assigned to study ways and means of implementing the principle of democracy in government administration. Included in this task was his special interest in the training of personnel to carry out administrative reform. He was well aware of the lack of trained personnel as the main obstacle to the necessary reform. It was precisely the personnel bottleneck that had frustrated Chulalongkorn, more than anything else, when that enlightened monarch was earnestly carrying out his many faceted revolutionary programmes a few decades earlier.

Determined to solve the administrative personnel problem once and for all, Pridi picked up his alma mater — the Law School — and looked into the possibility of developing it into an administrative training institution. The new generation of civil servants, according to his French-inspired tendency, should have basic training in law, as the new system was government by law. But apart from that, they must also be equipped with a knowledge of economics, political science and other related subjects, the so-called “moral sciences”. Subsequently, he came up with the idea of founding a new university which combined the Law School of the Ministry of Justice and the Faculty of Law and Public Administration of Chulalongkorn University. The new university was named, “the University of Moral and Political Sciences” or “Thammasat University”. The law which gave birth to this university was passed by Parliament on March 17, 1934 and Thammasat was officially opened on June 27, 1935, with Dr Pridi Banomyong as its chancellor, the position he held, without interruption, until his departure from Thailand in 1947. Pridi’s Thammasat scheme was to have a lasting value to the nation. For almost half a century since it was founded, the prestigious university has produced tens of thousands of graduates in law and social sciences who have filled positions in the entire Thai civil service and the private sector, among them prime ministers, ministers, members of parliament, ambassadors, supreme court judges, provincial governors, departmental heads, generals, professors, journalists, bankers, industrialists and others. In later years, Pridi’s political opponents have often accused him of using Thammasat as his political power base, first to rival Pibul’s growing influence in the military, and finally to consolidate all power in his own hands. Superficial though the accusation seems to be, it inflicted damage on Pridi’s reputation.

There has also been an accusation made on his attitude towards

the country's highest institutions, namely the nation, the religion and the monarchy. However, when going through the passages required by Pridi as chancellor for his Thammasat graduate's declaration, one begins to doubt the validity of the accusation. Before receiving their degrees, the graduating class made the following declaration:

"I shall protect and observe the Constitution of Thailand.

"I shall follow the right paths, and shall not act in anyway which is detrimental to the honours of the University, as well as to the Nation, the Religion, the Monarchy and the Constitution."

Also in his congratulatory message to the graduating class of 1939, Pridi said,

"When I say 'good things', I do not mean only those for you as individuals. I also refer to 'good things' for the whole, for your own University, for the Nation, for the Religion, for the Monarchy and for the Constitution. Under no circumstances, should you ever inflict damage, by your actions, your expressions or your thoughts, on these institutions. But instead, you shall always see to it that our Nation, Religion, Monarchy and Constitution would last forever."

Since those formative years, Thammasat has undergone many structural changes. It is at present a full-fledged university on the Anglo-American pattern, and no longer a higher learning institution teaching only law and the "moral sciences." Despite organisational and curriculum changes, and also despite serious efforts to disassociate it from Pridi Banomyong, the progressive spirit has remained with it. Thammasat remains the intellectual centre of socio-political consciousness in Thailand. It was at Thammasat that the student-led popular uprising in 1973 began. And it was also at Thammasat that Thailand deplorably witnessed the most barbaric political crime committed against her own youths some three years later.

At the time of Pridi's appointment as minister of the interior, King Prachathipok and his queen had already left the country. Embarrassed by the Bovoradej incident and its unpleasant consequences, particularly on the prosecution and persecution of those persons alleged to be involved in the rebellion, many of whom were overt royalists, the king found it better for him to be away from the country, at least temporarily. Equally pressing perhaps was his deteriorating eye condition, a life-long personal suffering. Prachathipok felt the real need to obtain proper

attention from an eye specialist for himself, at that time not available in Thailand. There were also other factors involved in his decision to leave the country. His involvement in a civil lawsuit was understandably an embarrassment to the king and the attitude of disrespect shown by some idiots was also unbearable. Besides, the king also found that he did not quite see eye to eye with the new government on many matters. He was, somehow, under the impression that the Bhahol government did not seriously respect his opinions and truly appreciate his concern, both on official and personal matters. Prachathipok was bitterly disappointed by the way politics was being pursued. Possible, he thought that his dialogues with the government would be more effective if he were not in the country, the failure of which could possibly mean abdication. The king's departure on January 12 was therefore tantamount to separation before divorce.

King Prachathipok's tendency towards an abdication had been sensed once before when Pridi and a few members of the first Manopakorn government were granted an audience with him on June 30, 1932 at the Sukhothai Palace. The confidential record disclosed that Prachathipok mentioned the possibility of his abdication after the transition period, on the grounds of his health. The king even discussed his successor, referring to Prince Ananda Mahidol, the eldest son of the late His Royal Highness Prince Mahidol of Songkhla, Prachathipok's half brother, as the most legitimate choice. Phya Srivisarn requested that the king put aside his consideration of abdication for the time being as the nation was still in need of his assistance. Prachathipok said that it would depend on his eye condition which, even had there been no political change, would make him consider abdication anyway if it ever became aggravated. The king finally stated that his continued reigning would be subject to both his eye condition and how his personal honour would be affected by the act of the People's Party.

The Bhahol government was stunned when informed of the king's desire to make a journey abroad. The government felt that Prachathipok's departure at that time would adversely affect the government's prestige. They made a plea to the king not to make the trip, and they would make effort in bringing an eye specialist to Bangkok. But the king had his mind made up.

On January 11, 1934, the day before his departure, King Pracha-

thipok made his farewell speech over the radio, in which he demonstrated his superb political spirit, as well as his responsibility as a constitutional monarch. He said:

“On this forthcoming January 12, the queen and I are to make our journey abroad for my medical treatment. But I will also take the opportunity of promoting international goodwill for our nation.

“I do realise the political difficulties at present. But I have full confidence in the government under Colonel Bhahol’s leadership. My government and the army have successfully suppressed the recent rebellion and I am positive that peace will return to our country, and national unity will be fully restored.

“Presently, we already have parliament, consisting of two categories of members as prescribed in the constitution. So far it has proved to be of great assistance to the government in working for national progress.

“I have had for a long time, a sincere belief in the constitutional form of government and since acquiring constitution, I have shown my interest in seeing to it that all matters are pursued in accordance with the constitutional system. I have expressed my wish on several occasions that I am desirous of seeing politics conducted in the manner compatible with constitutional principles. I wish to emphasise that once again, particularly during my absence from the country. I request my people to remain peaceful and to maintain utmost unity.

“In a time of economic depression like this, it is natural that everyone seeks to alleviate his suffering. But I wish to request that in doing so, we must not forget our social interest, that is peace in the nation. Our people are guided by religious teachings, therefore we love peace. On the occasion of my temporary absence from our beloved Thailand, I pray to the Triple Gems and to all the sacred beings in the universe to provide protection for the Thai people that they may enjoy peace and happiness forever.”

Those were King Prachathipok’s last words ever to be heard in Thailand. He and the queen left Bangkok for Medan in Sumatra the following day and took an East Asiatic liner from there for Europe. He never returned to his beloved country. The king passed away after a heart attack at Surrey, England, in 1941 at the age of 48.

In October 1934, nine months after his departure from the country, King Prachathipok, having exercised his veto power on three bills passed

by Parliament, sent a cable to H.R.H. Prince Naris, his regent in Bangkok, informing the latter of his desire to abdicate. When the message was relayed to the government, Prime Minister Bhahol wrote to Prince Naris expressing his cabinet's deep sorrow and confirmed the government's absolute loyalty and fidelity to the king. Bhahol stated in his letter dated October 23, that had there been any act either by the government or by Parliament which had caused concern to His Majesty, it had been carried out in good faith, and not meant to displease him in any way. The government wished that the king would let them know each of the matters causing his displeasure, so that the cabinet would try its best to find a satisfactory solution to it. Bhahol ended his letter by confirming once again the nation's earnest desire to see the king return to Thailand and remain on the throne indefinitely.

Prachathipok was, then, in a state of low morale. He sent a long cable on October 27 through the regent containing passages which clearly reflected his displeasure on a number of matters, as well as his distrust of the government. "I have heard pleasant words from the government before, but things never turned out to be as pleasant," the king began his cable. "The situation in the country makes me feel that the continuation of reign does not seem to benefit anyone," said the king. He then continued to express his frustration. "They have never kept their words," stated Prachathipok. "Their most convenient excuse is that they cannot make Parliament comply with my wishes. I am sick and tired of the quarrel which always ends up with me as the loser."

Realising that the delicate situation must be handled with great care, and further correspondence could lead to worse, the government decided to dispatch its representatives to England with the view of finding out Prachathipok's precise wishes, and also to request the king to return home. The government's mission consisted of Chao Phya Sri Dharmmathibes, speaker of parliament who had served once as Prachathipok's minister of justice, Lt Commander Thamrong-Navasawat representing the cabinet, and Direk Jayanama as secretary. The mission arrived in London on December 7, 1934, and they were granted an audience at the king's residence at Knowle Granleigh, Surrey, on December 12. Admiral Phya Rajawangsan, then minister in Paris, was also asked to join the government mission.

At the first audience, the king told the mission that in granting the

constitution, he anticipated that the government was to be carried out on the pattern of British democracy. His disappointment ranged from the selection and appointment of the "second-category" members of parliament to the suppression of freedom of the press and public opinion. The king stressed that he had granted the constitution to the people, and not to any group of men. On specific matters, his objections included the Protection of the Constitution Act which empowered the government to detain persons accused of involvement in activities which endangered the constitutional form of government and the principles of the new bill on the crown property. The mission requested that the king give the details of his complaints, point by point, so that the government could attempt to correct them as far as the constitution permitted.

The second audience, which took place on December 23, did not seem to brighten the hope for a compromise. The king had written his memorandum containing a number of points which he commanded to be forwarded directly to the government in Bangkok. During the audience, Prachathipok spoke about the desirability of having political parties as the means to bring out differences in viewpoints openly and constitutionally. The king also said that he had been accused of giving moral support to the closure of parliament and to the Bovoradej Rebellion. On this matter, the mission reassured him that the government had conceived no such idea. Prachathipok finally said that he had a great pity for those who had been convicted of political crimes and hoped that his return to the country should, in some way, help them.

Upon receiving the royal memorandum, the Bhaol government quickly complied with many of the king's wishes: no action was to be taken against the officers of the royal guards; no streamlining of the ministry of the royal household was to be undertaken; no more accusations were to be made against the former regime and strict action would be taken against those who were to make such an accusation; no strong socialist economic policy was to be adopted; and lenient punishment for political crimes would be considered.

The government's response to the royal memorandum was submitted to the king during the third audience which took place on January 20, 1935. Prachathipok's reaction was that Bangkok had not yielded anything to his request. "There is nothing more to discuss," said the king, "it's finished."



The problem was that although many of the king's demands had been complied with in principle, the details remained unsatisfactory. For instance, the government had agreed that the size of the royal guards would remain unchanged, but it was not possible to equip them to the extent that would please the king. The mission, however, assured Prachathipok that every point was negotiable and there was nothing final at this stage.

On the question of the "second-category" members of parliament, the government reminded the king that the appointment was made in accordance with the constitution and the list had been submitted to him for consideration before the appointment was made. As to the king's proposal to amend section 39 of the constitution in order to allow referendum, the government was of the opinion that referendum should wait until the people were better educated. The government also pointed out the fact that in the passage of the bills on which the king had exercised his veto power into law, all cabinet ministers and their political secretaries, as well as many of the second-category members abstained from voting. Although the government did not favour constitutional amendment in this case (overruling the king's veto) from a simple majority to a 2/3 or a 3/4 majority, it was, however, prepared to dissolve parliament if such an act would meet the king's desire. Dissolution was, to the government, a better alternative to constitutional amendment at this time.

On these and other matters, the Bhahol government tried to explain, to justify, as well as to suggest alternatives as the basis for compromise. In other words, the government, while trying to maintain constitutional principles, was in earnest to comply with the king's wishes as far as possible. The government's "Yes Sir, but..." manner apparently frustrated Prachathipok. At the fourth audience on January 24, the king stated that he realised that the government did not sincerely want him to return.

The Bhahol government, on January 31, 1935, submitted the king's memorandum in full detail together with the government's response for the consideration of Parliament. Despite its sympathy with the monarch's feeling, Parliament, however, found the government's response appropriate.

As hope for persuading the king to change his mind regarding the abdication seemed very dim, the government decided to recall

Commander Thamrong to report more fully on the situation at Knowle Granleigh to the cabinet. Thamrong had his last audience with the king on February 6 during which he sensed the imminence of abdication. Prachathipok stated that in case he abdicated, he would not exercise his power in the appointment of his successor, but would rather leave it to the law of succession and the constitution. Thamrong had an audience with Prince Ananda Mahidol in Lausanne on February 14 and arrived back in Bangkok by air on February 27, just before the abdication actually took place.

Also on February 14, Phya Sri Dharmmathibes and Rajawangsan had another audience with King Prachathipok. Sri Dharmmathibes told the king that Parliament had been fully informed of the details of the royal memorandum. The king asked for the minutes of the parliamentary record which was then on the way from Bangkok.

Three days later, on February 17, Sri Dharmmathibes dispatched a cable to the prime minister quoting Prachathipok's final questions, the answers to which must reach him before the end of the month at the latest. The king's questions demanding precise answers included the followings:

- 1) Whether or not the government accepted his proposal on the constitutional amendment regarding the second-category members of parliament;

- 2) Whether the government accepted his proposal on the constitutional amendment regarding the passage of the bills which had been vetoed by the king;

- 3) Whether the government would allow the formation of political parties;

- 4) Whether the government would repeal the Protection of the Constitution Act;

- 5) Precisely how the government was to act on the amnesty to be granted to the politically convicted persons;

- 6) Whether the government would change the dismissal orders on political grounds from dishonourable to honourable, so that the dismissed officials would be entitled to pensions by law, and

- 7) Whether the government would equip the royal guards with arms and ammunitions as requested, before the king's return.

"Should the government and Parliament consider my requests

contradictory to the constitutional principles and the democratic system of government,” stated the king, “then our principles do differ and as such we cannot work together.” Prachathipok also demanded that the government’s answers to his questions be straightforward and precise, and he would consider indefinite response as a refusal to accept his request on the part of the government.

On February 21, Colonel Bhahol gave the government’s response through the royal secretary acknowledging the king’s demands and stating that the government had already submitted the full explanation on all matters to which Parliament had given endorsement. Therefore, “there is nothing else to add.” In brief, the government was not prepared to amend the constitution, to allow political parties, to repeal the Protection of the Constitution Act or to interfere with the court of justice’s decisions on the political cases.

Prachathipok kept his promise. He wrote in his own handwriting, dated March 2, 1935, at 1.45 p.m. giving up the throne which he had occupied both as an absolute monarch and a constitutional ruler for nine years and three months. His abdication message contained everything he possessed under the circumstances: sentiment, frustration, regret, dignity, and sincerity — sentimental on the eve of leaving the duty to which he had been destined for life, frustrated over the defeat of his principles and beliefs, regretful for the inability to do anything more for his country, with all the dignity that he always upheld as a man and as a king, and the sincerity of his best wishes for the nation and its people.

The abdication message read:

“When Colonel Bhahol and his colleagues took over power on June 24, 1932, they asked me to remain on the throne as a constitutional monarch. I accepted the request on the understanding that they would establish a constitutional regime, a belief in which I also share: one that gave people freedom and rights for self-governing.

“I have attempted to assist them in making the transition as smooth as it could be, but any attempt had proved to be fruitless. They have not made an effort to provide full political freedom, neither did they care to listen to the people. They only want to keep power in their own hands.

“When I made the request that constitution be amended to conform with democratic principles, the government refused to do so.

Moreover, they have sought to suppress their political opponents by ruthless and unfair practices that I never used, even as an absolute monarch.

“I cannot and will not allow any group or party to exercise power in my name, in such a way contrary to my principles. I am willing to relinquish my former power to the people, but I will not hand it over to anybody or any group, so that it will be exercised against the people’s wishes.

“I have come to the conclusion that I can no longer assist and give protection to my people. Therefore I hereby abdicate.

“I deeply regret that I cannot do more for my people and my country, as I had intended and hoped to do. Yet I sincerely wish Thailand prosperity, and the Thai people happiness.”

Between March 2 and 7, 1935 was a hectic period for the government in Bangkok. In the first place, the abdication, in effect, also meant the termination of the authority of H.R.H. Prince Naris who had served as regent since King Prachathipok’s departure from the country on January 12, 1934. The prime minister, together with Lt Commander Thamrong-Navasawat and Prince Wan Waithayakorn, went to request the prince to continue his regency until Parliament decided on the new king. But the prince declined. In fact, the constitution had a provision that in the case like this, the government could also function as regency. The Bhahol government, however, strongly felt it inappropriate to do so.

Secondly, there was the question of Prachathipok’s successor. From the list of the line to succession, there were a few possible contenders to the throne among King Chulalongkorn’s nephews. Pridi wrote later that the government very carefully considered those possible contenders one by one, taking into account the law of succession, the relative ranking in the royal family, as well as other relevant aspects. Finally, it was unanimously decided that H.R.H. Prince Ananda Mahidol, the nine-year-old eldest son of the late H.R.H. Prince Mahidol of Songkhla, was the most appropriate choice to be Thailand’s next monarch. Among other things, the young prince’s father, a Doctor of Medicine from Harvard, during his short lifetime had done so much for the country in public health. Prince Mahidol was very popular and always demonstrated his democratic spirit. This seemed to be the decisive factor in the choice for Prince Ananda. The government secured parliamentary approval on

March 7, and Ananda was proclaimed King Rama VIII succeeding to the throne as from the very time of Prachathipok's abdication, which was March 2, 1935 at 1.45 p.m. Thamrong-Navasawat was assigned by the government to explain the whole situation on abdication to Parliament, with Prince Wan assisting on legal aspects of the implications. After this, Prime Minister Bhahol hurriedly sent a cable to Prince Ananda in Switzerland, informing him of the parliament's resolution, and inviting him to succeed to the throne. At the same time, Sri Dharmmathibes, the speaker of the house, was instructed to represent the government in making a call of respect to the new monarch.

As the new king was still a minor, a suitable person or persons had to be found to serve as regent or regents. Bhahol and Pridi saw Prince Naris and requested that he act as King Ananda's regent. The prince once again declined the offer and suggested that other senior members of the royal family be approached. The cabinet decided that there should be a regency council consisting of one senior member of the royal family as chairman, one member of royal family and one senior and experienced official as members. In his article, "The Royal Family in World War II", written in 1927, Pridi gave the following account: "Apart from H.R.H. Prince Naris, there was H.R.H. Prince Anuvat Chaturont, son of H.R.H. Prince Chakrabhatpong, King Chulalongkorn's younger brother. Prince Anuvat had served with Colonel Bhahol as King Prachathipok's military aide. The prince also had known me since my student days in Paris. At that time, he was accompanying H.R.H. Princess Valai Alongkorn of Petchburi, Prince Mahidol's elder sister, to Europe for medical treatment. Prince Anuvat asked me to serve as his guide in Paris on several occasions. I respected him for his democratic attitude. Often he would do his own cooking at the Legation kitchen. I still remember that there were some delicious dishes which I learnt to cook from him, starting from buying the ingredients upon his request, and then helping him in the preparations. Colonel Bhahol and myself went to see the prince and asked his permission to propose his name to Parliament as president of the regency council. The prince kindly gave his permission.

"During that time, H.H. Prince Athit, King Prachathipok's personal secretary, came to see Colonel Bhahol and me at the Parus Palace, bringing some official papers for our consideration. Both the colonel and I had found the prince very cooperative with the government, therefore

we approached him for nomination as a member of the regency council. Prince Athit also had known me since we were students in Europe, and I had served as his guide for Paris when he came over from England for holidays. I also found him very democratic.

“As for a senior government official, the cabinet considered Chao Phya Yomaraj, who had served in many important positions since the Chulalongkorn era and being the most senior of all, as the most suitable candidate. Colonel Bhahol asked me to approach the grand old man, but I declined, on the ground of my family connection with him. Bhahol therefore made the approach himself and met with a favourable response.

“After Parliament had concurred with the government’s proposal to invite H.R.H. Prince Ananda Mahidol to succeed to the throne, on March 7, 1935, it also gave consent to the appointment of the regency council.

“On August 13, 1935, when the ship on which I was sailing to Europe on my way to negotiate for the reduction of the interest on government loan, and also to make preliminary proposals on the abolition of the unfair treaties, arrived at the Italian Port of Brindisi, one of my passenger companions brought to my attention headline news in an English newspaper on Prince Anuvat’s suicide. It was incredible, because when I last saw him just before leaving Thailand, the prince did not show the slightest sign that anything of the sort would happen. I continued my voyage arriving at Trieste and postponed my scheduled call on Mussolini. I hurriedly took the train to Lausanne to have an audience with His Majesty King Ananda Mahidol. In Lausanne, I asked to see government cable about the incident from Siri Raja-Maitri, the king’s personal secretary, and found it concurred with the news I had read. From Lausanne, I hurried to Paris where I received the report from Police Colonel Adul-Dejcharas who had personally took part in the autopsy. The prince had taken a pistol into his mouth and instantly killed himself. Police’s interrogation with the princess and persons in the palace revealed that before his death, Anuvat had been severely criticised by some members of the royal family on his acceptance to become president of the regency council in support of the People’s Party.”

Upon Prince Anuvat’s tragic death, the Bhahol government, on September 20, 1935, proposed General Chao Phya Bhitchayen-Yothin to

replace the vacancy. Prince Athit then became president of the regency council.

The abdication incident was the most spectacular event during the initial phase of new Thailand. Although publicly Pridi appeared to be in low profile throughout the event, it was most likely that he, as an influential cabinet minister and also as the prime minister's confidant, must have taken part in practically every step of government's decision-making, including the consideration of Prachathipok's successor.

The Abdication Incident, which took place during the time Pridi was minister of the interior, was considered one of the mistakes made by the People's Party of which he was a leading member. Queen Rambhai, in recent years had disclosed that Pridi once frankly admitted to her of his immaturity in those days, for which he felt deeply regretful. Pridi himself confirmed this in his memoir on "Founding the People's Party and the Democratic System", written in 1972. He said that he himself and many of his friends in the People's Party realised that they had made a mistake on the abdication. They were, therefore, determined to correct it. Pridi recalled that just before the Second World War broke out, the king wrote to the government, his letter being read by Prime Minister Pibul-Songgram in the cabinet, expressing his desire to return to Thailand as H.R.H. Prince Prachathipok, and to take residence at the province of Trang in the south. But before the government replied, the king had passed away, and that was another deep regret on the part of Pridi and his friends. After the war, in 1946, Pridi as regent, did restore the late Prince Prachathipok to the full status and honour of a king as before his abdication.

Pridi had been interior minister barely six months when the government faced its first crisis on the question of a rubber quota. The government, with a view to achieving price stabilisation, had signed an international agreement on a rubber export quota and was now asking Parliament for ratification. After four days of heated debate, the government was defeated, on September 13, 1934, with 25:73 votes. As a good democrat, Bhahol, without delay, tendered his resignation.

On the next day, there was a sounding for a new prime minister in parliament, and Bhahol was again the choice. The colonel, at first, declined the offer, but finally accepted it upon the request of King Prachathipok dispatched from England. Bhahol's new cabinet, assuming

office on September 1934, had Pridi again as interior minister and Colonel Pibul-Songgram, for the first time, as minister of defence. Other members of the People's Party such as Captain Sindhul-Songgramchai, Commander Subha-Chalasai and Lt Commander Thamrong-Navasawat, all from the navy, were appointed ministers without portfolio.

In the capacity of minister of the interior, Pridi occupied himself with restructuring the administration in accordance with the new administrative law. Under the law, the country was administratively divided into three levels, namely central, provincial and local. The central administration was that for the country as a whole, covering the functions, organisation, and structure of the ministries and departments. The provincial administration was concerned with the seventy provinces. Primarily the responsibility of the Ministry of the Interior, it also covered functions of other ministries and departments operating in the provinces. Finally, there was the local administration which formed the grassroots of the democratic system where people managed their own local affairs. Pridi also drafted the law on municipality which provided a mechanism for local government. In laying the foundation for the new government administration, the thirty-four-year-old interior minister also devoted his attention to implanting the understanding of a new administrative philosophy into his officials. He regularly called meetings of provincial governors and district officers, and discussed with them ways and means to implement the new administrative system. His warm personality, his sound knowledge and his teaching experience played an important part in his achieving not only the implementation of the new principle and policy, but also the command of respect of the interior ministry officials.

Pridi served as minister of the interior for two years, from March 1934 to February 1936, during which his assignments were also extended to other related areas such as the reorganisations of the civil service, the judiciary council, and the audit council. It would not be wrong to say that Pridi Banomyong served as the "brain-trust" of the Bhabol governments as well as personal adviser to the prime minister.

One of his "special assignments" was a journey to Europe, the United States and Japan in August 1935. The purpose of the trip was two-fold. One was to negotiate for the reduction of the interest rate on loans contracted after the First World War for railway construction and irrigation works. Secondly, it was to make a preliminary approach to



various governments concerning the abolition of the unequal treaties Thailand was forced to sign with them. On this trip, Pridi had the opportunity to meet with many well-known figures in international politics of the days, including the Duce Benito Mussolini, Premier Pierre Laval of France, Hitler's National Economy Minister Schacht, British Foreign Secretary Sir Samuel Hoare and Roosevelt's Secretary of State Cordell Hull. On the way back, he was also granted an audience with Emperor Hirohito. The whole trip was a great success on the part of the Thai government. It was during this trip that the minister of the interior was granted his first audience with His Majesty King Ananda Mahidol and his younger brother, H.R.H. Prince Bhumibol Adulyadej at Lausanne, Switzerland. The royal brothers were then 10 and 8 respectively.

Pibul-Songgram, then defence minister, was fighting for his life during the abdication incident. On February 23, 1935, one week before the abdication, while entering his car after presiding over a football match in front of the Grand Palace, a hired gunman shot at him twice from a short distance. One bullet grazed his neck, but the other one passed through his right shoulder. Luckily, none of them hit any crucial organ. The young colonel was rushed to the army hospital where he spent about one month recuperating from the wounds. After the event, a few suspects were arrested but the police was unable to find out who was behind the attempted assassination. Apparently, it was not a personal matter. Pibul had already made many political enemies since his successful suppression of the Bovoradej Rebellion.

Six months later, in September 1935, when Pridi was still on his European trip, twenty-one non-commissioned army officers were arrested on the charge of conspiracy against the government. A Special Court Act was passed by Parliament empowering a special court to handle the case, similar to the one enacted to deal with the Bovoradej Rebellion. The special court judgement was considered final and like a military tribunal, no defence counselling was allowed. It was harsh and seemingly an undemocratic practice ironically under the band of the defence of democracy. The special court passed the death sentence on the leader whereas his collaborators received life imprisonments.

Despite political disturbances, the task of restructuring government administration under Pridi's responsibility was carried out with success. The foundation for effectual administration had been laid down;

the mentality of government administrators had been re-oriented; and the new administrative personnel had been trained for the new system. Pridi Banomyong had done his best under the circumstances. The success in the restructuring of the administration now led to the second step. Pridi was now ready to tackle Thailand's long-time problem, the abolition of the unequal treaties with foreign powers. Early in 1936, Dr Pridi Banomyong directed his energies towards a new direction. He left the interior portfolio for foreign affairs.



CHAPTER 9

REGAINING ABSOLUTE SOVEREIGNTY FOR THE NATION

There is nothing of which a statesman can be more proud than his contribution to national independence.

In the year 1936, Thailand, or Siam then, despite international recognition of her independence, and a place in the League of Nations, was not yet enjoying absolute sovereignty. For over eighty years since the time of King Mongkut in 1856, Thailand had gone through a bitter experience of unfair relations with foreign powers which imposed, under unequal treaties, legal and economic constraints on her sovereignty. It was this bitter feeling which partly inspired the June 24 Revolution, particularly for the founders of the People's Party in Paris. It was also one of the prime objectives which the government of the People's Party was determined to accomplish.

In his impressive book, "Siam and World War II", the late Foreign Minister Direk Jayanama gave the following historical background of the unequal treaties.

"In 1855, during the reign of King Mongkut, England sent Sir John Bowring, her governor in Hong Kong, to open new negotiations with us. This led to the signing of an agreement that same year. It was followed by a supplementary agreement between the two countries in 1856. This was the first of a number of subsequent treaties under which Siam suffered unilateral disadvantages. The treaty, which could not be ended except with the consent of England, laid down that the duty payable

on goods imported by the British would be limited to 3% ad valorem, while export duties were to be paid according to fixed rates. Further, any privileges granted to other countries must likewise be extended to England. In addition, British subjects who found themselves at variance with the law were to be tried by the British consular court. No arrest of any British subject could be made without the prior authorisation of the British consul, nor were British subjects liable for any taxes other than customs revenue, unless these had first been approved by the consul. This last condition was not in fact written into the treaty, but was interpreted as such by England, and Siam was obliged to consent thereto. The Siamese government of that time was well aware of the disadvantages it had been placed under by the treaty, and recognised that it amounted to a partial loss of our absolute sovereignty. However King Mongkut (Rama IV) considered it wiser to cede partial rights rather than lose our total independence, given the fact that several Western powers were advancing into Asia at that period.

“Other countries soon began to demand rights comparable to those granted to England. Siam was obliged to sign similar treaties with thirteen other countries, ranging from France and the United States in 1856, to Denmark in 1858, Portugal in 1859, the Netherlands in 1860, Germany in 1862, Sweden, Norway, Belgium and Italy in 1868, Austria-Hungary in 1869, Spain in 1870, Japan in 1898 and Russia in 1899.

“In all fairness one has to admit that our judicial system at that time was not as up-to-date as the European judicial system. Although our having to grant foreign countries consular jurisdiction over their own nationals was a blow to our absolute sovereignty, foreign demands in this regard could not be judged unreasonable. However, forbidding us to levy customs duties at higher than the fixed rates was grossly unfair, and an extremely oppressive measure.”

Along with the cession of legal and economic rights under the treaties, Thailand was also forced to cede parts of her territories to both England and France. We again turn to Professor Direk’s book for details.

“In 1863, Cambodia was squeezed out of Siam’s jurisdiction. In 1867, Siam was forced to recognise both Cambodia and the Khong Island as French territories. In 1888, Siam was forced to cede the Sib Song Ju Thai area to France, and in 1893, all lands lying on the left bank of the River Mekong. In 1904, the French took over further Siamese



territories on the right bank of the Mekong facing Luang Phrabang and Pakse, and finally in 1907, France seized Battambang, Siem Reap and Sisophon.

“In 1909, we signed a further agreement with England ceding Kelantan, Trengganu, Kedah, Perlis and islands adjacent to British territory in the Malayan peninsula in return for England agreeing to allow her subjects, both English and Asian registered as British subjects, to be tried in the Siamese courts once Siam issued a complete legal code. In the meantime, they were to remain subject to the jurisdiction of the consular court.”

From the time of signing the Bowring Treaty in 1855 until the outbreak of the First World War, the Thai government was fully occupied with problems concerning the containment of foreign intervention. As national security was always in a precarious situation, other national objectives such as economic development and social reforms had to give way to the maintenance of the country's independence. During the First World War, Thailand took part in the global conflict on the allies' side. When the war ended, the Thai delegation to the Versailles Peace Conference took the opportunity to negotiate for the revision of those treaties.

In fact the preliminary step on revising the treaties had been taken before the First World War. During the last years of the Chulalongkorn reign, the king and his Harvard adviser, Edward Strobel, had seen some possibility that the United States could be approached on this important matter. In 1909, Jens Westengard, another Harvard man who had taken over the post of foreign affairs adviser upon the death of Strobel, was sent to Washington to sound out the American attitude. Three years later, Westengard visited Washington again, and with the Thai minister, Prince Traitos, had the opportunity to make a courtesy call on the newly elected president, Woodrow Wilson, who showed his friendly attitude towards Thailand. However, while negotiations were going on, the First World War broke out, and as such they had to be temporarily postponed.

After the war, both sides resumed negotiation on the revision of the treaty signed in 1856. The Thai government attached great importance to the success of the American negotiation because once the United States had agreed, the new treaty signed with the Americans could be used as the prototype and the basis for the revision of similar treaties with other foreign powers. At that time Dr Elder James, another

Harvard man, was serving as foreign adviser. Together with the Thai minister in Washington, Phya Prabha-Karavong, the Harvard law professor managed to obtain the United States government's agreement to revise the old treaty, terminating America's extraterritorial rights in Thailand. And with President Wilson's support, the new treaty was signed in Washington on December 16, 1920 and ratified by the US Senate on April 27, 1921.

After their mission to the United States, the Thai foreign office was commanded by King Vajiravudh to approach other treaty powers for the revision of their respective treaties along the same principles. At first, the negotiations were carried out with those countries' diplomatic representatives in Bangkok, but progress proved to be very slow, due to the reluctance on the part of those powers to give up their interest. In 1924, Dr Francis B. Sayre, also a Harvard law professor serving as foreign affairs adviser, made a suggestion to King Rama VI that Thailand ought to send a mission to negotiate the revision of treaties at those foreign capitals in order to speed up the matter. The king agreed to the suggestion and gave instructions to the foreign office to draw up a programme for the mission. King Vajiravudh also appointed Dr Sayre to head the Thai mission for Europe.

Undoubtedly, the new American treaty made it somewhat easier for Thailand in her negotiations with other countries. "Through America Led the Path to Freedom," wrote Dr Sayre in his book "Glad Adventure" published in 1957. However, his task proved to be not an easy one, particularly when dealing with Great Britain and France. In the French case, just three days before the signing of the new treaty, bad news was received in Paris which delayed the signing. Madame Burnay, the wife of a French legal adviser in Bangkok, was murdered in Rajburi province. The incident prompted the French government to demand that there would be no signing of the new treaty until it was clear that the tragic incident was not a result of an anti-French feeling. It was the king who personally assured the French government that he would do everything in his power to see to that justice was most earnestly upheld in this case. Francis Sayre, who was bestowed the Thai official title "Phya Kalayana-Maitri", the same title once held by Jens Westengard, took one full year before his "Fight for Siam's Sovereignty" was completed with a success. As the result of his efforts, new treaties were signed with all countries,

mostly in 1925.

The success in concluding the new treaties which removed the judicial and fiscal restrictions that had been imposed on the nation for seventy years was due to the great efforts of many people in the Thai foreign service, not to mention King Vajiravudh who inspired, directed and pushed the matter of vital significance from the beginning. Credit is due to H.R.H. Prince Devavong, long-time Thailand's foreign minister, and his son and successor, H.H. Prince Traitos, who had endeavoured, with great patience and skill for more than two decades, to seek ways and means to regain the lost sovereignty for their country. They were assisted by their faithful and capable diplomats in Europe and America, without whom the mission could not have been accomplished. In this regard, Thailand also owed a great deal to those Harvard men who, in their capacity as advisers, proved beyond doubt their sincere devotion to their duties and to the cause of justice. It was these men, more than anyone else, who portrayed the best of the American image in Thailand which was to last for many decades.

Although the conclusion of new treaties in the 1920's was a great step forward, nevertheless, Thai sovereignty remained short of absolute-ness. Those revised treaties were subject to conditions which had to be fulfilled before Thailand could claim to have enjoyed absolute sovereignty. Professor Direk Jayanama summarised the conditions attached to the 1920's treaties as follows:

“1. The consular courts would be dissolved and their nationals made subject to Siamese law only if and when Siam set forth a complete legal code. Even then, for five years after that time, if members of the consulates or the consul himself saw fit to take out a case in which his own nationals were involved and to have a re-trial in the consular court in the interests of justice, they would be allowed to do so, although not if the case had already been presented to the Supreme Court.

“2. Although Siam would now be free to set the scale of her taxes, there were still certain limitations remaining. In our treaty with England, for example, it was agreed that import duties on textiles, iron and steel, or manufactures thereof, were to be limited to within 5% ad valorem for a period of ten years.

“It can be seen, then, that Siam was still subject to a number of pressures and did not yet enjoy absolute sovereignty. We suffered from

unilateral obligations which limited our ability to direct our national policy to an undesirable extent. Moreover, we were not free to levy taxes fully for the benefit of our country in the way that countries with absolute sovereignty over their affairs had the right to do.”

In other words, even after the signing of the new treaties in the 1920's, Thailand was still not absolutely free to manage her own affairs. The difference, indeed a significant difference, was that she now could be sure of how and when she would be absolutely free from the extra-territorialities. Before the new treaties were signed, it looked as if Thailand would remain a partially sovereign state indefinitely.

As a complete legal code was made an important condition in the new treaties, the Thai government during the reign of King Rama VI hastened to compile it. This legal task took much longer than expected, and it was continued into King Prachathipok's reign. The first, the second and the third books of the Civil Law Code were completed in 1925, and the completion of fourth and fifth books followed in 1931. Pridi, while secretary to the judicial council after his return from France in 1927, contributed significantly to the completion of the legal code, especially Book Five of the Civil Law Code. The Civil and Criminal Court Procedures which were drawn up in 1935 were also mainly Dr Pridi's efforts. By the year 1935, all treaties signed in the 1920's were approaching expiry, and Thailand had managed to complete the legal code.

Professor Direk summarised the situation as follows:

“Thus armed with the complete legal code called for by foreign nations, our government reopened negotiations with various countries, including England and France, pointing out that the circumstances under which the treaties of the 1920's had been drawn up had since changed greatly. Formerly, Western nations had been concerned because we did not as yet have an up-to-date body of law. By that time we had a complete legal code drawn up on the same basis as that of other countries governed by the rule of law, and compiled by both Siamese and foreign legal experts jointly. Siam therefore hoped for cooperation and sympathy in requesting these countries to grant her full and equal rights based on the principles of reciprocity and mutual benefit which all countries duly accepted.”

There was apparently the need for a foreign minister who was perfectly qualified to carry out the delicate assignment to a complete

success. There was only one man who met all the qualifications needed; highly competent, absolutely trustworthy, legally experienced, intensely energetic and indisputably devoted to the national cause. Dr Pridi Banomyong was that man.

On his trip to Europe, the United States and Japan in the autumn of 1935, Pridi had already made a preliminary approach to various governments on the matter. He met with Mussolini, Pierre Laval, Hjal' mar Schacht, Samuel Hoare, Cordell Hull and others, and the results were quite promising. Upon his appointment as minister of foreign affairs in the Bhahol government early in 1936, Pridi submitted his proposal to the government that Thailand would begin with abolition of all treaties and afterwards, open negotiations for completely new treaties. In this way, all new treaties would be based exactly on the same pattern. To begin with, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs would inform the various governments concerned through their representatives in Bangkok two weeks in advance of the purpose of the new treaties based on the principles of reciprocity and mutual benefit. Then it would be followed by a memorandum notifying them of the termination of the existing treaties.

This new approach which was adopted by the government in 1936 was basically different from that taken in the 1920's. Whereas the old approach had been based on negotiation for treaty revision, the new concept was abrogation of the existing treaties. The tactical change was considered necessary. Foreign Minister Pridi Banomyong sent notes to Thai diplomatic representatives abroad explaining this crucial tactic in October 1936.

The new treaties as drafted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs followed the universal principles of reciprocity and mutual benefits. And as the United States was the first country which agreed to revise the treaty with Thailand in the 1920's, it was decided that America, again, was to be approached first for the new treaty. In the US-Thai treaty of 1920, after notification of abrogation, the treaty would remain in effect for one more year. On this point, in his letter to the American legation in Bangkok, Pridi expressed his hope that the two countries would have reached an agreement on the new treaty within that one-year period. In the same letter, dated October 19, 1936, Dr Pridi also assured the United States that under the new treaty, which would be basically the same for all countries, "both the Thai interests and the interests of the other treaty

powers would be concretely determined and best protected.” The Thai minister in Washington was instructed to transmit a notification of abrogation to Secretary of State Cordell Hull on November 5, 1936. Throughout the negotiations for a new treaty with the United States, Dr Francis B. Sayre again rendered his fullest assistance. The new treaty was signed in Bangkok on November 13, 1937 and its ratification instruments were exchanged on October 1, 1938.

Following the same procedure, the new treaty with Britain was signed in Bangkok on November 23, 1937 and its ratifications were exchanged on February 19, 1938. In the case of France, there appeared to be some problem because of colonialists’ influence in the French government. But finally, the new treaty was signed in Bangkok on December 9, 1937 and its ratifications were exchanged on January 27, 1939. Before the year 1937 ended, similar treaties were signed with Switzerland, Belgium, Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, Germany and Japan, and all of them were ratified by 1938. As from January 27, 1939 on which the ratifications were exchanged with France, “the new era of foreign treaties based on the principles of reciprocity and mutual benefit had begun,” as stated by a Thai scholar, Songsri Arj-arun, in her book, “Extraterritorial Rights”. The same scholar praised Pridi Banomyong, the foreign minister, as the man “whose prominent role for the quick success in the negotiation for the new treaties was undoubtedly due to his great ability”. During the negotiation period, Dr Pridi was officially empowered by the council of regency to have “full authority to conduct negotiation with foreign powers on the entire matter.”

Professor Direk Jayanama, serving as the secretary-general to the cabinet at that time, made the following reference to the joyful event in his “Siam and World War II”.

“In 1937, new treaties were finally signed between Siam and thirteen other countries, including England, France and Japan whereby Siam regained her complete judicial independence. Foreigners and Siamese alike now had to submit to the jurisdiction of the Siamese courts. We were also left free to levy taxes and grant citizenship to persons born in our land, as well as obtain absolute freedom to reserve unsettled land for the use of Siamese subjects. In short, Siam regained absolute sovereignty over her territory.”

After Pridi had left the foreign ministry with the change in the government early in 1939, the new prime minister, Colonel Pibul-Songgram, in recognition of his colleague's invaluable service to the country, requested the crown to bestow on Pridi the "Dusadeemala Medal of Honours". Prince Wan, the Thai adviser for foreign affairs, was, on the same occasion, given the same honour. The government announcement on March 10, 1939 stated: "The prime minister has considered that the new treaties with thirteen countries, regaining for Thailand absolute sovereignty, are both honourable and beneficial to the nation. The success of this task is attributed to Dr Pridi Banomyong's effort while foreign minister, with valuable assistance from Prince Wan Waithayakorn, adviser to the prime minister's office and Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The prime minister, therefore, with cabinet approval has requested the crown to bestow upon these two officials, the 'Dusadeemala Medal of Honours'. The regency council, in recognition of their most valuable service to the nation, expresses, on behalf of His Majesty the King, a deep gratitude to both Dr Pridi Banomyong and Prince Wan Waithayakorn."

As foreign minister, Pridi adhered to the policy of friendship with all countries on the basis of equality and mutual respect. In his broadcast to the nation, on behalf of the Pibul-Songgram government, on February 15, 1939, Dr Pridi stressed that "The regaining of absolute sovereignty is most significant to national independence. The present government will exercise its utmost endeavour to maintain it, so that it will be inherited by the future generations of Thai people." Pridi also added that, "We should be aware that our success in this is brought about by international sympathy and understanding, and by the policy and efficiency of Thailand under the constitutional regime."

While Pridi was fully occupied with negotiations for the new treaties, Prime Minister Bhahol was encountering a series of crisis in Parliament. Among elected members, there were outstanding men, mostly representing northeastern provinces, who demonstrated seriousness in their roles, stubbornness in their stand, and toughness in their debates. These members of parliament included "Thong-in Bhuribhat, Thawil Udol, and Lieng Jayakarn.

The first serious blow that prompted the government to resign on July 27, 1937 originated from a government bill passed on March 31, of

the same year, under which the management of crown property was to be transferred to the Ministry of Finance. But before the actual transfer had taken place, it was disclosed that some blocks of land which were crown property had been sold, allegedly at low prices, to certain persons close to the government. The sale of these lands had been authorised by Prince Athit, president of the regency council. It was Lieng Jayakarn of Ubol who openly questioned the government in Parliament which made Prime Minister Bhahol furious as his integrity was at stake. Bhahol decided to resign in order that investigation could be carried out openly and fully. On the following day, Prince Athit, the regency council's president, also tendered his resignation on the same ground, which was promptly followed by the resignations of the other two regents. But on August 2, the prince and his two colleagues were reappointed along with Colonel Bhahol as prime minister, on the grounds that the issue was never meant to question their personal integrity. Bhahol therefore formed a new cabinet on August 10, 1937.

On November 7, 1937, the second general election was held with 40.22 per cent of the eligible voters, or 2.46 million out of 6.12 million people, going to the poll. Lieng Jayakarn, Thong-in Bhuribhat, Thawil Udol and other well-known northeastern representatives were among those returned to the national assembly. Colonel Bhahol, once again, was unanimously elected to form a new government which took office on December 21, 1937. On February 1, 1938, Foreign Minister Pridi Banomyong submitted the thirteen new treaties to Parliament for ratification.

The second parliamentary crisis, the last for Bhahol, occurred on September 10, 1938. Thawil Udol of Roi-et proposed a motion requiring the government to submit to Parliament its annual budget in minute detail. The government was opposed to it on the grounds that such a detailed budget was both time-consuming in preparation and involved costly expenses, and after all, it was not absolutely necessary. Prime Minister Bhahol frankly told Parliament that if forced to do so, his government had no alternative, but to resign. In a secret ballot, it came out that Thawil Udol's proposal was endorsed with 45 for, and 31 against. In high political spirits, Bhahol tendered his resignation. The regency council, however, in consideration of the current world situation and also of King Ananda Mahidol's forthcoming return to Thailand for the first



time since his succession, counter-proposed an alternative. On September 11, a decree was proclaimed dissolving the national assembly and commanding that a general election be held within ninety days.

The general election which was held on November 12, 1938 returned to the national assembly ninety-one members including Thawil, Thong-in, Lieng, and other veterans from the Northeast. But three days before the election day, there was an assassination attempt on the life of Defence Minister Pibul-Songram. The incident took place in his own residence, and the man who shot him was a long-time servant. The two shots fired by the inexperienced gunman, though from a short distance, missed him. One month later, on December 9, just before the opening of new parliament, and while speculation was running high on who was to become the next prime minister, there was again an attempt made on the life of the forty-one-year-old colonel. Pibul, Prayoon and a few other officers were having lunch at the colonel's residence, when it was found that they had been poisoned. All were taken to the army hospital for immediate treatment.

At that time, it was known that Bhahol would be most reluctant to accept another term. Since June 1933 when he first took office, Bhahol had been fighting a series of political battles for which he was never trained and groomed. No doubt, Bhahol had depended a great deal on his junior colleague, Pridi Banomyong, not so much for political manoeuvring but for complex government administration and legal matters. Once on December 17, 1934 when Pridi was holding the interior portfolio, it was proposed in the national assembly that Pridi be elected its speaker because "whenever there is any problem on parliamentary procedure, we have always turned to him for advice." Pridi was requested not to decline the offer, which he did not. He stated jokingly that he declined the nomination even before his appointment as a minister. But now as minister with a salary higher than that of the house speaker, if he declined, he might have been accused of having the desire to remain in a higher-salaried position. But Prime Minister Bhahol was strongly opposed to the proposal. In accepting prime ministership, Colonel Bhahol told Parliament, "It was agreed that I select my own assistants and teamwork. Now you are going to take him away from me. How can you expect me to continue my duty as Prime Minister? If you still insist on doing that, I will take it that you no longer want me to remain in office." Nevertheless,

by the end of 1938, after having served as chief executive for more than five years, Bhahol, at fifty-one, was weary and exhausted, both physically and mentally.

On Bhahol's refusal to accept another term of office, it was speculated that either Song-Suradej or Pibul-Songgram would be his replacement. Song-Suradej who left the country on a vacation trip abroad three months after he resigned from government in June 1933, had now returned. He re-entered the army once again in April 1936 as director of the war school, based in Chiangmai, and had been appointed a "second-category" member of parliament since July 6, 1937. His colleagues who left government with him in June 1933, had also returned to public life. Ridhi-Arkanay had become minister of agriculture twice from February 12, 1936 to August 8, 1937, and from December 21, 1937 to December 16, 1938. Both Ridhi-Arkanay and Prasas-Bhithayudh were appointed to Parliament on December 8, 1937, later Colonel Ridhi-Arkanay went to live in exile in Singapore. Prasas-Bhithayudh, promoted major general, was appointed Thai minister to Berlin.

The return of Song-Suradej seemed to raise the hope of his followers that the forty-six-year-old colonel might become Bhahol's successor. He was still young, energetic and commanded the respect of a large group of army officers, as well as of many members of parliament. However, the colonel had chosen to live a quiet life, occupying himself with the responsibility as director of the war school in Chiangmai. Despite his isolation from politics, he was closely watched by Pibul-Songgram and his army cliques. Once Prayoon Bhamornmontri, also having re-entered the army with the rank of major, was sent to serve as liaison officer at Song-Suradej's war school.

When it became almost certain that Bhahol would not return to politics and his successor had to be found, followers of Song-Suradej began to campaign for their idol. This political manoeuvre was quite alarming to the Pibul group which was determined that under no circumstances should Song-Suradej be allowed to return to power. The rift between the Pibul and the Song groups was beyond repair. There was no secret that the two men were suspicious of each other and both of them had political ambitions. In a biography of his late father, published in 1975, Major General Anant Pibul-Songgram expressed bitterness towards Song-Suradej, and explicitly blamed the latter for having been



involved in all major incidents against the People's Party. Pibul's son also implicitly speculated that Song-Suradej might also have been connected with plots against his father's life. It is interesting to note that Anant also linked the series of political crises that finally led to the downfall of the Bhahol government to Song's appointment to Parliament since July 1937. According to Anant, Song-Suradej always behaved like a mysterious person. He had both refused to join the Bhahol cabinet and declined Pibul's offer for an army post in Bangkok. But to be fair to Song-Suradej, it may be realistic to view Song's attitude as that of a disappointed man who sought to retain his personal pride in seclusion. His disappointment, his pride, and his bitterness were obstacles to the possibility of a reunion with his old colleagues in the People's Party. Perhaps, until the end of life, Song-Suradej always considered that he was right and they were wrong.

In fact, Pridi was also considered eligible as Bhahol's successor. His achievements in restructuring government administration and in regaining national sovereignty, as well as his image of integrity, capability and intellect, had earned him respect among his colleagues, politicians, bureaucrats and the general public. However, considering internal politics which was still far from tranquil, Thailand then required a firm hand to maintain law and order. On the international scene, dark clouds had appeared on the horizon, which called for defence preparations to back up Thailand's neutrality. The choice of Bhahol's successor was inevitably in favour of Pibul-Songgram. Besides, Pridi's efforts were further needed on various technical aspects of government, particularly in public finance and monetary management. With all these considerations, Pridi sincerely threw his full support to his old-time friend and colleague. Pibul-Songgram was to be the captain of the team while Pridi would serve as his second-in-command.

Being alarmed by Song-Suradej group's campaign activities, members of the People's Party, mostly military officers, held a meeting and reached a consensus that Colonel Pibul-Songgram must be the next prime minister. They, first of all, called on Bhahol and requested him not to accept responsibility to form a new government. After having obtained Bhahol's assurance, they sent their representatives to the regency council and the house speaker, informing them of their support for Pibul. Therefore, when Parliament met informally on December 15, 1938, Colonel

Pibul-Songgram was chosen to become the new prime minister. Pibul's first cabinet, consisting of 24 men, included Pridi Banomyong as minister of finance, Captain Sindhu-Songgramchai, R.T.N. as minister of education, Captain Thamrong-Navasawat, R.T.N. as minister of justice, Police Colonel Adul-Dejcharas as deputy minister of the interior, Kwuang Abhaivong as deputy minister of education, whereas Direk Jayanama, Lt Colonel Prayoon Bhamornmontri, Dr Toua Labhanukrom, Lt Commander Sangvorn-Yuthakit, R.T.N. and many other members of the People's Party were ministers without portfolio. Pibul himself became both minister of defence and minister of the interior.



CHAPTER 10

MAINTAINING SOUND FINANCE AND MONETARY STABILITY

Sound public finance and monetary stability had been the traditional economic policy of Thailand since the time of absolute monarchy.

In reorganising government administration in the 1890's, King Chulalongkorn took into consideration the need for sound finance as well as monetary stability, primarily to safeguard the nation from foreign interferences. It was during this period that the annual budgetary system was introduced, and the royal purse was separated from public expenditure. There was also a proper accounting and auditing system under the responsibility of the Ministry of Finance. In undertaking organisational changes, the Thai government recruited a few Englishmen into its service such as Rivett-Carnac, Williamson and Francis Henry Giles. While Rivett-Carnac and Williamson served as financial advisers, Giles later became director-general of the revenue department.

In November 1902, Thailand adopted the gold-exchange standard, establishing exchange parity of the baht with sterling. In 1928, during the reign of King Prachathipok, the Gold Standard Act of 1908 was replaced by a new currency law which, by most standards, was very conservative. It provided for a highly liquid reserve which was set free from any degree of government management. The authors of this currency act, including Sir Edward Cook, another British financial adviser, were determined to separate the monetary system from government finances.

When Britain left the gold standard in September 1931, the Thai government did not follow the British immediately but rather decided to wait for further developments. But owing to her close commercial interests with Britain, Thailand finally left gold standard for the sterling-exchange standard on May 11, 1932, just over one month before the June 24 Revolution.

In public finance, budgetary surplus had been continuously maintained until the latter part of the reign of King Vajiravudh when the annual budgets turned into deficits for six consecutive fiscal years, between 1920-1925. Since then, the government always saw to it that government current expenditures were matched with revenue, leaving capital expenditure to be financed from public loans, both internal and external.

The Thai government began its foreign borrowings before the First World War, primarily for railway construction. Two foreign loans were secured in London after the Great War to finance more railway and irrigation projects. The first one amounting to two million pounds was raised in 1922 with interest at 7%. The second loan, secured two years later, amounted to three million pounds with interest at 6%. Like the pre-World War I loans, redemption was to be effected within 40 years.

In 1935, when the Bhabol government sent Dr Pridi, then minister of the interior, to Europe, one of his assignments was to negotiate in London for a lower rate of interest on the 1924 loan contracted with the National Provincial Bank and the Chartered Bank. Pridi accomplished his assignment by succeeding in lowering the rate of interest from 6% to 4% which could save the Thai government about 600,000 to 700,000 baht (about US\$200,000-230,000 of the value then) per annum over a period of 30 years. When the government submitted a bill on the new interest rate for this loan in February 1936, Parliament, in approving the bill, recorded its thanks to Dr Pridi, in appreciation of his valuable service.

During his three years as minister of finance, from December 1938 to December 1941, Pridi accomplished much in the maintenance of sound finance and monetary stability. Many of his accomplishments, like his previous work, namely the restructuring of government administration, the regaining of national sovereignty, the compilation of legal codes, and the founding of Thammasat University, were of permanent value.



Upon taking the office as minister of finance, Pridi outlined his policy, focusing on four major areas, namely tax reforms for social justice, greater financial facilities for economic development, maintenance of monetary stability and adjustment of the fiscal year to suit the country's economic conditions.

Barely two months after taking the finance portfolio, Dr Pridi Banomyong on behalf of the government introduced a tax reform bill to Parliament which contained a revenue code providing for a taxation system based on the ability to pay, convenience on the part of the taxpayers, economy in tax collection, as well as fairness. His Revenue Code was aimed at making the taxpayers feel that the taxes they paid were to be used for developing their country and for their own well-being, so that the individual sacrifices became spontaneous and voluntary. Some former taxes which were considered socially unjust were abolished. In the meanwhile, Pridi also introduced import duties which Thailand was now free to impose at her own will and in accordance with her economic policy. Among the new indirect taxes introduced at that time, there was also the duty stamp which remains a source of government revenue until today. In introducing the tax reform bill, Pridi saw to it that both the general public and Parliament did realise its full implications, and had the opportunity to suggest and recommend appropriate improvements. The bill was passed into law on March 29.

As many of the unjust taxes were abolished, particularly the capitation tax which imposed a flat rate on every adult citizen regardless of his ability to pay, the finance minister had to find compensation for Bht 12.5 million, or about 12% of the total revenue. For this, Pridi resorted to indirect taxes such as import duties, excise taxes and duty stamps which were less burdensome, more convenient, and relatively fairer. Income tax at that time, though considered appropriate in principle, still could not be counted upon as an important source of revenue. Its effectiveness had to wait until the economy became more developed and the tax administration itself had gained more experience and efficiency. Nevertheless, between the fiscal years 1938 and 1941, government revenue had increased over 25%, and annual budget had risen from Bht 132 million to Bht 194 million, under the conditions of price stability. With these increased financial means, the Pibul-Songgram government was able to carry out many projects, including road

construction and modernisation of the armed forces. During the armed conflict with French Indochina at the end of 1940, Finance Minister Pridi Banomyong was able to provide full financial support for the successful military operations, without any adverse effect on the nation's financial and monetary stability.

On January 12, 1939, Pridi Banomyong introduced a bill on the budgetary procedure (No. 4) to the national assembly which was to change the fiscal year, which up till then started from April 1 to October 1. The minister of finance explained that the change was required to adjust budget timing to climatic seasons. He said that government field work was normally carried out in the dry months from December through March, therefore budget appropriation by October would prompt field work to begin on schedule. After the bill had been passed into law, the government introduced the special budget bill for April 1 through September 30, 1939, and the next fiscal year started from the following October. However, in 1941, Thailand changed the April to March calendar year to January to December. As October and January were only three months apart, Pridi once again proposed that the fiscal year should be adjusted to the calendar year. That was to remain in effect for twenty years, until it was changed back to October 1 in the early 1960's.

Pridi did not occupy himself only with government revenue and expenditure, but he also took into consideration the ways and means to promote economic activities. On March 22, 1939, he introduced two bills under which not only substantial excise duties were to be collected, but the indigenous commodities involved would also be promoted. One of the bills dealt with marine salt, the production of which was found in provinces along the Gulf of Thailand. Finance Minister Pridi proposed that the government reserve certain areas in those provinces for marine salt and undertake some investment on it besides giving technical assistance to the farmers. In addition, the government would guarantee to purchase whatever amount of salt was left unsold at determined prices. From the point of view of revenue, the development of this commodity would provide the government with an extra source of excise duty.

The other bill was concerned with tobacco. It was proposed that government step in to promote tobacco growing and marketing. Like marine salt, the government was to provide technical assistance to the farmers, as well as price and purchase guarantees. Pridi also proposed



stamp duty on cigarettes, and later authorised the Ministry of Finance to buy a cigarette factory from a British firm and to operate it for government revenue.

However, it was the founding of the Bank of Thailand, the country's central bank, which is always considered Pridi's most important contribution as finance minister. On September 29, 1939 Pridi Banomyong introduced a bill on the establishment of the Thai national banking bureau which was to perform some limited functions of a central bank. The bureau was, as preparation for a future central bank, the government agency responsible for the issue and management of internal loans. In retrospect, it appears that the bureau's real contribution to the central banking system in Thailand was a training ground for the next generation of Thai central bankers. In Pridi's own words, "We have to carry on step by step, beginning with the preparatory stage towards the full-fledged central bank in the future."

The Bank of Thailand was established in December 1942, during the Second World War, only three years after the founding of the Thai national banking bureau. Its establishment was by no means the result of an illusive judgement about its capability to function as a central bank. It was a diplomatic device designed for the maintenance of the country's monetary sovereignty, and nothing more. As the late Prince Vivat, the bank's first governor, put it, "The bank was born prematurely no doubt, but sufficiently lusty to prevent foreign (Japanese) usurpation of the monetary crown."

At the opening ceremony of the Bank of Thailand on December 10, 1942, Major General Boribhan-Yudhakit, then finance minister, made reference to Dr Pridi Banomyong in his opening speech. Boribhan said, "His Excellency Dr Pridi Banomyong was the one who laid the bank foundation when he established the Thai national banking bureau in 1939... the development of which was due to the high capability of that finance minister."

The history of the Bank of Thailand was closely connected with a major development of Thailand's external reserves during Pridi's tenure as finance minister. In September 1938, the Thai government shipped 43 million silver baht coins in the currency reserve, and the major part of the holdings in the treasury reserve to San Francisco, converted it into bullion and then sold it to the US mint. This sale was completed in the

late spring of 1939 and the proceeds, valued at US\$9.50 million, were used to purchase gold in London. More purchases of gold were made in London with the government's sterling balances valued at £3.90 million, during the summer of the same year, and when the outbreak of the Second World War appeared inevitable, a final purchase of the gold-based US dollars was effected in New York, valued at £2.00 million. The decision to acquire gold and the gold-based dollars as part of the country's external reserve had been made by Pridi in view of the need to strengthen Thailand's monetary position. In other words, the external reserve of Thailand then would consist of sterling, US dollars and gold, instead of sterling and silver whose prices had been subject to fluctuation. These purchases provided some profits to Thailand. At the time the gold purchases were made in London, the price of gold was 148 shillings and 6 pence per ounce, but soon rose to 157 shillings and 2 pence per ounce, giving Thailand some £346,000 or Bht 3.81 million profit. The dollar purchase made on August 24, 1939 similarly earned some profit, because the next day, the exchange value of sterling to US dollar dropped from £1 = US\$4.68 1/8 to £1 = US\$4.42. The profit from the dollar purchase amounted to £113,000 or Bht 1.24 million. Altogether, the right timing of the Thai government's decision on this monetary matter earned for Thailand Bht 5.05 million. Finance Minister Pridi Banomyong used this profit together with the interests accrued from the foreign exchange balance, as the initial capital of the Thai national banking bureau. On this event, a former secretary-general of the national assembly recorded with pride in his monumental volume, "Thai Parliament, 1932-1974", that "It was the start for the establishment of the central bank, without a single cent from the government budget."

To complete the account, during 1940 the government acquired a small amount of gold, mined in the southern part of the country, and bought gold worth Bht 25 million from the bank of Japan in Tokyo. On December 8, 1941, when the Pacific War broke out, Thailand possessed 1,323,413 ounces of gold, 799,736 ounces were kept in Bangkok, 257,142 ounces deposited with the Federal Reserve Bank of New York, and the rest deposited with the bank of Japan in Tokyo. The gold and dollars deposited in the United States were later to become the funds for financing the Free Thai Movement outside Thailand.

There is no question, that Pridi Banomyong, as finance minister,



was deeply concerned about the country's financial and monetary stability. To him, sound finance and monetary stability were the cornerstone of the country's economic progress. To ensure a smooth economic growth, the value of the Baht, both externally and internally, must be stable and strong. Externally, Pridi directed his attention to the management of foreign reserves, as well as to the maintenance of satisfactory external balances. On the latter, the average annual exports grew from Bht 158.30 million during 1933-35, to Bht 230.83 million during 1939-41, and the average annual imports increased from Bht 101.14 to Bht 162.56 million. The growth in foreign trade was accompanied by increasing surplus. Between 1933-35 and 1939-41, the average annual surplus rose from Bht 57.16 to Bht 68.27 million, which contributed to the increase in foreign exchange reserve. Because of strong reserves, exchange stability during 1933-41 was quite remarkable. Except for a few dips in the third quarter of 1937, the quotations were stable at Bht 10.89 per pound between July 1932 and May 1937, and at Bht 10.91 per pound between September 1937 and November 1941. As economy, trade, and exchange were sound, public revenue rose from an average annual total of Bht 90.79 to Bht 132.99 million between 1933-35 and 1939-41. Throughout this period, current expenditure was always kept within government revenue. The general price level was exceptionally stable, and there were no public complaints about inflation. Those who still recall the pre-Second World War price stability, also remember how remarkable the purchasing power of the bank notes with the signature, "Pridi Banomyong", or rather his official title "Pradist Manudharm", really was.

During the three years, 1939-1941, when Pridi served in the Pibul-Songgram government, there occurred a few incidents which have remained political controversies until these days, and are likely to go down in Thai history. Personally, Pridi was not involved, and for that reason, he has never been blamed for them. In most cases, when he was at the zenith of political power some years later, he even took the responsibility to correct them as far as he could.

The first incident which occurred in October 1939 was a civil law case between the office of the royal household and the former King Prachathipok and his queen. Two years earlier, a law was passed transferring crown property to the finance ministry for management and

supervision. Upon taking office, Finance Minister Pridi found it appropriate to check at once all assets belonging to the property as they were national properties placed at the disposal of the reigning monarch. And like other public properties and assets, they had to be recorded and maintained in accordance with the treasury's rules and regulations. A high-level committee was appointed to verify the property assets, consisting of Group Captain Kaj-Songgram, then minister attached to the Ministry of Finance, as chairman, and several senior officials of the old regime as committee members. The committee found out that some cash balances deposited with foreign banks abroad had been transferred to the account of the former king before his abdication. As such, a lawsuit was filed with the civil court by the office of the royal household demanding the return of those funds. The government's act in this case was not interpreted as an intention to inflict damage on the former king's image, but rather was a routine procedure in accordance with the law. As an absolute monarch, the king had full right over crown property and could make use of it in any way he saw fit. The matter was also not very clear as what would be the new practice during the transition period to constitutional monarchy. As it was a purely legal problem, the matter was submitted to the court for judgement.

The second incident was indeed regrettable, and perhaps one of the most controversial incidents in Thailand's political history in recent decades. This was the arrest and execution of eighteen persons allegedly involved in a plot to overthrow the Pibul-Songgram government.

It should be recalled that two attempts on Pibul's life had been made in the months of November and December 1938, prior to the colonel's appointment as prime minister, and the police under the command of Pibul's closest friend, Colonel Adul-Dejcharas, had been all out in search of the clues leading to people who were behind such attempts. Barely one month after the new government had taken office, the police, on January 29, 1939, made arrests of fifty-one persons including H.R.H. Prince Rangsit of Chainat, King Chulalongkorn's son and King Prachathipok's half brother; Lt General Phya Dhephasdin, the head of the Thai expeditionary force to Europe in the First World War; Colonel Song-Suradej and many of his followers including Colonel Chamnan-Yuthasilp, former deputy minister of economic affairs in the last Bhahol cabinet; Phya Udompong-Pensawat, former minister of the interior in the



early Bhahol government; and Lieutenant Nor-nane Talalak, an MP for Bangkok and a Pridi admirer. Colonel Song-Suradej and his aide were not detained, but instead were immediately sent out across the border to Cambodia. The government again introduced a bill creating a special court to hear the case. The court, under the chairmanship of Colonel Phrom-Yothi, a member of the People's Party, passed death sentences on twenty-one of the accused. Prime Minister Pibul, however, requested that Prince Rangsit, General Phya Dhephasdin and Colonel Chamnan-Yuthasilp be spared from death sentences and the three men were given life imprisonment instead. Eighteen men including Colonel Sura-Ronachit, a former Bhahol minister and Song-Suradej's close friend, Lt Nor-nane Talalak, the daring and youthful army officer turned politician, two sons of General Dhephasdin, and also Lee Boonta, Pibul's long-time servant who attempted to kill his master, were executed before the end of the year.

As the Special Court Act did not allow defence counselling, and a number of reliable accounts were later brought to public attention that substantial parts of police evidences were fabricated, therefore the arrests, the sentences and the executions of 1939 became a blemish on the government of the People's Party. The question remains: who were to be held responsible for the incident. Perhaps, Pibul-Songgram himself and Adul-Dejcharas, his closest friend and the police chief, could provide some answers to it.

In the interview with a newsman after the war, Pibul denied his involvement in the trial and the executions, saying that it was the special court which made judgements and passed the sentences. He himself did manage to request the regency council to change the death punishments for three men, namely the prince, the general and the colonel, to life imprisonment. He wanted to do the same favour for everyone of them, but Adul would not allow him to do so. "My wife knew the truth," said the former premier, "I was at that time suffering from a nervous breakdown, and could not hold myself together when I knew that Adul had brought the execution documents for me to sign. I went to bed after vomiting and fainting, but Adul would not leave. He got hold of a bottle of Black Label and just sat there in front of my bedroom. He declared that he would not leave if I did not sign the paper. Finally, I had no choice but to sign it." Pibul also admitted to his interviewer that he was afraid of

Adul-Dejcharas, his classmate at the royal military academy.

Adul-Dejcharas was definitely a man of strong character. A former artillery officer who joined Pibul in the June 24 Coup, he was transferred to the police force, primarily to provide security for the government of the People's Party. Adul was known for his integrity and straightforwardness. During the Second World War, he arrested two cabinet ministers on corruption charges, and once arrested Pibul's elder brother, a general in the army, on a charge of irregularities. To the police chief, nobody, regardless of rank and importance, could get away with an unlawful act, and also nobody would be allowed to sabotage the constructive work of the government of the People's Party. Adul also was known for his ruthlessness and determination.

When the Second World War broke out he was deputy prime minister in the Pibul government. But towards the end of the war, he became second in command of the Free Thai Movement, known as "Pulao" to the allies. After the war, he again became deputy prime minister and commander-in-chief of the Thai army, and finally, after the return of Pibul-Songgram to the political scene during 1947-1958, he served as a privy councillor, and an effective liaison between Prime Minister Pibul and the crown.

In 1967, not long before Adul's death, Pal Banomyong, Pridi's eldest son, paid a personal visit to the retired general at his residence in the Parus Palace. Adul, then appearing to be convinced of the innocence of those eighteen men executed in 1939, was saying that it was Pibul and not him, who should primarily be responsible for their deaths. The general requested Pal to relay this message to his father once again. It was no doubt that Adul had been feeling guilty about the incident. Pridi, in 1939, once requested him to show consideration for those men who were accused of political conspiracies. But Adul declined to respond, saying that the matter rested with Pibul-Songgram, and not with him. Pridi, at that time, tried his best in vain to save these men's lives. But Pibul in 1939 was a rising sun, so untouchable that only Adul-Dejcharas alone could deal with him.

Now, forty years have gone by but the 1939 incident still remains a mystery. It is rather positive that there had been plots against Pibul's life, possibly engineered by some of his many political opponents from the time of the June 20, 1933 coup, particularly those who had suffered

harsh punishments following the Bovoradej Rebellion. There were also Song-Suradej's followers who regarded Pibul as the main rival of their idol both politically and in the army's internal power struggle. As there were various groups of political opponents involved, it is not possible to determine precisely who actually plotted against Pibul's life.

It was also possible that those arrested and executed in 1939 were not interconnected in their acts. With the exception of Lee Boonta, Pibul's own servant, there was no convincing evidence of their unlawful acts. It is likely that if their cases were brought to the ordinary court, and not to the special court, most, if not all, would not have been convicted.

There was a possibility that Adul-Dejcharas could have been provided with false reports and evidence by his police subordinates. There have often been complaints about the way in which Thai police handle political cases. Many mistakes have been made, due to misleading political conceptions, misjudgement of political realities, as well as to opportunistic attitudes for self-interest. Some police officers tend to regard political suspects their own personal enemies. Upon those false reports and evidence, Adul rounded up suspects and passed them to the prosecutors who probably possessed more or less the same mentality as police officers.

If the story that Adul was insistent on carrying out the sentences passed by the special court was true, it was obvious that his act was motivated by a conviction of the necessity of harsh punishment to deter further attempts to overthrow the government by force. In fact since the 1939 executions, the Pibul government was spared attempted coups and plots which characterised the transition period preceding it. In Pibul's conscience, he was not the one who ordered the arrest of suspects. He knew nothing about the evidence, the charges or the guilt. The police had found evidence and passed them on to the prosecutors. The prosecutors made studies of this evidence and found sufficient grounds for prosecution. The special court, consisting of both military personnel and professional judges, heard the cases, and made collective deliberation on them. They found these suspects guilty of the charges, and passed the sentences in accordance with the law. Pibul thought that he could not and should not be blamed for the incident.

The years preceding the Pacific War were really eventful. Shifting from domestic affairs to the international scene, Thailand was

found to be moving towards international conflict. In August 1939, a few days before the Second World War broke out in Europe, the French minister in Bangkok approached Major-General Pibul-Songgram in his capacity as foreign minister with a request that Thailand sign a non-aggression pact with France. Pibul brought the matter to the cabinet's attention and obtained from it consent to comply with the French proposal. In October of the same year, the foreign office informed the French legation that though Thailand was willing to enter into such a pact, there were still some outstanding problems concerning the frontier-line of the Mekong that she wished to see settled in accordance with the Thalweg principle of international law. The French government agreed to consider the matter in principle. Afterwards, Thailand also approached Britain and Japan for the signing of similar pacts with the view to dispel any misunderstanding and suspicion of all parties concerned. At the same time, the legations of the United States, Germany and Italy were also informed of the development. The signing of the non-aggression pacts with France, Britain and Japan were taken as the expression of neutrality on the part of Thailand in international conflicts. The pacts with Britain and France were signed in Bangkok on June 12, 1940, and that with Japan in Tokyo, also on the same day. Later, the pacts between Thailand and Britain and Thailand and Japan were ratified by their governments. Only the pact with France remained unratified by the Thai government.

Professor Direk Jayanama was then deputy foreign minister, and he gave a detailed account of how the non-aggression pact signed with France in June 1940 developed into an armed conflict between Thailand and French Indochina before the end of the year, in his authoritative book, "Siam and World War II".

According to Direk, two days after the signing of the pact in Bangkok, German troops entered Paris, and eight days later, France surrendered at Campiagne. Thailand's non-aggression with France was therefore received with great joy by the French. Radio Saigon broadcast its praise of Thailand's goodwill, stating that the friendship between the two countries should be forever maintained. On June 24, Prime Minister Pibul-Songgram, in his national day's broadcast to the nation, made a special reference to France's surrender to Germany, saying that, "I beg all of us to forget the past and think of it as only a bad dream (the fact that

France had taken away Thai territories). In this way, we will be able to sympathise with the fate of France, our friend, and extend to her our understanding..." But before the end of June, Japan sent a military mission to Hanoi, and later demanded that France allow Japanese troops to enter Indochina.

Being alarmed at the Japanese move, Pibul-Songgram pressed France to send a delegation to Bangkok for negotiation over the frontier problems as contained in the letters of exchange attached to the non-aggression pact. The French minister asked for a postponement, due to the state of confusion in France after the surrender. Two months, therefore, passed by without the French delegation arriving in Bangkok to hold talks. The prime minister called on a cabinet meeting and told his colleagues that the situation in Indochina had deteriorated, and that it was necessary for Thailand to take some steps to secure the return of her territory which had been lost to France. "Should these lands be handed over to the Japanese without our government showing any sign of concern," said Pibul-Songgram, "then what explanation is the present government to give to Thailand's future generations?"

Direk Jayanama was instructed to inform the French minister, M. Lepissier, again of the Thai government's anxiety over the problem of frontier adjustments, and therefore the need to open the negotiation with France on the matter as soon as possible. He also informed the French minister that Thailand hoped that the agreement on the frontier problems could be reached at the same time that the non-aggression pact was ratified by the national assembly. According to Professor Direk, Lepissier's attitude seemed to be one of inertia. At that time, both the American and the British ministers called on Direk and asked about the Thai government's attitude towards Japanese movement in Indochina. Sir Josiah Crosby, the British minister, who had been in Thailand for thirty years, asked what the Thai reaction would be, should Japan lay claim on Indochina. Direk gave the answer that as Sir Josiah was well aware that Thailand had been forced to cede territory in Indochina to France on a number of occasions, therefore "should it become really necessary, the Thai government would have to ask for the partition of Indochina before the whole country fall into Japanese hands." The British minister expressed his agreement with Direk's view, stating that "if France really had to abandon Indochina, she should consider first giving Thailand back

former Thai territories.” Crosby also told Direk that he would report to his government about what he and Direk had agreed upon.

On August 15, 1940, Deputy Foreign Minister Direk Jayanama invited the British, the American, the German and the Italian ministers for a joint discussion at the foreign office. Direk mentioned that the ministers must have realised that the Indochinese situation had deteriorated. He then informed them on behalf of the Thai government that Thailand wished to know their governments’ reactions should the Thai government ever have to ask for the return of the former Thai territories in Indochina.

“Both the German and Italian ministers straightaway said they believed their respective governments would support us in our demands as they already had sympathetic feelings towards us,” wrote Professor Direk. The American gave his reply on August 27, stating that the United States felt that all countries should try to solve international problems through peaceful negotiations. “The Minister then gave us his personal opinion that it would be much better for us to wait until the war was over and then put forward our demands at the peace conference.” Direk’s personal reaction to the American reply was reflected in his own words as follows: “I felt like telling him that Thailand had already learned her lesson in this regard from the First World War. The Allies had persuaded us to enter the war on their side. Yet when the war was over, no country with the sole exception of the United States was willing to revise its unequal treaties with us, and even in the case of the United States we had run into great difficulties and secured revision of the treaties only through the help of Dr Sayre, who happened to be the son-in-law of President Wilson. However, out loud I only mentioned that there were two questions involved here. The first was who would win and who would lose the war? The second was, supposing the Allies were victorious, could the Minister say that the United States would support us in our future demands? He replied that this lay in the future, and that he was not in a position to answer this. All that he had expressed so far was merely his personal opinion.”

As for the British reply, it was made clear that Britain stood by the principle of maintaining the status quo in Indochina as long as possible, and asked Thailand to consider “carefully whether it would not be better in Thailand’s interest to have Indochina remain under French jurisdiction



than let it be ruled by Japan, which would then have lands contiguous with Thai territory.”

On September 10, 1940, the Thai minister at Vichy cabled Bangkok informing the government that the French foreign minister had expressed the wish that Thailand ratify the non-aggression pact immediately. The Thai government sent a memorandum to the French legation in Bangkok the following day, pointing out that at the time the pact was signed in June the situation in Indochina was still stable, whereas at the moment this was not the case. It was natural that the Thai government was concerned about the fate of Thai nationals in Indochina. Therefore before allowing the non-aggression pact to come into effect, Thailand would therefore like to propose that definite agreement be reached over the following problems:

1. The boundary line in the River Mekong should be adjusted according to the Thalweg-line principle of international law.
2. The boundary should be re-defined according to natural frontier lines with the Mekong forming the boundary line between Thailand and Indochina from the north southwards to the frontier with Cambodia. Thailand would thus recover her territories on the right bank of the Mekong opposite Luang Phrabang and Pakse.
3. In the event of Indochina being taken out of French jurisdiction, France would return Laos and Cambodia to Thailand.

On September 17, France sent a reply through the Thai minister at Vichy stating that:

1. The French government had not made any request that the non-aggression pact become effective prior to the ratification.
2. The French government did not see any reason why the Thai government should feel that the situation in Indochina was abnormal.
3. The French government was ready to send a delegation to negotiate with Thailand for settling the differences relating to the Mekong.
4. The French government was firmly resolved to resist any demand or attack, whatever its origin, designed to alter the political status or territorial integrity of Indochina. It therefore rejected the Thai demand for territories on the right bank of the Mekong. The French government also considered the Thai demand concerning the possible return of Laos and Cambodia as groundless.

On September 25, the Thai government replied to the French, pointing out that the Thai request was based on fairness and justice and presented for the French government's consideration and sympathy. To maintain good relations between the two countries, France should consider the return of the territories she had forced Thailand to cede to her.

On October 5, the French government sent a reply stating that France could not in any way accept the principle of returning the territories in question to Thailand, and considered the frontier arrangements then as final. The French government once again stated that it would uphold its political status and its sovereignty in Indochina against all claims and attacks regardless of their origin.

Not only was the diplomatic reply of the French provocative, but in the meanwhile, there were a number of border incidents both in the air and on the ground, and the French authority in Indochina began to give harsh treatment to Thai citizens who crossed the Mekong to Indochina. One Thai man was shot dead by French police in Vientiane when he failed to produce a passport. On October 20, 1940, Premier Pibul-Songgram broadcast to the nation explaining the development of the situation from the beginning. He stressed that what Thailand wanted was frontier adjustment according to principles of international law. Meanwhile, tension over the frontier increased. French planes were reported to have continuously violated Thai territory. Throughout November, Thai border areas were bombarded both from air and on the ground. A critical point was reached on November 28, when five French planes bombarded the town of Nakhon Phanom. The Thai government therefore instructed the supreme command to organise field armies and Thai troops began crossing the frontier into Indochina, from the northeast down to the southeast. Professor Direk gave the following account:

“On the northeastern front, the northeastern army pushed westwards from Ubol to join forces with the eastern army across the frontier from Buriram and Surin, seizing about ninety kilometres of land around Siem Reap and Angkor Wat. It also moved eastwards into the triangular area of land on the right side of the Mekong opposite Pakse and Champasak.

“On the eastern front, the eastern army attacked Poipet, a frontier post across the border from Aranyaprathet, took over the highways from the frontier to the city of Sisophon, and then fanned out along the border

for approximately forty kilometres from the area opposite Buriram and Surin down towards Chantaburi, later taking some villages near Ban Phailin.

“Lastly the northern division occupied the entire Luang Phrabang region on the right side of the Mekong.

“The Thai air force also sent bombers to bomb Battambang and Siem Reap, and fought gallantly with the French defensive squadrons over those areas. On the sea, a Thai fleet met with the French advance unit in the historic ‘Battle of Kor Chang’ along the eastern coastline. The French fleet, after a heavy battle, fled the Thai territorial waters. The Thai navy lost three ships including the fleet’s flagship, the gunboat Dhonburi. There was no doubt that had the armed conflict continued, the Thai armies would have taken all Laos and Cambodia.”

The fighting went on through December 1940 and part of January 1941, until Japan stepped in to offer mediation. At 10.00 a.m. Bangkok time, on January 28, a cease-fire was declared on all fronts. The next day, a Thai delegation left for Saigon to negotiate the truce agreement with the Japanese and French delegations. This was signed off Saigon aboard the Japanese cruiser Natori on January 31, 1941. On February 4, a Thai delegation headed by Prince Wan left for Tokyo to conduct peace talks and carry out negotiations for an adjustment of the frontiers. The final peace agreement was signed in Tokyo on May 9, 1942, under which Thailand regained all lands on the right bank of the Mekong together with those territories in Cambodia that had been ceded to France in 1904 and 1907, although Siem Reap and Angkor Wat were to remain under French jurisdiction. Thailand had also gained territory in Cambodia from Angkor Wat north to the Mekong, just below Steung Treng. In addition, the deep water channel, or Thalweg line, had been accepted as the frontier line in the Mekong, with islands to the right of this line to be regarded as Thai territory.

Such a demand for the return of lost territories in Indochina was unanimously supported by the whole nation, as the feeling of French injustice in the past was still fresh in the memory of the Thai people. Pridi as finance minister rendered his full support to the government policy, but as lawyer, he was personally not in favour of the use of force. In his letter to the widow of Pibul-Songgram on August 16, 1964, written from his exile in Canton, China, Pridi gave the following account:

“After France had surrendered to Germany, I, at that time, finance minister conceived the ways in which Thailand could regain our lost territories by means of international law. I therefore went to see Field Marshal Pibul-Songgram at the Suan-Kulab Government House and related my view to him that it was appropriate for the Thai government to bring up this matter for the consideration of the international court of justice, requesting the court to order the return of the territories taken away by France since 1893 to Thailand on the ground that France had been defeated by Germany and therefore, was no longer in a position to look after those territories. Nevertheless, my viewpoint was not endorsed by the government. Instead, the government chose to directly demand the Vichy government to return those territories, and when the Vichy government refused to yield, the Thai government sought to make use of force. As I respected the majority view in the government, I went along with the government policy. As finance minister, I managed to appropriate a large fund for military expenses in perfect timing as required without any adverse effect either to the military operations or to the country’s monetary and financial stability.”

The period since the Indochinese conflict until the end of 1941 was one of delicate diplomacy for the Pibul-Songgram government. Japan, in her preparation for war, was pressing Thailand for rubber and tin, reminding the Thais of her effort in mediating the Indochinese conflict to Thailand’s benefit. Later, after Britain and the United States had frozen Japanese assets in July of the same year, Japan, lacking pound sterling to pay for Thai goods, approached the Thai government for a loan valued at Bht 10 million, repayable in yen. Finance Minister Pridi, although considering it necessary for Thailand to yield to the Japanese demand, insisted that the loan should be repaid in gold. In August, Japan again asked for a new loan of Bht 25 million, with gold as repayment to be left with the bank of Japan in Tokyo. Pridi, agreeing to make the loan to the Japanese, strongly insisted that the gold bullion must be delivered to Bangkok. According to Direk Jayanama, the then newly appointed foreign minister, “The negotiations were conducted with such acrimony that Japan complained to the prime minister that the minister of finance was an obstructionist and that he had insulted Japan. The Japanese asked why Thailand should trust Britain and the United States with custody of her gold, yet not do the same with Japan. However, despite



these exchanges, in the end Japan accepted our conditions.”

Seeing that the Pacific War was imminent, and that Thailand's neutrality would be difficult to defend without more arms and war materials, the Thai government approached the United States and Britain for assistance. Nothing concrete, however, was promised by the allies. In fact the American government had even suspended the delivery of the twenty-four fighter planes purchased by Thailand and already paid for. During October and November, the situation had become very tense. Both Japan and Britain and the United States were keen to know precisely what stand Thailand was to take in the event of war. To prepare for the eventuality, Prime Minister Pibul, now a field marshal, was appointed the supreme commander of Thai armed forces. Radio Thailand repeatedly warned the Thai people that the Pacific War was imminent, and should Thailand's neutrality be violated, the nation would fight to the last man.

Thailand's neutrality was indeed violated before dawn of December 8, 1941.



CHAPTER 11 MOMENTS OF DECISION

The dawn of December 8, 1941 was set to test the sense of responsibility of many people in Thailand, including Finance Minister Pridi Banomyong.

It was on that particular day that the Thai nation witnessed foreign troops marching into its capital, for the first time since the fall of old Ayudhya some 175 years earlier. It was a very sad day for Thailand and her people. It was the beginning of another struggle to regain full independence and absolute sovereignty which the nation had only briefly enjoyed.

The general public was informed by a government announcement on that day that as from 2.00 a.m., Japanese troops had been landing at Songkhla, Pattani, Prachuab, Nakorn Srithamrat, Surat and Bangpu, and penetrated inland to Battambang and Pibul Songgram provinces. The Thai army and police forces had been putting up fierce resistance. "In the meanwhile," the statement continued, "the Japanese navy had launched attacks on Hawaii and the Philippines and had landed troops at Kota Bharu in Malaya and heavily bombarded Singapore."

The Thai public was also told by the same announcement that at 10.30 p.m. the previous night, Japanese Ambassador Tsubokami (Thailand and Japan had mutually raised the status of their diplomatic representatives from the rank of minister to that of ambassador in October 1941) had come to the prime minister's chancellery and informed the foreign minister (Direk Jayanama) that Japan had already declared war

on Britain and the United States. The Japanese ambassador stated that Japan did not regard Thailand as an enemy, but it was necessary for her to request the right of passage through Thai territory.

“The government had given careful consideration to the matter,” continued the announcement, “and found that the event which had taken place was unavoidable, despite all of our efforts to avoid it. A continued resistance on our part could only result in a futile loss of Thai lives with nothing to benefit from it. The government had therefore been compelled to consider the Japanese proposal, and had decided to grant the Japanese army the right of passage through our territory, upon receiving an assurance in writing that Japan would respect the independence, sovereignty and honour of Thailand. Having granted such a right to the Japanese, the fighting between Japan and Thailand had now come to an end.” The government announcement concluded with a request that the public remain calm and carry on their routine life. “The government would try its best to keep the severity of the situation to a minimum,” it said.

The government announcement came as a shock to the public which had had no prior knowledge of the development of the situation. In fact, the Thai people were then looking forward to the forthcoming constitutional fair which was to take place on the next day. Like every year in the past, December was a month of joy. The annual recurrence of dryness and cold breezes was a delightful seasonal change for most people. A city of less than a million inhabitants then, Bangkok in December was coloured with flowers and sweaters, adding vividness to the already colourful capital.

There was a group of people who had for quite sometime anticipated the outcome of the event. For weeks now, Prime Minister Pibul-Songgram and his cabinet had been following the tense international situation with great anxiety about Thailand's national security. The imminence of Japan's involvement in the World War was beyond doubt, but nobody knew as to when and how the Pacific War was to break out.

On November 23, the American minister, Mr Peck, called on Foreign Minister Direk, and informed him of the United States government's policy that if Thailand was attacked by Japan and there was resistance in self-defence, America then would consider Thailand as being in the same position as China, and would help her in the same way as it had helped China. Direk wondered if the situation in Thailand would

be the same as that in China, as the two countries differed a great deal in size as well as in manpower.

On the next day, November 24, Japanese Minister Futami called on the foreign minister and asked him to convey to the government that should it become really necessary for Japan to seize British territory, then she would use Thailand to pass through, but would not invade the country.

By this time, Prime Minister Pibul-Songgram also had definite information that Japan was to attack Thailand very shortly, most likely on December 3. The information received could have come either from Thai military intelligence, or possibly from some of his own men such as Vanich Pananon, a bureaucrat who was appointed a minister without portfolio nine days after the Japanese attack. Pibul normally did not make use of the foreign office in dealing with the Japanese. At cabinet meetings on November 28 and December 3, Pibul brought the question of possible Japanese attack to the cabinet's attention. He told cabinet that there were three alternatives for Thailand to choose from, namely cooperation with Japan, fighting against Japan, and non-participation in the struggle. The prime minister outlined the advantages and disadvantages of each of the alternatives.

On December 3, the American minister in Bangkok cabled Washington reporting his meeting with Foreign Minister Direk Jayanama who had told him that Japan was definitely planning an invasion of Thailand and that Thailand would have to defend herself. The American minister expressed his belief that the Thai government and people were confident that in that event, the United States and Britain would come to her aid, thus, a declaration of support from both countries would be of tremendous help. The next day, Minister Peck again met with Direk Jayanama. In his cable to Washington on December 5, the American diplomat reported that the Thai foreign minister had informed him that Ambassador Tsubokami had assured Thailand that Japan would not use her forces in Indochina to invade Thailand, so the Thais had no cause for alarm. But Direk said that the Thai government still felt seriously concerned about the matter, because it had received reports from various sources that Japan would launch both land and air attacks within a day or two. Foreign Minister Direk hoped that the United States and Britain would make a declaration in support of Thailand as he had earlier requested.



On December 7, at 4.15 a.m., Sir Josiah Crosby, the British minister in Bangkok, sent an urgent and secret cable to the British foreign office in London in the following words:

“1. I have just seen minister of foreign affairs (Direk) and we send you the following message from us both. For God’s sake do not allow British forces to occupy one inch of Thai territory unless and until Japan has struck the first blow at Thailand. At present practically every Thai is behind Britain in opposition to Japan, but it will be otherwise and irreparable harm will be done, if Britain is the first to violate Thai neutrality.

“2. The Thai prime minister has positive information that a Japanese attack on Thailand was planned for December 3. It was postponed at the last moment, but it is to take place in the immediate future.

“3. The minister of foreign affairs tells me Colonel Moriya, who was the Japanese military attache here some years ago, suddenly appeared in Bangkok and procured an interview yesterday (December 6) with Pridi Banomyong, now minister of finance but formerly minister of foreign affairs. Moriya enquired what was the attitude of Thailand towards Japan and said that the situation was very serious. Dr Pridi replied that he was no longer foreign minister and was not competent to answer this question.

“4. In view of the urgent critical situation I beg you to telegraph to me, most immediately, authority to approach the prime minister with a proposal for the joint defence of southern Thailand in the event of a Japanese attack, as suggested in the second paragraph of my telegram No. 820 (previous one). But I think the Thais would not transfer the seat of government to the north for strategic considerations, though they would send a portion of their troops south.”

Colonel Moriya called on Pridi on December 6 as reported in Crosby’s cable to London. After he left, Pridi immediately telephoned the prime minister to report his conversation with the Japanese. As Field Marshal Pibul had left Bangkok for a field trip, the finance minister reported the incident to Police General Adul-Dejcharas, who was at that time deputy prime minister, and also to Foreign Minister Direk Jayanama, who relayed the message to Sir Josiah Crosby. Feeling concerned, Adul said to Pridi that in time of crisis like this, the field marshal should not have made a field trip.

After the war, Pibul revealed the event leading to his making a trip to the eastern provinces on the Thai-Indochinese frontier. On December 4, the prime minister, who was also the supreme commander as well as the commander-in-chief of the Thai army, conferred with the army's chief of staff, General Vichit-Songgram, at government house. The chief of staff suggested that since there were reports of a large concentration of Japanese troops along the border, they had better go there to supervise the Thai defence lines. They were also agreed that upon their return from the inspection tour, they would move their headquarters from Bangkok up to the army base at Lopburi. Both Pibul and Vichit, despite their concern about the imminent Japanese attack, were convinced that since the United States-Japan negotiation was still going on, the Japanese would delay their attack for some time. Pibul therefore left Bangkok by car on December 6, first to visit the second division at Prachin and then proceeded to Aranyaprathet. On the next day, December 7, Pibul and Vichit went to inspect the army's defence lines at Sisophon, and drove further to the new province of Battambang. That night, after having returned to Aranyaprathet, the prime minister found an urgent telegram calling him back to Bangkok immediately. At 1.00 a.m. on December 8, Pibul began his road journey from Aranyaprathet towards Bangkok, and before dawn, he met with Air Marshal Muni Vejayant-Rangsarit, minister of agriculture, whom the cabinet had sent to fetch the prime minister. Pibul arrived back in Bangkok and presided over the cabinet meeting at 6.50 a.m.

In Bangkok, Sir Josiah Crosby, the British minister, called upon Foreign Minister Direk Jayanama at the latter's residence around 6.30 p.m. on December 7. Crosby told Direk that he had received report of Japanese warships sailing from the Indochinese peninsula towards the Gulf of Thailand. The British minister also informed the Thai foreign minister that if Thailand put up any resistance, she would receive the maximum support Britain could possibly provide. Direk replied that Thailand would definitely put up a fight, but as for how long he really did not know. After Crosby left, Police General Adul came over to Direk's house for a pre-arranged dinner. They discussed the grave situation, and were both agreed that Japan would definitely declare war. Adul also complained that the prime minister should not be out of the capital at such time of crisis. A few moments later, Adul had a telephone call and he left



Direk's house right away without having his dinner, saying that the situation was critical. About half an hour later Direk was called to the government house immediately.

It was Thawee Bunyakatu, the cabinet's secretary-general at that time, who ordered his assistants to telephone Direk and the other ministers to come over to the government house immediately, upon the request of Adul-Dejcharas. Upon his arrival at Suan-Kulab Palace, Direk saw Japanese Ambassador Tsubokami, the Japanese military attache and naval attache, and other Japanese embassy staff, were already there. Adul told him that the Japanese had come to see the prime minister, but since Pibul was away, Direk was asked to receive the Japanese on his behalf. When the Thai foreign minister met with the Japanese ambassador in the reception room, he found Vanich Pananon, the commerce department's director-general, who had served as Pibul's liaison with the Japanese, also there. Tsubokami said that he had come to see the prime minister because "the most crucial event in Japanese history had taken place." The Japanese diplomat continued to say that Japan could no longer tolerate the British and American pressures. She was now rising up in self-defence, and had declared war on both Western countries. Tsubokami told Direk that his government must request Thailand for the right to send its troops through the Thai territory on their way to attack Burma and Malaya. The Japanese stressed that his government's request was "a matter of life and death, vital and absolutely imperative".

Direk Jayanama explained to Tsubokami that the Thai government had already passed a standing order that the Thai armed forces should offer full resistance against any aggression, and the only person who could revoke this order was the supreme commander himself. At that moment Colonel Tamura, the Japanese military attache, said that any delay would lead to bloodshed as Japanese troops were about to land at various places in Thailand. Direk asked the Japanese to wait as he was going to report the matter to the cabinet.

Thawee Bunyakatu had been waiting in the meeting room since 9.30 p.m. and the ministers were arriving there one by one, with the exception of a few who could not be contacted, particularly the navy's commander-in-chief and education minister, Admiral Sindhu-Songgramchai. The admiral was detained by the Japanese at Samutprakan province. Thawee recalled in his memoir, "Additional Facts on the

Situation in Thailand During World War II", written in 1966, that "while waiting for the arrival of ministers, telegram, radio, and telephone messages flowed in reporting Japanese invasion at different locations which were being encountered by Thai army, police, and the youth organisation."

It was around 11.00 p.m. that the cabinet meeting was declared open by Deputy Prime Minister Adul-Dejcharas. Those who were present at the meeting at that time included Dr Pridi Banomyong, the finance minister; Direk Jayanama, foreign minister; General Phrom-Yothi, defence minister; Major Kwuang Abhaivong, communication minister; Major Chavengsak-Songgram, minister of the interior; Colonel Prayoon Bhamornmontri, deputy education minister; Vichitr-Vathakarn, deputy foreign minister; Air Marshal Vejayant-Rangsarit, agriculture minister; Dr Dej Snidvong, deputy agriculture minister; Vilas Ostanond, deputy communication minister; Captain Thamrong-Navasawat, justice minister; Pora Samaharn, deputy interior minister; Colonel Boribhan-Yudhakit, economic affairs minister; Chamnan-Nithikaset, deputy economic affairs minister; and ministers without portfolio such as General Kriangsak-Bhichit, commander of the northeastern army during the Indochinese conflict; Admiral Nava-Vichit, commander of the strategic naval command; Colonel Sarit-Yuthasilpa; Commander Sangvorn-Yuthakit and Prince Wan Waithayakorn, adviser to the prime minister's office.

The meeting was given a briefing by the foreign minister on his meeting with the Japanese who demanded that they must have the Thai answer by 2.00 a.m. Since nothing could be done except to wait for the return of the prime minister, the cabinet decided to send Finance Minister Pridi, Foreign Minister Direk and Prince Wan to inform the Japanese that they should postpone whatever actions they were to take until the prime minister's return. The Japanese insisted that the cabinet order the Thai armed forces to stop the resistance as there would be no time for them to communicate with their headquarters to delay the landings, scheduled to take place at 2.00 a.m. Pridi told them that he had to consult the cabinet as to what could be done.

The cabinet, however, found that as the law specifically vested all power concerning the military actions in the supreme commander alone, therefore neither the defence minister nor the deputy supreme commander could revoke the standing order of the supreme commander.



The Japanese were asked to come back at 5.00 a.m. To speed up the return of the prime minister and supreme commander, Adul and Direk went to the general post office to contact Pibul, and after learning that the prime minister was returning to the capital by car, the cabinet sent Air Marshal Vejayant-Rangsarit to meet Pibul on the way, so that the prime minister would be informed of the matter before his arrival. In the meanwhile, Colonel Prayoon and Prince Wan were sent to inform the Japanese at their embassy that the prime minister was on his way back, but were not expected to arrive before 7.00 a.m. The Japanese ambassador said that he had radioed the military headquarters in Saigon asking for the delay of the landings until receiving the Thai answer. But he could not guarantee the outcome. Upon knowing that the Japanese were also to land at Samutprakarn, twenty-five kilometres from Bangkok, the cabinet sent two naval officers to accompany Japanese officers attached to the embassy to stop the landing troops from advancing towards Bangkok. At the same time, Deputy Prime Minister Adul-Dejcharas, upon the proposal of Dr Pridi, ordered the closure of the Bangkok-Samutprakarn highway at 3.00 a.m.

At 6.50 a.m. Field Marshal Pibul-Songgram returned and entered the cabinet's meeting room. During the last leg of his journey, Pibul was informed of the development of the event by Air Marshal Vejayant. They discussed the alternatives, including the possibility of the supreme commander heading for Lopburi army base and holding the cabinet meeting there. Pibul however was surprised to have learned of the Japanese landing at Samutprakarn without Thai navy interception. When he arrived at the cabinet building, the twenty or so Japanese, both military and civilian, who had been restlessly waiting, surrounded the prime minister. Physically exhausted from his long journey and mentally tired from heavy deliberation, Pibul refused to communicate with the Japanese crowd and almost ran upstairs into the meeting room.

Deputy Prime Minister Adul-Dejcharas, without any delay, began his briefing on the development during the past ten hours, and then asked Foreign Minister Direk Jayanama to explain the Japanese demand. Adul-Dejcharas was of the opinion that as it was so evident that Japan had opened the war with powerful attacks at all fronts, and that the countries under Japanese attack must help themselves, there was no possibility for Thailand to successfully resist the aggression. Adul suggested that there

seemed to be no alternative, but to comply with the Japanese demand for the right of passage.

At this point, Finance Minister Pridi proposed that before coming to any definite decision of such significance to the fate of the nation regardless of the final decision, consideration should first be taken of the pros and cons. The prime minister interrupted by asking the cabinet a straight question whether or not we should continue fighting the Japanese. Pibul said that soldiers were being killed at every passing minute, therefore the decision must be first made whether to continue fighting. The prime minister also instructed Radio Thailand to broadcast all news concerning the war, especially those about the Thai resistance in great detail. At 7.30 a.m., the cabinet unanimously decided to cease fire. Army's chief of staff, Vichit-Songgram, was instructed to give the order to the Thai armed forces to that effect. The prime minister made it clear that after cease-fire, the Thai now could talk with the Japanese, the result of which would then determine whether or not the fighting would be renewed. Pibul also said that he had been aware of the Japanese intention for some time as he had informed the cabinet at previous meetings. He had not, however, expected that "Tojo would order his troops to march in before we decided what to do."

Field Marshal Pibul-Songgram left the cabinet to meet with the Japanese at 7.45 a.m. The Japanese proposed three possible plans for him to choose. "The first asked merely for the passage of troops, the second that Thailand and Japan sign an alliance for the defence of Thailand, and the third that Thailand and Japan become allies in the war against Britain and the United States in which case Japan was ready to give us back all the territories we had lost to France and England," summarised Professor Direk in his book. Encountered with the Japanese demands, Pibul requested Japan to bypass Thailand without getting his country involved in the conflict. As the Japanese insisted on a definite reply, Pibul asked for consultation with the cabinet. "At first they would not allow me to leave the room," wrote Field Marshal Pibul after the war, "they wanted me to make the decision by myself." Back to the meeting, Pibul told his colleagues, "I have proposed to cease fire first, after this whether we shall fight them or cooperate with them is all right with me," and asked, "What shall we do? Accept their proposal, or not accept; if not, let us go out today..."

At first the cabinet seemed to be divided. Some ministers such as General Phrom-Yothi, the defence minister, were of the opinion that Thailand should enter into a military alliance with Japan in order to preserve her independence. Foreign Minister Direk Jayanama thought otherwise. In his opinion, Thailand had to yield to the Japanese request because she was not able to resist the Japanese forces, but only to the extent of allowing the passage of Japanese troops and nothing more. Deputy Foreign Minister Vichitr-Vathakarn proposed that Thailand might consider joining the Axis Pact for at least she would have Germany and Italy involved, serving as a guarantee. Finance Minister Pridi was in favour of the passage condition, but he stressed that the agreement must cover only the military aspect, and not to touch on other matters, especially economic and financial aspects.

The cabinet finally agreed that Thailand would allow Japanese troops to pass through Thai territory and would facilitate such a passage as deemed necessary, while Japan would respect Thailand's independence, sovereignty and honour. The agreement was signed by Direk Jayanama on behalf of the Thai government and Ambassador Tsubokami on behalf of Japan. The thirteen-hour cabinet meeting was adjourned at 11.55 a.m.

It should be noted that after the cabinet had decided to order cease-fire and allowed Japanese troops the right of passage, Prime Minister Pibul-Songgram was handed a cable from British Prime Minister Winston Churchill through the British legation in Bangkok. The cable which was dated December 7, 1941, and classified as "most immediate" and "most secret" reads as follows:

"There is possibility of imminent Japanese invasion of your country. If you are attacked, defend yourself. The preservation of the full independence and sovereignty of Thailand is a British interest and we shall regard an attack on you as an attack upon ourselves."

The cable arrived too late, after the crucial decision had been made. Therefore, it had no influence on the decision of the Thai government to allow the passage of Japanese troops.

After the cabinet meeting, Foreign Minister Direk Jayanama met with all foreign diplomatic representatives in Bangkok and informed them in detail of the event that had taken place.

"The foreign minister had been deeply moved," Minister Peck

sent a cable to Washington, "he had recalled the efforts his country had made to obtain arms for just such a contingency, and had expressed gratitude for the friendliness that had been shown by the United States. He said that the hearts of the Thais were with America and Great Britain. I could not but be struck by the sincerity of this country's effort to resist Japan and the overwhelming force to which it finally yielded."

At 5.05 p.m. in the afternoon of the same day, December 8, 1941, the cabinet ministers who had gone home for rest at noon again returned to another meeting. Prince Athit, the president of the regency council, was also present. Direk Jayanama, who had earlier met with the foreign diplomatic representatives, came in a short while after the meeting had begun.

The cabinet spent about an hour checking and evaluating developments following the cease-fire. As finance minister, Dr Pridi made a point that detailed records must be kept on the goods and services the Japanese might use during their passage through the country and the cost was to be credited to Thailand's accounts for claiming repayment at a later date.

The highlight of this cabinet meeting was Direk's report on his meeting with Sir Josiah Crosby, the British minister. He had informed Crosby of the resistance Thailand put up against the invasion and the subsequent agreement on the passage of Japanese troops. The British minister, according to Direk, expressed his confusion over Thailand's passage of the "Duty of the Thai People During the War Act" on September 11, 1941, under which "all Thai people must resist the force of the enemy in ways possible until the end" and any person failing to do so "must be executed or jailed for life." Crosby raised doubt as to the necessity of doing so when knowing well that such resistance was not always possible. The foreign minister satisfied Sir Josiah with explanation that the law was a bluff, a preventive bluff. The British minister said that he did not regret the agreement the government had signed with Japan, and he realised that the prime minister had done his best under the circumstances. Direk also informed the cabinet that he had told the British minister that in case British troops crossed the border into southern Thailand, there would be no resistance from the Thai side. General Adul-Dejcharas cautioned the foreign minister that, in principle, Thailand would resist any invasion unless there was an agreement otherwise, such



as in the Japanese case. Also at this meeting, there was a discussion on whether or not the government should remove its site from Bangkok. It was Justice Minister Thamrong-Navasawat who insisted that the government must remain in Bangkok, at least as a psychological deterrence to further Japanese action.

Two days later, on December 10, another cabinet meeting was held. At this meeting, Prime Minister Pibul-Songgram elaborated his policy regarding the Japanese, and also the ways and means to ensure national survival. He requested his ministers to explain to their subordinates that regretful as they were, but they must look ahead to try to overcome all obstacles with the view to regaining the nation's sovereignty. The field marshal stressed that he believed that what had been done was the best and the only way for national survival, as well as for regaining independence. At this time, no matter how they felt about the Japanese, they must offer them friendship and hospitality, so that the Japanese would return their respect and keep their promise. Any violent act against the Japanese under these circumstances would invite violent retaliation. The purpose was to let them go as quickly as possible without doing Thailand any harm. He finally said that the change in the situation would have an impact on Thailand's economy and finance, the adjustments of which, he would leave it to "the Professor", as he always called Dr Pridi.

On the following day, December 11, Prime Minister Pibul-Songgram called a special cabinet meeting. He informed the cabinet that he had been approached by the Japanese who requested the Thai government to consider a military cooperation pact with Japan. The Japanese had told him that Japan still had a gigantic task ahead for her military operations, and as such, she would feel more secure if Thailand would enter a military cooperation agreement with her in addition to granting the right of passage. Pibul said, "I really do not know what to say, because whatever I decide now could be turned against me as traitor in the future." In his personal opinion, if the government refused to cooperate as demanded, the Japanese might disarm the Thai forces. On the other hand, if Thailand were to resist the demand and fight, then there would be a national disaster. "I personally feel that we have to cooperate with them, it is better for us to do it fully, so that at least we would get their sympathy," said the prime minister. The field marshal then went on

to say, "In fact, as a soldier I feel ashamed for not being able to fight because of the lack of strength. I want to hear your views on this matter. Anybody who has a better idea, please do speak up."

It was at this point that Pridi Banomyong opened his heart on the matter. He said, "I speak now as one of those who took part in the June 1932 Revolution. As you are well aware, my patriotism is as strong as anybody else's. I therefore wish to express my view, even though it could put myself in deep trouble. The opinions that I have given so far might have sounded pro-British, but I place Thai interests above anything else.

"There seems to be two different views on the whole situation; one speculating victory on the Japanese side, the other optimistic about British victory. The question whether we should fight the Japanese or not has already been settled a couple of days ago. In deciding not to fight, we have chosen the alternative which would affect us less. The other day, I said that first fighting the Japanese and then switching to fighting the other side would inflict damage on our reputation. Now, the crux of the problem lies in the new issue before us. If we join with Japan with the view to revive the national honour, our honour would be even more damaged, because it means switching back and forth. We therefore should try to seek ways and means to make the Japanese observe the agreement which has been concluded. If they do not observe it, they would be the ones who breach the contract. This is my view. But as to what we can do I do not know. As one who has taken part in the Revolution, I naturally wish to see the nation prosper. I think this is the most critical event as far as national honour and the reputation of this government are concerned. If we turn to be on the Japanese side after resistance, we all know what the effect on national honour and the government's reputation would be, regardless of the war's outcome. The best we can do at the moment is to seek ways and means of getting the Japanese to observe the agreement."

In response to Pridi's viewpoint, Prime Minister Pibul said, "What you have said is correct, but there seems to be no way out. The Japanese said that for their own security, they could not be present in Thailand while we were fully armed."

Pridi: "I have only tried to protect the prime minister's honour and prestige." Then he asked, "What would they do to us, if we refuse to

become their military partner?"

"First disarm us," replied Colonel Prayoon who had served as a liaison with the Japanese, "secondly, topple the government."

To make the question clearer, Pibul further explained, "I have tried everything possible. In negotiating with them last night, they said that they were grateful to us for what we had done so far. But they felt that the existing arrangement lacked firmness. I asked them what they wanted. They said they wanted military cooperation. They have brought in tens of thousands of troops, saying that they could not wait. They have taken over everything they want; schools, temples and what have you. They do not trust us and now have strategically controlled our movements."

The cabinet ministers who had experience with the Japanese during the past few days then reported a series of incidents of clashes between the two sides. The Japanese had intercepted the evacuation of British and American nationals; had made use of the Thai railways and airports at their will; had disarmed Thai soldiers and policemen, etc, and in many incidents, there were casualties on both sides. The crucial problem was clear that if Thailand did not enter into a military cooperation with them, she just had to fight them. After all these reports to which the cabinet listened with bitterness and despair, the prime minister finally summarised the situation.

"I am prepared to do either way. But mind you, I am not the Japanese broker. They just asked whether we should cooperate militarily. They said it's up to us, but if not, they would continue to use force as they see fit.

"And I cannot guarantee what's to come up next, nor have I a way out. If we think that we all shall die in fighting, let us fight to the last man. If we do not fight, we will just wait for our final days to come, like lingering on with the help of oxygen. In other words, if we refuse to sign the cooperation agreement with them now, it means disaster. But it can also be disastrous for us if we do cooperate with them. Besides, it may still be disastrous despite Japanese victory; we can be just like Manchukuo. These are the only alternatives. And what about the economy and what about trade? Where shall we get necessary things such as medicines, etc? If we do not cooperate with them, we shall not get these goods, and also we shall not be able to sell our goods. I really do not see how we

can refuse the cooperation proposal. To my mind, it is a sacrifice for an unknown outcome which could end up like Manchukuo (the Japanese puppet state), all depending on Japan. We just have to be prepared for the eventuality. By submitting ourselves to them through cooperation, they may deal with us ethnically in the same manner like our relations with Britain and France in the past. It does not mean a lack of courage. We have only fifty tanks, but they have come in thousands. Our planes whose speeds proved inferior during our conflict with French Indochina are obsolete. The most important thing is that at the moment the Japanese forces have been so successful everywhere. Our armed strength is so trivial and so much will be wasted if not carefully preserved. Why not spare lives for further deliberation? When everything is all over, we can wash our hands. At the moment, nobody can foretell the outcome of the event, knowing only that to survive now, we have to cooperate with them.”

Listening to the prime minister's logical analysis, cabinet ministers shared the view that despite bitterness and humiliation, there seemed to be no other way but to yield to the Japanese demand. Pridi said nothing more, but his mind was searching for ways and means to regain his nation's honour and sovereignty. He was never convinced of Japan's ultimate victory, and he was not prepared to see his country dragged along the war and finally end up in defeat.

The Japanese were waiting outside for the Thai reply. Pibul, after having obtained his cabinet's approval, went out to see them and informed the Japanese of the Thai agreement for a military cooperation pact. The actual pact was however signed by Field Marshal Pibul-Songgram on December 21, whereby both Thailand and Japan agreed to respect their mutual independence and sovereignty and to give each other the fullest political, military and economic support in the event of conflict with a third party. Both countries agreed not to sign a separate peace treaty or to declare a truce on its own accord. Besides, the pact contained a secret protocol, stating that Japan would help Thailand to regain her territories from Britain, and in return, Thailand promised to help Japan in the war with Western countries. This pact did replace the agreement signed on December 8 which permitted only the passage of Japanese troops. The said protocol was also kept “top secret”, until it was revealed by Ambassador Tsubokami at the international military tribunal in Tokyo on April

18, 1946.

But by December 21, Dr Pridi Banomyong was no longer a cabinet minister. On December 16, barely a week after Japanese troops had entered Thailand, Prime Minister Pibul-Songgram stated in Parliament that in view of the critical world situation, the government was of the opinion that the regency council needed to be strengthened so as to consist of qualified personnel. It therefore nominated Dr Pridi Banomyong to be a regent filling the place having been left vacant for about two years by the death of Chao Phya Yomaraj. The government's nomination of Dr Pridi Banomyong to the prestigious, but non-political post, was approved by Parliament on the same day. Upon his appointment, Pridi left the cabinet and also tendered his resignation as a member of parliament. He was sworn in for the new post on December 23. On December 17, Vilas Ostanond also left the cabinet. Pibul appointed General Boribhan-Yudhakit, minister of economic affairs, to replace Pridi as minister of finance, and also appointed Vanich Pananon, his confidant in Japanese affairs, a cabinet minister replacing Vilas.

After the Second World War, in his personal letter to Pridi, Pibul said, "When the Japanese came, they wanted to get you. I never asked them to do so and Adul could confirm this fact. I therefore nominated you to become a regent." It was true that Pridi was nominated by Pibul to become a regent, but behind this truth, there was an interesting historical account.

In his memoir, "Additional Facts on the Situation in Thailand during the Second World War", Thawee Bunyakatu, a postwar Thai prime minister, who was at the time of the Japanese invasion the cabinet's secretary-general, told the following story:

"I cannot remember the date exactly, but I believe it was sometime between the 10th and 12th of December, or at least only a few days after the government signed the agreement permitting the passage of Japanese troops. Japan made its first approach for a loan from us to meet the expenses of her troops in Thailand.

"Dr Pridi Banomyong, the minister of finance, told the cabinet that he did not believe Japan would stop at this one loan, but would continue to make endless demands. If we agreed to their request we would have to print more money that would, in turn, lead to inflation and have an adverse effect on the economy. He believed it would be better if

the Japanese were to issue their own currency notes, to be called invasion notes, for the use of their own army. In this way once the war was over, we would be able to repeal them. The economic and financial situation of our country would not be much affected once the war ended, and inflation could be curbed.

“The prime minister opposed this suggestion on the ground that Dr Pridi’s proposal would be tantamount to a loss of our independence and sovereignty, even if such measures were able to prevent an inflation.

“The minister of finance retorted by asking whether by having allowed Japanese troops into our country and giving them freedom of action in a number of ways we had not already lost our independence and sovereignty to a certain extent?

“It seemed as if a heated argument broke out between the prime minister and the minister of finance. In the end the prime minister insisted on the adoption of his policy. A baht loan was made to Japan and the requisite additional bank notes were issued accordingly.

“A few days later, several cabinet changes took place. Dr Pridi resigned as finance minister, and was appointed to the regency council where there was a vacancy...”

In his testimony as a witness to the war criminal tribunal in Bangkok on December 17, 1945, General Adul-Dejcharas told his own story:

“I went to the Suan-Kulab Palace which was the prime minister’s residence at that time and met with the prime minister together with Mr Vanich Pananon. Vanich said that the Japanese were not in favour of Dr Pridi and Mr Vilas Ostanond because of the pro-British attitude which tended to obstruct the cabinet’s policy of cooperation with them. The Japanese therefore wished to see these two men removed from the cabinet. As for Pridi, the Japanese proposed that he should be appointed to the regency council. If I read their mind correctly, the Japanese realised that Dr Pridi was influential and well respected by government officials and the general public, and as such his elevation to the regency council, though out of politics, would not create the impression of Japanese mistreatment of him. After that, the prime minister said the same thing to me and asked me to invite Pridi, Vilas and Thawee Bunyakatu for a briefing. I therefore invited them to the Suan-Kulab Palace and explained to them the situation. Dr Pridi asked for time to discuss the proposal with



his colleagues, whereas Vilas readily expressed his agreement to it. On the same evening, Dr Pridi came to see me at the Parus Palace and informed me that he had already consulted with his people, but still felt uncertain whether it was appropriate for him to become a member of the regency council. I tried to reason with him, pointing out the necessity for the future. Finally he yielded, and Thawee Bunyakatu processed the matter for both Pridi and Vilas to resign from cabinet posts, as well as for the appointment of Dr Pridi to the regency council.”

In the statement he submitted to the civil court as plaintiff in a libel suit in 1978, Pridi said that at that time, some members of parliament were also preparing to nominate him as a regent replacing the late Chao Phya Yomaraj. He also pointed out that his nomination by Pibul was not carried out with the intention to save him from the Japanese mistreatment, but rather because the Japanese wanted it that way. To show that Field Marshal Pibul was not sincerely happy about his elevation to the regency council, Pridi referred to a few instances which took place after he had become a regent. The first instance took place early in March 1942. Pibul was then forming a new cabinet with Pridi's name included. Pridi was informed about Pibul's intention by General Adul while he was on his way back from Ayudhya by boat. Adul said that he had already raised an objection, but to make sure, Regent Pridi must hurriedly return to Bangkok and inform the prime minister of his unwillingness to join the cabinet. Pridi did just that. Upon his return to Bangkok, he wrote an urgent letter to Pibul telling the latter that he had arrived back in Bangkok and requesting him not to include his name in the list of the new cabinet. Pridi also stated in his letter that if his name appeared on the list, objection would be raised by him in the regency council. The idea of including him in the cabinet, said Pridi, was an explicit desire of the field marshal to place him as a subordinate. Later on March 30, 1943, Pibul, in his capacity as supreme commander, issued an order making both Prince Athit and Dr Pridi, the two members of the regency council, attached to the supreme command, and requiring them to report on duty within twenty-four hours. While Prince Athit readily complied, presumably out of his apprehension of Pibul, Pridi flatly refused to do so. He argued on the grounds that he was then the king's representative who was, by constitution, chief of the armed forces, and as such he could not be subordinate to the supreme commander. Field

Marshal Pibul-Songgram later withdrew his order.

Pridi remained in the regency council from December 16, 1941 until December 5, 1945 upon the return of His Majesty King Ananda Mahidol. During these four years, he was given a rare opportunity to serve his monarch and the royal family and to demonstrate his loyalty, devotion, and sincere respect in time of war and danger. As regent he also patronised all religions on the king's behalf. But more than that, in his individual capacity, Pridi, then in his early forties, took the opportunity to serve his nation during the crucial time when sovereignty and independence were at stake, while honour and prestige were humiliated. He was determined, more than ever, that the Thai nation must survive the cruel war, and constitutional monarchy and democracy must remain Thailand's political institutions forever.



CHAPTER 12

LEADING THE FREE THAI MOVEMENT

Every statesman has his own “finest hours” — the hours that provide him with the opportunity to render his best service to be permanently recorded in the history of his nation. Pridi Banomyong’s “finest hours” were those exciting months and years during which he led the Free Thai Movement to save his country’s independence.

The December 8 event, and its subsequent developments, did not only give Pridi a bitter feeling over the Japanese invasion of his country, and sadness for the fact that the Thai patriots were not given more chance to resist the aggression both militarily and diplomatically, but it also gave him a deep concern over Thailand’s destiny after the worldwide armed conflicts were over. Unlike some cabinet ministers, perhaps including Prime Minister Pibul-Songgram himself, who, despite their unquestionable patriotism, had been, to some extent, swayed by the impressive Japanese success at the initial stage of the Pacific War to believe in a probability of Japan’s final victory, Pridi Banomyong was a believer in the Allies’ ultimate triumph. His belief in the outcome of the war was based on a careful and systematic analysis of the backlog potentialities of both sides, together with the strong sense of history always found in his analytical mind. The more he became convinced about the inevitable outcome of the war, the more he was worried about his country’s future. Pridi accepted the fact that under the circumstances as they were on December 7-8, including the prime minister’s indecision despite his prior knowledge of the event and his consolidated and absolute power

as both the chief executive and the supreme commander of the armed forces, Thailand had no choice, but to allow passage over her territory to Japanese troops. What Pridi had in mind, which he used as his argument in the cabinet meetings, was that Thailand must try her best under the circumstances to isolate herself from the conflict, and least of all, not be dragged into military cooperation with Japan. He was repeatedly told by the prime minister that his wish, which was shared by the majority in the cabinet perhaps including Pibul-Songgram himself, could not be fulfilled because of mounting Japanese pressure. Unable to further his argument on the issue, Pridi kept quiet, but wondered if there was really no way out.

Although since December 16, 1941, Pridi Banomyong was no longer in the cabinet which undertook, during December 15-17, reshuffling with Pibul taking over the portfolios of foreign affairs and defence himself, he followed closely the development of events. Even without knowledge of the secret protocol in which Thailand would help Japan in the war in return for the territories lost to the British, Pridi was stunned by the military cooperation pact Pibul signed with the Japanese in the Sriratana Temple before the sacred Emerald Buddha on December 21. Being concerned about the wrong direction the Pibul government then was heading, the newly appointed regent was determined that his most challenging and crucial task was to prevent Thailand from falling into the position of a defeated nation once the war ended. To Pridi, the only way to accomplish that objective was to get in touch with the Allies as soon as possible, and inform them of the genuine stand of the Thai people in the armed conflict. Besides, in order to prove the reality of such a stand, there was a need for Thai people to take some action in defence of their country's independence and the spirit of democracy.

"My close friends and I shared the belief in democratic idealism, and this was the root of our feeling," stated Dr Pridi Banomyong in the court of justice on February 13, 1946, as witness in a war criminal suit. "As the War was made by the anti-democratic side, we therefore felt that we must fight for what we believed.

"After the Japanese had invaded Thailand on December 8, many friends dropped by to see me and asked whether we would do something for our country," added Pridi, "I told them that I had already got some ideas."

The first man who came to see Pridi with a concrete plan was Group Captain Kaj-Songgram, deputy minister of finance and one of the June 24 promoters. He proposed that they should flee the country to Burma, and then possibly to India, in order to form a government in exile. Pridi was grateful, but since the Japanese had already moved in that direction, it was not possible to implement such a plan. Pridi suggested that they should set up resistance in the North, first at Nakorn Sawan, and later further up. But again, the plan failed because the Japanese had already moved up north as far as Lampang and Chiangmai. Pridi's northern plan depended a great deal on the cooperation and assistance of leading members of parliament from the northern provinces.

About this time — towards the end of the year 1941 — Direk Jayanama came to see Pridi and informed the regent that he had been asked by the prime minister to become Thai ambassador to Tokyo. In fact after the event of December 8, Direk told Pibul that since the country's foreign policy had changed, a new foreign minister should be appointed. Pibul refused to take his advice, but instead the prime minister became foreign minister himself, with Direk remaining in the cabinet as deputy foreign minister. However, about December 20, Direk was asked to take up the appointment as ambassador to Japan. He came to see Pridi for advice. Direk recalled his meeting with the regent that afternoon as follows:

“Dr Pridi expressed the view that if the matter had gone as far as Japan's approval having been sought officially, then it was very difficult. However, he felt that if I went, it might in fact do some good, for he believed that the Allies would emerge the victors in the war, and that a wrong move by Thailand might later cost our country its independence. He therefore felt that given the circumstances, I had better comply, but should try to use the opportunity to study the situation and see whether contact could be made with the Chiang Kai-shek government so that the Allies could see that we were trying to help them in every way we could. He also advised me to take trustworthy people with me to be the members of my embassy staff.”

Direk Jayanama left Bangkok for Tokyo on January 5, 1942. Before leaving, he asked the prime minister for the government's policy that he had to follow while in Japan. Pibul told him that he “could take any course of action considered suitable and in the interests of our

country.” The Thai diplomat therefore decided that if he could not contact the Chinese as instructed by Pridi, he would try his best to resist Japan’s treatment of Thailand as a colony, by making the Japanese “see that it would be more to their advantage to treat us otherwise.” Direk took along with him “trustworthy” young men as members of his staff, three of whom, namely Dr Tawi Tawethikun, Dr Thanat Khoman and Dr Konthi Suphamongkhon, all French-educated “docteurs en droit”, knew their ambassador’s real purpose in going to Japan.

Barely three weeks after Direk had left for Tokyo on what could be considered “the first mission of the Free Thai movement”, the situation in Thailand developed one more step towards the worst. On Sunday January 25, at noon, Bangkok time, the Thai government of Field Marshal Pibul-Songgram suddenly declared war on the United States and Great Britain.

General Adul-Dejcharas recalled the event in his testimony to the war criminal investigation committee on December 18, 1945, as follows:

“... when I arrived at the urgent cabinet meeting around noon that Sunday, I learned that the meeting had been called to approve the sudden declaration of war on Great Britain and the United States. I observed that Vichitr-Vathakarn and Vanich Pananon were the persons active and responsible for the briefing, as if they had contacts and pre-knowledge about the matter. The rest of the cabinet, including myself, had known nothing about it, not even the reasons behind the sudden move. A few cabinet ministers, with the exception of the two men, hardly said anything. Later on, I found out that Vichitr-Vathakarn and Vanich Pananon had unusually frequent contacts with the Japanese and the prime minister for a few days before the event, and also learned that these were the persons who made approach to the Japanese proposing the declaration of war. Japanese civilian authorities had no objection to it, whereas the military authorities expressed their disagreement with the proposal. The reason behind the proposal for the declaration of war on the part of those people was simple that Japan at that time was winning the war ...”

The late Prime Minister Thawee Bunyakatu, who was at that time the cabinet’s secretary-general, gave his impression about the declaration of war as follows:

“In my personal opinion, it was the sinking of the two British warships (the battleships “Prince of Wales” and “Repulse”) on the same



day which prompted Vichitr-Vathakarn, deputy minister of foreign affairs, to suggest to the cabinet that Thailand should declare war on the United States and Great Britain. This suggestion obtained support from the prime minister who was concurrently foreign minister, and it was decided that the declaration be made at noon on January 25, 1942. Once the declaration had been drafted (by Vichitr-Vathakarn) and signed by the prime minister (Pibul-Songgram) for the royal decree, it was sent to the regency council for their signatures.”

That was the usual practice during the Pibul government. The field marshal would “countersign” the royal ordinance or decree before submitting it to the regency council. The declaration of war was no exception. At that time there were three members of the regency council, including Dr Pridi Banomyong. Thawee Bunyakatu continued his description of the event as follows:

“Once the decision to declare war had been made by the cabinet, it was decided that an announcement should be made to the nation at noon sharp. At about 11.00 a.m. officials reported to the prime minister that only two members of the regency council were in Bangkok, namely Prince Athit and General Bhitchayen. The remaining regent, Dr Pridi, was out of Bangkok, believed to be away up-country. Only two members were thus able to sign the royal ordinance. They could not wait for the signature of Pridi, as the deadline set for the announcement would otherwise have had to be postponed. The president of the regency council, Prince Athit, had the name of Dr Pridi put down, even though the latter did not actually sign the ordinance, and said that he would take the responsibility for this action. Thus only two regents actually signed the declaration, although the announcement proclaimed that all three had done so, which was not the case.”

Pridi, without prior knowledge of the declaration of war, left Bangkok for Ayudhya, his hometown, for a usual weekend trip. In a statement contained in a libel suit against a writer in 1978, Pridi revealed the event as follows:

“In fact, the president of the regency council, officials of the royal private secretariat, and the prime minister himself knew well that I always spent the weekend, from Saturday through Sunday evening, in Ayudhya, taking turns with Prince Athit who took his vacation each time for three to four weeks at Hua Hin seaside resort. At Kum Kunbhan

where I stayed, there was also a telephone. So if Field Marshal Pibul-Songgram did not want to act by himself on the question of life and death to the nation like this one, and wanted to consult with me who was one of the regents, he would have asked me to come back to Bangkok by telephone. In that case, I would have been in Bangkok within a little more than an hour. What happened was evident that the declaration of war was carried out in haste, without allowing the possibility of the regency council learning about it beforehand.”

It was no doubt a pity that Pibul did not consult his old friend and long-time colleague before making the decision concerning the life and death of the nation, the independence and prosperity of which both of them were sworn to protect and sustain since their student days in Paris. At that time, the two men had not been as close as they used to be in the early days of their joint political efforts. Pibul had been surrounded by his army subordinates and civilians who believed in his lasting leadership, and who also wanted to gain his favour. The uninterrupted rise to supreme power since his successful suppression of the Bovoradej Rebellion in 1933 and the increasing involvement in tasks of heavy responsibility had not only given the forty-five-year-old field marshal greater self-confidence, but had also isolated him from old friends whose disagreements he could no longer stand. Pridi, on the other hand, had become both mentor and idol of civil servants, intellectuals and members of parliament who found in him a champion of democracy, an undisputed source of knowledge and wisdom and a prototype of righteousness. Many people then seemed to take pride in being Dr Pridi's disciple. The popularity of Pridi, to some extent, hurt Pibul's pride and unfavourably affected his prestige. When the two men were in disagreement, Pibul could not help being angry with his friend, and he also knew that Pridi was not always pleased with him.

On the Japanese affairs, the prime minister realised that Pridi held a different view, and he was too proud to seek the latter's personal advice. It was also possible that should Pridi raise objection to the declaration of war and suggested an alternative, the regent's view could have had some impact on the decision of many cabinet ministers. By that time, Pibul seemed to have made up his mind that the only way for Thailand to survive the Japanese threat was to go along with them. Should there be an opportunity later, the Thai army was still in a position to fight back



and regain its honour. In 1945, after the war had ended, while being on trial as a war criminal, Pibul told the following account in defence of his course of action:

“About the middle of January 1942, the Japanese, whether military or civilian I could not recall, came to tell me of their displeasure that we had not declared war and fought along with them from the beginning, indicating that our cooperation with them was not sincere. The Japanese said that they had made good progress in the war, but were concerned about their back lines as the Thai army still remained inactive. At that time, the Allies had already launched heavy air attacks on Thailand, yet the declaration of war on them could still create a misunderstanding on the part of the Thai public. I therefore told them that I would take their proposal into consideration, but felt that the military cooperation pact should be adequate for the purpose.

“Later Vichitr-Vathakarn reported to me that the Japanese had expressed their displeasure on the delay in our deliberation ... and urged that we considered declaring war (on the Allies)... We thought that the declaration of war was just a matter of token, not expecting the British and the Americans to give response. To declare war or not Thailand was going to resist, and get ready to fight the Japanese as originally planned.”

Whether or not Pibul's decision to declare war on January 25, 1942 was really made under Japanese irresistible pressure, as the field marshal stated, or because of other reasons, remains vague. In later years, many of Pibul's followers defended his act on the grounds of it being imperative and unavoidable. Some pointed to the fact that after the declaration of war, the Thai army moved up north, not only to avoid armed engagement with the British forces, but also to seek friendly contacts with troops of China's Chiang Kai-shek.

Direk Jayanama, in his “Siam and World War II”, referred to the event from his experience as Thai ambassador in Tokyo at the time as follows:

“Sometime around January 26, 1942, I received a cable from the prime minister in his capacity as foreign minister stating that as the United States and Britain had taken aggressive action against Thailand by sending planes to bomb our territory, our government had therefore declared war on those two countries on January 25, 1942.

“This news produced a great feeling of uneasiness in me and in

the other officials at the Thai embassy, as we felt we had already committed ourselves deeply enough in our alliance with Japan without having had to make such a declaration.

“I tried to sound out the opinion of the Japanese foreign minister as well as of others in official circles (regarding our declaration of war). Japanese opinion on the subject was divided among those who approved of and were pleased about our declaration of war, and those who disapproved of the move. Possibly the latter group felt that if Thailand had not declared war on the United States and Britain, Japan would have been able to derive greater benefits from Thailand, as the Allies would not then have dared to take firm action against Thailand. Now that Thailand had declared war, the Allies would treat her as a full enemy.”

In February 1942, shortly after Thailand’s declaration of war, Vichitr-Vathakarn, then deputy foreign minister, sent Ambassador Direk an official letter stating that the prime minister felt that although Thailand had declared it was on the Japanese side, she had not yet been admitted to the Triple Alliance (The Axis), that is the alliance between Germany, Italy and Japan. The prime minister was of the opinion that should the Axis powers win the war, Thailand, as a non-Axis member, would not benefit as much as she should. Direk was therefore instructed to negotiate with the Japanese in order to get Thailand admitted to the Axis Alliance.

Direk was curious about the instruction he had received. He could not understand why the Thai government found it necessary to voluntarily join the Axis Alliance, the act that would place Thailand in trouble should the war end with the Allies’ victory, unless Bangkok was confident about the Axis victory. The ambassador consulted with his confidants at the embassy and agreed that the government instruction must be carried out with great care, since there was no way to tell beforehand what the Japanese reaction on this matter would be. “I therefore decided to take a risk and put forward the proposal as if it was my own personal suggestion,” wrote Professor Direk, “so that if the Japanese should suspect our actions, their suspicions would fall on me rather than on the Thai government.” Direk then began to sound out unofficially from various sources the Japanese reaction to such a proposal and found that Japan was indifferent to it.

On February 20, 1942, the Thai ambassador met with Japanese

Foreign Minister Togo. Direk told him of his personal opinion that perhaps Thailand should join the Axis Alliance, but being unsure about the advantages and disadvantages of doing so, he wished to request the foreign minister's advice on the matter so that he could further make recommendations to Bangkok.

Direk recalled Foreign Minister Togo's reaction to his personal request: "Mr Togo was silent for a while, and then replied that at present Japan and Thailand were already cooperating satisfactorily with one another both economically and politically, so he saw no necessity for us to depend on others. It would be better, he claimed, if we Asians stuck together. I was readily agreed with his opinion, as it was what I had in mind already." Direk immediately sent a secret report to inform Pibul about the Japanese reaction and advised the government to halt its Axis plan. Pibul readily approved the course of action Direk had taken.

There was no doubt that Field Marshal Pibul-Songgram had his mind on only one thing, that is, shooting the immediate trouble that he was having with the Japanese. He wanted the Japanese to trust his government in whatever way he could. "During the time of my government," wrote Pibul after the war, "the war was going at full swing and the Japanese were still very strong, thus their attitude was always one of threat. The Japanese were suspicious of us at every single step. We therefore had to demonstrate our friendliness to them from time to time." Throughout his time in the office, Pibul's demonstration of his pro-Japanese attitude, as reflected in his acts, his statements, as well as in the substance and tone of Radio Thailand, was too genuine for other people, both inside and outside Thailand, to believe that it was a fake. However, towards the end of his term in office which coincided with the beginning of Japanese defeat, there was substantial evidence that the field marshal had made up his mind to turn his back to Japan and attempt to establish contacts with the Allies through the Chinese in the north.

One of Pibul-Songgram's right-hand men on Japanese affairs, Vichitr-Vathakarn, revealed many interesting elements in defence of the declaration of war in his article "Behind the Declaration of War", published in January-February 1947, after his release from jail upon the Thai supreme court passing judgement that the War Criminal Act was void because of its retrospectiveness. Vichitr-Vathakarn served as secretary at the Paris legation in the 1920's, becoming a close friend of Pridi

and of Pibul, but he was not recruited to the People's Party. He first joined the Bhahol government in August 1937 and had remained in the cabinet since then. When the Pacific War broke out Vichitr-Vathakarn was serving as deputy foreign minister, but later in June 1942, he became foreign minister. In September 1943, he replaced Direk Jayanama as the Thai ambassador to Tokyo and remained in that position until the war ended, when he was arrested. Vichitr-Vathakarn reappeared in public life again in the 1950's as cabinet minister and ambassador. During the early 1960's, before his death, he served as "brain-trust" to the late Prime Minister Sarit Thanarat. A versatile person, he had a colourful career as diplomat, historian, author and even song-composer.

Vichitr-Vathakarn's argument was that the declaration of war was imperative. To begin with, the event of December 8 clearly proved that Thailand's neutrality was only a dream. The Thai armed forces had been weakened as the result of the Indochinese conflict a year earlier, and there had been no way to replenish their strength. Armed resistance without adequate strength meant disaster, not necessarily on the part of the government which could find a new site in exile, but on the part of the people who would have had to suffer ruthless Japanese treatment, in addition to material destruction. Vichitr-Vathakarn stressed that none of the cabinet ministers was pleased about the decision to enter into military cooperation with Japan, but they realised that there was no choice. He gave as the reason for signing the pact with Japan in front of the Emerald Buddha that the Japanese always claimed to be Buddhist, so the choice of such a sacred place was meant to make them keep their word. Vichitr-Vathakarn admitted that the Japanese were divided in their views on the Thai declaration of war on the Allies. But the Thai government found it necessary to declare war on the grounds that it could maintain a working army and could take over the assets of the Allies' nationals to be returned to the owners after the war, no matter which side won. Besides, the declaration of war made it possible for the Thai government to take over the custody of the belligerent nationals, and to give them proper treatment, while there could also be an exchange for Thai students in the United States and Britain (there were at that time about 60 Thais in Britain and about 100 in the United States).

At the time of the Japanese invasion on December 8, 1941, M.R. Seni Pramoj was the Thai minister in Washington. A son of a former



police chief, H.H. Prince Kamrøp, during the absolute monarchy regime, Seni was an Oxford graduate and a barrister-at-law. After serving as a judge for some ten years, he was chosen by Pibul to serve as his country's representative in the United States. Upon receiving a cable from Bangkok notifying him that the government had yielded to the Japanese demand, the thirty-six-year-old diplomat decided that he would remain in the United States and refuse to recognise Bangkok's pact with Japan. In other words, the Thai legation would continue to resist Japanese aggression in accordance with the Duty of the Thai People During the War Act, 1941. Later when Thailand declared war on the United States, Bangkok instructed the Thai minister to deliver the declaration of war to the American government. On this occasion, Seni recalled that "I went to the state department with a copy of the cable I had received from Bangkok, and informed them that I could not represent Thailand in declaring war on the United States because there existed no causality about it. On the contrary, we had been good friends for more than a century. The United States' state department also adopted an unconventional attitude, saying that if the Thai minister refused to declare war, the United States also refused to acknowledge the state of war between the two countries." Seni Pramroj told about his wartime experience in a talk delivered at Chulalongkorn University on August 17, 1946.

Seni's ability to maintain the status of the Thai legation in Washington was a great contribution to the cause of the Free Thai movement, both inside and outside Thailand. In the United States, the Free Thai movement under Seni's leadership organised activities in three main areas; namely propaganda works, especially through broadcasting, beaming to Thailand in the Thai language; military volunteers on the part of Thai students who had refused to return home; and urging the Thai people to resist the Japanese. Seni himself travelled around the United States, giving talks on Thailand, in order to gain understanding and sympathy from the American public. The Free Thai movement in America had at its disposal a couple of million dollars deposited in the National City Bank of New York, plus gold reserves worth about nine million dollars, of which about one million dollars were spent for all purposes throughout the war years. Seni Pramroj's main problem was how to contact people in Thailand who shared the same view. As an "outsider", physically and politically, he had no way to judge the domes-

tic political tendency, nor the political inclination of the leading public figures in Bangkok. He only hoped that there must be some people who were opposed to the government's current direction. But who? In August 1942, there was an exchange of personnel between Thailand and the United States and Britain. There were some students including Prime Minister Pibul-Songgram's two children departing the United States for their homeland. But Seni found it too risky to include some of his men in the exchange group, nor to request any of those returning students to get in touch with whoever was active in the resistance activities in Thailand.

Seni Pramoj's broadcast of his independent stand after the declaration of war, and of his organisation of the Free Thai movement, which had been recognised and given support by the US government, was received with great delight by Pridi Banomyong in Bangkok. While Seni was desirous of establishing contact with the same movement in Thailand, Pridi was equally enthusiastic to get in touch with the movement in the United States. Both men saw clearly the need for contacts between inside and outside, so that the overall resistance movement of "Free Thais" could become effective. Pridi had experienced failure in his attempt to dispatch his men to make contacts with the outside world.

Not until early in 1943 had Pridi found the possibility of dispatching a courier to China via Indochina, and also discovered a very suitable man who volunteered to risk his life on the assignment. The man was Chamkad Balankura, an Oxford graduate in Modern Greats, who had been dismissed from the government service because of his anti-government radio talk. Since his student days in England, Chamkad was strongly opposed to Pibul-Songgram's dictatorial attitude. After the event of December 8, 1941, he, together with a few close friends mostly members of parliament from the Northeast, including Tiang Sirikahn, Thong-in Bhuribhat, Thawil Udol and Chamlong Downreang, decided to resist the Japanese, as well as to oust Pibul-Songgram from power. To Chamkad and his friends, Pibul was identified with Japanese militarism which was everything against the liberty, the democracy, and the sovereignty of the Thai people. "I was confident that there must be someone high-ranking who shared our thought. If we could join forces, then something could be accomplished. I looked around for leadership, and found it only in one person — Professor Pridi Banomyong. I therefore went straight to see him," the Oxford don wrote in his memoir, published

after his untimely death in Chungking, China's wartime capital.

On February 17, 1943, Chamkad was instructed by Regent Pridi to prepare his long journey across Indochina into southern China. Once outside Thailand, Chamkad was to send cables to Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek, Dr T.V. Sung, the Chinese foreign minister, and M.R. Seni Pramroj, requesting them to send him to Chungking. Once arrived in Chungking, he was expected to contact the American embassy to send a cable to Seni Pramroj in Washington, inviting him and Willis Peck, the last American minister in Bangkok, together with Dolbeare, former American adviser to the Thai foreign office, to meet with him in London. Furthermore, another cable should also be sent by the United States embassy to Sir Josiah Crosby, former British minister, and W.A.M. Doll, former British financial adviser, both in London at that time, to meet with Chamkad who was going there from Chungking.

The task assigned by Dr Pridi was for Chamkad to negotiate with the British and American governments on the following points:

1) Clarifying that the declaration of war on January 25, 1942 was not valid because Pridi, as a member of the regency council, neither approved nor signed it;

2) As the declaration of war was invalid, the treaties between Thailand and Great Britain and the United States concluded before December 8, 1941, still remained in force. But since Thailand was under Japanese occupation, a government in exile would be established in India by Pridi Banomyong as the king's representative together with cabinet ministers, members of parliament, as well as high-ranking government officials. Chamkad was to request the British and American governments to recognise the Thai government in exile;

3) As the Thai government in exile would be set up in India, then British territory, it was requested that the British government accorded hospitality and honours as it had done to other governments in exile; and

4) Chamkad was to request the British and American governments to release assets of the Thai government in their respective countries. These assets would be used in the conduct of warfare against Japan.

Chamkad left Bangkok on February 28, 1943 with his interpreter, Phaisal Trakullee. "For the country and for humanity, Chamkad," Pridi told the young patriot, "with the best of luck, we shall meet again in forty-five days; otherwise within two years; or else, we shall be sacrificing our

lives for the country.”

After a long and dangerous journey, Chamkad and Phaisal finally arrived in Chungking on April 21, 1943. He failed to establish contact with Seni Pramroj for many months until finally, he received Seni's cable saying that the minister would be glad to meet him and was doing everything he could to help facilitate Chamkad's trip to Washington. In the meanwhile, he had the opportunity to meet with the generalissimo. Chiang Kai-shek told him that his government was prepared to ignore the Thai-Japanese military cooperation pact, and promised to help Thailand regain her sovereignty. The Chinese leader also said that he would authorise the informal contact to be made with Thailand which, in fact, had already begun. Finally, he was pleased to arrange for Chamkad to go to Washington, provided that Seni made such a request. Again, his journey to Washington was delayed due to some confusions over the Chinese attitude.

On August 5, 1943, while waiting for his trip to Washington, Chamkad met Lt Colonel Prince Suphasawat, the leading member of the Free Thai group in England, who managed to fly into Chungking from India. Prince Suphasawat's purpose in making the trip was to get information about Thailand under Japanese occupation.

Unlike in the United States, the Free Thai group in England did not have any official leader. After Thailand declared war on Britain, the Thai minister in London was recalled to Bangkok, leaving behind only legation officials and some fifty students who had chosen to remain in England. One of the students at Cambridge wrote to Seni Pramroj in Washington, asking him to come over to England for the purpose of organising the Free Thai group, and taking them to America. Seni sent one of his men from the Washington legation, Mani Sanasen, to London upon the request. It was under Mani Sanasen that members of the Thai community were given the opportunity to apply for the Free Thai movement's membership. Fifty-four men and women applied for membership, including ex-Queen Rambhai, King Prachathipok's consort. Those who enlisted in the British army were given basic training and then were dispatched to India for specialised training.

Prince Suphasawat, an English-educated former army officer, was a son of H.R.H. Prince Sawatsophon and a brother of Queen Rambhai. At the time of the June 24 Revolution, he was serving as the



commander of the royal guard, and later got into political trouble in connection with the Bovoradej Rebellion. Only because of King Pra-chathipok's strong pressure was he not prosecuted in the special court, and was allowed to leave the country. Naturally, Suphasawat had not been on good terms with the government of the People's Party.

Having learned that Chamkad had sneaked out of Thailand as the representative of the resistance movement in the country, Prince Suphasawat was determined to meet with him. Like Seni in Washington, the prince was counting on the collaborators inside the country as the main strength of the whole Free Thai movement. Also with their collaboration, it was possible for his small group to undertake on the outside intelligence operations which were effective and useful for the Allies' conduct of war in this area.

Meeting with Chamkad in Chungking, Prince Suphasawat learned all about the resistance movement under Pridi Banomyong. "I am very glad to know about this," the prince told Chamkad. "In fact, I have been hoping that Dr Pridi would have thought along this line. Although a member of the royal family myself, truly, I firmly believe in democracy. Therefore, I have respect for Dr Pridi's works. He is the appropriate person to be chosen for leadership in this great task of our national liberation. In early days, there could have been some misunderstanding between members of the royal family and the Doctor who was a member of the People's Party. But at present, there is no more ill feeling between us, because Dr Pridi's life and work have, more than anything else, proved that he is a genuine patriot ..."

Prince Suphasawat promised, before his departure from Chung-king, that he would negotiate with the British and obtain their recognition of the Free Thai movement within the country. The prince also stressed that there must be joint efforts by all of them, both inside and outside Thailand. While Prince Suphasawat was in Chungking, the prince and Chamkad also met with the British ambassador there, who also promised that he would report the whole matter to his government.

In Bangkok, two weeks before Chamkad's departure for Chung-king, there was a political incident which, although relatively insignificant, to some extent adversely affected Pibul-Songgram's political leadership. On February 12, 1943, the prime minister, probably on personal reasons, tendered his resignation to the regency council. By doing so,

Pibul perhaps anticipated either the refusal to accept his resignation on the part of the regency council, or acceptance with his reappointment. It is believed that the field marshal, also on personal reasons, had done just that before, but Prince Athit always sent his resignation back without taking any action. On this occasion, Prince Athit passed Pibul's resignation to Pridi for consideration, presumably in the belief that Pibul really meant to resign in order to reshuffle his cabinet, and he could not find the prime minister for his explanation. Pridi found the resignation constitutionally valid, and therefore recommended that the regency council approve it accordingly. Thawee Bunyakatu, the cabinet's secretary-general and a cabinet minister, carried out his routine duty by having the news of the prime minister's resignation broadcast over Radio Thailand on the next day.

Many persons were shown Pibul's resignation letter, including Major Kwuang Abhaivong and General Adul-Dejcharas. Kwuang recalled that Prince Athit sent for him and showed him Pibul's letter in front of Adul. When asked what to do, Kwuang replied, "What to do? Is Your Highness accepting it? If so, that's the end of it." Adul-Dejcharas recalled that Pibul sounded sincere in his letter of resignation. The field marshal even recommended that General Phrom-Yothi, then interior minister, succeed him as prime minister. When Adul met with Pibul on that day at the latter's private residence on the outskirts of Bangkok, the prime minister told him that it appeared that some people really wanted him to resign, therefore he was going to stay on. The next morning Radio Thailand again broadcast correcting the mistake. It said that Field Marshal Pibul-Songgram had not resigned and still remained the prime minister. The story says that Pibul managed to get his resignation letter back and order some officers to arrange for the mistake-correcting broadcast. This incident caused two ministers, both soon later to become Thailand's prime ministers, to resign on February 25; one being Kwuang Abhaivong and the other Thawee Bunyakatu.

"Afterwards, the field marshal called a cabinet meeting," recalled Kwuang Abhaivong, "I was also notified, but I paid no attention to it. Then the prime minister asked Dr Dej Snidvong to phone me and Dr Dej insisted that I come over. When I got there, the field marshal was looking angry. He asked me why I had refused to attend the meeting. I said why should I. The government had resigned, therefore there should



not be any cabinet meeting. The field marshal asked me how I knew about his resignation. I said Prince Athit had shown me his letter of resignation and I suggested that the matter must have been properly settled before we could continue. Pibul was angry and told me that he did not want me to work with him. I replied that I never asked for the job, but he was the one who asked me to join him. I then said, OK I resign. I wrote my letter of resignation, handed it to him and then walked out.” After that Kwuang and Thawee left Bangkok for their vacation at Hua Hin.

Thawee Bunyakatu recorded the further development of the event: “One evening while I was resting at Hua Hin after my resignation, Dr Pridi Banomyong asked me to come over to his bungalow in the Klai Kangvon Palace. While we were alone, Pridi asked me if I could join him in the work of the Free Thai movement. He told me that he had begun making contacts with the British and the Americans by sending his men to meet with the representatives of the movement outside the country, one of whom being Chamkad Balankura who presumably had lost his life on the way. Pridi explained that it was deemed appropriate to form a government in exile, just like what Charles de Gaulle did for France. He said that he would find ways and means to get me elected the house speaker, so he as the king’s representative, myself as speaker of the national assembly and Kree Dejativong, a cabinet minister, could leave the country to form the exile government which was constitutionally legitimate. Pridi and I exchanged views until we reached agreement.” On June 26, 1943, the national assembly elected Thawee house speaker and Kwuang deputy house speaker, but the prime minister refused to countersign the appointment decree, so there were no appointments. Again on July 2, the national assembly elected Kwuang as deputy house speaker. Similarly, the appointment was never made because of Pibul’s opposition to it.

At that time, Pridi was concerned about Chamkad’s mission which, except for the news of his arrival in Chungking on April 21, had been silent. The Free Thai leader therefore decided to send out another mission, led by one of his close associates from the June 24 Revolution, Sa-nguan Tulalak, who safely arrived in Chungking in August 1943. Sa-nguan’s mission was warmly welcomed by the Chinese as it re-confirmed the existence of the resistance movement inside Thailand under Pridi Banomyong’s leadership. Chamkad learned from Sa-nguan with

great delight that the movement, by now, had expanded, and its influence had penetrated into both parliament and cabinet circles. On September 11, both Sa-nguan and Chamkad met with the military leader of the Free Thai movement in America who flew into Chungking. It was Lt Colonel Kab Kunjara, Thailand's military attache in Washington.

Colonel Kab, like Colonel Suphasawat, was a career officer. Although one of Pibul's pupils who was dispatched to the post in Washington on Pibul's personal choice, Kab foresaw the necessity for Thai patriots to work closely with the Allies, so that their country's independence would be retained when the war ended. Assuming leadership for young Thai men who voluntarily joined the US army, and were trained in both intelligence works and guerrilla warfare, Colonel Kab came to China, preparing for himself and his men, to sneak into the country. After a long delay, to some extent caused by the Chinese suspicion of Kab's plan, the young "Free Thais" under Colonel Kab's command began their journeys into Thailand at the end of February 1944.

The meeting of Chamkad, Sa-nguan and Kab with the Chinese and American representatives in Chungking in September 1943 led to concrete agreement on many points, one of which was the sending of a seaplane to take Pridi and his resistance group out of Thailand, scheduled in October of the same year. It was at this meeting that the Americans agreed to supply arms to the movement inside Thailand, and the Chinese were prepared to assist in setting up a well-equipped Free Thai army division near the Sino-Thai border. It was also agreed that Chamkad and Sa-nguan would be going to meet Seni in Washington, while other members of Sa-nguan's mission would be waiting for further instructions in China.

Chamkad was never able to make his trip to America. His chronic illness, which had been caused by hardship during his long journey from Bangkok and the unsanitary conditions with which he had been forced to live for months in Chungking, was exhausting his physical strength. The Chinese appeared to give him the best medical help as far as they could. But it was too late. The young Thai patriot could endure life no longer. He passed away in the Chinese wartime capital on October 7, 1943. Sa-nguan arranged for his cremation at a small Buddhist temple in Chungking. Then he packed up Chamkad's remains and left for the United States. After the war, in appreciation of his patriotic sacrifice, Chamkad

Balankura became a national hero and was posthumously made a major of the Thai army.

“But the work of Chamkad Balankura did not die with the hero,” stated Seni Pramroj at Chulalongkorn University in 1946, “his memoir and reports about the resistance movement inside the country considerably impressed the United States’ state department. It meant that our men could now enter Thailand and operate there safely with the cooperation of the internal resistance movement. Chamkad’s work, in fact, had given Washington light”

Sa-nguan Tulalak’s arrival in Washington at the end of 1943 made possible concrete cooperation between the resistance movement inside Thailand and the Free Thai movement abroad. The United States was openly in support of the work of the Free Thai movement, although the British remained reserved in their recognition of the movement’s efforts. Sa-nguan was therefore sent to work with the Americans at Kandy, Sri Lanka. On the way to India, Sa-nguan was granted an audience with ex-Queen Rambhai and met with leading Free Thai members there, including Colonel Prince Suphasawat.

While Suphasawat was in Chungking he was authorised by the British to send men from Yunnan into Bangkok carrying the British army’s letter to Pridi, asking him to prepare for the coming of the first group of Thai intelligence units, the “white elephants” as it was referred to. This group would come to Thailand by a submarine which was to emerge somewhere on the west coast in December 1943. The submarine left Colombo for the rendezvous spot at the appointed date, keeping about 4-5 miles distance from the shore. She was waiting there for about a week, but no sign of contact from the Pridi group appeared to be seen. It was learned later on that the messenger from Yunnan did not get to Bangkok until after June 1944. Three young Thai men in British officer uniforms were in that submarine, one of whom, Major Puey Ungpakorn, who was in later years to become Thailand’s most celebrated economist and educator.

The “resignation incident” definitely had an adverse impact on the Pibul-Pridi relationship. For obvious reasons, the field marshal was suspicious that Pridi had been the influence behind the regency council’s unconditional acceptance of his resignation. Pibul, however, did not either directly or indirectly exert any pressure on Pridi but some of his

aides rather chose to intimidate Prince Athit, the regency council's president. In his testimony given to the war criminal investigation committee after the war, the prince recalled that he received many telephone calls from Pibul's military aides, warning him of the grave consequences if the wrong man were to be chosen to replace Prime Minister Pibul. Prince Athit was frightened of the threat and came over to stay with his regency colleague at the latter's official residence. Pibul sent for him next morning, but Prince Athit, realising that his position as president of the regency council was well above that of the prime minister and supreme commander, refused to comply. The "incident" stopped at that.

Prince Athit and his wife, Mom Kobkeo, who was formerly Queen Rambhai's lady-in-waiting, had been on intimate terms with Field Marshal Pibul-Songgram. "Both Prince Athit and Mom Kobkeo were keen in sports, but I was not so skilled in that particular field. So I did not join them so often in sporting activities," wrote Pridi in his "The Royal Family in World War II", published in 1972. "Sometimes they asked me to play badminton with them. But Field Marshal Pibul was a sportsman, so their joined sports activities helped to promote their close relationship and mutual sympathy." "About July 1943," wrote Pridi, "Prince Athit went on his vacation at Hua Hin and he asked me to join him for the trip. At that time there was news about Italy's King Victor Emmanuel taking action against Mussolini who had led the country to defeat and disaster. Having arrested the duce, the king appointed Field Marshal Badoglio to form a new government. Prince Athit and I had a casual discussion on this event, and he said that nobody in Thailand would dare do a thing like that. I jokingly told him that there must be found an old man like Badoglio, and further told him that on my way to Hua Hin, I saw General Vichitvong-Vuthikrai standing at a station whose age was about Badoglio's, and perhaps he could do it. Then both of us laughed at the joke.

"One day after we had returned from Hua Hin," continued Pridi with the story, "Chaleo Pratoomros (royal secretary) hurried to see me and told me that Field Marshal Pibul had called an urgent meeting of the June 24 promoters, and informed the meeting that Prince Athit had reported that I was planning to arrest the prime minister in the same way that Mussolini was arrested, by assigning the task to General Vichitvong. Pibul asked the meeting to judge my seemingly treacherous act. The meeting was, however, of the opinion that Prince Athit's words should

not be taken for granted, and a committee was appointed to interrogate me. At the time I was informed about it, the interrogating committee members were already on their way to see me. I remember there were three members including Admiral Sindhu-Songgramchai and Colonel Chavengsak-Songgram. I told them the truth, stressing that what I said was a joking response to Prince Athit's initial reference to the Italian story. I also told them that if I really had planned to arrest Field Marshal Pibul, I would not disclose my plan to Prince Athit, because I still had friends who were more trustworthy than him. Besides, General Vichitvong was an old man so that there was no point making use of him for the task. The interrogating committee went back to report to the field marshal that he had been given a nonsensical report from Prince Athit, and as such the accusation was put off. Since then, Prince Athit seemed somewhat different towards me, and I also became more careful in my conversation with him. After the war, while he was in serious illness, a few days before his death the prince sent for me. At his bedside, he asked me to give him pardon for whatever inappropriate thing he had done to me in the past. I told the dying prince that I had done so, and begged him to contemplate on Lord Buddha's kindness, freeing his mind from all concerns. Later he died in peace. I never did anything in revenge that would hurt his feeling. He knew then and he should know now."

Three months after the failure of the submarine mission, another attempt was made to send the same group of the "white elephant" officers to establish a communication network in Thailand for intelligence reports that were needed by the allied command for Southeast Asia. In the middle of March 1944, three young men, Puey Ungpakorn, Prathan Premkamol and Prem Buri, all British officers under Prince Suphasawat, parachuted into a spot in central Thailand. With them, there were radio transmission equipment and other supplies. But most importantly, there was a letter from Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten, supreme commander of the allied forces in Southeast Asia, to "Ruth" or Pridi Banomyong, which gave recognition to the latter as the leader of the Free Thai movement. The three men were arrested by Thai authorities upon landing and were taken into custody at the police headquarters in Bangkok. Later on, practically all "Free Thai" officers, both from the British "Force 136" and from the American "OSS", who sneaked into the country by land, sea and air, were taken into Thai police custody and

were interrogated by joined Japanese and Thai authorities. They were allowed to operate their communication equipment, and some were sent out to be trainers attached to various resistance units across the country. Direct contacts were, from that time on, established between the allied supreme command at Kandy, Ceylon, and the headquarters of the Free Thai movement in Bangkok, in other words, between Admiral Mountbatten and "Ruth".

The reason why the Free Thai officers' works, and later also the works of British and American officers who sneaked into Thailand, were given cooperation and protection by Thai police was that General Adul-Dejcharas, chief of the Thai police, had now become deputy leader of the Free Thai movement in the country. Although a close friend of Pibul, Adul saw clearly the best way to get Thailand out of trouble. To his mind, the nation's interests came before anything else. Owing to his full cooperation, the work of the Free Thai movement under Pridi's leadership was able to make satisfactory progress. The movement had been able to recruit many supporters and collaborators from the official ranks and files, among whom were Captain Subha-Chalasai, General Sinad-Yotharak and Admiral Sangvorn-Yuthakit.

In the meanwhile, Field Marshal Pibul-Songgram and government had been losing their popularity very rapidly. As the war continued, Pibul was seen to be more arbitrary in decision-making, as well as in action-taking. He became surrounded by flattering people and isolated from his former colleagues. The prime minister was sensitive to criticism and suspicious of conspiracies. As a result, the public began to lose confidence in him, and also began to question his war policy. Then there was the issue of the new capital, Petchaboon, the building of which Pibul had ordered so that the country's administration would be transferred there. As Petchaboon at that time was a malaria-infested area and it still lacked facilities of modern living, the rushed construction work created hardship beyond normal endurance on the part of officials and Thai workers involved.

On July 20 and July 22, 1944, the national assembly on secret ballots rejected a bill for the establishment of Petchaboon as the new capital and a bill for the creation of a Buddhist Territory. Pibul's first reaction to it was to dissolve parliament. Adul and Direk Jayanama, then back in Bangkok as foreign minister, consulted Pridi on constitutional



implications. Pridi advised that the Bhahol government, upon being defeated in similar manner back in 1934, had chosen to resign, so this democratic practice should be continued. As a result, the cabinet majority decided that the government should resign. Field Marshal Pibul-Songgram tendered his resignation on July 24, 1944.

Anticipating the possibility that the regency council might reject his resignation or accept it but reappoint him, Pibul was disappointed on knowing that things were not going to be as he expected. Prince Athit, upon receiving Pibul's resignation, did not promptly approve, but asked the house speaker to sound out among members of parliament first, as who would be the next prime minister. When privately consulted by leading MPs as to the appropriate choice of the new prime minister, Pridi suggested General Bhahol. The house speaker with the support of the majority of the house therefore recommended the regency council to ask the old-timer, Bhahol, to form a new government. Kwuang Abhaiwong, who had been elected deputy house speaker on June 29 of the same year, recalled his experience as follows:

“The national assembly met to sound out the new prime minister for which General Bhahol obtained the highest votes in absentia. It was learned that after the meeting, some of Pibul's men went to see the general privately. The house speaker, in the meanwhile, reported the sounding result to the regency council's president. Prince Athit sent for General Bhahol, the house speaker and myself as deputy house speaker and asked Bhahol whether he would accept the duty of forming a new government. The general declined. I tried to catch his eyes to give him a signal that he must accept, but the general never caught my eyes. Prince Athit therefore turned to me and asked what we should do next. I told him that we had to let the national assembly sound out once again.”

Pridi had the following story continuing from what Kwuang had left: “As such, members of parliament who had joined me in the Free Thai movement came to consult me as who would be the appropriate choice in the context of our work. Most of them preferred Thawee Bunyakatu, the man they once had elected to become the house speaker, though his appointment to that position never took effect because of Pibul's rejection, on the grounds of his honesty and ability and also of his seniority in the People's Party. Thawee joined the party while he was a student in Paris in 1927. The trouble was that Thawee was too straight-

forward in his speaking, as such it would be difficult for him to 'make face' with the Japanese. Therefore it was agreed that we had to approach Kwuang to see whether he could handle the Japanese. After that I sent for Kwuang Abhaiwong."

"I was taken ill with tonsillitis when Dr Pridi telephoned me from his residence, asking me to come over," recalled the late prime minister. "I asked him whether there was anything important, otherwise I would like to stay home because of the illness. He said that it was important, so I went to see him. Upon arrival at his residence, Pridi came out in his favourite casual dress with a piece of cloth around his waist as belt. He told me that Parliament had elected me prime minister and insisted that I must accept the post for the country's sake. I was surprised, not knowing how they played the game so that the responsibility fell on me. I knew only that nobody was willing to accept it. My goodness! ... everyone was afraid of Pibul. As it was my instinct to accept the challenge, I therefore told Pridi that if nobody really accepted the job, then I would take it."

After Kwuang had agreed to accept the premiership, the house speaker made his recommendation to the regency council. Prince Athit was still reluctant, asking to see the new government's policies, as well as the names of the new cabinet first. Kwuang and Pridi argued that the appointment had to be made first, then the policies and the cabinet could be presented. It was learned later that Prince Athit's indecision was caused by his apprehension of Pibul.

During that time, the Japanese who had learned of the change in Thai government came to see Dr Pridi Banomyong, and asked the latter very politely of his view with regard to the appointment of the new prime minister. Pridi told them that governmental change would proceed in accordance with the constitution, and requested the Japanese to take it as Thailand's internal matter. He added that Japan's non-interference on this matter would be a credit to herself in the eyes of the Thai people. The Japanese said that Japan would not interfere, but wished to request the new prime minister to continue cooperating with Japan. Pridi was also asked about Kwuang, the new prime minister, whom the Japanese hardly knew. Pridi assured them that Kwuang was a good and cheerful man and hoped that they could get along well with him.

In his memoir, Admiral Sangvorn-Yuthakit, then deputy minister



of the interior, was reminiscent of the scene at the last cabinet meeting presided over by Field Marshal Pibul-Songgram. "Our end was then very near," wrote Sangvorn, "with the exceptions of Adul-Dejcharas and Sindhu-Songgramchai, all cabinet ministers were present with the prime minister at the head of the table. General Chai Pratepasen, the secretary, left the meeting for a while and returned with information that Parliament was undergoing a heated debate, with only Pora Samaharn and Thamrong-Navasawat defending the government. In his hand there was a letter which he handed to the prime minister. General Chai's face was pale. After reading it, the prime minister passed it around until it reached me. It was a letter from the Japanese army's commander which requested the government to act in accordance with the constitution otherwise the Japanese would take whatever action they saw fit. I understood the meaning very well. At that time, ministers were leaving the room one by one. Field Marshal Pibul moved to sit close to me and said to me in desperation, 'What can we do, Admiral? I have nobody left on my side.' In a moment, the air force's commander-in-chief came in and I heard him say that 'if there is anything the air force can do, please let us know.' In a little while, Prince Athit and Captain Yuthasart also came in and the prime minister turned to say a few words with them. At that moment, his wife in sports dress appeared. The prime minister immediately told her, 'Would you please prepare a car, I am leaving for Lopburi.' I then took my leave." Prince Athit finally tendered his resignation. According to Pridi's account, the prince was under the impression that the Kwang government could not last very long. Sooner or later, Field Marshal Pibul would return. Then Pridi would be ousted and the prince would come back to the regency council.

On August 1, 1944, Parliament met to take note of Prince Athit's resignation, and deliberated on the question of the regency council. After deliberation, the national assembly adopted a resolution that, as from that date, Dr Pridi Banomyong was to become the only regent of the realm.

At forty-four, the man who had devoted his entire career to the nation, and to the progressive development of its fundamental institutions, had now reached the zenith of power. At the same time, he had on his shoulder the heaviest and most crucial responsibility few men in the history of Thailand had ever carried. It was the responsibility of bringing his nation out of the war with dignity, honour and sovereignty.



CHAPTER 13

AT THE ZENITH OF POLITICAL POWER

If August 1, 1944 was a turning point in Thailand's modern political history, it was also one of the most hectic days in Pridi Banomyong's political career.

Immediately after the national assembly passed the resolution appointing him the king's sole representative, Pridi summoned the house speaker to his official residence and advised that Khuang Abhaiwong be appointed prime minister without delay. As Parliament had already endorsed Khuang and Khuang himself had agreed to accept the responsibility, the appointment of the new prime minister was made on that day by the regent in the name of His Majesty the King, and the house speaker, Phya Manavarajsevi countersigned the royal decree.

Khuang Abhaiwong's nineteen-man cabinet included Admiral Sindhu-Songgramchai, commander-in-chief of the Royal Thai Navy, as minister of defence and minister of agriculture; Chao Phya Sri Dharmathibes as minister of public health and minister of justice; Captain Subha-Chalasai, R.T.N. as minister of the interior; Thawee Bunyakatu as minister of education; Dr Dej Snidvong as minister of commerce; Srisena-Sombatisiri, former Thai ambassador to Tokyo, as minister of foreign affairs; while Major Khuang himself took the portfolios of finance and communication. In addition, there were three naval commanders, plus Lt General Sinad-Yotharak, and most surprising of all, General Bhaol, the former prime minister. As for Thawee Bunyakatu, apart from his education portfolio, he also took charge of the prime minister's office,



servicing concurrently as the liaison between the government and the Free Thai movement, as well as liaison between the regent and the government. General Adul-Dejcharas was not included in the cabinet, but remained director-general of the police department, as well as the unofficial deputy leader of the Free Thai movement.

The most immediate problem facing the new government was the position and the attitude of former Premier Pibul-Songgram. During his meeting with Prince Athit before the prince's resignation, Kwuang was warned that Pibul's troops might move in to oust the new government. Kwuang told Athit that if that were the case, it was his duty to fight back. After resignation, Field Marshal Pibul, still supreme commander of the armed forces, moved to his army headquarters at Lopburi. Rumours were spread that the supreme commander was planning to take back the lost political position. There was probably an element of truth concerning the rumour. Although it was not likely that Pibul himself seriously considered such an unconstitutional act, the field marshal had a large group of loyal army officers who could possibly conceive the idea of regaining power and prestige on behalf of their leader. No matter what the truth was, upon Adul's advice, Major Kwuang Abhaiwong decided to go and meet with the field marshal at his Lopburi headquarters.

Kwuang met Pibul twice. The first meeting seemed to be a very friendly one. The two men, who had been good friends since their Paris days, had a private talk just between themselves in the field marshal's bedroom. The meeting was so friendly that "when I came out, I saw a number of tins of my favourite Goldflake cigarettes, so I put one into my pocket," recalled Major Kwuang Abhaiwong. Seeing that his successor was driving in a junk car, Pibul offered to send a new car to replace it.

The second meeting was, however, not very cordial. Kwuang proposed that the field marshal give up his position as the supreme commander because of the growing Japanese suspicion of the latter. Pibul was not happy about the proposal. Kwuang came back to Bangkok, and with the consent of Defence Minister Sindhu-Songgramchai and Police Chief Adul-Dejcharas, he proposed to Regent Pridi that Pibul must be at once removed from his post as supreme commander and commander-in-chief of the army. On August 24, three royal proclamations were broadcast over Radio Thailand. The first one was the appointment of Field Marshal Pibul-Songgram as the "general adviser". The second was

the dissolution of the posts “supreme commander” and “deputy supreme commander” and the appointments of General Bhahol-Bholpayuhasena as chief field commander and Lt General Sinad-Yotharak as deputy chief. The last one was the appointment of Bhahol to replace Pibul as commander-in-chief of the Thai army. By virtue of these proclamations, Field Marshal Pibul-Songgram was entirely stripped of his military power.

The proclamations which were to effect drastic changes in the military command had been prepared in top secrecy, known only to Regent Pridi who signed them, Prime Minister Kwuang who counter-signed and Thawee Bunyakatu who drafted them. On the night of August 24, in preparation to meet the eventuality, Pridi moved over to spend the night at Thammasat University, whereas Kwuang and Bhahol were given the navy’s protection at the naval headquarters across the Chao Phya River. Bhahol, who had suffered from a minor accident on that day, was carried across the river in an ambulance. The chief field commander, however, called an urgent meeting of military commanders and high-ranking officers in Bangkok. At the meeting, Deputy Chief Sinad-Yotharak requested the officers to remain calm, and prepared to take orders of the chief field commander who, upon his past distinguished records, still commanded respect and obedience from the officers. Field Marshal Pibul-Songgram took the unexpected changes very calmly, and in excellent sportsmanship. He left Lopburi military headquarters for his private residence in a rural area outside Bangkok and remained there completely inactive in politics until the end of the war. Pibul, however, remained the general adviser, a prestigious position without any responsibility, from August 24, 1944 until the position was dissolved on September 13, 1945.

The next step taken by the new government after removing Pibul’s military power was the granting of amnesty to all political prisoners since the Bovoradej Rebellion in 1933. This step was initiated by Regent Pridi with the view of achieving national unity, and also in response to Prince Suphasawat’s suggestion. It was Thawee Bunyakatu who was single-handedly instrumental in this righteous act. He first, with the help of Pridi, obtained the consent of Police Chief Adul-Dejcharas who had been responsible for the arrests of those unfortunate people. After Adul agreed upon the matter and officially proposed it to the



government, Thawee drafted the royal decree granting the amnesty which was signed by Regent Pridi and countersigned by Prime Minister Kwuang on September 20, 1944, in commemoration of the king's birthday.

After the change of government, it became much easier for the operations of the Free Thai movement. About one half of the cabinet ministers were leading members of the movement and the prime minister himself had agreed to give support to its work in whatever way he could, but without involving himself too deeply in it. "Prime Minister Kwuang Abhaivong knew very well about our operations," wrote Thawee Bunyakatu in November 1967 in his preface to the books, "The Life of a General" and "The Underground Work of Colonel Yothi", an autobiography of General Netr Kemayothin. "Nevertheless, he requested that whatever I deemed appropriate to carry out for regaining the country's sovereignty, I should go ahead with, without letting him know too much detail about it. The prime minister said that if he knew, it would make his dealings with the Japanese difficult." Under these circumstances, Thawee had almost a free hand to operate his "Free Thai" affairs. During the period of Kwuang government, the Free Thai movement activities had only the Japanese to worry about, unlike in earlier times, when both Pibul and the Japanese were equally important problems.

The fact that the activities of the Free Thai movement conflicted with Pibul-Songgram government's policy was explicit. The movement's objective contained a dual purpose: to resist Japanese aggression, and rather implicitly, to oppose Pibul-Songgram's allegedly dictatorial regime. Nevertheless, putting aside internal political conflicts and rivalry, the ultimate aims of both Pibul-Songgram and the Free Thai movement were identical, namely the preservation of Thailand's independence. The difference was in the approach, as well as in the strategy.

Field Marshal Pibul-Songgram described his efforts in resisting the Japanese and in preventing Japan from taking over the country, in a letter dated September 8, 1945, which he wrote to the press within a month after the war was over. In this letter, Pibul emphasised that he had been continuously resisting Japan since December 8, 1941, until he was relieved of duty on August 24, 1944. "But during the war when the Japanese were powerfully present in Thailand," wrote Pibul, "we could

not report our operations to anyone.”

In reply to the accusation against him of entering Thailand into military cooperation with Japan, Pibul said, “In reality, we never intended to do so. Our conviction was always to have peace, and we never wanted to enter the war on any side, and we knew our own strength ... therefore we always tried to keep away from war.” The field marshal then told the story of how the Japanese pressured him to sign the military pact, and later to declare war on the Allies, by threatening to disarm the Thai army, if their wishes were not promptly complied with.

“I had decided that we should comply with their wishes. It is better to swallow our tears and our bitterness and take over revenge some time later by contemplating on fighting them until they were driven out of the country,” wrote Pibul in the same letter.

After the declaration of war, the supreme commander organised the northern army and immediately moved it to the northern frontiers. Later, the northern army made an advance into the Shan State and took position just opposite China’s Yunnan province. It was in the middle of 1943 that the northern army’s third division was instructed by the supreme commander to contact the Chinese 93rd division. During the first meeting with the Chinese on February 5, 1944, the Thai “delegation” informed them of the Thai army’s plan to cooperate with the allied forces in driving out the Japanese from Thailand. The Chinese were also requested to pass on the message to their British and American allies.

At that time, Colonel Kab Kunjara, military leader of the Free Thai movement in the United States, was stationed in Chungking. Kab was informed by the Chinese military intelligence about the meeting between the commanding general of the 93rd division and the Thai officers at Chienglau. Kab readily recognised the name of one Thai officer as his former student at the army staff college. He therefore wrote to Colonel Saweang Tabpasuta, expressing his desire to meet him at the next meeting. Kab’s letter was delivered to General Han-Songgram, commanding officer of the third division, who passed it on to General Vichit-Songgram, chief of field army staff. Finally, it reached the supreme commander. The Chinese arranged for the next meeting on April 2, 1944.

“One evening towards the end of March 1944, I was sent for by Lt General Vichit-Songgram. Both of us were then based at Petcha-

boon,” wrote General Netr Kemayothin, at that time a colonel in charge of operations planning, “the general told me that the Chinese had made the appointment so I must go to see General Han-Songgram in Shan State before the end of the month. A plane was arranged to fly me there in the morning.”

The thirty-five-year-old colonel was a graduate from the royal military college in Bangkok. Like his supreme commander, who was twelve years his senior, after graduating top in the class at the army staff college, Netr was given a scholarship to further his studies abroad in 1935. He spent four and a half years in France and graduated from the French army staff college. He returned home in 1939. When the war broke out, he was one of the fast-rising staff officers in the Thai army. Later, he was to become the youngest general, and not long afterwards, the army's chief-of-staff. When one of his former classmates at the royal military college, Sarit Thanarat, became a field marshal, supreme commander and prime minister in the 1960's, General Netr served as under-secretary for the prime minister's office and one of Sarit's advisers.

“Colonel Yothi” or Netr Kemayothin joined with General Han-Songgram and four other staff officers including one of Adul's police officers at the third division headquarters in Shan State, and on April 2, 1944, the “Thai delegation”, riding on horseback, crossed the River Lum opposite Chienglau into China. General Liu Wee Eng, commanding general of the Chinese 93rd division, and his staff were already waiting. Netr was a little disappointed when he saw neither Colonel Kab nor any other Thai officers included in the Chinese delegation. In response to the Thai enquiry about Kab, General Liu explained that Kab had come to Chungking with eight other Thai officers. The colonel had originally planned to come along, but some business in Chungking had prevented him from doing so. Suspicion was raised in the Thai officers' minds that perhaps the Chinese did not want Thais to meet with Thais at that stage.

According to General Netr, the two sides had a frank and friendly discussion. The Thai delegation explained the necessity for their government to have cooperated with the Japanese, and the Chinese expressed their understanding and sympathy. The Thai delegation therefore requested that the Chinese passed this understanding on to the British and the American allies, as well as to the members of the Free Thai movement abroad. They exchanged ideas on the communication system

between the two sides, on the military positions along the borders and on other military matters. Then they came to the strategic question, namely the joint efforts of the Thai army and the allied forces in driving the Japanese out of Thailand.

The Chinese disclosed that the Allies were preparing an offensive with ten Chinese divisions driving from northern Burma to join with the British forces coming from India. Preparations on landing in Malaya were also under way. There would also be an attack made on Japanese troops in Thailand in which China would cooperate with the Thai army. The Chinese said that they would inform the Thais as to when the operation would begin. General Liu Wee Eng was presented with a hunting rifle as a gift from Pibul-Songgram, brought all the way from Petchaboon by Netr. After that, Netr hurried back to Petchaboon and a few days later, with General Vichit-Songgram, he came down to Bangkok to report to Pibul-Songgram who was very pleased with the report.

About one month after that, Netr was informed by his chief of staff that the supreme commander wanted to send a staff officer to serve as a liaison with the allied headquarters in the Chinese capital. Vichit-Songgram also disclosed that upon Chiang Kai-shek's invitation, Thailand was going to send a full-fledged delegation to Chungking which could consist of General Adul-Dejcharas as leader, General Prayoon Bhamornmontri as the government representative, General Han-Songgram and Netr himself as military representatives. The new mission, however, was never appointed, and the proposal to cooperate with the Chinese was called off when the Pibul government resigned in July of that same year.

Although not questioning the fact that Field Marshal Pibul-Songgram did make contact with the Chinese, Pridi Banomyong has been, however, sceptical about the supreme commander's personal motive behind his move. In a statement submitted to the court of justice on a libel suit in 1978, thirty-four years after the event took place, Dr Pridi recalled that early in 1944 when Pibul instructed his officers to contact the Chinese, the Second World War outcome had already become certain. Italy had surrendered, and the German armies were retreating from the Soviet front. In the Pacific theatre, Japan had suffered defeats one after another, on land, and in sea and air battles. It was also during that time that the Allies' mass media, particularly radio broadcasting, had begun

threatening and accusing Field Marshal Pibul as a war criminal. Pridi also questioned if Chiang Kai-shek would agree with Pibul's proposal to give cooperation in fighting the Japanese at that stage. In the first place, Thailand was not under the generalissimo's territorial jurisdiction in the Allies' agreement, and secondly, it was not likely that Chiang Kai-shek could forget so easily Pibul's personal message broadcast over Radio Thailand between December 25 and December 31, 1942, persuading the generalissimo to yield to the Japanese and cooperate with them in the war against the Allies.

Pridi also recalled that in April 1944, General Adul informed his Free Thai movement colleagues, including Thawee Bunyakatu, Direk Jayanama and himself, that Field Marshal Pibul had asked the police chief casually whether he could make a trip to meet Chiang Kai-shek in Chungking, and offer Thai cooperation with China in the fight against Japan. Adul said that he had told Pibul it was too late for such a proposal, because the war had already turned its tide against the Axis both in Europe and in Asia. Adul was also not certain if Chiang Kai-shek would believe in Pibul's sincerity. The field marshal told Adul to convince Chiang that whatever he had done with regard to cooperation with the Japanese were only tricks. Adul argued back saying that if tricks could be played against Japan, they could also be played against Chiang as well. Finally, General Adul-Dejcharas declined to represent Pibul in the negotiation with the Chinese, suggesting that he should find another officer who was more capable of convincing the generalissimo. Adul, on the same occasion, also reminded Pibul that he should not attempt to wake up the "sleeping giant", because once the "giant" was awakened, it could move down to Thailand, a situation which was even worse than Japanese occupation.

In a statement submitted to the court in a libel suit, Pridi emphasised that the objective of the Free Thai movement in making contacts with the governments of the United States, Great Britain, China and the Soviet Union was to make those governments accept that the declaration of war on Britain and the United States, as well as the carrying out of armed conflicts along the Chinese border at the beginning of the war, were not carried out in accordance with the wish of the Thai people. They were arbitrary acts on the part of the Pibul government. Therefore, those countries must not conceive Thailand as an enemy, and must not treat

her as a defeated country once the war had been won by the Allies. "The Resistance or Free Thai movement would not ask the Chinese government to cooperate with it militarily in the fighting against Japan," stated Pridi, "because if we did that, the huge Chinese armies would be flowing into Thailand and it would be very difficult to get them out after the war. Thus the situation would be much more disastrous to Thailand than the presence of a few hundred thousand Japanese troops." Pridi also disclosed that at the time of the Japanese surrender in August 1945, before Chiang Kai-shek's armies moved down to disarm Japanese troops as far as the 16th parallel in the Thai territories, he sent an urgent cable to the American government informing them that if the Chinese advanced into the northern part of Thailand, there would be grave consequences. President Truman promptly responded to Pridi's information by ordering all Japanese troops in Thailand to surrender to Lord Mountbatten, the allied supreme commander in Southeast Asia.

As from August 1944, the Free Thai movement began to make fast progress towards its goal. During the last year of the war, both the American OSS under General Donovan and the British Force 136 under Brigadier-General "Hector" Jex had set up their intelligence units in Bangkok in collaboration with the Free Thai members. Radio contact with Kandy, Lord Mountbatten's headquarters, was kept on a continuous basis. A number of Free Thai divisions were secretly set up throughout the country, being trained by British or American officers and also by their Thai counterparts. The guerrilla units were equipped with modern weapons supplied by the Allies. All the Free Thai fighting forces were placed under the responsibility of Thawee Bunyakatu.

It was also during that time that the Free Thai movement received full cooperation from Thai people from all walks of life, although not many of whom knew precisely the operations plan of which their services formed parts. University students, school teachers, provincial governors, district officers, businessmen, even village headmen were directly or indirectly rendering their services to the cause of the movement in one capacity or another. They knew only one thing, that is, they were performing their duties as patriots. These people never knew who their leaders were, yet they were prepared to carry out orders promptly and fearlessly.

Among the top-ranking servicemen, General Sinad-Yotharak, the



deputy chief field commander, who had been acting for his chief, General Bhahol, was the key man. Under the code name "Jampa", Sinad was the coordinator between the Thai armed forces and the Free Thai movement. He also selected officers to help carry out activities which required military personnel. General Sinad had his headquarters within the grounds of the Chitlada Palace. Besides Sinad, the army's chief of staff, General Chat-Nakrob, was also playing an important role as a military coordinator. As most of the high-ranking army officers had been close associates of Field Marshal Pibul, their recruitment into the Free Thai movement had to be specially selective. The situation was quite different for the navy, where many of its unit commanders had become active in the Free Thai movement, including Admiral Nava-Vichit, the Thai fleet commander, and many of his deputies and subordinates, the most daring of all being Admiral Sangvorn-Yuthakit who was one of the movement's leading members.

Sangvorn-Yuthakit was a senior lieutenant in the navy when he joined the June 24 Revolution. A man of exceptional courage and high integrity, he was always on hand to render his services to his colleagues in whatever way he could. During the Bovoradej Rebellion in 1933, Sangvorn was the only naval commander who openly declared his support to the Bhahol government. During 1936-38, Sangvorn was in Japan supervising the building of the "Sri Ayudhya", the 2200-ton gunboat, the pride of the modern Thai navy. In 1938, Lt Commander Sangvorn-Yuthakit, newly appointed captain of the Sri Ayudhya, sailed home the first Thai warship which carried four 8-inch guns. In December of the same year he was nominated to represent the June 24 promoters in the navy to inform the regency council of their wish to replace Bhahol with Pibul as prime minister. When Pibul formed his first government, Sangvorn-Yuthakit was named a minister without portfolio, but left the cabinet in the reshuffling after Japanese invasion. In July 1943, Pibul dismissed Sangvorn from the navy on suspicion of his support given to the Pridi side, but was appointed a cabinet minister again before the year ended. After the fall of the Pibul government in August 1944, Sangvorn was requested by Pridi to join the Free Thai movement. He was also appointed chief of military police by the new government, a position that made him responsible for the day-to-day delicate and sensitive dealings with Japanese soldiers in Thailand. After the war, Admiral Sangvorn

became deputy minister of defence, director-general of the customs department and lastly director-general of the police department.

“The Free Thai movement within Thailand was divided into two groups,” wrote Thawee Bunyakatu. “One group was concerned with the camp divisions and had as its duties the training of Free Thai members in the use of modern weapons, as well as in guerrilla warfare. The other group represented the intelligence service.

“The intelligence had as its duties spying on the movements of the Japanese army and then reporting on such to allied intelligence at Kandy. Its members had to provide information on such matters as where Japanese stocks of firearms were situated, the location of Japanese military camps, the destinations and times of train or automobile convoys carrying Japanese soldiers and military equipment, the various places used by the Japanese to store their provisions, the location of their military headquarters, field offices and other such strategic points, etc.”

Despite all these efforts on the part of the Free Thai movement, Lord Mountbatten was still not fully satisfied. In December 1944, he sent a letter from his headquarters in Kandy saying that the Free Thai co-operation with the Allies up till then had not been close enough. “He wanted to know the extent of the cooperation we could give the United Nations,” wrote Direk Jayanama, “and requested that we therefore send a military delegation to meet the Allies secretly in Ceylon.”

“Ruth” asked Direk to lead the Thai delegation under the code name of “Violet” to Kandy in February 1945. Direk took along, among others, General Chat-Nakrob, the army’s chief of staff, and his former junior confidant, Thanat Khoman. They were picked up by a British amphibious plane which flew them to Calcutta, and then further to Kandy, where the Thai delegation discussed the matter with General Mackenzie and Mr Dening, Mountbatten’s political adviser. On military affairs, they discussed the strength of the Thai armed forces as well as that of Japan. On the political side, the Thai delegation told the British that “Britain would be making a sound policy move if she was to declare that she would respect the independence and sovereignty of Thailand, as she knew that we had only cooperated with Japan out of necessity and that we were now ready to rise against Japan. A policy statement along similar lines to that made by the United States would be received with appreciation and would encourage us more in our co-

operation against Japan,” wrote Direk Jayanama in his book.

The question of British attitude towards Thailand had become crucial for the Free Thai movement for some time. Seni Pramoj had always sensed this almost from the time the Thai government declared war in January 1942. In December of that year, at the meeting of the Institute of Pacific Relations at Montreal, Seni found himself in a heated debate with the British delegate which had made a statement that Britain would make Thailand a British protectorate after the war. In February 1943, the British government also made a proposed declaration of its position with regard to Thailand, the text of which appeared in the United States document, “Foreign Relations of the United States, 1944” (Volume 5, page 1312) as follows: “The position of Thailand is in some respects unique in the Far East though not without parallel in Europe. A country with a long traditional friendship with us has, though admittedly under pressure from Japan, betrayed that friendship. Not content with collaboration with our enemy and despite her treaty of non-aggression with us the ‘quisling’ government of Pibul took the initiative in declaring war upon us. For these acts Thailand is already paying the price and will undoubtedly pay yet a heavier price as the war reaches her territories. It is still possible for the people of Thailand to do something to save themselves from the worst consequences of their betrayal, and they will be judged by the efforts that they make to redeem themselves from the position in which the action of their present regime (the Pibul regime) has placed them. Like other countries in a like case ‘they must work their passage home’. If they do so they can look to this country (Britain) to support the emergence of a free and independent Thailand after the war is over.”

In contrast, the United States attitude towards Thailand was one of friendliness and sympathy. In a memorandum prepared by the state department’s division of Southwest Pacific Affairs for President Roosevelt in his discussion with Winston Churchill and Stalin at Yalta dated January 13, 1945, entitled “Future Status of Thailand”, as published in “Foreign Relations of the United States, 1945”, volume 6, pages 1242-1244, states the followings:

“... we do not regard Thailand as an enemy but as an enemy-occupied country. We recognise the Thai minister in Washington as ‘minister of Thailand’ with a status similar to that of the Danish minister.

We favour a free, independent Thailand, with sovereignty unimpaired, and ruled by a government of its own choosing. Thailand is the one country in Southeast Asia which was still independent before the war. We believe that it would be prejudicial to American interests throughout the Far East if, as the outcome of the war in which we will have had the major part in defeating Japanese aggression, Thailand should be deprived of any of its prewar territory or should have its independent status impaired. The history of European pressures on Thailand and of European acquisition of territory in Southeast Asia is vivid in Asiatic memories. This government (the United States) cannot afford to share responsibility in any way for a continuation towards Thailand of prewar imperialism in any guise.

“Within Thailand, the administration which first yielded to Japan and which was notoriously collaborationist has been replaced by an administration largely controlled by Pridi, present regent, most respected of Thai leaders and opponent of Japan from the first. American contact has been established with Pridi who is actively aiding allied intelligence work and who has expressed his desire that Thailand enter the war against Japan and that the Thai army fight by the side of the Allies.

“It is the view of the department (of state) that an effort should be made to persuade the British to alter their plans so that they are not inconsistent with our own ...”

This was to confirm the United States position with regard to Thailand as contained in President Roosevelt’s statement made in 1943 in support of Chiang Kai-shek’s announcement at that time that China would respect Thailand’s independence.

As the war was drawing to an end, there was a growing concern among the Free Thai leaders over their country’s fate upon the Allies’ victory. It was therefore decided that something must be done in order to prove to the world that Thailand did actually take part in the struggle against Japan. Professor Direk had the following account of historical interest.

“Around March or April 1945, our resistance movement came to the conclusion that if we did not show the world and the United Nations one way or another that we were ready to make sacrifices, our efforts would have been in vain. We therefore decided to launch out bravely. The regent (Pridi) sent telegrams to the leader of Free Thai movement in

Washington (Seni Pramroj) to be forwarded to the United States government, and another to Lord Louis Mountbatten, telling them that Japan was trying to squeeze another 100 million baht out of the Thai government. Prime Minister Kwuang Abhaivong had consulted the regent about this, and it had been agreed that we would refuse to grant this loan. If strong pressure was brought to bear on us, then the Kwuang government would resign. Once a new government was formed, it would declare all agreements and policies made with Japan void, or, in other words, although Thailand would not declare war on Japan, she would declare a return to the status quo position of the period prior to December 8, 1941. Once this status quo position was re-established, Japanese troops would no longer have the right to remain on Thai soil.

“We fully expected that Japan, as the arbiter of power in Thailand, would not allow the Thai government to carry out such measures. An open break, or declaration of war, would therefore result between the two countries. Even though the weapons sent in by the United Nations would not be sufficient for us to carry on the fighting effectively, we believed, nevertheless, that with the efforts of the civilian population of Thailand, as well as the military, we would be able to withstand any belligerent acts on the part of the Japanese ... We felt that on the day that we changed our government and policy, if the United States and British governments would make a declaration approving these steps and agreeing to respect our sovereignty and independence in every way, this would definitely boost our spirits towards offering the fullest possible resistance to Japan.”

Ruth's telegram mentioned in Direk's account was received in Washington on May 21, 1945. It read:

“Thai resistance movement, in all its dealings, has continually adhered to the advice of American representatives not to take any premature action against the enemy. But at this time, I believe the Japs desire to fight can be weakened if the resistance movement no longer tries to remain under cover. The Japanese will be more quickly forced to surrender unconditionally to the Allies because of the fear of the dissolution of the so-called co-prosperity sphere. ... I have been informed by the present government that they will not remain in office if the Japs persist in this matter (more borrowings). In that event, a new government would have to be installed and it would have to take action against the

Japs by first ordering void all debts and agreements the Pibul regime had contracted with the Japs ... I have also advised the supreme commander, SEAC (Lord Louis), of this whole matter.”

Upon receiving Ruth's message, the United States acting secretary of state, Mr Grew, sent a reply on May 28, 1945, in which he said, "... We understand your desire that Thailand actively oppose the enemy as soon as possible. We are sure you realise, however, that all opposition to our common enemy must be coordinated with the overall strategy against Japan and that it would be unfortunate if the Thais prematurely and before being reasonably assured of success should commence overt action We hope, therefore, you will continue your endeavour to prevent premature overt action." Britain did not give immediate response to Ruth's proposal, but when she did eventually she stated that her view on the matter was similar to that of the United States. Such replies received from the United States and Britain did not only prevent unnecessary bloodshed, but somehow they also indicated the British and American acknowledgement of the Free Thai movement's will to fight alongside with the Allies, resulting in Britain's modification of her attitude.

Around that time, "Ruth" was asked by SEAC to send an army staff officer to Kandy for the purpose of information and military operations planning on the part of the allied command. By that time, two Thai officers had already been dispatched to serve as liaison officers at the American OSS unit, also at Kandy; one of them was Wing Commander Dawee Chullasapaya and the other, a Westpointer, Lt Colonel Ekasak Prapanyothin. Dawee, later air chief marshal, has written an autobiography, "Nation is Above Everything", published in 1974 describing his experience as a Free Thai liaison officer in India. Dawee's main duty there was to study the aerial photographs of his country to identify targets for Allies' bombings, and also to report on the damage assessments of previous operations. Wing Commander Dawee Chullasapaya was perhaps the first Thai officer to meet Lord Mountbatten, the supreme commander of SEAC. He recalled the event as follows:

"Colonel John Coughlin, chief of OSS at Kandy, took me to SEAC headquarters at the Botanical Garden in Kandy. The headquarters consisted of both luxurious permanent buildings as well as of canton-

ments, giving no impression of a military headquarters. Big trees were seen everywhere with colourful flowers and green lawns like carpets.

“After waiting in the sitting room for a little while, Lord Louis’ aide invited me and Colonel Coughlin into Mountbatten’s office. Lord Louis, in a smart white working uniform, rose from his desk and offered his hand-shake. ‘I am so pleased to have you with us. You are welcome here,’ said the supreme commander. ‘How is your regent?’

“‘Thank you sir, I am very glad to join with your forces and I shall do my best to assure our future success.’ I replied after being seated, ‘Ruth, our regent, is fine and he asked me to convey his personal regards to you, Sir.’”

Dawee also recalled that at his meeting with Lord Mountbatten, he also met Mr Dening, Lord Louis’ political adviser and Brigadier-General “Hector” Jex. Mountbatten asked Dawee to render his full cooperation to the allied forces in driving out the Japanese from Southeast Asia as soon as possible. Throughout his tour of special duty in India and Ceylon, the daring wing commander of the Royal Thai Air Force had met with several keymen at SEAC, both British and American, and never missed an opportunity to make them understand Thailand’s position with regard to Japan and the Allies. He travelled back and forth between India and Thailand a couple of times as liaison officer. On one occasion, General Sinad-Yotharak gave him a map of the Bang Pa-in Palace, north of Bangkok, and told him that “Ruth” wanted to pass on his request to the Allies that the palace, being the temporary residence of members of the royal family, must not, under any circumstances, be touched upon by the allied bombers. Dawee worked directly under Air Marshal Devarid-thi-Bhanluk, commander of the Thai air force and one of the leading members of the resistance movement within Thailand.

Having Dawee Chullasapaya as a liaison with the Americans in India had proved to be of great value to the work of the Free Thai movement. Now “Ruth” wanted another staff officer of similar quality to be attached to the British Force 136. He asked General Sinad-Yotharak to select the man for the task. Sinad selected Colonel Netr Kemayothin. He had learned of the Colonel’s secret assignment during the Pibul-Songgram’s period, and asked him if he was prepared to carry on the same type of work under the new leadership and direction. Netr replied that for the nation he had made sacrifices, and there was no reason why

he should not continue to do so. At that time, "Colonel Yothi" was deputy chief of staff of the Thai army, and was also in charge of operations planning. One evening, General Sinad took Netr to see General Adul-Dejcharas, chief police and "Pulao" of the resistance movement, at the latter's small wooden house in the Parus Palace, opposite the Royal Plaza in Bangkok. There, the colonel had his first opportunity to meet Major Puey Ungpakorn, his former acquaintance at the time both of them were studying in Europe before the war. Puey, who had parachuted into Thailand, was then being kept in police custody during the daytime, and allowed to move about on his intelligence assignment at night.

Netr Kemayothin recalled that one of the important days in his life was the day he first met "Ruth", the regent and the leader of the Free Thai movement. Netr had never met Dr Pridi before, although, like the general public, he knew of his important role in the government since June 24, 1932. "We waited for a while in the sitting room of the regent's official residence, then there appeared a man in his forties, relatively fair in complexion, with a short haircut, and in casual dress with a white-silk scarf around his neck. I recognised readily that our host was Dr Pridi Banomyong," wrote General Netr Kemayothin. "In that room, there were only three of us, 'Ruth', General Sinad and myself. 'I am very glad to meet you,' 'Ruth' said to me, 'I understand that the deputy chief must have told you all about our activities.' Then he continued to say, 'I am pleased that you have volunteered to join us. I have also learned of your underground assignment during the field marshal's government and have for a long time known about you.' He paused before furthering his conversation, 'Our work is very important. It is a matter of life and death for our country. Everyone of us had agreed that we shall sacrifice without personally expecting anything in return.'" On that occasion, Pridi told Netr that he would send him to India as the representative of the resistance movement. The colonel's task was, in addition to serving as liaison officer, to take care of the men the Free Thai movement was sending out there for training.

Not long after he had first met with "Ruth", Colonel Netr Kemayothin followed General Sinad to an important meeting which took place in the middle of the Chao Phya River. The big boat which was prepared for the meeting moved slowly up the river in the moonless night and then moved down to stop just opposite the regent's official residence across



the river. Netr recalled that on the "Free Thai" boat that evening, he had the opportunity to meet practically all of the movement's leading members apart from "Ruth", including Adul "Pulao" Dejcharas, Direk "Omar" Jayanama, General Chat-Nakrob, and Thanat Khoman. He was also introduced to two British officers in their army uniforms — Brigadier-General Jex and Major Hobb of Force 136. There was also a Thai gentleman in British officer's uniform showing the rank of Lt Colonel. It was Prince Suphasawat, the Free Thai leader from Britain. As the prince and Netr were graduates of the royal military college in Bangkok, though the former being many years the latter's senior, they recognised each other. The prince was glad that Netr had joined the resistance movement. By the end of March 1945, Jex, Hobb, Puey and Netr left Thailand for India on a British seaplane. "Colonel Yothi" was attached to SEAC until July when, together with Major Puey Ungpakorn, he returned to Bangkok.

In May of the same year, "Ruth" sent another mission to contact the Allies, this time as far as Washington. The mission's purpose was to get the Free Thai message across to the American congress, the understanding of which was expected to provide the necessary support for Thailand's sovereignty after the war. The mission consisted of two prominent men, the Sukhum brothers, son of the late regent, Chao Phya Yomaraj. Both Pisal-Sukhumvit and Sukhum-Nayapradit had spent years in the United States as students; Pisal went to MIT, whereas Sukhum attended Boston University. Back in Thailand, the elder brother, Pisal, had been the chief highways engineer, and his younger brother a senior official of the civil service commission. Both of them had mixed socially with the foreign community in Bangkok and had many American friends. Upon their arrival in Washington, they met with an old friend who introduced them to a congressman from Kentucky. The congressman, in turn, introduced them further to Congressman Sol Bloom, then chairman of the House of Representatives' foreign affairs committee. The Free Thai mission was given an opportunity to explain the facts about Thailand before the House's committee on July 12, 1945. In addition, the Thai mission was also asked to give a briefing on various aspects of the conditions in Thailand at the Pentagon. The Sukhum brothers were still in the United States at the time the war ended.

As the war was drawing to a close, the Free Thai movement's

activities became more intensified. On this particular period, Thawee Bunyakatu told the following story:

“Lord Louis Mountbatten at Kandy had given strict orders that every attempt should be made to prevent any outbreak of fighting in Thailand before D-Day ... It was a joint agreement that on D-Day the Free Thai forces and the Thai army and police forces within the country would launch an active resistance against the Japanese, using guerrilla tactics such as unexpected attacks, ambushes and sabotage, while allied parachutists would simultaneously land at various places, backed up by the marines. This was only a rough plan that had been broadly sketched out. There were other plans the details of which had not yet been agreed upon, as the proper time had not yet arrived.

“During this period the Japanese must have heard something of our plans, or at least have been deeply suspicious about them, for they also started making preparations for their own self-defence such as setting up fortifications and machine-gun bases in front of the military barracks and at other strategic points throughout Bangkok. Meanwhile, the Thai army also began building the same things face-to-face with the Japanese, clearly demonstrating a mutual distrust. As the news of an impending clash between Thailand and Japan spread, this mutual distrust increased more and more until the Thai forces were put on a twenty-four hour alert every day. Meanwhile, cooperation between the Free Thai movement and the Thai army became even closer.”

The situation was therefore very tense. Netr Kemayothin recalled his meeting with “Ruth” in July 1945 after his return from Kandy. “Ruth” told him that “While you were away in India, we were once on the verge of clashing with the Japanese if there had not been strong disapproval of our act from Kandy. We are now in a very precarious position, not knowing as to when the Japanese would get us. I myself have to be very careful, having been informed that Japanese are often around here.” When Colonel Yothi met with his boss, General Sinad, he was also told the same story. “Whenever the Japanese move against us, that will be the day of our fierce resistance,” said the general. The deputy chief field commander also revealed his idea to Netr that Thailand must wait until D-Day, as planned, in order to keep her losses to a minimum. “But there are some people who want to act now,” said the general, “but their idea has been opposed by us, so they might think



that our soldiers are cowards.” Neutr Kemayothin informed his superior that Britain still legally held Thailand as her enemy, and as such all the assistance provided by SEAC had to go to the resistance movement, and not to Thailand’s armed forces. General Sinad-Yotharak also learned from “Colonel Yothi” that the Allies would not be ready to launch a major offensive in Southeast Asia for about three more months.

Neither “Ruth” nor General Sinad-Yotharak, and for that matter nobody at all, could predict what was going to happen during the next three months’ waiting. It was evident that the Japanese were not only suspicious of Thailand’s attitude, but they seemed to know what had been going on. It was learned later that General Nakamura, the Japanese commanding officer in Bangkok, had been instructed to make arrests of the leading Thai government members as well as the members of the resistance movement. But Nakamura, in sympathy with Thailand and the Thai people, and fully aware of the inevitable outcome of the war, kept postponing the carrying out of his superior’s instruction in order to avoid unnecessary bloodshed and destruction. “General Nakamura was a statesman as well as a soldier,” praised Direk Jayanama in his book. “He possessed great foresight, and was able to prevent fighting between the Thais and the Japanese.” On the day Japan surrendered, the Japanese general gave his samurai sword to Direk Jayanama as gift, and requested the latter to accept it, as the general had no desire to hand it to a representative of any other country. General Nakamura was one of the few Japanese generals who were not prosecuted as war criminals.

On August 15, 1945, Japan unconditionally surrendered. On the very same day, the British government, with the consent of the United States government, authorised Mountbatten to personally advise “Ruth” to “make announcement as soon as possible disavowing Thai declaration of war upon Britain and the United States and all measures flowing therefrom.” This account is found in the United States government’s “Foreign Relations of the United States, 1945”, Volume 6, pages 1278-79. Pridi received Mountbatten’s cable at dawn on August 16, Bangkok time. In the same cable, Lord Mountbatten was also authorised by his government to further advise that the announcement “might also state that Ruth had informed British and American Governments at an earlier stage that the resistance movement wished to initiate overt action against the enemy and refrained only on the request of the Allies for operational

reasons.” “If Ruth takes the necessary initiative as advised,” continued the cable, “British are disposed, because of support by Thai resistance movement and of allied request not to take action last May, to forego pressing for a separate act of unconditional surrender which under existing circumstances would be considered normal procedure, and to mould their policy according to Thai readiness to make restitution for the past and to cooperate for the future.” Lastly, Ruth was asked to send a representative immediately to Kandy to get in touch with the Allies.

It was proven in Mountbatten’s cable that the various efforts made by Pridi and his Free Thai movement throughout the war to contact the Allies, making an understanding with them and rendering whatever assistance they could to the common cause, as well as the risky proposal to initiate overt action against the Japanese, had borne fruitful results. Thailand was not required to “surrender”. Her sovereignty and honours were not impaired. She was not treated as a defeated country. Although there was going to be a price to pay for this, there could be nothing more valuable than the nation’s independence.

Upon receiving Lord Mountbatten’s cable, “Ruth” conferred with Prime Minister Kwang Abhaivong and Thawee Bunyakatu, the minister of education and minister attached to the prime minister’s office. They agreed to proclaim without delay a “peace declaration” on that same day — August 16, 1945. The royal proclamation made by Pridi Banomyong in the name of His Majesty King Ananda Mahidol and countersigned by Thawee Bunyakatu read as follows:

“Whereas Thailand has pursued a definite policy of maintaining strict neutrality and of resisting foreign aggression by all means, as is clearly evident from the enactment in 1941 of the Duties of Thais in Time of War Act, this absolute determination was made clear when Japan moved her forces into Thai territory on December 8, 1941, by acts resisting aggression everywhere, and many soldiers, policemen and civilians lost their lives thereby.

“This circumstance, which stands as evidence in itself, shows clearly that the declaration of war on Great Britain and the United States on January 25, 1942, as well as all acts adverse to the United Nations, were acts contrary to the will of the Thai people and constitute an infringement of the provisions of the constitution and the laws of the land. The Thai people inside as well as outside the country, who were in a

position to help and support the United Nations who wish to maintain world peace, have taken action by every means to assist them as most of them are already aware of. This demonstrates once again that the Thai people did not approve the declaration of war and acts adverse to the United Nations as already mentioned.

“Now that Japan has agreed to comply with the Potsdam declaration, peace has been restored to Thailand as the Thai people have wished.

“The regent, in the name of His Majesty the King, hereby openly proclaims on behalf of the Thai people that the declaration of war on the United States and Great Britain is null and void and not binding on the Thai people as far as the United Nations is concerned. Thailand has resolved that the good friendly relations existing with the United Nations prior to December 8, 1941, shall be restored and Thailand is ready to cooperate fully in every way with the United Nations in the establishment of stability in the world.

“As for the territories the occupancy of which Japan entrusted to Thailand, namely the States of Kelantan, Trengganu, Kedah, Perlis, Kengtung, and Muang Phan, Thailand has no desire of those territories and is ready to arrange for their delivery as soon as Great Britain is ready to take delivery thereof.

“As for any other provisions of the law having effects adverse to the United States, Great Britain, and the British Empire, their repeal shall be considered hereafter. All damage of any kind resulting from those laws will be legitimately made good.

“In conclusion, all the Thai people, as well as aliens who are in the kingdom, are requested to remain in tranquillity and not to commit any act that will constitute a disturbance of public order. They should hold steadfastly to the ideals which have been laid down in the resolutions of the United Nations at San Francisco.”

The “peace declaration” was also read to the urgent and special session of parliament which gave unanimous approval on the same day. At that session, Parliament also moved a vote of thanks to Prime Minister Kwuang Abhaivong and his government for their difficult tasks and unselfish efforts in bringing the country through danger until peace was restored. Kwuang deserved such praise, as it was by his wits and skilful “diplomacy” that prevented the Japanese from taking harsh action on Thailand despite their suspicion of many disguised activities carried

out by Thais against their interests. A man of rare quality, Kwuang Abhaivong had played his best role as a wartime prime minister under Japanese threats. With the agreement of the regent, Pridi, Kwuang and his government tendered their resignation on August 20, 1945, paving the way for a more appropriate person who had to handle the peace implications.

There was a meeting presided by Regent Pridi Banomyong and attended by General Adul-Dejcharas, General Sinad-Yotharak, Admiral Sangvorn-Yuthakit, Thawee Bunyakatu, Captain Subha-Chalasai R.T.N. and Direk Jayanama, all leading members of the resistance movement. The meeting considered who would be the most appropriate choice for the next prime minister, and unanimously agreed that Seni Pramroj would be the best man for the job under the circumstances. However, pending the return to Thailand of Seni during which there were so many things to be handled, Thawee Bunyakatu was nominated and appointed the prime minister on August 31. His government was to be in office only until September 17 when Seni arrived from Washington.

The choice of Seni Pramroj was an appropriate one. Seni had worked closely with Washington whose support Thailand badly needed for her peace settlements. Besides, Seni Pramroj was isolated and completely clear from any involvement with the Pibul regime whose acts were still unfavourably viewed by the Allies in general, and by the British in particular. The appointment of Seni as the new prime minister was also a demonstration on the Thai part of their sincerity to cooperate with the United Nations. In his letter to Seni Pramroj dated September 17, 1945, Pridi, as regent, said that "I consider that you possess the ability to administer the state affairs for the benefit of the country and you have acquaintance with the United Nations, so that good relations with them could be promoted ... My offering to you, prime ministership, is not a reward for you, but it is the duty that I entrust upon you to carry out for the nation ... I appoint you the prime minister as from this day ..."

It was at this point that Pridi Banomyong, then forty-five, was at the zenith of political power. To the Thai people, he was the king's representative, the ruling power behind the government, and above all, the man who had saved the nation. No one else was above, or even parallel to him in Thailand at that time. He was the hero of all heroes.

To the Allies, Pridi was "Ruth" of the Free Thai movement who



had been on their side in the war. Until the peace settlement, it was “Ruth”, not the Thai government, whom the Allies had recognised and dealt with. To the Allies, “Ruth” represented Thailand in totality.

Pridi Banomyong was admired by the Americans and respected by the British as the cornerstone of Thai democracy, peace, and idealism. Despite the British government’s relatively harsh attitude towards Thailand, Lord Mountbatten who had come to know “Ruth” and his wartime performances, on many occasions, unhesitatingly said some nice things about him. On December 27, 1946, during Pridi’s visit to Britain upon the British government’s invitation, Lord Louis Mountbatten delivered a speech at the City Livery Club, attended by representatives of the press, and in honour of the Thai statesman. Admiral Mountbatten had the following to say:

“In January 1945, he sent a body of his key resistance leaders under the command of the present foreign minister of Thailand (Direk Jayanama) for consultations with me in Kandy. We got them out and back again by seaplane, or by flying-boats. During our talks we laid concrete plans for future action in conjunction with the main forces of my theatre. I had constantly under review the need for Pridi himself to be flown out in an emergency. By the end of the war he had organised sabotage and guerrilla forces comprising some 60,000 fighting men and numerous passive supporters, who were in positions at all the key strategic points in Thailand poised to strike.

“I realised the difficulty he had to hold these forces in leash, but I had also to keep in mind the tremendous danger of a premature move which would bring down crushing Japanese counteraction and disturb my strategic plans for the theatre as a whole. The strain imposed on Pridi and the risks he ran for over three years were very formidable, but his own discipline and that which he inspired in his followers won out. He never failed us.

“There are, I know, many who were prisoners of war in Thailand who have good reason to be grateful for Pridi’s goodwill to us. So let us honour the man who has rendered high service to the allied cause and to his own country, and who, from my personal knowledge of him, is a firm advocate of Anglo-Thai friendship. The chain of local resistance to Japanese oppression in the occupied lands of Southeast Asia had very few gaps in it, and one of the strongest links was forged by Pridi in

Thailand.”

There were loud and prolonged cheers following Mountbatten’s speech.

Now the war was over and the nation’s sovereignty had been retained. To Pridi, although the ending of the hostility was a pause of stress and strain on his part, it was a very brief pause indeed. In fact, as we shall see, the postwar struggles for him personally were even more formidable than those during the wartime. In war, the nation was united for a common cause and his leadership was not challenged. In peace time, the situation was different. Being on top of the government’s echelon, he was inescapably subject to both pressures and demands. People looked at him as if he were Aladdin’s genie that could satisfy every want and desire, and a dissatisfaction on their part was to lead to anger, exasperation and indignation. If political power could turn enemies into friends, it also could turn friends into enemies.



CHAPTER 14

THE LAST PHASE OF A POLITICAL CAREER

“Those who have joined with me in the Free Thai movement do not consider themselves the nation’s liberators,” declared Pridi Banomyong before the assembly of thousands of Free Thai members on September 26, 1945, upon the dissolution of the movement, “they have only served their nation. Once the situation has returned to normal, then the activities of the Free Thai movement come to an end.”

The activities of the Free Thai movement had ceased as soon as the war ended, but the formidable diplomatic task of the negotiation for the price Thailand had to pay in settling the account with Britain had begun. When it came to the matter concerning interests, the British were tough, unkind and demanding. The British demands were based on Thailand’s declaration of war on them in January 1942.

The United States attitude was entirely different. Being delivered Thailand’s peace declaration by Minister Seni Pramoj in Washington, Secretary of State James Byrnes announced on August 21, 1945, that the United States government had always believed that the declaration of war had not been the wish of the Thai people and for this reason, it had never accepted it, but had continued to recognise the Thai minister to Washington as Thailand’s representative. Secretary Byrnes further stated that the United States had been in constant contact with the Free Thai movement from which she received substantial cooperation. The United States had viewed Thailand as a country to be liberated from the

enemy, and not as an enemy itself. Now that Thailand was free from enemy control, the United States would like to see her resume her place in the world's community as a free, sovereign and independent nation.

Two days earlier, on August 19, the British foreign secretary, Ernest Bevin, also made a statement concerning Thailand in which a number of reservations were contained. Bevin said that while Britain acknowledged the assistance she had received from the Thai resistance movement, she had yet to consider the Thai peace declaration carefully to see "if there were grounds for reconsidering the wrongful position which Thailand would normally be deemed to have placed herself in." The British foreign secretary also stated that there were many problems which had to be settled and the attitude of the British government would "depend on the extent to which the Thai cooperated with the British forces (now) in Thailand, on how far the Thais were willing to correct the faults of the previous regime and pay compensation for the damage, destruction and hindrance caused to the interests of the British and the Allies, and on how far they helped and cooperated in restoring peace and economic well-being in Southeast Asia."

On September 2, 1945, the Thai delegation arrived in Kandy to negotiate and sign a military agreement with Britain. The delegation was led by Lt General Sena-Narong, the commanding general of the 5th division which had fiercely resisted the Japanese landing in southern Thailand on December 8, 1941. It also included Colonel Netr Kemayothin, then deputy army's chief of staff, Wing Commander Dawee Chullasapaya, and Major Puey Ungpakorn, all of them having had close contact with the British Force 136 at Kandy. The Thai delegation was hopeful that the British would be considerate and their demands accommodating. It was a great disappointment. The British demands which were as harsh as those imposed on a defeated enemy included the following:

No. 1: Thailand was to abolish all military, paramilitary and political organisations conducting propaganda hostile to the United Nations.

No. 8: Thailand was to cooperate in charging and investigating persons accused of having been war criminals or having afforded active assistance to Japan or having been open enemies of the Allies;

No. 10: Thailand was to maintain and be ready to place at the

disposal of allied officers, naval, military and air force, together with the use of the ports, airfields, construction materials, equipment, communication routes, arms and other stores as might be required from time to time for accommodation and storage purposes by allied officers arriving to disarm the Japanese.

No. 15: Thailand was to agree that Thai freighters, whether in home or foreign waters, be subject to allied control for use as required by the Allies.

No. 16: Thailand was to agree to the setting up of a military mission to be appointed by the appropriate military authority to act as consultants on the organisation, training and equipping of the Thai armed forces.

No. 17: Thailand was to agree not to export rice, tin, rubber and teak for a period of time.

No. 18: Thailand must increase her rice production and the resulting surpluses were to be made available to the allied rice committee at prices to be agreed upon by this said committee and based on the controlled price of rice in other Asian countries.

No. 19: Thailand was to agree with the allied rice committee on the details necessary to bring about above requirement in the most effective way. Details of this were to be included in the appendices to this treaty and were to provide for the following, namely that: (a) the Allies would take whatever measures might be required for the fulfilment of these obligations until the Thai government was itself, in the opinion of the Allies, in a position to ensure this; and for (b) the continued cooperation thereafter of the Thai government with the allied rice committee in order that obligations already incurred continued to be administered.

No. 20: Thailand was to agree that Thai monetary policy, together with the rate of exchange, be fixed according to the advice of allied representatives, with a view of facilitating the production of the greatest possible yield of rice and other necessary food commodities, and to avoid economic problems.

Appendix A prescribed the details of the procedures that would be required in order to guarantee the production of the required amount of rice and Appendix B in effect allowed the British control over all communications in the country.

No. 21: Thailand was to continue the civil administration subject to the requirements of allied officers in the pursuance of their tasks.

“If all of these twenty-one proposals had been put into effect,” wrote Direk Jayanama, “it would have meant that controls were placed over all of Thailand’s political, military and economic affairs.”

The draft of the pact was handed to the Thai delegation to study on the morning of September 4, just before the luncheon given by Admiral Lord Mountbatten in its honour. Stunned by the British demands, the delegation assigned Dawee to contact Colonel Coughlin, chief of the American OSS at Kandy. Coughlin, a Westpointer who had worked closely with the Free Thai movement, suggested that the Thai delegation should not sign the pact until he had received instruction from Washington. He then radioed General Donovan, his superior in Washington, who had no prior knowledge of such British proposals. The Thai delegation, in the meanwhile, refused to sign the pact on the grounds of lacking authority to do so. “We were fully authorised to negotiate, yes,” wrote Dawee Chullasapaya, “but not fully authorised to hand over the nation’s sovereignty.”

Upon receiving the report from the Thai delegation, Pridi consulted with his colleagues in the government and finally decided that it was, for the time being, necessary to yield to the British demands. Parliament was also called to an urgent session and regretfully informed about the development. However, at that time, Washington had already made a strong protest to Britain that the latter had moved without prior consultation with the United States. American intervention changed the whole situation. Only the military agreement was signed separately on September 8, and it was confined only to cooperation in the matters relating to prisoners of war, the disarming of Japanese troops and the use of facilities.

On that day, the prime minister-designate, Seni Pramoj, arrived in Colombo on his way back to Thailand. Before leaving Washington, he had received information from Bangkok that a negotiation was going on at Kandy and Seni was instructed to negotiate the matter in Washington, although no details about the British proposals were given to him. The prime minister-designate tried to contact the British embassy in Washington in order to open the negotiation, but he was informed by the British that the latter had not received any instruction from London on the

matter. While in London, Seni also called at the British foreign office, but nobody mentioned the twenty-one proposals treaty. He only learned about the British demands after arriving in Calcutta, from Dawee Chullasapaya and Konthi Suphamongkhon, a young Thai diplomat whom Pridi had sent to Washington before the war ended. "I then learned about the twenty-one proposals to which Bangkok had already yielded," said Seni. "After studying them, I found nothing but an agreement to reduce Thailand's status to a British protectorate. I therefore saw no benefits to return home and become a colonial prime minister." Konthi however comforted the prime minister-designate by informing him that things were improving since the United States had intervened. Seni flew to Bangkok on September 16 in an American plane during which as he said later, "I gave my guarantee to Konthi that I would not sign such an agreement." Seni Pramroj took office on September 17, 1945.

The Seni cabinet was essentially a Free Thai cabinet. General Adul-Dejcharas served as deputy prime minister, General Sinad-Yotharak as defence minister, but was later replaced by General Vichit-Songgram, Direk Jayanama as finance minister and Thawee Bunyakatu as minister of interior. Seni took the foreign affairs portfolio himself. Also included in the cabinet were those leading members of parliament who had been active in the resistance movement. In Seni's policy statement it appeared, for the first time in Thailand's democratic history, an explicit advocate to keep the political appointments and permanent civil service strictly separated. The choice of his cabinet must have been strongly influenced by Pridi's advice. Seni himself admitted that he was, at that time, not so clear on who's who in Thai politics.

Within a few days after Seni had taken office, the new government was asked by Britain to send another delegation to Kandy regarding the normalisation of relations between the two countries. The Thai delegation which left Bangkok on September 22, 1945, was led by Prince Vivat, then financial adviser. It also included two members of the royal family who were English-educated, then serving in the Thai armed forces. Dr Konthi and Major Puey Ungpakorn were also included. The delegation was instructed not to sign any agreement with the British before consultation with the government. It turned out in Kandy that the British had expanded their demands from twenty-one to fifty-one proposals, basically the same as the original demands, except that they

were more elaborate. Under the new proposals, Thailand was required to provide Britain with one and a half million tons of free rice, as war indemnity, in addition to the compensatory payments for damage and destruction of British properties, plus expenses on British prisoners of war. Seni found out later that the heavier burden imposed on Thailand was partly the result of British displeasure over the Thai approach to the United States for assistance. In any case, the prime minister was contented with the fact that he was given the chance to re-negotiate with Britain.

Britain, in the meanwhile, encouraged France to demand the return of Indochinese territories which had become parts of Thailand since 1940. Although Seni Pramroj, like Pridi, was not too happy about the way in which the Pibul government regained the former territories by force, he was also determined not to let the French just take them back. The Seni government announced that the territories in question had been regained with the sacrifice of Thai lives and France had already been given compensatory payments, therefore the settlement could be made only by legal process in the international court.

The Thai delegation tried its best to persuade the British to modify some of their demands which were unacceptable. But Maberly Denning, the chief British negotiator, was not prepared to yield. The negotiation, therefore, came to a deadlock. During that time, Seni and Pridi were informed by Brigadier-General Jex, the British military representative in Bangkok, that if Thailand yielded to the delivery of one and a half million tons of free rice, then the rest of the British demands could be modified. This expectation, supported by humanitarian consideration, prompted the Seni government to request Parliament's consent to the delivery of free rice to the British. Such a request came under heavy attack in Parliament, and for the first time, the man who had been recognised as patriot was accused as traitor only after he had taken office for barely one month. Finally, the government offered to resign if its proposal was not approved because without Parliament's consent on the rice delivery, it was not possible to further negotiate with Britain. The national assembly, therefore, agreed in principle, provided that Thailand was given concessions to her satisfaction on other matters.

Even with the agreement to deliver free rice, the Thai delegation at Kandy still found Britain strongly insistent on the other demands.

Furthermore, the British also showed unusual coldness and lack of cordiality towards Prince Vivat and his delegation. In Bangkok, the British made a direct approach to Pridi through Prince Suphasawat, trying to convince him that the signing of the fifty-one-clause agreement was only the right thing to do. In their letter dated October 28, 1945, addressed to the regent, the British recommended that the Thai government sign the agreement and then they would assure Thailand of the fairest treatment. Seni did not show his special interest to the British suggestion, but rather was under the impression that the British were attempting to divide himself and the regent by directly approaching Pridi. He was also sceptical about the liaison role played by Prince Suphasawat.

Seni's stubbornness began to create public criticism and concern, as it seemed that the unsettled situation was not to the advantage of Thailand. At that time, Parliament had been dissolved and the country was preparing for its first postwar general election. It was therefore the time for political debates. In cabinet, Seni found many of his colleagues favoured the signing, particularly those who were close to Pridi, such as Direk Jayanama, Thawee Bunyakatu and Sa-nguan Tulalak. The prime minister therefore called on the regent and told him in an uncompromising manner of his strong objection to the signing of the agreement. Seni informed Pridi that his government would delay the signing as long as possible, trying to make its utmost effort to preserve Thailand's sovereignty.

On December 1, 1945, the British again asked the Thai government to send a delegation to Singapore in order to resume the interrupted talk. Seni agreed to do so, and Prince Vivat and his team were dispatched to Singapore on December 9. One day before the Thai delegation's departure, Prime Minister Seni was handed a letter from Dening stating that Britain was still not satisfied about the extent of the assistance Thailand had provided to the Allies in war efforts, and felt that Thailand should be grateful to the Allies for having defeated Japan before any actual fighting took place on the Thai territory. Dening also told Seni that the British proposals put forward could not be changed in substance and that Thailand had to give free rice without any conditions attached to it, the delivery of which must be immediate.

Prince Vivat flew back to report to the cabinet on December 12. According to Prince Vivat, Maberly Dening had stated in a preaching

manner that the reason for the meeting was because Thailand had declared war on Britain, and the British demands which were already “minimal” were not negotiable. If Thailand agreed, then the state of war between the two countries would come to an end right away. Prince Vivat, in his report to the cabinet on December 12, and again on the following day, expressed his delegation’s opinion that as there was no way to negotiate for lighter penalty, Thailand had better sign the agreement. Besides, there were thousands of British troops in the country which were not only costing the Thai government expenditure, but were also creating unbearable social problems. If Thailand still refused to agree, the British might even send more troops into Thailand as the means to pressure the Thai government. The majority of the cabinet also favoured the signing as inevitable. Pridi, invited to attend the crucial cabinet’s meeting on December 12, was also in favour of the signing, giving his rough calculation of the possibility for Thailand to sustain the British demands financially. The cabinet after careful deliberation, decided to yield to the British and instructed Prince Vivat to inform Dening accordingly.

On December 14, after Prince Vivat had left Bangkok for Singapore, Charles Yost, the United States representative in Bangkok, came to inform Prime Minister Seni that Washington had already intervened in this matter, so that Thailand should postpone the signing of the agreement. Seni cabled Prince Vivat accordingly. A few days earlier, being informed about the British pressure by both Seni and Pridi, Yost cabled Washington which, in turn, instructed the American embassy in London to make protest, asking London to stop Dening in Singapore from going any further. Prince Vivat, who had already informed Dening of his government’s agreement to sign, reported that after the American intervention, Dening’s attitude suddenly changed from coldness to one of extreme cordiality. As a result, the British softened their demands to almost what the Thai government had wished to see. The Formal Agreement which was signed on January 1, 1946, in Singapore, ending the state of war between the two countries included the following major provisions:

1. Restoration of the status quo ante bellum.
2. Thailand declared void any actions which she had carried out against the British following the Japanese occupation. The status quo

ante bellum would be restored and compensation paid for damage to British properties.

3. Thailand would take responsibility for safeguarding and restoring unimpaired British property, rights and interests in Thailand.

4. Thailand agreed that the war with Japan had demonstrated the importance of Thailand to the defence of the region and would therefore cooperate fully in international security arrangements.

5. Thailand would not cut any canal across Thai territory to connect the Indian Ocean and the Gulf of Thailand without British consent.

6. Until September 1, 1947, Thailand agreed not to export rice, rubber, teak and tin.

7. Thailand was to give free of charge, one and a half million tons of rice.

8. Until September 1, 1947, Thailand would arrange to make available all of her rice above her domestic requirements at prices to be fixed.

9. Thailand would arrange with Britain for the upkeep of war cemeteries in Thailand.

10. Britain would support Thailand as a candidate for membership in the United Nations.

During the following two years, there were gradual amendments of the Formal Agreement, especially that the rice delivery was to be paid for, until finally when Direk Jayanama was posted as Thai ambassador to London in 1947, Britain agreed to terminate the Formal Agreement on the grounds of its obsolescence. The story of negotiation with Britain after the war revealed the heavy burden and responsibility of everyone concerned, including Pridi Banomyong. Although Thailand had again managed to restore her sovereignty with endurance and diplomatic skills, one big scar was left on Thai politics and unity. The postwar political leaders were divided and had become suspicious of each other. Pridi's followers became critical of Seni, which deeply hurt the latter's feelings. On that account, Seni began to lose his reverence for Pridi Banomyong, the consequence of which proved to be devastating to Pridi's political career later.

On September 27, 1945, Seni introduced that bill on war criminals to Parliament. It was no secret that towards the end of the war, the Allies,

through mass media, had expressed their determination to bring Field Marshal Pibul-Songgram and some of his confidants on trial as war criminals. There seemed to be two alternatives open to the government: sending “war criminals” to the Allies upon their request, or handling the “war crimes” internally. The Seni government had chosen the second alternative. It was not likely that both Pridi and Seni, in the passage of the War Criminals Act, were primarily interested to either help or destroy Pibul-Songgram. Both men were more concerned about the interests of the nation, as well as in seeing that justice was done. However, Pridi was prepared to do whatever he could in seeing to it that those accused of “war crime” were provided with the fairest opportunity to defend themselves before the law.

Parliament was quite stormy during the bill’s readings. But finally, the bill was passed into law, not without some amendments which demonstrated the House’s unwillingness to punish the “war criminals”. On October 15, 1945, the Parliament which had been in session since 1938 was dissolved, and a general election was to be held within ninety days.

Under the War Criminals Act, a number of persons including Field Marshal Pibul-Songgram, General Phrom-Yothi, General Prayoon Bhamornmontri, General Seri-Reangridthi and Ambassador Vichitr-Vathakarn were arrested. The field marshal took his arrest calmly and engaged a prominent defence counsel. Pibul’s legal defence was based on the grounds that he was compelled under Japanese pressure and the circumstances to cooperate with Japan, that his cooperation with the Japanese was only superficial, that his government never inflicted any damage on the Allies and that he had secretly organised his resistance based on the Thai army. Pibul, however, had no chance to defend his case as planned. On March 23, 1946, the supreme court ruled that the retrospective War Criminals Act was void and unconstitutional and thus set free Pibul and all other suspects. It was Seni Pramoj who suffered most directly from the consequence. Even today, many of Pibul’s followers still remember him as the man who put their hero in jail.

When the war ended on August 16, 1945, King Ananda Mahidol was approaching his maturity. He would be twenty on September 20 in that year, the age at which he himself could assume his state duties. But since the king was still in Switzerland, Parliament, on September 6,



passed a resolution reappointing Dr Pridi Banomyong to serve as regent until His Majesty's return to Bangkok. On that day, Pridi sent a cable to Lausanne: "... the day is now approaching when Your Majesty will formally assume the royal state duties. I therefore humbly beseech Your Majesty to return to the capital in order to conduct the affairs of the state in accordance with the constitution, and as from September 20, my regency will terminate."

On September 14, the king replied: "I have received your telegram asking me to come back and take up my duty. Although I have concern about my country, I rather feel it more appropriate if I may be allowed to complete my studies. I have passed my first-year in law last July, after which I still have other more difficult examinations which require about one year and a half, and then I will need about one year to prepare for my doctorate thesis. I hope that you understand my desire to complete my studies. If you and the government agree, I should like to go home for a visit before completion of my studies. I wish to thank you sincerely and I am grateful to you for the difficult work you have done and are doing in my name."

Upon receiving the king's cable, Regent Pridi sent Ananda another cable in which he gave warm response to the king's wish to visit his capital. He also informed Ananda of the constitutional revision which was going on at the time and said that the king's return, even for a short visit, "would be most highly desirable for national interest," because "these fundamental issues would be decided with Your Majesty's personal participation and consent."

The young king, accompanied by the princess mother and His Royal Highness Prince Bhumibol, his younger brother, arrived in Thailand on December 5, 1945. As soon as the king arrived, Pridi returned all the powers to the reigning monarch, thus his regency had come to an end. Three days later, on December 8, His Majesty conferred on Pridi the title of "senior statesman" in recognition of his "performances of the various duties with honesty, integrity and loyalty to the nation, the religion, the monarchy and the constitution, as well as with proven capability and wisdom, rendering a great deal of benefits to the country". As senior statesman, the title he still holds until today, Pridi was entrusted with "the duty to render advice on the affairs to the state for the lasting progress of the nation".

During his four years as regent, Pridi, despite his crucial responsibility in the Free Thai movement and in other government functions, showed his absolute loyalty to the monarch he was representing, as well as to the members of the royal family under his care. When the war was entering its critical stage and aerial bombing had become a part of life in Bangkok, Pridi took personal initiative in preparing the Bang Pa-in Palace near Ayudhya as the royal residence of the queen grandmother, while the regent himself devoted much of his time personally in attendance. "Please take good care of my grandson," King Chulalongkorn's consort often told Pridi when he was in private audience with her, "he is still a child, you know." His strong request to the Allies to avoid bombing in the area close to Bang Pa-in where the queen grandmother and members of the royal family were staying was well-known to both the Allied and Free Thai officers.

Dr Pridi Banomyong had been a great admirer of King Ananda's father, H.R.H. Prince Mahidol of Songkhla, since the time the benevolent prince had made a visit to Paris in the 1920's. For this reason, when the issue of King Prachathipok's successor came up for cabinet's consideration in 1935, Pridi unhesitatingly mounted his support for the choice of Prince Ananda Mahidol to succeed to the throne. In 1936, while on his official trip to Europe, he had an audience with the young king at Lausanne. Again in 1938, when King Ananda Mahidol paid his first visit to his country as the reigning monarch, Pridi, then foreign minister, had an opportunity to show his loyalty to his young lord of life. On this visit of the king, Dr Pridi, although no longer active in government service, still occasionally was granted audience with His Majesty, particularly when Ananda Mahidol required his advice on some important state affairs. It was only after Pridi had become prime minister that he had regular audience with the young king.

His becoming prime minister on March 24, 1946, was something unexpected. Unfortunate as subsequent events were to reveal, it was the result of political disunity already beginning during the strained period of the Seni government, and coming out to the open following the general election which took place on January 6, 1946. At that time, there appeared in the shadows three main groups of politicians contesting for parliamentary seats or giving support in the background. The first group, led by former Prime Minister Kwuang Abhaiwong, consisted of the



“liberals” who, with the exception of their leader, had attachment neither to the People’s Party nor to the prewar building of political institutions. These politicians might have come from different backgrounds, but they had one thing in common, that is, the detestation of a political system which placed absolute loyalty to a single man no matter who he was, including the national hero, Pridi Banomyong. Later, these politicians would combine themselves under the band of the “Democratic Party”. The second group consisted of members of the People’s Party, both Pridi’s and Pibul’s factions. Although their intra-unity might not have been always solid, when it came to a confrontation with opponents, the spirit of the June 24 “promoters” still proved to be very strong. They called themselves the “Constitutional Front”. The last group consisted mainly of veteran representatives who had fought against the Pibul government and had joined with the resistance movement during the war, many of whom from the northeastern provinces. Socio-economically, they were more progressive than the other two groups and could be considered “social democrats” according to the western political standards. These politicians found in Pridi Banomyong their intellectual mentor, as well as ideal leader for their socio-economic-change programmes.

On January 24, 1946, King Ananda Mahidol officially opened the new parliament. After that, there was an unofficial sounding of a new prime minister to succeed Seni Pramoj. The House’s majority expressed their favour for Dr Pridi Banomyong, but the senior statesman declined the offer. After the second sounding, the national assembly chose Major Kwuang Abhaiwong to form the new government. Kwuang, upon his appointment on January 31, selected Seni Pramoj as his foreign minister, General Sinad-Yotharak as his defence minister, Phya Srivasarn as finance minister, Captain Subha-Chalasai as industry minister and many new faces from the popularly elected MPs. In his policy statement, the prime minister referred to the constitutional amendments which began during his previous government as one of the tasks his new government was determined to accomplish. On February 21, 1946, the draft of the new constitution was submitted to Parliament by a group of second-category members including Seni Pramoj and Direk Jayanama. Pridi Banomyong was elected chairman of the ad hoc committee to further study the draft. The committee also elected Kukrit Pramoj, Seni’s

younger brother who had successfully become a representative for Bangkok, to be its secretary.

The idea of amending, or rather rewriting, the constitution was initiated by Dr Pridi Banomyong while regent in 1944. He passed the idea to Kwang Abhaivong, then prime minister, to consider the amendments that would bring it up to the changed circumstances, as well as to promote the democratic system of government. Since then, the work had been carried on nearing its final stages in 1946. The new constitution had a bicameral parliament, both chambers popularly elected, although at the initial stage the senators were to be elected by the House of Representatives in session.

In June 1976, thirty years after the event, in his reply to the question as to why he declined to accept premiership after Seni Pramoj and, instead, rendered his support for Kwang Abhaivong, Pridi said that at that time he still had a good deal of responsibility in trying to alleviate Thailand's burden imposed by the British Formal Agreement, and besides, he also needed some rest after the stress and strain of the work he had carried out during the war years. "But it was not true that I endorsed Kwang to become the prime minister after Seni," explained Dr Pridi. "Kwang came to see me and asked for my support, but I advised him that since he was prime minister during the war and although I had declared the declaration of war void, the British still demanded from us much compensation. So, as a matter of political etiquette, he should give way to other people, such as Direk Jayanama. Kwang however did not take my advice." Pridi also admitted that in the case that he accepted the offer to become prime minister after Seni, although there would have been no problem with regard to the initial vote of confidence, he could still foresee difficulties both from inside and outside Parliament.

By this time, as differences in viewpoints had widened, politicians began to formulate different political groupings in the form of political parties. The "Democratic Party" found leadership in Kwang Abhaivong, with Seni Pramoj as his second in command. Admiral Thamrong-Navasawat, former justice minister during the Pibul government, became the leader of the "Constitutional Front", whose membership was drawn from members of the People's Party. Dr Duean Bunnag, a Pridi follower, led the "Sahaship Party" of "social democratic" politicians including Thong-in Bhuribhat, Thawil Udol, Chamlong Downreang and Tiang Sirikahn,



veteran representatives who had actively worked for the wartime resistance movement.

On March 14, 1946, Thong-in of the Sahaship, with the support of the Constitutional Front, tabled a bill on price control measures and managed to get Parliament to accept it in principle in a very close voting. As the measures proposed in the bill were not in principle acceptable to the government, Kwuang, in frustration, tendered his resignation on March 18.

The next day, the house speaker called an informal meeting of Parliament to sound out a suitable person to replace Major Kwuang Abhaivong. Most of the members who attended the meeting favoured Pridi Banomyong, but some expressed doubt if the senior statesman would accept it. The house speaker, together with a group of MPs therefore went to Pridi's residence and informed him that the House majority requested that he accept the prime ministership. The reason given was such that there appeared to be no one else more appropriate for the job during the political crisis and also in view of the fact that the country was still engaged in further negotiations with the Allies. Pridi was compelled by a sense of responsibility to yield to the house speaker and his colleagues' requests, but not before making it clear that he would remain prime minister only for a couple of months, then Parliament would have to find somebody else to take his place. King Ananda Mahidol appointed Pridi Banomyong the prime minister of Thailand on March 24, one day after the supreme court had acquitted Field Marshal Pibul-Songgram and those accused of war crimes.

The sixteen-man Pridi cabinet was drawn largely from the former civilian faction of the People's Party, including Direk as foreign minister, Thawee as agriculture minister, Kree Dejativong as commerce minister and Dr Duean Bunnag as education minister. The cabinet also included General Vichit-Songgram, a former chief of staff of Pibul, as minister of defence and Colonel Chavengsak-Songgram as interior minister. In fact, half of them had been, on one occasion or another, cabinet ministers in the Pibul-Songgram government. It was also implicit that the Pridi government was, in a way, a "coalition" of the Constitutional Front and the Sahaship party. In his policy statement, Pridi laid great emphasis on the country's financial rehabilitation, including the negotiation to release Thailand's monetary reserves frozen in the United States and Britain, the

establishment of the exchange rates and the efforts to lay the foundation for monetary stability. In addition, Pridi also stressed the problems of the rising cost of living, of law and order, of improving welfare of the servicemen and civil servants, and of improving public health services.

During the short term of his government, from March 24 to June 6, 1946, there were a few events that could be credited as the government's achievements. On April 3, upon the request of the Thai government, the American embassy informed Foreign Minister Direk that the United States government had agreed to release Thailand's gold in the United States. Direk also recalled that as soon as Pridi assumed office, the foreign minister was also instructed by him to negotiate with Britain on the gold held in Britain. In June, the British agreed to release part of it, valued at about one million pound sterling. As a result of this, Pridi revalued the Baht from sixty baht to one pound sterling, and fifteen baht to one US dollar, to forty baht and ten baht respectively. The revaluation of the currency was also backed by the success in the government's negotiation with Britain over the rice delivery in which Britain agreed to pay, instead of demanding it free of charge. Prime Minister Pridi made a statement concerning all this "good news" in Parliament on May 2, at the end of which he assured Parliament that his government was trying its best to negotiate for the return of all gold assets, not only from Britain, but also from Japan. "I have told you all this in order to make you realise that the future of our country is no longer in darkness," said the prime minister.

The most important event of all was the granting of the new constitution. On May 7 which was the end of the last parliamentary session under the constitution of 1932, Prime Minister Pridi Banomyong delivered a long speech commending the late King Prachathipok for his gracious granting of the first constitution. Pridi also expressed what he believed to be fundamental for a system of constitutional democracy. Parts of his speech were as follows:

"Our democracy is a democratic system based on law, ethical practices, and integrity. Democracy must not be confused with anarchy which is dangerous to society and the nation. A democratic system of government cannot be maintained if law, ethics, and integrity are lacking. It is democracy, and not anarchy, that King Prachathipok graciously granted to the nation.

“I do not wish to see totalitarianism developed in Thailand, and for this reason, the prevention of anarchy which leads to totalitarianism is imperative. If we adhere to the principle which I have just stated, a dictatorial regime will never come into existence. I was one of those who made the request for the constitution from the king and have given great care to our democracy since then. I have no reason to turn into an enemy of the democratic system of government. I observe that there are people who mistake anarchy for democracy. I do not demand that everybody must always agree with me. In fact, I wish to see difference and opposition, but they should be expressed with sincerity and honesty. In politics, we must exercise our democratic rights with integrity, for benefit of the whole, and not for personal interests based on jealousy and enviousness. I have respect for those who show their honesty and integrity and we can work together. There have been people who were opposed to the People’s Party, but are truly loyal to the monarchy. I have respect in loyalty and we together have served our country. But there are also people who are loyalist only on the outside ...”

It is clear from Pridi’s statement that by that time, only nine months after the war had ended, there were political opponents who had taken the wrong course in the battle for power. Those opponents had adopted unethical practices out of jealousy and envy and they tended to make use of the occasion of King Ananda Mahidol’s visit to the capital for their own political advantage. They called themselves “royalists”!

The house speaker, Phya Manavarajsevi, who later was to become King Bhumibol’s privy councillor for some two decades, made a touching reply on behalf of the national assembly. “I wish to state with sincere respect,” said the house speaker, “that all of us in Parliament are not only impressed by your statement, but we have been unequivocally impressed, from the very beginning until now, in your efforts for upholding democracy in Thailand ... I am prepared to confirm the fact that you have been carrying out your responsibility with honesty and integrity which deserve high respect ... Besides, without the prime minister, the constitutional amendment would not have been possible ...”

On May 9, 1946, King Ananda Mahidol signed the new constitution in a royal ceremony at the Ananda Throne Hall, just like his uncle, King Prachathipok, did on December 10, 1932. On this occasion, Prime Minister Pridi Banomyong was the one on hand to present the young king

the new constitution for the royal signature, and he himself countersigned it. Pridi was proud of the occasion. It was the fruit of his untiring effort to move Thailand one more step forward on the road to democracy. The new constitution did confirm constitutional monarchy as Thailand's permanent system of government, and also confirmed the reality of popular participation in government on the part of the Thai people.

After the new constitution had taken effect, there was the election of the Senate on May 24, in which the members of the House of Representatives initially exercised voting rights on behalf of the public as prescribed by the constitution. By this time, the political splits had become explicit and "political parties" prepared their lists of candidates for the election of the eighty senators. Kwuang Abhaivong's Democratic Party prepared a list which consisted mostly of retired officials of high rank and titles, indicating the Party's inclination towards conservatism. The Constitutional Front, the Sahaship and the Independence, in the meanwhile, prepared separate lists of candidates. But about a couple of days before the election, having learned of the Democratic Party's tactic in submitting a "package" list of candidates, the three other parties agreed to an alliance, combining their lists into one. Under these circumstances, the election was based on the parties' lists and not on individual candidates. It was a direct contest between the Democratic Party and the allied Constitutional Front-Sahaship Parties. The election turned out to be a complete victory for the Constitutional Front-Sahaship allies. All eighty candidates on their combined list were elected to the newly created Senate.

The senators-elected consisted mostly of former members of the People's Party, many of whom had been former ministers in the Pibul-Songgram's cabinets, including Pridi Banomyong, Colonel Kaj-Songgram, General Kriangsak-Bhichit, General Seri-Reangridthi, Colonel Chavengsak-Songgram, Direk Jayanama, Kree Dejativong, Dr Duean Bunnag, Admiral Thamrong-Navasawat, General Prayoon Bhamornmontri, General Phrom-Yothi, and Vilas Ostanond. Prince Wan Waithayakorn was the only member of the royal family on the list. Seri-Reangridthi, Prayoon Bhamornmontri and Phrom-Yothi were among those who had been accused as "war criminals" with Pibul. The contest for the Senate in 1946 therefore resembled the struggle between the People's Party and the Manopakorn Group in 1933. In the former



struggle, Song-Suradej of the People's Party took side with Manopakorn, whereas in 1946, Kwuang Abhaivong, also of the People's Party, led the conservative opposition to his former party.

It was obvious that the defeat suffered at the senate election was a humiliation on the part of the Democratic Party under Kwuang-Seni leadership. Democratic politicians began launching open attacks on their political opponents, with Prime Minister Pridi Banomyong as the main target. Pridi was accused of nepotism and a lust for power. In fact for Kwuang, the humiliation he suffered was understandable. It began with Pridi's refusal to give him the support for prime ministership. Then Pridi's followers managed to defeat his government in Parliament only six weeks after it had taken office. Now, the parties of Pridi's support again took all the seats in the Senate. It looked as if Pridi was not going to give him any chance in politics. As for Seni, he had also clashed with Pridi during the British Agreement negotiation. But more importantly, the attacks made on him by Pridi's followers, while serving as prime minister, were humiliating. Both Kwuang and Seni had large followers, many of whom, including Kukrit Pramoj, were gifted orators with great persuasive power over the masses. As the result of the Democrat's attack, Pridi's image as a statesman began to crumble.

On June 1, 1946, King Ananda Mahidol officially opened the new session of Parliament and both chambers began their functions on June 3. On that day, Pridi Banomyong tendered his resignation as his work had been completed, and he had fulfilled his words that he would be in office for only a couple of months. With the new constitution in effect, there also should be a new government.

But on June 7, there was a call for an informal joint meeting of the two chambers to sound out the members' views on the next prime minister. The meeting unanimously agreed that Dr Pridi Banomyong was again the most appropriate choice for the chief executive post. Without consultation with him, the president of the Senate requested the king to appoint Pridi as prime minister, and the appointment was made on June 8.

Learning of the appointment, Pridi requested an audience with the king and informed Ananda Mahidol that he sincerely desired no executive power, and that he was already grateful for the title "senior statesman" which the king had graciously bestowed on him. However, since the

appointment had already been made, he was obliged to serve in the capacity of prime minister only temporarily. Pridi humbly requested the young king to consider somebody else to replace him. Ananda Mahidol told Pridi that he would rather see the latter continue as prime minister for a while during the transition period.

Ananda Mahidol's appointment of Pridi Banomyong as prime minister on June 8, 1946, was to become the twenty-year-old king's last official duty. Less than twenty-four hours after his meeting with the prime minister, and before the new cabinet had been formed, one of the most tragic events in modern Thai history did occur.

On Sunday June 9, 1946, at 9.00 a.m., King Ananda Mahidol was found dead in his bed at the Grand Palace.

The event meant a tragic loss to the nation, an adverse turning point in the history of Thailand's democracy, and unequivocally the beginning of the darkest hours in the life of one of the king's most loyal servants, Pridi Banomyong.



CHAPTER 15

THE DARKEST HOURS

“From the day I knew of the death of King Ananda Mahidol until the time I learned of the supreme court’s ruling on October 12, 1954,” stated Pridi Banomyong in 1978, “I honestly believed that the king had ended his life from an accident committed by himself and there were many reasons for such honest belief.”

King Ananda Mahidol was found dead by a bullet wound in his forehead at 9.00 a.m. on Sunday June 9, 1946. At 10.00 a.m., Prime Minister Pridi, being engaged in a discussion about a railway employees’ strike at his residence with the interior minister and the police chief, was informed of the tragedy by a senior royal household official. Shocked by the news, Pridi, accompanied by Interior Minister Chavengsak-Songgram and director-general of the police department, Police General Rama-Indra, rushed to the Grand Palace. When they arrived at the Borom-bhimarn Palace, they remained downstairs for some time until the blood-stained body of Ananda Mahidol had been cleaned by the court physician and nurses during which “outsiders” were, according to the royal customs, not permitted to observe. The prime minister was then ushered to the royal chamber upstairs to pay his respects to the dead king. There was nothing the police could do, as they would have done for an ordinary case of violent death, again because of the royal customs. Besides, when the prime minister, the interior minister and the chief police were there, the king’s body had already been removed from the original position which, for an ordinary case, meant that evidence had been tempered with.

Even the fatal wound had also been properly dressed.

The tragic death of the young king was more than a shock to Pridi. Ananda Mahidol was at that time preparing to return to Switzerland via the United States, and the date of his departure had been fixed for June 13. At one of his last audiences, Pridi was asked by Ananda to help arrange for his departure. The plane which was to fly the king to the United States had arrived, and Pridi had directed Foreign Minister Direk Jayanama to check the royal schedule with the American embassy. It was also on June 9, at 10.00 a.m., that a member of the royal family was scheduled to have an audience with His Majesty on the occasion of his entering monkhood. The king had also invited Prince Suphasawat, the "Free Thai prince", to have lunch with him. On the following day, the king was to go to see the patriarch of the Buddhist order to inform the chief monk of his departure for Lausanne. Everything had seemed to be quite normal; no signs of any unusual circumstances had been noticed. Even the unconfirmed report that the Pramoj brothers, Seni and Kukrit, had had an audience two days earlier, without the knowledge of the prime minister's office, was not considered really abnormal.

About 3.00 p.m. on the same day, at the gathering of senior members of the royal family, including Prince Rangsit of Chainat, the king's uncle, Prince Chumpot, the son of Prince Boribhat, Prince Bhanubhan, Prince Wan and Prince Thani-Niwat, and several cabinet ministers, it was decided, upon the recommendation and consent of the senior princes, that the cause of the king's death be made public in the following government announcement:

"His Majesty the King had suffered a stomach upset since June 2. Despite his weakness and exhaustion, he still continued with the royal duties. Only later on, as his illness persisted, had he chosen to stay in the palace and cancelled appointments. On June 9, the king woke up at 6.00 a.m. He took castor oil, went to the bathroom and then returned to his bed. At 9.00 a.m., the royal chamber pages heard the noise of a gunshot in the royal chamber. They rushed to the scene and found the king lying in bed bleeding. The pages informed the princess mother who went into the royal chamber to pay her respects to the king. Later, members of the royal family and the prime minister also went to pay their respects, and the director-general of the police department and the director-general of the medical department conducted their investigation

on the case. It was believed that His late Majesty might have been playing with the pistol, as he often had done when the accident occurred.”

In the same afternoon, Pridi called an urgent meeting of the cabinet which was informed of the tragic event. The prime minister proposed that His Royal Highness Prince Bhumibol Adulyadej, the late king's younger brother, succeed to the throne. His proposal received unanimous approval.

At 9.10 p.m., Parliament was called to an urgent joint meeting of the two chambers. Prime Minister Pridi informed Parliament of the nation's great loss and asked the police chief to assist in answering questions which were raised from the floor. The chief police explained that so far there had not been evidence that would point out to any other cause of the king's death than what was contained in the government statement. Police General Rama-Indra also disclosed that because of the royal customs, the police had not performed an autopsy as they could have done in ordinary cases, and that when the police got there, the king's body had already been removed. After that, Thawee Bunyakatu, on behalf of the government, made a proposal that H.R.H. Prince Bhumibol Adulyadej succeed to the throne. This was received with unanimous consent. Prime Minister Pridi Banomyong thus rose and firmly announced, “The King is dead. Long Live the King.” Before 11.00 p.m. on the same evening, Pridi, accompanied by the president of the senate, the house speaker and their deputies as well as the cabinet ministers, went to the palace and informed Prince Bhumibol of Parliament's resolution on his succession to the throne. Bhumibol accepted it and pledged to perform his duty as king for the prosperity of the nation.

Concurrently, the government issued an announcement on the succession of King Bhumibol. The announcement was signed by Pridi Banomyong who immediately afterwards tendered his resignation. Pridi explained later that constitutionally, there was no need for him to resign. However, because of his profound respect for the late king, and of his lack of desire to continue as prime minister, he therefore chose to tender his resignation. Nevertheless, on the next day, Parliament again deemed it appropriate to ask Pridi to continue in office, and requested the new king to appoint him as prime minister. Dr Pridi Banomyong therefore assumed office as prime minister for the third time on June 11 until his final resignation on August 21, 1946. Altogether, Pridi was in

prime ministership for 152 days.

The death of King Ananda Mahidol coincided with the period of heated politics resulting from the fall of the Kwang Abhaivong government in March and the defeat of his party at the Senate's election in May. Dr Pridi who had already become the target of political attacks, was now suffering a heavier blow as his opponents found it convenient to focus their attacks on the event of the king's death. Starting with the refusal to accept the government's "accident" explanation, they quickly moved towards arousing public suspicion of an assassination plot. More devastatingly, they spread the rumour across the capital that Prime Minister Pridi had some knowledge about the conspiracy.

In 1977, the British Public Record Service disclosed a "top secret" cable no. 769 dispatched by Geoffrey Thompson (later Sir Geoffrey Thompson), then British minister in Bangkok on June 12, 1946, to the foreign office in London saying that on the previous evening a Thai prince of the H.R.H. status had come to see him at the British legation and confirmed to Thompson that the king had been assassinated, and that a politician in power was going to turn Thailand into a republic. The prince expressed his concern about the consequences should British troops be withdrawn from Thailand as scheduled (i.e. after Japanese soldiers had been sent home). Thompson told his visitor that Britain had never interfered with Thailand's internal affairs, and reminded him that it would not be wise for some people to fabricate a sensation that would be harmful to the country. Geoffrey Thompson added in his cable that Thailand "is a country where the blindest bluffs hold good and wildest tales are true," and gave his own impression at the end that "... I do not doubt that he (the prince) was sent here by elements who under the impact of recent events may be contemplating some wild initiative." Throughout these long years, the British have never indicated their belief in any way that Pridi Banomyong had anything whatsoever to do with the death of King Ananda Mahidol.

On June 13, 1946, Prime Minister Pridi told Parliament of his regret about the rumour of his involvement in the king's death. "The rumour, I believe," said Pridi, "had stemmed from personal jealousy on the part of some people whom I know ... I consider myself genuinely loyal to the late king from the beginning, and I have taken so many risks in the protection of the throne throughout my service as regent ... I assure you



that I never put any pressure on him. It would have been senseless to have done so, because the king was a constitutional monarch.” On the following day, Pridi sent for the court physician and told him that he wanted to see the tragic incident made openly clear as to its real cause by appointing an investigation committee of medical specialists.

The committee to investigate the cause of the king’s death which was appointed by Pridi Banomyong on June 18, 1946, consisted of the president of the supreme court as chairman. Its members included chief judges of the appeal court and the criminal court, president of the senate, the speaker of the house of representatives, three members of the royal family, the representatives from the three armed forces, the attorney-general, with Judge Sanya Tharmmasak (prime minister during 1973-75) as secretary. The committee adopted court procedures in performing its duties and its hearings were attending by the general public. The committee spent more than four months in hearing the case, and finally reported to the government (Thamrong government), ruling out the possibility of an accident, but not being able to point out whether the cause of Ananda Mahidol’s death was suicide or an assassination. The Thamrong government, in turn, submitted the report to the regency council (at that time King Bhumibol had returned to Lausanne), and instructed the police to handle the case in accordance with the law. It is fairly clear that whatever the cause of the king’s death was, Prime Minister Pridi Banomyong had done his best in its clarification. He did, however, fail to reveal the cause of the king’s death during his two months and ten days in office. But more than twenty other cabinets following his also have been unable to reveal who killed King Ananda Mahidol during the past thirty-six years up till the present time (1982).

Pridi’s last cabinet which took office on June 11, 1946, was almost identical with his previous cabinet, with the exception of two replacements. The new men in the new cabinet were Admiral Thamrong-Navasawat as minister of justice and Thong-in Bhuribhat as industry minister. Admiral Thamrong had not been included in any cabinet since the fall of the Pibul government in July 1944. In July of the same year Prime Minister Pridi, together with some of his cabinet ministers such as Admiral Thamrong, Direk Jayanama, Dr Duean Bunnag and Colonel Chavengsak-Songgram resigned from the Senate to run for the supplementary election which was held on August 5, 1946 and all of them were

elected to the House of Representatives. Pridi and Thamrong were elected, the former, unopposed, in their hometown, Ayudhya. On August 21, Pridi Banomyong tendered his resignation at his own will on health reasons and Admiral Thamrong-Navasawat took over as from August 23. The new cabinet, consisting mostly of the same ministers, had Direk Jayanama as deputy prime minister and minister of foreign affairs.

After his resignation, Pridi who was again referred to as "senior statesman", left for a world tour on November 3, 1946, upon the invitations of friendly countries. During this trip, Dr Pridi Banomyong had the opportunity to meet many postwar leaders including President Harry S. Truman and President Chiang Kai-shek. With his wife, Phoonsuk, he was also given luncheon at Buckingham Palace. The countries which were visited by the senior statesman on this trip included China, the United States, Britain, the Philippines, Denmark, Norway and Sweden. While visiting the Scandinavia, Pridi became ill because of the fatigue, cold weather and great strains due to official responsibilities carried out on behalf of the government which included lobbying for Thailand's admission to United Nations membership. Thailand was admitted to the United Nations on December 15, 1946, and Pridi arrived back in Bangkok on February 20, 1947.

In April 1947, Pridi was appointed leader of the Thai delegation to the special session of the general assembly in New York, and on the way back, he visited France for an assignment with regard to the territorial dispute between Thailand and that country. It looked as if Dr Pridi planned to devote his time in the capacity of senior statesman serving the government in foreign relations to enhance Thailand's international position and prestige. He resigned as member of the House of Representatives on April 8, 1947.

The Thamrong government, in the meanwhile, was encountering a series of political attacks made by the Democratic Party of Kwuang Abhaiwong and Seni Pramoj. The deterioration of public morality and the rising cost of living, resulting from the war, created some basic grievances in the country. When these natural factors were added to the incident of King Ananda Mahidol's tragic death, the cause of which was never found out, they provided excellent material for the opposition's political manoeuvring. Admiral Thamrong-Navasawat was a gentleman and a truly democratic politician. He allowed the democratic

forces full play, with almost unlimited freedom of the press and full opportunity for parliamentary debates. Between May 19-27, 1947, Thamrong accepted the opposition challenge for a marathon debate on a wide range of subjects concerning the government's performance, including the incident of King Ananda's death. The eight-day-and-night parliamentary debates were a historic test of Thailand's democracy. Thamrong arranged for the debates to be broadcast throughout the country, and the prime minister himself proved unparalleled as a tough debator and a fine orator. At the end of which, the government won a vote of confidence with a clear-cut majority. Nevertheless, in the democratic spirit, Thamrong tendered his resignation, but was reappointed on May 30, 1947.

Despite the democratic atmosphere and the government's efforts to improve its administration, a conspiracy to overthrow the Thamrong government was secretly taking shape. The leaders of the conspiracy plot were two retired officers, Lt General Pin Chuhawan and Colonel Kaj-Songgram. General Pin had served in the northern army during the Second World War and retired when the war ended. Colonel Kaj-Songgram who was one of the "June 24 promoters" had been a cabinet minister in the Pibul government and had retired from public life since the war. The two men were able to recruit a number of collaborators, mostly army officers, both retired and in active service, including Colonel Pao Sriyanond, General Pin's son-in-law; Colonel Sarit Thanarat, commanding officer of the first infantry regiment; Lt Colonel Prapas Charusathien, commander of the first battalion, first infantry regiment; Lt Colonel Thanom Kittikachorn of the royal military academy; Major Siri Siriyothin and Major Pramarn Adireksan of the army's transport corps (Pramarn was another son-in-law of General Pin). After having recruited sufficient collaborators, the conspiracy group requested Field Marshal Pibul-Songgram to lead a coup against Thamrong.

The main reason behind the coup that took place on November 8, 1947, was the widespread discontent among army officers over the deterioration of the army's honour and prestige. Since the war ended, the general anti-militarism feeling had led to a decline in the respect and confidence the public held for the army. To some extent, it was identified with dictatorship and war-mongering. Worst of all, it was looked upon as a symbol of defeat and vanquishment. At the same time, the Free Thai

movement represented victory, pride and heroism. Such a contrast unquestionably was a source of humiliation for many army officers, particularly those who had fought in the battlefields.

Though rumours about an imminent coup had been circulating in the capital for some time before it actually took place, neither Pridi nor Thamrong was much concerned about it. Both of them placed full confidence in General Adul-Dejcharas, then commander-in-chief of the Thai army, for his ability to prevent such a thing. Besides, there was also Admiral Sangvorn-Yuthakit, the fearless naval commander, who was then in command of the police force as well as the military police, on their side. As the prime minister himself was a naval officer, the navy was also considered a safeguard for the government's security.

That the Thamrong government's popularity was being adversely affected by internal economic problems and oratory attacks by the opposition was well-recognised. In his book "Field Marshal Pibul-Songgram", Pibul's eldest son, Major General Anant, recalled that his father paid private visits to Prime Minister Thamrong twice, presumably to warn his former colleague of an imminent coup. It had also been reported that the Thamrong government decided to resign on November 11 and that Adul-Dejcharas would take over in forming a new government. Anyway, everything was too late. The coup was staged on November 8, 1947.

Early on that evening, Prime Minister Thamrong, General Adul and Senior Statesman Pridi met privately at Pridi's residence, during which the army's commander-in-chief once again assured the two men that there would definitely be no coup. Not long after Thamrong and Adul had left, Pridi was informed that army tanks had been seen on the road. He tried to check with Adul by telephone. Finding that the telephone lines had been cut, he realised what had already taken place. He informed his wife of the situation and then, together with two of his trusted men, the senior statesman boarded a small boat and left his residence by the Chao Phya River.

About that time, an advance unit of the coup accompanied by four armoured cars arrived at Pridi's residence, and broke into it with a few rounds of firing at the wall as well as at the building in which Phoosuk and the children were staying. The firing might have been ordered in anticipation of armed resistance which proved to be none. However, it



indicated the determination on the part of the coup leaders to get Pridi, dead or alive. The coup's advance unit then made a thorough search of the residence for the senior statesman, but found nothing as Pridi was already in the middle of the river, watching the incident from a distance. Soon afterwards, General Adul-Dejcharas arrived at the scene and ordered the soldiers to withdraw from it.

In the coup's communiqués released after the overthrow of the Thamrong government had been complete, it was revealed that General Adul had been informed about the plot, and had even been asked to be the leader. Therefore, the communiqué said, the coup group was disappointed that when the time actually came, the general became the one who was opposed to it. Perhaps, it was true that Adul saw the need for governmental change, and that he was prepared to accept the responsibility for new leadership. However, having been confirmed that Thamrong was resigning and that he would be nominated to take over in a few days, pending the annulment of the Formal Agreement with Britain which would be announced at any time, Adul finally decided to put a brake to the coup. It was too late.

Pridi spent that night of horror with some friends who lived on the other side of the river which was mostly orchards. The next day, he was picked up by a friendly naval unit sent for by Admiral Nava-Vichit to escort him to the headquarters of the navy. In the morning of November 10, he met with the ousted Prime Minister Thamrong, Admiral Sangvorn and others and on the following day, Admiral Sindhu-Songgramchai, the navy's commander, provided a naval unit to escort Pridi and his colleagues to the Satahip naval base.

In Bangkok, Field Marshal Pibul-Songgram was back in power as the military commander-in-chief of Thailand. The coup group had replaced the 1946 constitution with a provisional one under which Kwuang Abhaivong was asked to form a new government and to recommend a list of new senators. In the meanwhile, Pibul issued an order calling Pridi, Thamrong and Sangvorn to report at the ministry of defence, but none of them turned up. Later learning that Pridi was staying at the Satahip naval base, he asked Admiral Sindhu to turn him over to the coup group. Pibul's request was made known to the senior statesman who felt that as there was no opportunity to bring back the status quo at the time, his continued stay under the navy's hospitality would create a

predicament to his friends in the navy. Pridi decided to leave Satahip for Bangkok on November 19 with the view to seek ways and means to flee the country.

Disguised as a naval non-commissioned officer, Pridi made the journey to Bangkok in the official car of the royal marine corps commander. At 7.00 a.m. on November 20, he arrived at the residence of Captain Stratford Dennis, the British naval attache, with whom he had been acquainted since the wartime underground operation. Pridi told Dennis that he needed British help for his departure from Thailand. Captain Dennis gave Pridi breakfast and asked him to wait at his house while he rushed to the British embassy. After discussion with Geoffrey Thompson, the British ambassador, they agreed that the American ambassador, Edwin Stanton, should be consulted as Pridi's request was a delicate diplomatic matter. Both Thompson and Dennis therefore called on Stanton and the three men went on planning Pridi's escape route right away. Once decided that the escape should be made by sea, the American naval attache and the general manager of Shell in Thailand were sent for. The Shell man, William Adam, made a check and found that one of his oil tankers was, at that time, waiting for high tide at the mouth of the Chao Phya River, on its way to Singapore. As for the journey from Bangkok to board the tanker, it was agreed that the American naval attache, Gardes, would personally take charge by taking Pridi to the rendezvous at the mouth of the river in his own picnic boat. It was Captain Dennis in British naval uniform who led Pridi to the harbour where the latter boarded the American picnic boat, on that special occasion, flying the Stars and Stripes.

In the meanwhile, a search unit was sent out by the coup group in Bangkok to hunt for the American boat, but due to exceptionally bad weather, its mission met with complete failure. However, when the picnic boat arrived at the mouth of the river, the oil tanker had just left. Captain Gardes, USN then had to speed up his formerly submarine-hunting boat into the width of the Gulf of Thailand, until he finally caught up with it. By 7.00 p.m. on the same evening, November 20, 1947, William Adam received a radio message from the captain of the oil tanker informing him that everything was in good order. Adam reported the successful undertaking to Captain Dennis and to both the British and the American ambassadors who had been restlessly waiting for the news.

Pridi Banomyong and three members of his party, including Senior Lieutenant Vacharachai of the Thai navy, arrived safely in Singapore on November 22, and were readily greeted by British authorities who had already been notified by the British embassy in Bangkok of their arrival. Lord Killern arranged for Pridi to stay at the official residence on St John Island, and he himself came over to express his sympathy for what had happened in Bangkok. On November 27, Pridi broadcast from Radio Singapore to the Thai people. He said that before his departure from Thailand, he had asked his friends not to resist the political change by force, particularly those who were formerly Free Thai partisans. He also requested the new government in Bangkok to refrain from any provocative act.

After about three months on St John Island, Pridi moved to stay at the residence of a businessman in Singapore. Although at that time the British government granted him political asylum, Pridi knew well that it would last until the day Britain recognised the new regime in Thailand. In preparation for the eventuality, Dr Pridi asked the Thai ambassador in London (Direk Jayanama) and the Thai ambassador at Nanking (Sanguan Tulalak) each to issue him a diplomatic passport with visas that would permit him to go to various countries. The two ambassadors complied with his request. Pridi stayed in Singapore for about six months before his departure for Hong Kong in May 1947. In his book, *“Ma Vie Mouvementée et Mes 21 Ans d’Exil en Chine Populaire”*, published in France in 1972, Pridi said that he was informed of the preparation of a counter-coup against the new regime in Thailand, but it would take some time before it could be executed. So, “I left Singapore to visit other countries in awaiting this event.”

In Bangkok, the Kwuang government, in complying with the coup group’s wish and in response to popular public demand, began a re-investigation of the case of King Ananda Mahidol’s death. Police General Pinich-Cholkadee, Seni-Kukrit’s brother-in-law, was re-installed in the police force and put in charge of the re-investigation. At the same time, former Pridi’s political opponents, as well as some members of the coup group, spoke out openly on the possible connection of Pridi with the assassination plot. For those political opponents, their acts could be seen as a sheer revenge and hatred against the senior statesman despite his forced departure from the country. But for the

coup group members, the accusation against Pridi on the incident of the king's death was perhaps nothing more than a necessary political tactic to prevent the popular statesman from returning to power. On February 17, 1954, the day when three men were executed on complicity charges in connection with the assassination plot, General Kaj-Songgram, one of the leading members of the coup group then appearing in court under a rebellion charge, rose up and requested the court for a three-minute silence as a sign of respect for those executed. After that, Kaj-Songgram, one of the outspoken advocates of the assassination theory during the November 8, 1947 event, was asked by his associate in the same rebellion suit as to why he expressed sorrow over the execution. Kaj-Songgram is reported to have said that he never anticipated such an outcome, and further explained that the only reason his coup group had raised the issue against the "professor" (Pridi) at that time was to defeat him politically, as no other issues carried sufficient weight to annihilate Pridi's past achievement. Kaj-Songgram said that he was very sorry about what he did to Pridi, the consequence of which lay beyond his foresight. Despite this, Pinich-Cholkadee managed to come up with some questionable evidence which finally led to the execution of three men. Before leaving Singapore for Hong Kong, Pridi wrote a letter thanking the British authorities for their hospitality and assured them that "I categorically deny my having anything whatsoever to do with the death of King Ananda Mahidol of which I am deeply regretful. Furthermore, I wish to make it known that I am well aware and positive that none of the persons staying with me now had anything to do with that tragic event."

After a short stay in Hong Kong Pridi moved further to Shanghai, at that time still under the nationalists. Deciding to go to Mexico, he, together with Sa-nguan Tulalak, Thai ambassador to Nanking, went to see the Mexican ambassador and obtained a visa to visit that country without any difficulty. Pridi was planning to go to Mexico via San Francisco as he had earlier obtained an American visa. But just before his departure from Shanghai, while presenting his passport to the Chinese immigration, "a young American named Norman Hannah, vice-consul in Shanghai, having arrived suddenly, snatched my passport from the hands of the Chinese officer and crossed out the American visa which had been granted me by the US embassy in London," wrote Pridi. He was stunned as his journey plan to Mexico, as the result, had to be scrapped.

"I understood then that the medal and the citations that had been conferred on me by the American government had absolutely no value," recalled Pridi bitterly. "But in fact, they considered me a criminal, an indictment of their former enemies during the war, in refusing me to stay in transit for a few hours on American territory." Sometimes later, over a luncheon, Pridi met the US consul-general who expressed his regrets for the incident and informed the former regent of Thailand that the US Secretary of State George Marshall had instructed that the US visa be reinstated in his passport. Norman Hannah was later transferred to Bangkok, before his posting to Afghanistan, but soon afterwards, he returned to Bangkok as a minister-councillor at the US embassy. Hannah, after his retirement, wrote a letter published in "Far Eastern Economic Review", January 13, 1978, reflecting some of his experiences in Thai political affairs. In that letter, the American who once caused embarrassment to Pridi referred to him as "loyal Pridi".

In Thailand, political development in the year 1948 proceeded rapidly. On January 29, there was a general election which returned ninety-nine representatives to the House of Representatives, including Major Kwuang Abhaiwong, Seni Pramoj and Kukrit Pramoj, all of Bangkok. After the election, the government resigned, but Kwuang was again voted by Parliament to form a new cabinet on February 21. Like in his previous government, Kwuang pledged, in his policy statement, to continue probing the case of King Ananda Mahidol's death. But on April 8, 1948, the Kwuang government was given an ultimatum by the November 8, 1947 coup group to resign within twenty-four hours. The ultimatum was handed to Kwuang just one month after the United States and Britain had recognised the new regime in Thailand. There was often a question as to why the Kwuang government did not attempt to resist the illegal demand. On this the late prime minister once explained, "Why should I make a resistance that would cost lives of other people's sons just for myself to continue in office? You might think that I was wrong. But I know that I was right." That was the last occasion for the French-educated engineer to form a government.

Field Marshal Pibul-Songgram was appointed prime minister replacing Major Kwuang Abhaiwong on the same day, after almost four years absence from the political scene. For the next ten years, Pibul was to remain Thailand's chief executive, although he was no longer repre-

senting the People's Party. Pibul's role from 1947 until his ultimate fall in 1958 was that of a coordinator for the new army factions absolutely unrelated to the principles and beliefs of the People's Party. For this reason, it is not wrong to say that the political era of the People's Party ended with the fall of the Thamrong government on November 8, 1947.

On October 1, 1948, many high-ranking staff officers including General Netr Kemayothin were arrested on a conspiracy charge. After that incident, there were a series of accusations, charges and arrests of members of parliament. On January 28, 1949, the draft of a new constitution was approved by Parliament replacing the provisional constitution which had been brought into effect after the November 8, 1947 coup. The new constitution which had been drafted by a forty-man council, although containing many democratic elements, has been regarded as one of the most conservative among the numerous Thai constitutions. On February 23, 1949, the government proclaimed a state of emergency citing the increasingly tense situation in Indochina as reason.

Some of those who took part in the "October 1 Rebellion" but who escaped arrest sent representatives to discuss with Pridi the possibility of staging another coup against the regime in power. They also asked the senior statesman in exile to personally lead the rebellion. Pridi agreed to their request and by February, he engaged a 20-ton boat and secretly left China for the east coast of Thailand.

In Bangkok, the new constitution which was about to be proclaimed had created an uneasy feeling among some leaders of the November 8 coup group, including General Pao Sriyanond and Colonel Lamai Uthayanonond. These men met with Admiral Sangvorn, then in partial seclusion, and Admiral Thaharn Kumhiran, commanding officer of the marine corp, both staying in Cholburi on the east coast. According to Sangvorn, Pao expressed his preference for the 1932 constitution and also his continued support of the June 24 principles. The new police chief said that he paid no attention to Pridi and he had nothing to do with the probing of the king's death. It was also at this time that the two admirals were approached by Pridi's men who informed them that the senior statesman had a desire to return to Thailand to defend himself in court on the accusation made against him if Prime Minister Pibul was prepared to provide him justice. In any case, Pridi expected protection and cooperation from both Thaharn and Sangvorn, both of them were



June 24 promoters and Free Thai members. The two admirals, though sympathetic with Pridi's situation, found his request rather embarrassing under the circumstances.

Pridi arrived at the east coast of Thailand in a former submarine-chaser boat manned by American officers and Chinese sailors. Upon the special request of Pridi's wife, Sangvorn-Yuthakit went to see him on board Pridi's ship. Pridi told the retired admiral that the false accusation against him had made him suffer a good deal. "I intend not to return to China," said Pridi, "the red army is moving closer and the nationalist government seems to be in trouble." According to Sangvorn in his memoir published after his death in 1972, Pridi was very bitter with the feeling of being double-crossed.

Admiral Sangvorn knew that Pibul and Pridi were very close friends since their Paris days and cooperated with each other very closely in politics until there was a rift when the Second World War broke out. With the spirit of the June 24 promoter, the admiral, who at that time was on good terms with the field marshal, felt encouraged to assist in mending the rift between the two men. He told Pridi that he had met with Pibul and men like Pao and Lamai, having the impression that there was a possibility of establishing a good understanding. After all, Pao had expressed his indifference about the case of the king's death and Pibul had been quoted in the press as saying that he had no objection to working with Pridi again if the latter agreed to do so. Pridi was quiet for a moment and then said that he had tried his best to show his respect, his loyalty and his support to the royal family, and yet he was accused on the incident of the king's death. Sangvorn calmed him down by saying that the whole trouble had originated from disunity among the June 24 promoters and he had the impression that General Phrom-Yothi was doing something about the reunion.

Before leaving Pridi, Admiral Sangvorn had the opportunity to talk with Senior Lt Vacharachai who accompanied the senior statesman on board the ship. Sangvorn asked him to warn Pridi not to believe anyone. Vacharachai said that he knew nothing about Pridi's plan, except that he had made appointments to see many people. Later both Admiral Sangvorn and Admiral Thaharn met with Pridi again on board the ship. Thaharn frankly told the troubled man that there were thousands of political opponents who wanted to see his elimination. The admiral said

that politically, Pridi was still unpopular and there was nothing the navy could do about it. Thaharn honestly suggested to Pridi that the senior statesman should wait further for a more favourable political atmosphere. According to Sangvorn's memoir, Pridi in frustration said, "I have devoted my life to the country earnestly and honestly and have served all groups, the royal family, the people, even the Buddhist monks. Whatever they asked me to do, I never refused. Then I was the one who suffered. As for the king, it was I who requested him to return. Then they accused me of killing him. I want nothing more than justice." Pridi, however, had not disclosed his plan to the two admirals.

Within a few days, Pridi left Choburi for Bangkok with some of his disciples who came to pick him up. Before his departure, he met with one of his confidants who begged him to go back to China and remained there until his name in the case of involvement with the king's death had been cleared. But Pridi had already made up his mind.

On February 26, 1949, Pridi personally led a rebellion consisting mostly of former Free Thai members and a few military officers which took over the Grand Palace. The rebels made announcement over Radio Thailand dismissing the Pibul government and replacing it with a new government headed by Direk Jayanama. It looked as if the "Grand Palace Rebellion" was given support by the navy and there were exchanges of gunfire between army and navy units at certain places. However, the sporadic fighting ended at dawn on February 27 with the withdrawal of the Pridi group from its headquarters in the Grand Palace. The rebellion's failure was due largely to the lack of reinforcements to its advance units, as well as to the strong determination of the government to suppress it. After his total defeat, Pridi remained in Thailand for six more months hiding at a friend's house without police detection. At any rate, the subsequent events proved to be fatal to many of his friends and followers, some of whom including Admiral Sangvorn, who had not even taken part in the rebellion. Former Pridi ministers, namely Thong-in Bhuribhat, Thawil Udol, Chamlong Downreang and Thong-pleaw Cholabhum, were arrested and later shot dead allegedly by the police. In addition, former minister and diplomat, Thawi Tavatikul, Police Colonel Banchongsak Cheepensuk and a few others were also killed during their arrests. Upon the successful suppression of the rebellion, two men emerged as the real powerful figures in Thai politics. One of them was



Police General Pao Sriyanond, and the other, Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat. The rivalry between the two classmates of the royal military college went on for a number of years and reached its climax in 1958 when Sarit ousted both Pibul and Pao from the country and soon afterwards made himself prime minister with absolute power until his untimely death in 1963.

After six months in hiding without a possibility to stage another coup, Pridi decided to leave Thailand for China which by then had been taken over by the communists. He managed to escape from Bangkok in a small boat in August 1949 to the deep sea, and sailed southwards for about ten days until reaching Singapore. From Singapore, friends found him a boat which took him to Hong Kong and then proceeded, also by sea, further to T'sing-tao in north China where he arrived on September 18 of the same year. In his book, "Ma Vie Mouvementée", Dr Pridi described in great detail his journey from Bangkok of extreme excitement. Finally, Pridi arrived in Peking where he was given a warm welcome by many leading Chinese communist officials. As from that time on until 1970, for twenty-one years Thailand's Senior Statesman Pridi Banomyong lived peacefully in China as a guest of the Chinese government. At the time he left his country for the last time after his abortive coup attempt, Pridi was forty-nine, at the prime of his life. When he departed from China for France, he was already aging at seventy.

During his long stay in China, many events took place some of which were of his direct personal concern. Both his wife and his eldest son were arrested. The former was detained for eighty-four days, whereas the latter was imprisoned on a separate conspiracy charge, but was given an amnesty in 1957. In 1953, after Phoonsuk was freed from the detention, she left Bangkok for Paris with two daughters, and later all of them came over to China. Two years later, in 1955, Pridi and his family moved down from Peking to live in Canton where he remained until leaving China for Paris in 1970. In 1958, Pridi once prepared himself to return to Thailand to defend himself in the court of justice. His trip was, however, cancelled at the last moment when Marshal Sarit took power on October 20 of that year and ran the country with an interim constitution under which he himself as prime minister possessed unlimited power. During the Sarit regime, Pridi was, from time to time, falsely accused of

building up forces in Yunnan for advancing into Thailand.

Although staying far away from the scene, Pridi never set his mind really at peace. One of the reasons was that he kept on listening to Radio Thailand and read Thai newspapers. In this way, he was following the developments in his country very closely throughout the two decades of his exile in China. Naturally none of the news in those days was good news for him. Besides, he also occasionally wrote to newspapers in Bangkok whenever he felt that his explanation of certain facts were warranted. On one occasion during the last years of the Pibul government, the field marshal sent a representative to see Pridi at Canton to inform him that certain fresh evidence had been discovered concerning the death of King Ananda Mahidol. The field marshal was contemplating reviewing the case under proper legal procedure with the view to bringing out justice. However, Pibul never had the chance to prove his words. Soon afterwards, in 1958, his government was ousted by his own subordinate, Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat. Like Pridi, Pibul fled the country and finally passed away peacefully in 1965 at the age of sixty-eight in Japan. It is learned that while in exile in Japan, Pibul wrote Pridi some letters in which he revealed certain accounts of historical interest. These letters are, however, not expected to be made public as long as Pridi is still alive.

That Field Marshal Pibul-Songgram never believed in the guilt of the three men executed in 1954 during his premiership is now a well-known fact. In his book "Field Marshal P. Pibul-Songgram", General Anant, Pibul's eldest son, disclosed the followings: "The field marshal was puzzled by the investigation result concluded by the committee (appointed by Prime Minister Pridi in June 1946) that ruled out accident as a possible cause of the king's death, leaving only two alternatives, namely suicide and assassination, as possibilities ... Because of his illness *and his scheduled appointments during the day, as well as other facts, it was suicide that should be ruled out. As for assassination, I (General Anant Pibul-Songgram) could see no possibility at all, because the incident occurred during the daytime, in his bed and within the palace under strict security measures responsible by members of the royal household, royal security officers and military guards, both inside and outside the palace. If it were to be an assassination, the assassin, who had sneaked into the royal chamber and shot him, had to find his way out of*

the palace. The fact is that nobody ever saw any suspect either leaving the royal chamber after the shooting or roaming about the palace compound afterwards ... no suspect was being seen whatsoever ... There is therefore only one answer to the mystery, that is, there was no assassin to be arrested. Under these circumstances it is unequivocal that what did happen on June 9, 1946, was an accident as publicly announced by the government. However, since an accident could be the result of his own act or somebody else's act, this could have been the source of puzzlement to Field Marshal Pibul-Songgram when he first heard the announcement made by the Pridi government on that day. He only hoped to hear further clarification, but nothing ever came out as if the Pridi government had nothing more to add, until the public had been persuaded by the Democrats' tactical propaganda to believe that it had been assassination. Perhaps there was some important reason which prevented Dr Pridi Banomyong from disclosing the true fact."

General Anant said that he kept his curiosity to himself for a long time until one day during his father's exile in Japan when he decided to ask for an explanation. The question that the field marshal was asked by his own son was why he, as the prime minister, did not request an amnesty on behalf of those three men being sentenced to death in February 1954. "He answered my question instantly and positively that 'Three times I requested an amnesty. I did my best.' In the past there had been a few occasions when Field Marshal Pibul-Songgram felt sorry when he failed to accomplish something. But never had I witnessed, at any time, his sorrow deeper than when he answered that question of mine. There was the same strain and puzzlement on his face."

Three unfortunate men were executed in February 1954 for their complicity in the assassination plot; two of them, Chit Singhasene and Busaya Patamasarin were pages for the royal chamber, whereas Chaleo Pratoomros, formerly royal personal secretary, was a June 24 promoter. At Chit Singhasene's cremation on February 12, 1978, twenty-four years after his execution, his children published a book in memory of their father which contained the following account: "After father's death, the prime minister (Field Marshal Pibul-Songgram) instructed his secretary to offer his assistance to our family for the education of the children. We discussed it within the family and finally decided to accept the offer as a token of evidence that even the government then was

convinced of father's innocence."

Field Marshal Pibul-Songgram, in fact, was not the only sensible and justice-loving person who never believed in the dirty politics which attempted to connect Pridi Banomyong with King Ananda Mahidol's death. There were many others who shared the field marshal's disbelief. In this connection, the following passage contained in Prince Suphasawat's personal letter to Pridi written from Surrey, England, on April 10, 1947, is of some historical interest: "Last month we went to visit the king (Bhumibol) and the princess mother. I had written to the princess mother informing her of our planned vacation in Switzerland and our intention to pay her a visit. She sent a cable inviting us to stay with her ... From my audience with His Majesty and the princess mother this time, I dare tell you positively that they did not believe that you were the assassin as rumour suggests ... If she (the princess mother) did believe in such thing, she would have excused herself from seeing you when you were granted an audience with the king (Pridi had an audience with King Bhumibol and his mother at Lausanne in February 1947 during his goodwill trip around the world). For a mother who loves her son so deeply, she must, under all circumstances, avoid seeing the man accused of killing her son... It proved to be quite the contrary, she was pleased to see you and she said later that it was a pity that you did not say a word on politics, only 'how are you' type of things."

Although more than three decades have gone by during which Thailand has witnessed the rise and fall of governments and politicians, and even bloodsheds, the condemnation of Pridi Banomyong on King Ananda Mahidol's death still, from time to time, returns to public attention. It appears as if there has been some disguised force, perhaps since June 1932, to keep on mercilessly condemning the unfortunate man until the end of his life, or perhaps even after his lifetime. We do not know as to when Thailand will grant justice to one of her true sons, the man, now in his eighties, who has devoted so much of his life to the causes of the nation. Pridi Banomyong needs nothing else except to come out of the long dark hours.



POSTSCRIPT

Pridi Banomyong turned eighty-two on May 11, 1982. He has outlived most of his contemporaries in Thai politics, including Pibul-Songgram, Kwuang Abhaivong, Thawee Bunyakatu, Direk Jayanama, Adul-Dejcharas, Sindhu-Songgramchai, Sangvorn-Yuthakit and Prince Athit, not to mention his senior colleagues such as Bhahol, Song-Suradej and Manopakorn. Even younger men such as Sarit Thanarat and Pao Sriyanond have passed away many years ago. Only Thamrong-Navasawat and Seni Pramoj are, though aging, still alive. Pridi's long life has evidently been full of exciting events.

During his fifteen years of active political career between 1932-1947, Dr Pridi held perhaps all the important positions in Thailand's political hierarchy, namely cabinet minister, prime minister, regent and finally senior statesman. He was bestowed with the highest orders and decorations of the land, including the Order of Noparatana of which Field Marshal Pibul-Songgram was the only other receiver in his times. In addition, Pridi was also vested with some of the highest honours that other countries could give to foreigners. These include "Grand-croix de la Legion d'Honneur" of France, "Medal of Liberty" of the United States, "Order of St Michael and St George" of Britain, and "Order of Vasa" of Sweden. His wife, Phoosuk, was also created "Than Phuying", a Thai title equivalent to the English "Lady".

In terms of achievements, there have been only a few men who could claim to equal Pridi Banomyong. In 1927, he founded the People's

Party that was to rule Thailand for fifteen years with its principles and philosophy. In 1932, he played a most important role in the revolution that brought about constitutional monarchy which has lasted to the present day. In connection with the change in the system of government, he was the one who drafted Thailand's first constitution and his political thinking has strong impact on the 1946 constitution and many others to follow. In 1934, he founded Thammasat University which was to become the main training ground for the new generations of Thai politicians and public servants. In 1935, Pridi restructured government administration and introduced a system of local government. In 1938, he completely regained sovereignty for the nation by abolishing the century-old treaties, once and for all, and replaced them with the new treaties based on the principles of equality and reciprocity. In 1939, as minister of finance, Pridi Banomyong laid the foundation for the establishment of the Bank of Thailand, and by 1941, just before the Pacific War broke out, he had placed Thailand's finance and monetary positions on the most stable and secure basis in the country's history. During the war years, Pridi led the Free Thai movement which helped maintain national independence and sovereignty after the war. Also in the immediate postwar years, he took a significant part in revising the Formal Agreement with Britain, in settling the territorial dispute with France, as well as in gaining Thailand's admission to the United Nations. For every role to which Pridi was assigned his performance was superb.

Born in 1900, Pridi was only thirty-two when he risked his life staging the revolution of June 24, 1932, and took responsibility as the "brain-trust" of his party. At thirty-six, he was entrusted with his country's foreign policy and the conduct of negotiations to regain the national sovereignty. By the time he was thirty-nine, Thailand's finance was in his capable hands. At forty-one, he placed himself in the most crucial and risky task of safeguarding his country's independence. At forty-four, he became the most powerful man in Thailand, the centre of hope and the fighting spirit of the nation. But at forty-seven, a very young age for a man of enormous energy and strong willpower, he was forced to retire from public life, not temporarily, but for good. For the next thirty years Pridi patiently lived practically an idle life, although not necessarily an unfruitful one. He read; he learned; he analysed; and he reflected. At eighty-two, his mind is still clear, his memory brilliant and

his analytical power unparalleled.

Characteristically, Dr Pridi Banomyong is gentlemanly polite, and he possesses a charming personality. His image is one of a “learned man”, a “wise man”, and a “professor-type”. In many ways, he represents justice, rationality, reasonableness and righteousness. Throughout his public life, no falsehood could be found in his conduct either officially or privately. An absolutely incorruptible character, Pridi never misused his power or authority for his personal gain, including anything for his friends or relatives. As a rule, the national and social interest always comes before his personal benefits. To destroy a man like Pridi Banomyong, his opponents must look for unconventional ways and means that could replace truth with falseness interminably.

If so, it is interesting to find out why an admirable person like Pridi has had to suffer so much in life and his sufferings are definitely far beyond the experience of any Thai politicians. The best answer is, of course, to be found in the religion to which Pridi is devoted; the law of karma in the Buddhist teachings. But in practical terms it is also not difficult to find an answer.

In the first place, it was neither what he was nor what he did that created repercussions. A few people envied him but they fully appreciated his efforts which were not for himself but for the accomplishment of the system, the society and the nation. It is also falsely assumed that the attacks launched against Pridi have necessarily come from conservative elements because of the changes advocated by him. The Thai society as a whole is not that conservative in the sense that it resists any changes, whereas Pridi Banomyong himself is not that radical. In many ways, his conservatism has a stronger tendency than his radicalism. Perhaps, he is not conservative enough for the conservatives, and yet not radical enough for the radicals. But that is beside the point.

The point is that his sufferings have originated from the acts and the behaviour of some of his followers, the so-called “Pridi’s disciples”. If Song-Suradej and Manopakorn found Pridi unacceptable in 1932-33, it was not because they could not accept his ideas or had no faith in his sincerity and devotion to the country. They distrusted him because of their apprehension of his disciples’ possible activities which nobody would be able to check. It also cannot be denied that the rift between Pibul and Pridi, which already showed signs before the war, originated from the

latter's "disciples". There was absolutely no reason for Pibul to distrust his old friend, and yet there were many reasons for the field marshal to be suspicious of Pridi's "disciples" who were growing in number and influence at the time. It goes without saying that the breakaway of Kwuang and Seni from the Pridi camp during the early postwar years was also caused by the same factor. There is little doubt that the conservatives' campaign to eliminate Pridi Banomyong from the political scene by using the case of King Ananda Mahidol's death as a weapon was motivated, not by the belief or even the suspicion of Pridi's involvement in the tragic incident, but by the apprehension of his disciples' influence in Thai politics. Finally, it should not be wrong to say that the very reason why there remains strong resistance in some quarters to Pridi's return to Thailand despite his old age, is the fear of his disciples' reactions to it.

But who were "Pridi's disciples" and what did they do?

By his "disciples", we, of course, do not mean people like Thawee Bunyakatu or Direk Jayanama, or even Dr Puey Ungpakorn or Dr Duean Bunnag. These people were Pridi's friends and many of them were his political colleagues. They shared his views and principles. They admired his devotion, wisdom and integrity. They discussed problems with him, argued with him and worked with him. Their relationship was based on mutual trust and respect. Many military officers also belonged to this category.

The "disciples" were, however, a different type of people. To them, Pridi Banomyong represented the ultimate source of political wisdom, unchallenged leadership and the mentor of all mentors. Their acceptance of his thoughts, his acts and his leadership was unconditional, and their loyalty to him was unqualified. Few Thai politicians and statesmen could be said to have such disciples, definitely not Kwuang Abhaiyong, Seni Pramoj, Thamrong-Navasawat and not even Pibul-Songgram. In fact, there was only one other man who could possibly be compared with Pridi on this ground and that was Colonel Song-Suradej. We must not forget that Song-Suradej, too, was eliminated from political scene as soon as his "disciples", and not he, were considered a threat to the existing political regime. To have such disciples or followers, a man is expected to possess a rare quality, namely intellectual magnetism.

Pridi's "disciples" were not necessarily vicious people. On the



contrary, many of them were some of the finest politicians, intellectuals, as well as idealists. As a matter of fact, most of Pridi's achievements for the country would not have been made possible if not for the devoted efforts of his "disciples". Being loyal to him, many of these men would do anything, not only to please their leader, but also with sincerity to see to it that his beliefs and his profession were translated into realities. The degree of sensibility also varied from one "disciple" to another. Naturally, when the number of his "disciples" grew, among them could be found persons whose sensibility was somewhat less than what was to be expected.

It was not likely that Pridi Banomyong purposely desired to create a body of "disciples". As already mentioned, it was his intellectual magnetism that inevitably attracted followers. As his achievements and accomplishments accumulated, his "disciples" increased in number, some of whom were aggressive and refused to accept anything less than a furtherance of their leader's power and prestige. To his "disciples", Pridi had become untouchable. Viewed from this approach, it is not difficult to see why Kwuang and Seni could no longer work with Pridi; why the army officers who staged the November 8 coup were bitter about Free Thai members; and why the conservative elements were determined to keep Pridi out of the country.

Perhaps, the story of Pridi Banomyong's rise and fall could serve as a valuable lesson for future political leadership in Thailand. As for Pridi himself, he may not be totally convinced of this, but that is not important. Today, the old man is perfectly free of the cause of his sufferings. He no longer has "disciples". He has only friends, former pupils, and those who sincerely respect him. At his private residence at Antony, on the outskirts of Paris, not too far from the place where he had founded his People's Party in 1927, Dr Pridi Banomyong spends his time following the development of world affairs, writing memoirs and receiving people who come to pay him visits and respect. He is not lonely, because always at his side, there are the woman with whom he is in love and to whom he has been married for more than half a century, and also their children.



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A LETTER FROM PARIS

On October 22 BE 2525 I received a letter from a lawyer sending me the *Bangkok Post* of August 15 BE 2525 for me to consider action against the *Bangkok Post* which carried editorial material under the headline “Looking back ... Recollection of a coup d’etat” which the *Bangkok Post* claimed to be an interview with Lt Gen Prayoon Bhamornmontri by John Sipper in December 1970 (BE 2513) but which contained comment by the *Bangkok Post*.

The commentary contains much that is untrue on many matters which cause considerable damage to me and the People’s Party as well as make certain errors in Thai national historical facts. Therefore I write to inform you as follows:

1. Lt Gen Prayoon has passed away, and I had asked my representative to lay a wreath in respect to his remains for having participated in the revolution of June 24 BE 2475 (1932).

2. As for the *Bangkok Post* publishing the interview once again, the law considers that it is a new offence committed under different circumstances and timing from 12 years ago because those who read the *Bangkok Post* at present are different from those who read the paper 12 years ago and there are more readers than 12 years ago.

Those of the *Bangkok Post* who have to accept responsibility I have considered to be the following:

2.1 As for Prasit Lulitanon, I believe that he did not know or approve of the publication by the *Bangkok Post* of the commentary

because Khun Prasit is a trusted friend of mine for more than 50 years and had assisted the People's Party in BE 2475 and the Free Thai Movement with valuable work for the Thai nation and who had made sacrifices with me in struggling against dictatorship until he had to be imprisoned.

2.2 Although I consider the *Bangkok Post* as a friend, they made the following errors:

(1) They considered the hearsay from Lt Gen Prayoon only as a basis for printing an article on an important matter concerning the history of the Thai nation which affected me and the People's Party without the support of any documentary evidence and without making enquiries from me against whom charges were made.

(2) They were not interested in the fact that one month and eight days before they published the above-mentioned commentary many newspapers in Thailand had published a notice consecutively for many days that the Civil Court had ordered the Bannakit Trading Company, printers of a book by Lt Gen Prayoon, "My Life in Five Reigns," to apologise to me, admit responsibility for publishing Lt Gen Prayoon's book containing many violations of the truth, agree to submit to the court the remaining 1,000 copies for destruction and pay me a sum for damages. The Ministry of Education agreed to issue a notice rescinding an award commending Lt Gen Prayoon on his book. (Copies of the court verdict, the notice of apology of the printing press, the notice of the Ministry of Education and other court notices are attached.)

(3) They did not show interest in the 25-page charge submitted to court together with my 87-page protest and memorandum to support the protest to the Ministry of Education to demonstrate that Lt Gen Prayoon's book, "My Life in Five Reigns" contained inaccuracies on no less than 30 matters.

(4) They did not show interest in what Lt Gen Prayoon himself wrote in his book, to which I have referred, on pages 288-289 as follows:

"I got into trouble.

"I became like a skunk, a bat looking like a bird with ears and a rat (or mouse) with wings, being neither a soldier nor a civilian.

"The (revolution) promoters who were in the military did not care. I had no significance. The civilian promoters hated me even more.

"High-ranking civil servants did not like me, no respect was left.

“Our Princes look down upon me. I was a rebel.

“Finally, even His Majesty the King (of that time) was disappointed for having trusted me.

“Even Khun Arunwadee, my elder sister, scolded me. So much trouble, so many headaches.

“No matter where I walked everybody I met would turn away, as if I were a skunk, as I wrote earlier.”

This indicated that neither the civilian nor the military members of the People's Party trusted Lt Gen Prayoon. High-ranking officials, princes, His Majesty the King (of that time) and even the elder sister of Lt Gen Prayoon did not think much of him on his matter. However, the *Bangkok Post* did not take this into consideration before publishing his words and his writings to make people believe him.

2.3 Because I consider the *Bangkok Post* a friend, I am writing to those responsible for the *Bangkok Post* to reach a compromise on friendly terms by translating and printing my letter in full in the *Bangkok Post* by November 20 BE 2525 (extended to November 24 only in arrangement with the writer for his approval of translation) in order that the damage done to me and the People's Party could be redressed and the historical errors corrected.

3. I beg to mention further about inaccuracies in the *Bangkok Post* article as follows:

3.1 In the introduction to the reproduced article, the *Bangkok Post* tried to make people believe that Lt Gen Prayoon was “a prime mover in forming the nucleus of men who gave Thailand its first Constitution,” which fails to accord with the facts.

(1) The prime movers were actually the people of Thailand who desired to be freed from the absolute monarchy system and students who had studied in Europe from the latter part of the 19th century and who spoke at educational institutions and elsewhere about the usefulness of replacing the absolute monarchy system with a constitutional monarchy system. I have written about this fact in many commentaries, the last time during an interview by the BBC on June 24, 1982. I have sent a copy of the interview to the *Bangkok Post*.

Besides Lt Gen Prayoon, I and five others who set up the People's Party in Paris in 1927 had been influenced by the above-mentioned old students, before we went to Europe for our studies, concerning

changing the absolute monarchy system to constitutional monarchy system.

(2) The *Bangkok Post* published in big type at one place and ordinary type at another place that Nai Prayoon (later Lt Gen) had arranged a meeting between me and five friends at the “house” of Nai Prayoon at 9 Rue “de Sommerand” on February 5, 1925. This is untrue for the following reasons:

First Point: On that day, month and year Nai Prayoon Bhamornmontri had not yet come to Paris; therefore, it was impossible for him to have invited me and five friends to attend a meeting as mentioned.

According to Lt Gen Prayoon’s book, “My Life in Five Reigns,” on page 68, the ship on which Nai Prayoon came to Europe left Penang port at 20.00 hours on November 5, BE 2465 (1923). The ship had to take more than one month to reach London, where he stayed several days before travelling to Hamburg, Germany, and that was after New Year’s Day 1924.

Nai Prayoon studied and worked in Germany for about one year and fell sick with tuberculosis. He went to Switzerland for treatment for many months. Nai Prayoon came to Paris in May 1925, after the students’ association, S.I.A.M., of which I was the secretary-general, had held our first anniversary general meeting in April 1925.

Second Point: There is no street called “de Sommerand” in Paris, but there is a Rue “du Sommerard” in the Latin Quarter where S.I.A.M. had rented a room in Building No 5 for welcoming Thai students from upcountry or other countries so that they could have temporary lodgings.

When Nai Prayoon Bhamornmontri arrived in Paris from Switzerland in May 1925, I let him stay at the room rented by the association, as he reported in his book, “My Life in Five Reigns,” pages 96-97, which stated:

“... Then I met Khun Pridi Banomyong, handed him a letter from Khun Kwuang Abhaivong for him to read. He rose up to receive me in a friendly manner. He helped me find a place of accommodation near the Latin Quarter and also aided me in getting a special tutor in French for me and finding a French language school for me.”

The room was not the “house” of Nai Prayoon but belonged to the association which had rented it for use of fellow students. Nai Prayoon



stayed in the room temporarily according to association regulations, and then moved to a small room.

3.2 In the section sub-headlined “Birth of the Coup,” the *Bangkok Post* tried to let readers believe that Lt Gen Prayoon, when he was junior lieutenant in the reserves, was the one who arranged for me and five other Thai friends who together with Nai Prayoon made up seven to meet to form a unit to change the absolute monarchy system to constitutional monarchy system by repeating that the meeting took place at the “house” of Nai Prayoon on Rue “de Sommerand,” No 9, Paris, on February 5, 1925 — which, again, is not in accordance with the facts.

(1) I have pointed out the facts about the place and the year regarding the meeting in the paragraphs above.

(2) The *Bangkok Post* stated the following about the place where Nai Prayoon lived in his youth:

“In 1901, he lived with his parents and brothers and sisters in Moscow when his father was assigned as military attache.”

This is historically inaccurate because, before the Great Revolution in Russia in 1917, the capital of Russia was St Petersburg, which in Russian was “Petrograd.” When the Soviets gained control over the state the government was moved to Moscow in 1918, and when the Union of the Soviet Socialist Republics was set up in 1922, Moscow became the capital and remains so until now.

If Lt Gen Prayoon’s father was military attache to Russia before 1918 he and his family would have to be stationed in Petrograd, not at Moscow 700 kilometres away.

(3) I had the idea of changing the system of absolute monarchy to a system of constitutional monarchy when I was still a student in the Law School of the Ministry of Justice in Siam in 1918-1920. When I passed my examinations and became a Barrister at Law, the Ministry of Justice selected me to study law in France. I used the opportunity to contact other students in Europe with democratic ideas to establish an association with them.

(A) In April 1924, when Nai Prayoon was still a junior lieutenant and had not come to study in France, I passed French examinations to become “Bachelier en Droit” and was studying for “Licencié en Droit” when I urged Thai students in France, Switzerland and other countries, particularly those under the care of the Siamese Embassy in Paris, to set

up an association. The association was called in Thai “Samakyanukroh-sayam.” and in French “Association Siamoise d’Intellectualite et d’Assistance Mutuelle” with the acronym “S.I.A.M.”

The photograph taken of members at the establishment of the association does not include Junior Lt Prayoon (rank at that time).

(B) I was elected the first secretary-general of the association for 1924-25 and was elected president of the association for 1925-26 and was re-elected president for 1926-27.

(C) During the third annual meeting of the association in late July and early August 1926, as President, I organised a political debate on democracy and urged unity in a struggle against the Minister plenipotentiary considered a representative of the system of an absolute monarchy, because his conduct in many instances was regarded as inappropriate. And I also organised a discussion on the methods of disbursing pocket money and living expenses which students did not receive as they should.

The Minister cabled to His Majesty the then King that I was the motivator to change the association into a labour union and inciting the students to be obstinate with the Minister. I and other members of the association submitted an appeal to His Majesty the then King refuting the charges of the Minister.

His Majesty the then King decided that I was to be held responsible and therefore issued an order for me to return to Siam, but my father appealed to His Majesty the then King to permit me to stay on until I had gained my doctorate. His Majesty the then King granted me permission to stay on. Details appear in my “Brief Biography of Nai Pridi Banomyong.”

After I had received the “Docteur en Droit (Doctorat d’Etat)” and “Diplôme d’Etudes Supérieures d’Economie Politique” in January 1926, I invited Jr Lt Prayoon (Reserve Officer), Jr Lt Plaek Kheetasangkha, student of the Artillery Officers School, Jr Lt Tasanai Niyomsuk, student of the Cavalry School, Nai Toua Labhanukrom, student for a doctorate in science in Switzerland, Luang Siri Raja-Maitri (Nai Term Charoom Singhaseni), assistant at the Siamese Embassy in Paris, and Nai Nab Bhaholyothin, a law graduate of Britain, together with me making up a total of seven, to meet and form the People’s Party in Paris on February 5, 1927, using a big room in No 5, Rue du Sommerard, not

in the “small room” or “house” of Nai Prayoon.

3.3 Under the section sub-headlined “Purpose of the Change,” the *Bangkok Post* again referred to Nai Prayoon’s “house” at 9 “Rue du Sommerand” on February 5, 1925, a matter I have cleared up above.

I would like to point out that Lt Gen Prayoon did not mention to the *Bangkok Post* the matter of the important policy of the People’s Party, namely “The Six Principles,” to which Lt Gen Prayoon agreed in the party inauguration meeting in 1927 and to which he declared allegiance in the meeting of the Parliament of the People’s Representatives on June 28, 1932, because “The Six Principles of the People’s Party” referred to the necessity to carry out the Economic Plan, which Lt Gen Prayoon later rejected by joining with Phya Manopakorn, then Prime Minister, in opposing “The Six Principles.”

Under the subheading “Procedure for Confiscating Power,” the *Bangkok Post* published many inaccuracies which combined with other sections could cause some people to mistake me for a communist.

The *Bangkok Post* carried the following quotation in the Prayoon interview:

“It was decided that we would first acquire the necessary knowledge to ensure our confiscating power; second, set up qualifications for people to be accepted into the party; and third, find the capital to finance the coup.

“About getting knowledge, we went to all the big bookstores and several libraries to find articles concerning the confiscation of power and changing the ruling system — among them the Young Turk Movement (of that time).

“But this ‘finding knowledge’ was the beginning of some trouble as Pridi became influenced by the communist newspaper and publications subscribed to.

“Soon after that the French police became interested in us and started reporting out activities to the Royal Embassy in Paris. So we were under suspicion and Pridi was ordered back to Thailand as a person inclined to having communist sympathies.”

The above indicated the intention of Lt Gen Prayoon to repeat the accusation he had made against me when he joined Prime Minister Phya Manopakorn that I was a communist, dissolved Parliament and discontinued the Constitution on April 1, BE 2476 (1933). The *Bangkok Post*

should not have joined Nai Prayoon in libelling me.

I have evidence, including a telegram from Prince Taraidos, Minister of Foreign Affairs, to Prince Charoonsak, Siamese Ambassador to Paris, dated October 22, 1926 (BE 2469), and another telegram dated November 25, 1926. These two telegrams have been reproduced in my book, "Some Matters Concerning the Setting up of the People's Party and the Democratic System," and which I later photostated for my book, "Brief Biography of Nai Pridi Banomyong (up till July 24, BE 2525)," one copy of which I sent to Nai Prasit Lulitanon who replied that he had received it and placed it in the *Bangkok Post* library for reference.

Let it be known that the Siamese Government did not order me back to Siam because I had sympathies with the communists, I was ordered back in my position as President of S.I.A.M. with responsibility for inciting students to demand from the Minister more money for expenses, and for sending a representative of the association to a meeting of the Thai Students Association of England in violation of the Minister's orders.

However, my father made an appeal to His Majesty the then King for permission for me to study until I received my doctorate before returning. His Majesty the then King graciously granted permission for me to stay in Paris in accordance with my father's appeal.

I refer to the following paragraphs in the Prayoon interview:

"I reprimanded Pridi, reminding him that we hadn't gone far and already the police and government suspected us. I then asked him to sever his connections with communist agencies and to accept democracy with respect to majority opinion.

"If the majority of people, however, were interested in leftist ideology then I resolved that I would resign and not go on. Finally, Pridi accepted my wishes and went back to Bangkok, but he took with him a lot of books about the communist system.

"I learned this from Luang Siri so I cabled the ship 'Columbia' on which Pridi was travelling and told him to send back those books."

These untrue statements are added to earlier ones already printed to worsen the libel against me, that I was a communist. The following are the facts:

Point 1: Lt Gen Prayoon, then a reserve junior lieutenant, did not dare to reprimand me who was his senior as President of the association

and was elected as leader of the People's Party set up in Paris, and there was no way in which Lt Gen Prayoon could have taught me to be a democrat because the conduct of Lt Gen Prayoon when only a major-general was considered, according to the evidence of the War Crimes Commission, to be a supporter of dictatorship and the Axis, German Nazism, Italian fascism and the Japanese military dictatorship.

Point 2: Nai Prayoon never threatened me that if the majority favoured leftist ideology he would resign from the party.

If Prayoon had threatened me in that way, I would not have done as he claimed, "Pridi accepted my wishes," as if Nai Prayoon, a first-year political science student, were a special person by whom I should be "reprimanded" and needed "reminding" by him. Among the promoters were people with knowledge, capability and integrity, and it would have been a happy occurrence if Prayoon had resigned from the People's Party from the first.

Point 3: There is no truth whatsoever to the *Bangkok Post* quotation of Lt Gen Prayoon that I took many books on communism with me and that he, a reserve junior-lieutenant, had cabled the ship, Columbia, to send the books back to Paris.

I would ask you to read a copy of the letter of Prince Charoonsak, Minister to Paris, dated February 26, BE 2469, which, according to the Thai calendar of that time was still 1926, to Chao Phya Bhichaiyati, acting Minister of Justice. You will notice that I travelled by a Japanese steamer. During those days it was generally known that Japanese ships had "Maru" at the end of their names. The ship I travelled in was the Kashima Maru, not Columbia, an American ship. The *Bangkok Post* should not confuse American steamers with Japanese.

Point 4: I was already a barrister at law of Siam before studying in France. Therefore, I knew the Customs law and since I had journeyed through many countries, I was accustomed to Customs procedures. Therefore, I would not have brought any communist books for Thai Customs officials to find in my possession so that they could turn me over to the police.

3.4 The *Bangkok Post* quoted Lt Gen Prayoon further:

"The General said, 'About one month later, a large van wheeled up to my front door with a big pile of books — and accompanying them was a letter from the police saying that I was an undesirable alien and

that they wanted me to leave the country immediately. So I had to leave for Switzerland and for several months negotiated from there for re-entry. Finally, I secured a guarantee from a Mr Beyrangye — a wealthy Frenchman who had lived in Thailand for several years — for my return to France.”

I and my friends in the People’s Party just learned about his incident by reading the *Bangkok Post* of August 15, BE 2525. I, therefore, ask the *Bangkok Post* to use common sense to see how this could be true.

Reason 1: The political system of France from the 1789 revolution until its occupation by Hitler’s Germany during the Second World War was such that it welcomed foreign politicians of various creeds, including the communist ideology, Marx, Lenin, Chou En-lai, Deng Hsaio Ping, who could reside in France and freely disseminate their ideas. Therefore, it was impossible for the French police to confiscate the books and deport Nai Prayoon suddenly.

Reason 2: The *Bangkok Post* quoted Lt Gen Prayoon as saying that he had to leave France for Switzerland for several months and negotiated his return through Mr Beyrangye, a wealthy Frenchman who had lived in Thailand for many years. I ask the whole staff of the *Bangkok Post* to look through the register of French residents of Siam or Thailand to find a Frenchman named “Beyrangye.” If supposedly the name “Beranger” or “Berange” is found, let the *Bangkok Post* use common sense to consider whether, if Lt Gen Prayoon could not know the Frenchman’s name, that Frenchman would stand guarantee for him.

3.5 Under the headline “Procedure for Confiscating Power,” there were many other mistakes but I would pass them by in order not to waste time but I have to mention the obtaining of finances for expenses of the changeover of June 24, BE 2475 (1932).

The *Bangkok Post* carried praise in its introduction and again over the “hearsay” claimed by Nai Prayoon that he was a genius capable of managing the June 24, BE 2475, coup d’etat to success with only 5,000 baht. The *Bangkok Post* carried the following quotation, “Thirdly, in the search for capital — out of necessity we had to share all expenses — amounts were taken out of each one’s salary. As for me, I was head of the money order section of the Post Office Department, so I had a lot of



money in my hand but didn't touch it — thinking that if we were not going to succeed then we had better die. Money had no meaning and revolution no retreat. In summary, reimbursement of all expenses was 5,000 baht which we sent to the Treasury Department to be approved.”

The contents of the quotation carried by the *Bangkok Post* are incorrect for the following reasons:

Point 1: Person with average intelligence could use basic common sense to see that the June 24 coup which Lt Gen Prayoon claimed to have planned since 1925, eight years before June 24, 1932, was too big to cost only 5,000 baht.

Point 2: Nai Prasit Lulitanon, who assisted in the work of the People's Party and who joined in the work of the Nitsan Printing Press, of which I was a major shareholder, should know that the Nitsan earnings from printing law books amounted to tens of thousands of baht.

I contributed one portion of my monthly salary and of what I received from teaching law and one part of earnings from the printing of law books, as a sacrifice for the nation, amounting to several tens of thousands of baht. Other friends donated from their salaries and other income which altogether came to an amount exceeding 5,000 baht many times over.

Point 3: I accept the truth that when Nai Prayoon returned from France he found work in the savings section of the Postal Department, where, as he claimed, much money passed through his hands but he did not take any state money to use in the revolution.

As for his statement, “In summary, reimbursement of all expenses was 5,000 baht which we sent to the Treasury Department to be approved,” I and my friends in the party never asked the Treasury Department or any ministry of the Thai government to reimburse us for expenses in the revolution. As to whether Nai Prayoon was reimbursed by a government ministry by himself or together with some others to the sum of 5,000 baht I have no knowledge.

As for matters under the heading “Confiscating Power,” and others besides those which I have opposed as inaccuracies, there are many incorrect statements printed by the *Bangkok Post* but they are minor details which I could not tackle for the present.

Let those who have responsibility for the *Bangkok Post*

translate this letter in full into English and publish it to eliminate the damage done to me and the People's Party and to set the historical record straight.

When the *Bangkok Post* has published my letter, please send me 10 copies at the above address by air mail.

Yours respectfully,
Pridi Banomyong.

THE AUTHOR

DR VICHITVONG NA POMBHEJARA has been journalist, university lecturer, public servant, member of parliament, research fellow, banking executive, industrial enterprise president, scientific and technological research institute chairman and is at present a member of the Royal Institute.

He was educated in Thailand, Australia, the Netherlands and the United States, and obtained his doctorate in economics from Harvard.

The author of more than 30 books on economics, history, biography, science policy, social change and social reflections, Dr Vichitvong is a professional writer as well as a professional radio news commentator.

Appendix

**Statement by
Professor Dr Wichian Watanakun***

at the UNESCO Executive Board Meeting, Paris, 11 October 1999

11 October 1999

Thailand (Wichian Watanakun)

Item 9.6

Mr Chairman, Distinguished Members of the Executive Board,

I would like first of all to thank you, Sir, in giving me the floor to address this august body.

In fact, Thailand has proposed to UNESCO the nomination of the two eminent personages to the list of Anniversaries of Great Personalities and Historic Events 2000-2001. The first name is the most revered Somdet Phra Srinagarindhra the Princess Mother, the second is Professor Dr Pridi Banomyong, the educator and humanist. We are gratified to note that our first proposal, the hundredth anniversary of the birth of Somdet Phra Srinagarindhra was included in the list of requests considered admissible by

*Chairman of the Sub-committee on the Nomination of Professor Dr Pridi Banomyong to UNESCO

the Director General as appeared in Document 157 EX/34. However, it is at the same time deplorable that our second proposal i.e. the nomination for Professor Dr Pridi Banomyong was not included in the list.

It is understandable that it is the first time new criteria and procedure initiated by the Executive Board has been put into effect. Our people at home could hardly follow and realise how important is the new submission form to be filled by the National Commission for UNESCO. The criteria for the selection of anniversaries and the procedure by which the role of the Intersectoral Committee is so dominant have not been given proper attention. Moreover, the procedure was not totally followed as the document containing the list of requests which has been judged by the Director General to meet the criteria was not sent to Member States and to the Members of the Executive Board in good time before the opening of the session of the Executive Board as laid down in the procedure. You might notice also that document 157 EX/34 was dated 4 October 1999, one day only before the opening of this session. Therefore, Thailand would like to request the Secretariat to prepare a list of requests by the Member States whose requests have not been included in the list with the reasons thereof, in time for distribution to the Member States at the General Conference.

With your permission, Mr Chairman, may I present to this Board our appeal that the name of Professor Dr Pridi Banomyong should be added to the list.

First, I would like to present Pridi Banomyong as an able and farsighted educator. He founded in Bangkok in 1934 the University of Moral and Political Sciences as an Open University giving higher education to the large part of population both in the cities and upcountry and consequently became its first rector. The University later changed its name to Thammasat University and has been a leading institution in helping to promote and protect democracy, social justice, and human rights in Thailand. There have been exchanges of professors and students with foreign universities. Students from neighbouring countries also



attend courses at Thammasat which has become one of the two most prestigious universities in the country. I might add however that the Thai representative in this competent body, Professor Dr Adual Wichiencharoen was a former student and a graduate from this University, he later became Professor and one of the top administrators of the University. In presenting an appeal to this Board on the case of the founder and former rector of this University, Professor Wichiencharoen for this reason chose to leave it to his alternate instead.

Secondly, as a humanist, Pridi Banomyong advocated peace and non-violence. At the same time, he did not succumb to power from outside. He led national resistance and rallied the nation to oppose invasion and occupation during World War II. That is why he was respected internationally and was the first Thai to be honoured by the Smithsonian Institution by naming a species of bird found in Thailand in 1954 after him as a symbol for peace. The combination of Pridi's relentless efforts to strive for social justice and to establish a meaningful democracy in Thailand was reflected in the constitution he was the architect. Universal suffrage to both men and women was thereby guaranteed as well as human rights were firmly recognised and upheld.

The third and final point I would like to mention is Pridi Banomyong was a man whose ideals were well taken and appreciated throughout the region. He furthermore supported self-determination and independence for all people. He even contemplated creating a Southeast Asian league among neighbouring nations. But a military coup forced Pridi to go into exile in 1947. His vision of a league of Southeast Asian nations lives on and has become a reality in what is now ASEAN. Pridi spent his later years in Paris and died here at 83. He would be 100 years old in the year 2000. His centenary celebration, already prepared on the national level, will take place next year.

Mr Chairman, Distinguished Members of the Executive Board,

The ideals and achievements of Pridi Banomyong could largely be linked to UNESCO's ideals and missions in the field of education,

social and human sciences. It would be regrettable that a centenary celebration of a personage so eminent as Pridi Banomyong is to be ignored by UNESCO. In the light of what I have just said, the Intersectoral Committee might see that it is appropriate to reconvene and reconsider its decision. May I humbly submit to the Executive Board that the hundredth anniversary of the birth of Pridi Banomyong be added to the list of celebrations of anniversaries as proposed to the Executive Board in Document 157 EX/34.

PRIDI BANOMYONG
(Luang Pradist Manudharm)
1900-1983

**A Great Thai Commoner:
For Peace, Democracy
and Social Justice**

CABINET RESOLUTION

Subject: The submission of Pridi Banomyong's name to the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) for its anniversaries of great personalities and historic events calendar.

The Cabinet officially sanctions the Ministry of Education's submission of Pridi Banomyong's name to UNESCO for its anniversaries of great personalities and historic events calendar. This official decision is also made pursuant to the centennial commemoration of Pridi Banomyong, the senior statesman, that is being held by the University of Moral and Political Science (Thammasat University). Pridi was the University's founder.

11 May 2000 will mark the centennial anniversary of Pridi. He had devoted the bulk of his life to the betterment of his country and society. Pridi had played a vital role in promoting and developing public awareness of issues of peace, democracy, and education. He was a moral conscience for the Thai people, and, more importantly, for humanity. Pridi stands tall as a sociopolitical icon. He had displayed, by any standards, considerable degree of honesty, loyalty, courage and sacrifice throughout his long career as Regent, Senior Statesman, Prime Minister, Minister of Interior, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Minister of Finance, and as the first Secretary General of Parliament. It is most appropriate that the Thai people look up to Pridi as a leading model.

Thai Cabinet meeting, 13 May 1997

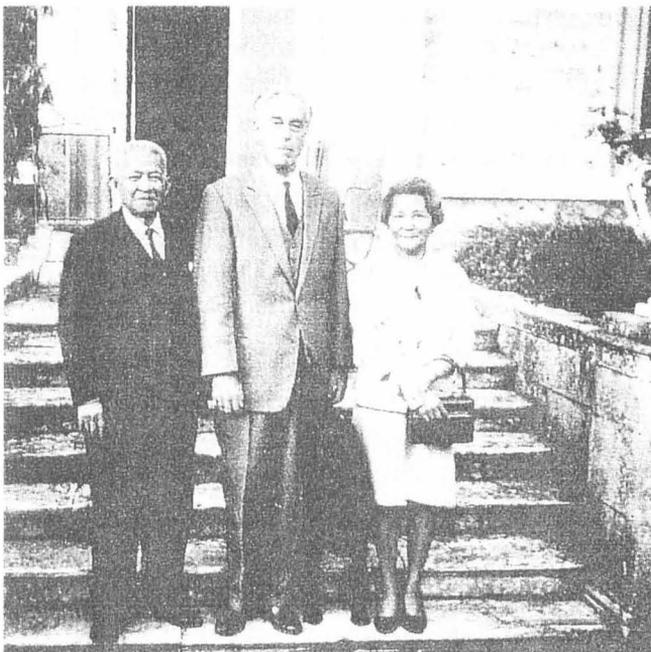
Pridi Banomyong was one of the greatest Thais of this century. Great, that is, in strength of character, vision, achievement, and nobility of purposes. Like all great personalities in history, Pridi continues to live posthumously. Many of his ideas, because they are embedded in universal values, are still very relevant today, inspiring many in the younger generation. The Thais often find themselves returning to or rediscovering Pridi's ideas and vision of a better society, especially when they had initially rejected them.

THE UPBRINGING

Pridi Banomyong was born on 11 May 1900 in a boathouse off the southern bank of Muang Canal in Ayudhya, the former capital of Thailand. He was the eldest son of a relatively well-to-do farming family. At the age of 14, he completed his secondary education. Too young to enrol in any institution for higher education, Pridi stayed with his family for an extra two years, helping them in rice farming before darting off to law school in 1917. Two years later, he became a barrister-at-law and was simultaneously awarded a scholarship by the Ministry of Justice to study law in France. In 1924, he obtained his "*Bachelier en Droit*", "*Licencié en Droit*" from *Université de Caen* and in 1926 a "*Doctorat d'Etat*" and "*Diplôme d'Etudes Supérieures d'Economie Politique*" from *Université de Paris*. Pridi was the first Thai to earn this appellation. In November 1928, a year after returning to Siam, Pridi married Miss Phoonsuk na Pombhejara. They had six children.



**Signing Ceremony with Minister Edwin Neville of U.S.A.
10 October 1937**



**Visiting Broadlands, England
September 1970
as invited guests of Lord Louis Mountbatten**

THE BEGINNING OF A POLITICAL LIFE

In February 1927, while still in Paris, Pridi and six other Thai students and civil servants, later to become the core of the People's Party, held a historic meeting. They vowed to transform the Thai system of governance from absolute monarchy to a constitutional one. The group elected Pridi as their provisional leader. As their guiding stars, the People's Party laid down the so-called "Six Principles" to put Thailand on the road to spiritual and material progress:

1. "To maintain absolute national independence in all aspects, including political, judicial, and economic;
2. To maintain national cohesion and security;
3. To promote economic well-being by creating full employment and by launching a national economic plan;
4. To guarantee equality to all;
5. To grant complete liberty and freedom to the people, provided that this does not contradict the aforementioned principles; and
6. To provide education to the people."

Later in 1927, Pridi returned to Thailand and joined the Ministry of Justice where he served as judge and subsequently as assistant secretary to the Juridical Department. Meanwhile he found time to run a printing house where he published many law documents and books. He also became a lecturer at the Ministry's law school. However the hope for progressive socio-political and economic changes in Thailand never faded from Pridi's mind. The 1932 Revolution opened the avenue for Pridi to realise his vision of a better, more just society.

At dawn on 24 June 1932, the People's Party, consisting of government officials, military officers, and ordinary civilians rapidly and



bloodlessly took control of the government, changing it from absolute to democratic, constitutional monarchy and installing the 1932 provisional constitution as the supreme law of the land. Pridi, the civilian leader of the People's Party, was the progenitor of this provisional constitution.

The 1932 provisional constitution served as a solid and fertile foundation for the growth and development of democracy in Thailand. It introduced two fundamental, hitherto unknown ingredients to Thai society and political culture: 1) the supreme power rests with all Siamese people; and 2) there must be a clear separation of legislative, executive, and judicial powers. Together, these two unprecedented principles brought about a complete transformation in the nation's power structure, planting the seeds of democracy in Thailand.

FOR PEACE, DEMOCRACY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

Between 1933 and 1947 Pridi held many major political positions, including Minister of Interior, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Minister of Finance, Regent and Prime Minister. King Rama VIII officially appointed him "Senior Statesman" for life. Throughout these years as government official and leader, Pridi assiduously worked to realise the "Six Principles." Among his notable accomplishments, some of them having long-term impacts, are: the drafting of the nation's first economic plan; the founding of the University of Moral and Political Science (Thammasat University); the 1933 Municipality Act which allowed the people to elect their own local governments; the revocation of unequal treaties that Thailand had been forced to sign with foreign powers; the reformation of the unfair tax system; the compilation of the country's first revenue code; and the founding of what ultimately became the Bank of Thailand.

During the Second World War, once the Japanese had invaded and occupied Thailand, even as Regent, Pridi clandestinely led the Free Thai Movement to resist such action. In recognition of the brave cooperation and assistance rendered by this movement, the United States government subsequently recognised Thailand as an independent country that had been under Japanese military occupation as opposed to a belligerent state subject to postwar Allied control.

On 16 August 1945, at the advice of Lord Louis Mountbatten (the Allied South East Asia Commander), as Regent and Leader of the Free Thai Movement, Pridi declared null and void the Pibulsonggram Government's declaration of war on the Allied as it was against the will of the Thai people. Through the good work of the Free Thai Movement, Thailand had thus worked its passage to peace and pre-war status. Fifty years later, in 1995, the Thai cabinet gave belated recognition and declared 16 August the "Thai Peace Day".

Throughout these turbulent years, Pridi never lost sight of what 'democracy as a way of life' meant. He never tired of nurturing and protecting the infantile Thai democracy gurgling in its cradle. Unlike most of his genteel contemporaries, Pridi never related to the masses with distrust and trepidation. On the contrary, he had great faith in them. In the essay (1973) "Which Direction Should Thailand Take in the Future," Pridi vividly and passionately reiterated his conception of participatory democracy, one that guided him all his life. He wrote, "Any system favoring a small section of a community will not last. In any community the majority must shape its future. [Here the majority includes] the deprived people, poor farmers, low-budget entrepreneurs, and patriotic capitalists who place the public interest above their own... and who want a new social system which provides a better living standard to the majority of people... social injustice [must be] abolished or reduced."

Pridi realised that a society is more democratic to the extent that fewer people are denied human rights and opportunities. He knew that political freedom without socioeconomic opportunities is a devil's gift.



He tried to reduce and eventually to remove hierarchies of reward, status, and power in order to improve society. He wanted to foster solidarity and compassion among his compatriots, enabling them to develop themselves, come to care about, promote, and benefit from one another's well-being as opposed to embarking on a cutthroat competition — a complete waste of energy. Pridi envisioned a society where all citizens helped contribute to the enrichment of the lives of all.

As Pridi neatly put it, “A society exists because of the participation of its members, and a social system which enables most people to legally influence decisions and move society forward is a democracy.” He added that since every society has political, economic, social, and cultural dimensions, it is essential for a democratic society to not only promote political democracy but also “economic democracy” (e.g., fewer people are being denied economic opportunities) and democratic thinking (e.g., compassion).

For instance, to promote economic well-being, Pridi advocated the creation of local cooperatives to undertake economic activities for the benefits of their members. The people should have direct control over their livelihood rather being dependent on the ruling circles' charity or philanthropy, he believed. Not infrequently, magnificent philanthropy masks brutal economic exploitation and charity becomes a pretext for maintaining laws and social practices which ought to be changed in the interest of justice and fair play, Pridi implied.

Pridi and his colleagues deemed it necessary for the people to fully understand the system of democratic governance and to be aware of their new rights and, hence, responsibilities under the newly-found system. As a result, in 1934 Pridi, then Minister of Interior, founded the University of Moral and Political Science. He was also appointed its first rector. The University was designed as an open institution offering numerous courses, including law, economics, human and social sciences. Reflecting his ideals, Pridi, in the speech made at the University's opening, declared “...A university is, figuratively, an oasis that quenches the thirst of those

who are in pursuit of knowledge. The opportunity to acquire higher education rightly belongs to every citizen under the principle of freedom of education... Now that our country is governed by a democratic constitution, it is particularly essential to establish a university which will allow the people, and hence the public, to develop to their utmost capability. It will open up an opportunity for ordinary citizens to conveniently and freely acquire higher education for their own benefits and for the development of our country..." Indeed Thammasat University has been a leading institution in helping to promote and protect democracy in Thailand.

Pridi also firmly advocated international peace. As a minister in Field Marshal Pibulsonggram's government, Pridi consistently expressed his disagreement with the government's irredentism: the plan and aggression Thailand embarked on to reclaim former territories in Indochina from France while Paris was lying prostrate under German occupation during the Second World War. Another evidence worth citing is his effort to tell the international community the uselessness of international violence through the English-dubbed film he produced, *The King of the White Elephant*.

Not surprisingly, Pridi supported self-determination and independence for all colonial peoples. This was particularly apparent when he served as prime minister. Such a foreign policy was merely the international counterpart of his domestic, democratic reforms. After all, they attempted to empower the people, granting them with the essential freedoms and rights necessary to manage their own destiny. He even contemplated creating a South East Asian League (SEAL) among neighbouring nations.

Again, Pridi was the architect of the 1946 constitution, one of the most democratic in Thai history. The adoption of this constitution reflected the culmination of Pridi's relentless efforts to strive for social justice and establish a meaningful, as opposed to nominal, democracy in Thailand. The constitution guaranteed universal suffrage to both men



and women and enabled the people to elect members of parliament in both the upper and lower houses. Human rights were well recognised and upheld in this constitution.

IN EXILE

On 9 June 1946, the young King Ananda Mahidol or Rama VIII was found mysteriously dead in his chamber with a bullet in his forehead. After visiting the palace and the scene and having consulted with leading members of the Royal Family, as prime minister, Pridi publicly declared this an “accident.” Intending to undermine his popularity and power, Pridi’s political opponent opportunistically trumpeted that the late King was murdered and that Pridi was involved in the regicide.

On the night of 8 November 1947, a group of military leaders and civilians staged a coup d’etat, using the regicide as one of the pretexts to destroy Pridi. (Numerous court decisions had since proven Pridi innocent.) Their tanks stormed Pridi’s residence in Bangkok, forcing him to flee to Singapore. On 26 February 1949, Pridi, aided by a number of naval officers and Thais who favoured a democratic government, unsuccessfully staged a counter-coup. Once again, he was banished from Thailand — this time never to return. Between 1949 and 1970, Pridi resided in China. He then lived an ordinary life, joined by his wife and daughters in the suburb of Paris. There he died peacefully on 2 May 1983.

While in exile, he wrote profusely and gave numerous speeches, continuing to share with later generations his conceptions of democracy, peace and social justice. The seeds of democracy that Pridi planted in Thailand more than six decades ago are beginning to sprout. Whether or not his tree of liberty will continue to grow and branch out, to some extent, depends on how the Thais apply and learn from his vision.

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DR VICHITVONG NA POMBHEJARA

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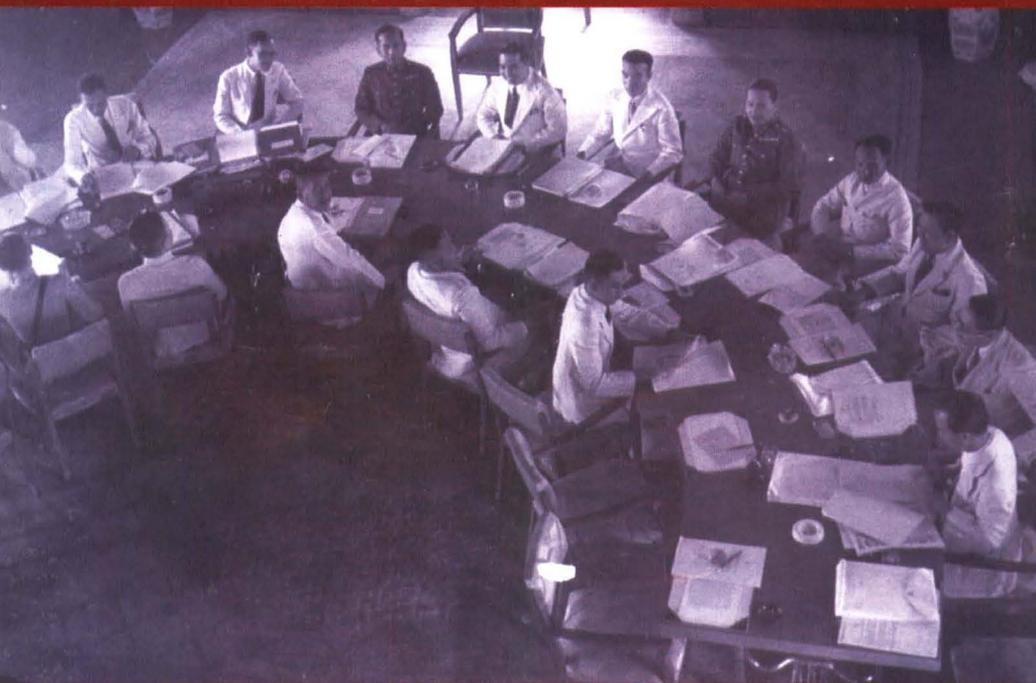
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The present book tells the story of a Thai statesman who, for 15 years, played a leading role in shaping the course of his country's development. Together with a group of friends who shared the same aspiration, he staged the 1932 Revolution which was a milestone in modern Thai history. When national independence was at stake with foreign troops impinging on Thai territories in 1941, he organized a resistance movement the success of which helped preserve Thailand's sovereignty.

But when the King, under whom he had loyally served as Regent and Prime Minister, met his tragic death, he was politically accused of plotting the assassination. For more than 30 years now he has never set foot on his homeland.

The man is Pridi Banomyong



To celebrate the centennial anniversary
of Pridi Banomyong
(11 May 1900 - 11 May 2000)
and on the occasion that UNESCO has included Pridi
Banomyong in the calendar of Anniversaries of great
personalities and historic events (2000-2001).

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