



TRENDS IN THAILAND

Moderator : *The seminar will be off the record. I will be taping it here, but it will be only for background use for our studies. It is on a non-attribution basis. We have asked Dr. Puey to speak for about half an hour, to be followed by questions, comments and general discussion. We have some microphones scattered around and there are seats which have been left open. Those are for those who were unable to sit around the table. If you would like to make a comment or ask a question, please come to one of the microphones and speak.*

Dr. Puey does not need any introduction at all. Most of you who are participating today are very familiar with his background, but we prepared a short biographical sketch which is attached to your list of participants. We are delighted to have him here and without any further introduction I am going to ask Dr. Puey to begin his comments.

DR. PUEY UNGPHAKORN: Madam Chairman, friends, I am also delighted to be given this opportunity to speak in this building today. I was told to keep to a time limit of 30 minutes

and I hope that you will remind me when I am about to overstep my time.

First of all, I would like to remind everybody here that what I am going to tell you is my version of the story. There are many other versions, perhaps the one that might be diametrically opposite to mine is the government version. I would urge you not to believe every word I say, but to weigh them against the government version and the version of the press from Thailand. Incidentally, my version happens to be close to the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* and the *Far Eastern Economic Review*, so you have been warned that perhaps we are in league together.

I don't need to introduce the subject by elaborating on the history of the politics in Thailand at great length. It suffices for me to remind this assembly that ever since 1947 or 1948 until 1973 we have had a military dictatorship all along. This is a stretch spanning at least one generation.

The prime ministers during that period of dictatorship all had the rank of field marshal. You could not be prime minister unless you were a field marshal.

When I talk about a military dictatorship, perhaps I am talking in sweeping terms. Our military dictatorships in Thailand are sometimes very mild and sometimes it becomes more rigid and more forceful. For instance, when Field Marshal Sarit took power from Field Marshal Phibul, for the first year or so, he became very severe with our people, particularly his opponents. The question of human rights was, of course, in the background. Later on he became a bit more lenient, shall we say, or forgetful about suppression. Then he died. I do not need to say how many million baht he left behind; I do not need to tell you how many hundred of widows he also left behind him.

Field Marshal Thanom became Prime Minister and then he soon declared a constitution and later on we had a general election. That, again, lasted for a few years until Field Marshal Thanom could not govern the country. Then he staged a revolution against himself and called himself the leader of the revolution in 1971.

In 1973, of course, partly because of luck—I think mostly because of luck, partly because of the division within the army, partly because of the mistakes of the military leaders to promote student power at first against the Japanese and later against themselves in October 1973, partly, also, because of the intervention of His Majesty, in October 1973 we suddenly found ourselves set free. Free in the sense that previously in the universities and colleges you could not mention Marx, you could not mention Lenin. The history of the world was taught for only half of the world with no mention of the other half. Before 1973 we could not have freedom of association. The Labor Law was adopted and enacted towards the end of 1973, giving full freedom to negotiate and freedom to strike. The minimum wage during the dictatorship until 1973 was about 60c per day which is very low by any standard. The price of rice in Thailand had been kept down by the deliberate policy of favoring the urban population, etc.

Even though during this period, since the 1950's and '60's, our economy as a whole had shown great progress. For some years the gross national income might rise 15% at any rate between 8% and 10% every year. The balance of payments was in good position and the international reserves continued to accumulate. At the same time, the social and economic problems—because of the factors I have mentioned—the minimum wages, the rice prices, the economic and social problems within

the country, as I saw it, were acute. It is a problem of distribution, a problem of bridging the gap between the rich and the poor. During dictatorship, the rich got richer and the poor got poorer. During that period, perhaps in conjunction with the Vietnam War, we had insurgencies in Thailand that gained momentum slowly. In 1963 three provinces were declared "sensitive" provinces, that is to say, they were provinces that the communist insurgents were operating in. In 1973 those three provinces became thirty-two provinces out of some seventy provinces in the country.

As I saw it, the economic and social problems began to be felt, more and more seriously. In 1973, from October 1973 until October 1976, we had progress, not only in the political field. That is to say, freedom of the press, personal freedom, academic freedom and the freedom of association were allowed to flourish. During this period we tried to solve many problems. The minimum wage went up from 60c per day to 80c to \$1.00 to \$1.25 in 1975. This had not been achieved without quite a lot of negotiation and, in certain cases, big rallies by the trade unions. I was then the Chairman of the Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister. We had been calculating this minimum wage matter and discovered two pertinent things. One is that if you take all the protein and calorie intake, the minimum for a man and a wife, and you take also the minimum calorie and protein intake for food, and you take minimum shelter, clothing and medical care plus a little tidbits here and there, we found that in 1974 the minimum wage should be \$1.35, not \$1.25. Nevertheless, there was improvement. Another thing we found is that on the average the wage bill that goes into the industrial product made in Thailand was only 9%. We came to the conclusion that the minimum wage could go up without endangering the econo-

mic conditions for the employers.

During that period the price of rice had been subject to negotiation, was questioned in Parliament, and the result was that the government found itself guaranteeing the minimum price of rice and sugar cane and other commodities. The rural area was a matter of attention by various people. The rights and the conditions of work of the farmers had been defended. The mining companies in the North had been using the streams to dispose of their tailings to the detriment of the farming community. That was the subject of negotiation. In the end the farmers won a victory over the mining company.

Measures for land reform were drafted and other kinds of reform had been begun, especially the all-important educational reform that we had been working at for more than two years. All this improvement, all this partial solution of the economic and social problems was accompanied by disturbance, definitely. How else could you negotiate with reluctant employers if you did not strike? How else do you push the government to intervene in your favor against the mining company without some kind of rally and demonstration? All these so-called disturbances were usually arranged by the student body-the National Student Center of Thailand. This was composed of members of all the universities.

Looking back, I think we were all short-sighted when we complained about the disturbances. If we don't have these kind of disturbances and this kind of negotiation, perhaps we could sit back and be quiet, but in the end it would turn into an explosion-like Russia in 1917. I personally feel that we ordinary people dislike strikes, we dislike rallies because they disturb the calm of our daily life. Maybe we have been wrong about all this.

What happened in 1976? My version is this, because of the habit of the military for a long time to rule the country, I think

the military really wanted that power back. I realized this as early as 1974, in the middle of 1974 while we were drafting the Constitution. We knew that certain people were plotting to organize various hooligan groups who armed themselves to the teeth and appeared in the streets of Bangkok and were never arrested by the police. There was a psychological warfare group that was organized by the army. There was a vigilante group that was organized by the Ministry of the Interior people. The army in 1973 and 1974 had never been touched by the administration of Thailand; local administration which is highly concentrated in Bangkok, had never been reformed. These people had been able to organize various groups in order to seize power again. They were not concerned whether Democracy would work or not.

That was the forefront of the change in 1976. I think that when you look at the association of these groups of military people with the police, with the governors of the provincial district offices, the alliance of this group with the big landowners and big bankers and industrialists and even small men in the villages that act as middle men, moneylenders, you will see that they were all on the side of so called "stability" that might be provided by the army. I am mentioning even the small moneylender or middle men because the students have been accused quite often for being Communists, purely because the students might organize the villagers into some kind of cooperative. When you organize a cooperative, you cut out the middle man and his profit disappears and, thus, he would certainly side with the military against the students.

I don't need to explain to you what happened in 1976, October 6, last year. The world press is full of horrid, horrific pictures and stories. I would like to mention to you something that, although it appeared in the world press, has not been

circulated very widely. On the sixth of October, after the killing of the students in my University, not one group was prepared to seize power, but at least two, maybe three. The group that has become the present government was the first one to go into the field. That is to say, they seized power at 6:00 p.m. of that day. The second group planned to seize power at 10:00 p.m. on that day. They could not do very much. Maybe the second group's astrologers were not as smart as the first group's astrologers in the sense that they could tell a more propitious time to stage a coup. One of the leaders of the second group was, of course, General Chalard Hiransiri who was subsequently dismissed from the army and became a priest in the same temple as Field Marshal Thanom. We don't know where he is now.

There may be a reason to believe that a third group of the army tried to stage a coup later on, too. The result was that one of the generals who belonged to that group was sent to supervise students in Japan and now he is back and will become Ambassador in the Netherlands. In your American system, you appoint as ambassadors those who have campaigned for your president and so on. In the Thai system, whenever there is a scandal, those people involved in the scandal become ambassadors. This has happened again and again.

I would skip to the present day. What is happening in Bangkok now? My diagnosis happens to coincide with the latest issue of the *Far Eastern Economic Review* (February 11). That is to say, the present government, although under the control of one group of generals, is in a precarious position. I must say that although the present government, which is civilian, does not see eye to eye with me in many respects, still they are controlled by the relatively moderate among the competing groups of generals in Bangkok. Since Field Marshal Praphas

has returned in January and because of the presence of Field Marshal Thanom inside Bangkok, the generals tend to rally around these two gentlemen. I believe that the present government realizes that the danger comes from this group.

Another group, apart from Field Marshal Praphas and Field Marshal Thanom's groups, would be the group that was led by one of the political parties, the Thai Nation. If you will remember, the leading members of this group originated from the family of General Phao. I must explain a little bit. When Field Marshal Phibul was Prime Minister, there were two rival camps under him. One was Field Marshal Sarit, who succeeded, and one was General Phao who did not succeed and eventually died in Switzerland. This branch of General Phao is again trying to seize power. They were allied with the second group on the sixth of October. They were also identified with the party that was in the coalition with Kukrit and in coalition with Seni Pramoj. They were in the government all the time during the parliamentary period.

A fourth group of army officers that might threaten the safety of the present government belongs to another group. For simplicity's sake I will say that they are those who have double-crossed Field Marshal Thanom and Field Marshal Praphas in 1973 and became more powerful—those who would like Field Marshal Thanom to go out, who do not like the prospect of serving under Field Marshal Thanom and Praphas should these two people become powerful again.

This is the situation in Bangkok nowadays as far as I can see. What about the rest of the country? Here I am on shaky ground. I am not supported by press reports, but I know from my correspondents and former students that quite a number of students and teachers and journalists and trade unionists, farm

leaders have gone into the jungle to join the Communists since October last year. How many? We don't know. I venture a guess of two or three thousand. Six thousand people are missing from regular University attendance. I take the number of those missing and divide by two. The number does not matter as much as the quality. The Communists have never been blessed with so many qualified people: medical students, engineering students, science students, educators, communications students and so on. In other words, the coup d'état that was launched in the name of anti-Communism, helped the Communists in the jungle of Thailand to become stronger. The result, as you may read in the paper, is that frequent attacks by the people in the jungle are being made.

On the other hand I hear, this time I am quoting the *Christian Science Monitor*, that the government forces have now resumed dropping napalm bombs on the guerrillas to the South and using chemical warfare in the North and the Northeast. The result is that there is fiercer fighting at this moment and in the future I am afraid it will become fiercer still.

Many of my friends and my students explain their own reasons for joining the communists in this way : we have tried by peaceful means to change society, we failed. Some of us have been killed. The only way to do it is by armed struggle and that is why they are, at this moment, forming a common front with the communists. I can understand them better now although I do not agree with them. I still believe that violence should not be resorted to and I still believe in the middle way. I do not want to live under Communism, but I do not want to live under the dictatorship. A group of friends share my view and we feel that we want two things. It doesn't matter what kind of model of Democracy it might be, but we want two

principles. One is freedom, some measure of freedom and human rights. Secondly we want to be able to participate in determining the destiny of the society. After all, these two principles are not new; they are not western. They are asian. Our name is "Thai"; that means "free." Every Thai would say that they want to be free. The principle of participation is embedded in the Thai culture. It is the idea behind the word "Sangha." Sangha means a collection of priests more than four in number who will determine what they want to do together—they consult each other. To those people who say that we are not literate and we are not rich, we cannot enjoy freedom, we are not ready to participate in the affairs of the country, I would say that that is not right. In fact, I and my friends' mission at this moment is to try to get to the middle way. We find it very difficult. We find it much harder to find the middle way in 1977 than we did in 1973. Whether we succeed or not, this is the aim we have set for ourselves. We will try and try again even if we fail 100 times.

One last word about what I want the American people to do or the American administration and Congress to do. In short, to support me, to support me and support my friends in this endeavor. Of course you cannot interfere with the internal affairs in Thailand, but at least as the member of a free country you should support those people who are legally and morally fighting for freedom. Secondly I would like the Congress to hold a hearing on Thailand with regard to determining the policy. It is about time that the American Congress and government revised their attitude towards the Cold War and the fighting in Asia. They should look at the history of the past 20 years. You have a knack, in Asia anyway, of backing the wrong horse and you side with the people who are not only defeated, but who are wicked and corrupt. Why don't you look at your own policy again? Thirdly,

I would like the American government to abstain from giving armed aid to either side. Of course, to give arms to the Communists is beyond question for the Americans, but do not give it to the Thai government because if you do the Communists will go to Hanoi and Peking and ask for more armed aid and then where are you?

At this moment I have the information fairly accurately that the arms used by the Communists in the jungle do not come from Hanoi or anywhere. They are bought in the black market or seized by the Communists inside Thailand from police stations or army detachments. I would ask you this, perhaps it is too much to ask for more. That is to say, to ask the American government to pressure the Thai government--whatever complexion it might be--to regard human rights as inviolable rights of the Thai people. Perhaps we should take heart from what President Carter has said quite often in regard to human rights. I think he is aiming at Soviet Russia and Czechoslovakia; how about beaming it to Chile and Thailand as well?

QUESTIONS

I would just like to ask Dr. Puey if he would explain a little bit more about the influence of the Communist Party elements in the student movement in Bangkok. You seem to indicate that there was little or no influence which is, of course, counter to much of what we've read. I wonder if you might like to comment on this particular question.

DR. PUEY: I would not say that there is no Communist influence among the students in Thailand. There has always been and I have been fighting with the students on this issue for

two long years. I know for sure that there has been some influence, but I think the influence is very small numerically. The communist tactics have been very influential sometimes among the non-Communist students as well. I don't deny that. I would like to report on one thing. When the students went out to Laos and declared on the radio of the Communists, the Voice of the Thai people, that they are now joining the Communists in a common front, the words 'common front' I interpreted as meaning that they are not Communists and they do not belong to the Communist Party, but that they are working with the Communists against the dictatorship. My assessment, even now, is that it is not too late for us to try to bring back those people who have formed a common front with the Communists. If they leave it too long, perhaps, as in the history of many other countries, the people who have joined the common front with the Communists will eventually come under the influence of the Communists.

You started your comments with some references to the state of the Thai economy in the years before 1976. I wasn't clear from your remarks whether you feel that economic influences played any significant part in the 1976 developments. I wonder if you'd address this subject and comment whether you would expect in the future the state of the economy to be influential at all in what transpires.

DR. PUEY: I am afraid I was rather short on this subject. Before 1973 I would say that we had progressed fairly well with the orthodox way of development, disregarding perhaps, to our regret, the social problems that accompanied that. We looked, together with many less-developed countries, at the gross national income

and the rate of growth; we did not look inside. For this I must blame myself as one of those who had devised this kind of development. As I said, the countryside was stagnant before 1973 and Bangkok, as you probably know, had grown bigger and bigger.

Between 1973 and 1976, the aggregate side of the economy went on as usual. Even last year we still had a balance of payments surplus; we had a growth rate of 6.5%. There was nothing to worry about on the macro side of the economy. The micro side, the distribution of income, wealth was our main purpose. As I said the bankers do not like it. The common man did not like it because of the disturbances I talked about. Big landowners looked at the prospect of land reform with horror although they dare not say so. Rich people do not like the inheritance tax in Thailand. All this played a big role in precipitating the coup, together with the quest for power by the military. It was a quite effective means for them to gain power.

Ever since October 1976, strikes have not been allowed. Minimum prices for commodities have been given up. Land reform appeared in the statute books, but no real political will exists to implement it. I could cite many things. Education reform has just been dumped. At the present moment, again, we are in the same situation that appeared before 1973. You can detect some economic motives and financial motives in all this, but I think they are supporting the political quest for power.

I wonder if you could give us your interpretation of the role of American policy in the years leading up to the 1973 establishment of democracy through the coup and how you view whether or not, American interests were served both by the establishment of parliamentary government and by the reestablishment of military dictatorship.

DR. PUEY: In the 1960's I happened to be the Budget Director and as such I was led into the conversations between the military and civilian people on the Thai side. All these bases, all the training of the border patrol police, and so on, I conceived, even at that time, as serving the American obsession for Cold War. Thailand is just a link in the international chain of strategy of containing Russia and China. It must have benefited the country, given your assumption that Thailand had to be protected from the Communists somehow. I think we all learned a lesson that the operation in Indochina was a failure. I think the operation in Thailand was a failure too. Coupled with this was the rumors—I do not think the rumors were unfounded—that military aid from the U.S. had enriched certain generals. On the whole I think the American influence in the defense of Thailand—I am not speaking about the American soldier—had been mixed. Looking back now we are a bit wiser. We can see that, on the whole, it had been futile in containing Communism. I don't claim that I foresaw in the beginning that it would come to this.

During the free period, 1973 to 1976, when the Americans were withdrawing from Indochina, the students demanded that the American forces should be withdrawn entirely and the American bases should be shut down and equipment taken out. In other words, quite a chauvinistic way of doing it. I believe that that was the time when the American influence had been rather negative, even momentarily. You appointed an Ambassador in Thailand in 1973 who had a great reputation for CIA adventure, although you withdrew him later on—it was a bit too late, the damage had been done. I must say that in my opening I said that—and I say this to my students often—all this, looking through history, the Americans have been our best friends all the time. They have never been, until now perhaps, imperialistic.

We have nothing to fear about losing territory to Americans. On the contrary, they have helped us, in 1914 to regain our sovereignty by being the first country, and by supplying a good foreign advisor in the person of Dr. Francis Sayer to go around the world and get other countries to withdraw their extra-territoriality rights. In 1945, at the end of the Second World War, I had first hand knowledge of how the American government had helped Thailand during the defeat of the Japanese against the claims of the British, the French and the Australians so that we were not a loser in the war. That was all very good influence.

The bad influence of the Americans started to be felt in the 1960's and the 1970's. Nevertheless, most Thai people still regard the Americans as our best friends and people who help us. The government cares for its image abroad. After all, they don't like me speaking to you; they make it quite clear that they don't want me to speak in Washington, D.C. because that will spoil their image. Nevertheless, it shows that they care for the image abroad, international public opinion and therefore they are a bit easier to influence than the people in Argentina or the people in Chile.

(.....is there any hope for that?)

DR. PUEY: I don't see any hope at all. I foresee if the coup d'état from any group of the three groups that I mentioned happen, then there will be more arrests and they will be more ruthless, because at the moment the military dictatorship is being hampered by the civilian cabinet. Many generals believe, they must have a fully military government. This is the rumour that circulates back home.

During the inauguration you didn't mention anything about the role of the palace in this. I thought that during the uprising of the students in 1973 it appeared more or less that the king had helped the students to succeed, but in 1976 I think, according to a rumor I heard and read about in the newspaper it seemed to be the other way around. Do you have any comment about that?

DR. PUEY: Well, I did mention about 1973 and it is true that I did not mention anything about the King or the Queen in my speech. That was deliberate because I feel that there are enough rumors in Thailand and across the press already. I feel that it is damaging to Thailand if too much is made out of what the King or the Queen is doing. I am not a royalist, I am not an ultra-royalist in the sense that I would consider the King as divine person. But I believe sincerely that the Monarchy has a role in Thailand, in a country like Thailand, a unifying role and a beneficial role. Therefore, I consider that it is my duty not to try to spread more news about the King. This is the simplest.

Dr. Puey, it seems that you've given us a very penetrating and profound insight into the two groups particularly, that is the military and the students. I want to ask if there is any other groups in Thailand developing political alertness, political consciousness. I have in mind for example, in the first elections of the 1960s, when a group of Thais with whom I was associated, maybe a dozen of them, 12, 15 of them wouldn't take the time. Now, these were people, college graduates, University graduates—they were disinterested completely. I was the only one trying to urge them to go vote. To them, they were completely defeatists, what's the difference? Now of course I realize those people had never lived under anything except that military dictatorship I speak of. Now are there any other groups developing today with more political alertness other than just students?

DR. PUEY: I'm afraid that at this moment the other groups are either silent or very small. I mean, people who think like myself, there are many, numerous. I hope in Thailand many of the ex-members of Parliament are trying to find a way out. Even Kukrit himself, by rumor, is trying to manoeuvre the situation somehow, but so far without success. So I would say that there are certainly some people in Thailand at this moment who are thinking roughly in the same way as my friends and myself. But at this moment nobody trusts any other person and therefore they keep quiet. Perhaps they will emerge later on as a third force for democracy.

On the other hand, quite a lot of young men, both inside the country and outside, have given up the idea of democracy by peaceful means. They think there is no choice now between the two: military dictatorship & communism. They have to join one or the other.

Dr. Puey, I would like to ask for your comment about something I found out when I was in Bangkok. I happened to go to Bangkok two days after the coup and some of the western observers I talked with told me that the students had overestimated their power. They went too far, because by asking the expulsion of Thanom, they were asking something that was against the Constitution that they and the rest of the intellectuals had worked so hard to bring about. They gave me this article from the constitution, section 47, which says "no person of Thai nationality shall be deported from the kingdom." And they said that it is very ironic that both the students and the intellectuals who worked so hard to bring true Democracy to Thailand have been the tools, or have been the force in bringing the military regime back.

Do you think that if the students had not over-demon-

strated, had not asked for things that really were beyond the power of the Seni government, because Seni, as we all know, is a lawyer, maybe military dictatorship would not have come back? Would there have been another occasion, another opportunity for the military to decide that they should take over? Because what I have been told was that the days before the military takeover were real anarchy and nobody was happy with the situation. So would you like to comment on that?

DR. PUEY: I must give my own opinion, my honest opinion. I can't hide my opinion. But I believe that you have been told half-truths. What the students had been asking the Seni government was to do either one of two things. Either to expel him or to bring him to court. The students, in fact, had been demanding this. But, I am not arguing for the students at all, but they did actually ask for two things; one or the other. Either expel him like Praphas, or if not, to bring him into court. And Seni's government, from the 19th of September to the 6th of October had not done anything at all, except to postpone decision. Well, that is my version of the story.

Another version of my story, is regarding the chaos that reigned before the coup d'état. In my opinion, the demonstration of the students in Thammasat, although I don't like it at all, was peaceful, a peaceful demonstration. There was no chaos, anything about it at all. The chaos was caused by the police going into the University at dawn, on the 6th of October and firing indiscriminately. And that created the chaos that you were talking about. And therefore, that was the time, the conditions from which you could stage a coup d'état, under the pretext that it was chaos. But if you will reread the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*, if not the *London Times*, the *Guardian*, if not the Japanese newspaper, this is the situation.

So who created chaos? I'm not saying the students are not at fault. I agree with your informer that the students were over-confident about their power. I wrote in the Thai language, and translated into the English language, my account of the situation. There was a paragraph that I have written about the student and perhaps I will give you a copy. I said the same, that the students were over-confident, they took up every issue, small or big, and tried to demonstrate, tried to create, so-called disturbances. Their popularity has waned. That is true. I have written that. It is true as far as the student's own behavior, that they create their own destruction. But it is not true in the sense that they had created chaos by any means.

Dr. Puey, you used to be mentioned rather frequently as a possible prime minister, and I don't really want to ask you what you might have done if you had been Prime Minister, but I wonder if in retrospect, there are some kind of general policy areas perhaps in relation to military or domestic politics or foreign policy where the democratic government might have done differently in order to permit Democracy to really take root in Thailand.

DR. PUEY: I think this is a subject that my friends and I intend to study and talk together. We must learn from the past. What have we done or have we omitted that creates situations by which democracy has just been destroyed. I think they are really important subjects and we intend to conduct some sort of seminars over this. My own opinion is that Democracy in my country has to be practices, or in any country. It cannot be done like in a classroom. In other words you cannot have a guided democracy and then suddenly you reach Democracy. You have to practice in this imperfection all the time. And therefore, it takes

time before you strike the right note. After all, Britain took several decades to do this. The French failed again and again and again and they reached this situation, although imperfect, still of democracy. And you yourself, you have since 1776 learned to be a free country, I am not flattering you at all, but the fact is that you prize Democracy very highly. But nevertheless, I think it takes time.

In order to allow some time for it to grow somehow, and then flourish, I think you need to take some action. In other words, I think we should have reorganized the army so that it could not strike back within two or three years. Perhaps if we reorganized the army then in 1973 the army might have seized, might have staged the coup right away. Perhaps, but that might be better than leaving three years before they strike. Perhaps we ought to do some kind of administrative reform so that we have local government control by the local people instead of being controlled by Bangkok. There are many other things that remain to be done. But we need time. We will have to study more about this.

Dr. Puey, your address left the impression, at least in my mind, that the U.S. presence in the sixties was sort of unilaterally imposed. I remember sitting in on some meetings in Bangkok with Marshal Sarit, Ambassador Young, and with you if I'm not mistaken in which there was a commonly perceived interest in having a U.S. military presence in Thailand. This was a Thai desire as well as an American one.

DR. PUEY: Oh, I'm sorry if I gave you that impression. I think that this was mutual, a mutual agreement between the U.S. and the Thai government definitely.

I think that one can argue that the presence was prolonged beyond necessity. I think that there's a good argument on that score. But another point I wanted to raise: Thailand and Vietnam have had an historical opposition that goes back, in warfare, at least 500 years. If one posited that in 1954, when the French left Indochina that we were left holding the bag there, we had a choice of either not taking up from the French role or staying on. We perhaps made the wrong choice. But if we had not made the choice we did, and we did make that choice I believe, because of the example of Korea in 1950 and the several examples in Europe in the years after World War II. At any rate, if we had not made that choice and had just walked out in 1954 along with the French I would guess that North Vietnam's takeover of the South would have been precipitated within a couple of years. Instead of occurring by 1975, it would have occurred by 1956 and 1957. Now Thailand, between 1957 and 1975 at least had the opportunity to build itself up economically. It had an awfully good opportunity to build up its road infrastructure for example, particularly in the Northeast. We bought time for Thailand really, in their whole presence, however disastrous it was in Vietnam. How do you think things would have turned out for Thailand given the historical North Vietnamese-Thai rivalry, if we had not stayed on in Vietnam in 1954?

DR. PUEY: I think that your analysis would presuppose a deliberate policy of the North Vietnamese to attack Thailand and you also presuppose that Thailand in the 1950's was even weaker than Vietnam in the 1950's. I don't believe that these two assumptions are true. You see, as a matter of fact, I don't know, after years of suffering, unnecessarily I think, suffering,

North Vietnam had taken over. Whether it's a good thing or a bad thing to have it happen in 1975 or have it happen in 1953 without so much suffering, I don't know. You have to judge for yourself. For myself, I would judge that if they were going to take over in 1953, without too much suffering, North Vietnam I mean, perhaps let them do it. I mean, I'm not encouraging the Communist takeover, as you can see not only from my words but from my actions and speech and writing. But again, in the 1950's, I think that Thailand, if we could not defend ourselves then it is hopeless for the Thai people; that is, I mean, if we cannot help ourselves, be self-reliant in defense against the Vietnamese, even if the Vietnamese wanted to attack us. Well I feel that Thailand came out of the Second World War fairly well, untouched, whereas Vietnam had been fighting war with the French. I think that we had the strength. I think that if you are tackling about inter-war strategy and tactics, military tactics, I think we could fairly well defend ourselves.

You went through a long list of the reforms that were instituted, or at least begun between October 1973 and October 1976. I have one simple question and that is, why wasn't there a groundswell of popular support and unification around the democratic forces within the country that would have made it impossible for the military to reassert itself?

DR. PUEY: Well, the short answer is that there was not enough time at that time. And also, the military had organized several groups of people to attack the students. Not only the students, but attack the farmers, the workers, urban workers as well. The psychological warfare that had been waged, had been waged successfully by the army. So on the one hand, there was not enough time, on the other hand, as I said, the students

spoiled their chance, their own chance. On the other side, the people who wanted to disrupt that system, who wanted to come back to power had time and money, that is, public money, to organize their resistance to the democratic forces.

Between 1974 and 1976 at least the terrorization and the political assassination took place in 50 or 60 cases, including of course, Dr. Boonsanong who was known to many of you here.

I have recently heard that there was a fairly large scale attack by the Khmer Rouge on several villages in the bordering areas that involved the killing of I guess 40 to 50 villagers in a brutal kind of way. I'm wondering if you would speculate as to the reason for the Cambodians trying to provoke a more powerful neighbor that is in a situation really, to retaliate, not to assist them economically, should that ever be possible, unless some outside force might be in a provocative posture.

DR. PUEY: It is incomprehensible for me why they should do so. But today in the *New York Times* there is an explanation put out by the Khmer to say that all these provinces belong to them and all these villages, and they are free to kill anybody who lives in that territory. That is rather lame duck excuse anyway. I was quite surprised because of a story I got from Kukrit himself. Kukrit when he was Prime Minister went to China. When he came back he told us, in a drinking session, that Mao had already told the Cambodians to be friendly with Thailand. Kukrit himself had asked Mao to use his influence so that the Khmer should send somebody to come and talk and normalize relationship between the two countries in Bangkok. And Iang Saree, the Foreign Minister of Cambodia came to Bangkok in the Chinese plane and talked. We were thinking

that we were all good friends. One thing I'm pretty sure of is the cruelty of the Khmer Rouge soldiers in their own country reflects the weakness of the Khmer Rouge among the Khmer population and therefore they have to be more ruthless.

After all, within Cambodia, apart from what Lon Nol might have created, they have to contend with the people who want to follow Sihanouk, they are still in great numbers. The explanation that variously reaches us was, regarding the attack on these villages on the border is that the Thai really took their money and promised to deliver goods to the Khmer and because they had not delivered the goods, they were killed. But I found it beyond reason to kill all the children and the women. I mean, I don't quite understand it at all, so I just take the explanation at face value.

You obviously do not expect much in the way of social reforms from the present government or any of the other possible coup groups that might replace it. Why is it that the military who does not need the support of the big landowners or the community in the same sense that another government might need it, why is it that they are so reluctant to move ahead with land reform, to move ahead with minimum wage reform. I can see the education reform, but the minimum wage and to help persons who are indebted and so on, why the great resistance to this within the military?

DR. PUEY: I can only venture to guess. I think they are short-sighted and that's why. I mean if they had been a bit more lenient to political prisoners, if they had undertaken some reform, they would be much more popular. They would be able to consolidate their position much better. I think that there is just short-sightedness.

when I saw you in Bangkok a couple of years ago, less than that actually, and talked with you and Prime Minister Kukrit about the zone of peace, freedom and neutrality, both of you were looking optimistically, for a trend that would create this kind of arrangement in a Southeast Asia that would embrace both the Socialist states and ASEAN. How would you guess that events in Bangkok over the past few months are effecting thinking about this strategic outlook.

DR. PUEY: The situation is reversed. When Kukrit told you his idea I think he was really sincere about it and I think even nowadays he still holds on to that. The first step of the Kukrit government as well as any government was to normalize the relationship with our communist neighbors in order to take advantage of the declared principle of Panchasila that had been invoked since Nehru and Chou En Lai's time in 1955. Unfortunately, this matter had been reversed because of the intransigence of the military group. You see, when Pitchai Rattakul, the Foreign Minister under Seni, went to talk with Hanoi, the military at that time openly stated their disapproval. Immediately after the coup our old friend Anand Panyarachun who was Undersecretary of Foreign Affairs was investigated. It was only much later that he was found innocent of any charge.

All the rumors that the government had encouraged to happen about the Vietnamese in Thailand, all sorts of stupid rumors, showed that the Thai government at this moment regards their Communist neighbors as enemies, ready to fight them at any time. Of course, they exercise patience with regard to the Khmer Rouge, that is true, but the kind of provocation that they spread about the Vietnamese is unthinkable. But you see, that zone of peace has disappeared, unfortunately.

Dr. Puey, there were several references in your presentation to what you call the "stagnation of the rural areas" during the, I guess up till 1973. Actually, from the middle 1960's on, isn't it true that the government did initiate, and actually implement a large number of rural programs which, while I think they might have been motivated because of insurgency and political reasons rather than a desire for social and economic reasons, but weren't those same programs later pursued, furthered, by the government after 1973, from 1973 to 1976?

DR. PUEY: The government arm for rural development consists of the ARD (The Accelerated Rural Development) and I think that they have done some good work. They have done that with American money, I acknowledge that. They have also the Border Patrol Police to look after the hill tribes. That is not very successful. On the contrary, I know of many cases where opium is the commodity that attracts more attention of the police rather than law and order.

They have also enlarged the work of the Public Welfare Department under the Ministry of the Interior. That is true, but in my mind and I have surveyed quite a lot, they have not penetrated the problem at all. That is why I feel, as you said, you are quite right, the motive of the ARD was to combat insurgencies. There are quite a lot of rural people, leaders, who say that if you want the government to take care of you, you must create a Communist in your village. Otherwise, the government would not come to do anything at all. And that is true of perhaps 80% of the countryside. The central plain where the land reform problem is the most acute, well, not very serious like in many countries, but relatively acute, had never been touched by the government.

In the meantime, I feel that there has been a gap between government services and the local people. You go and look at the government extension service, how do you call, your agricultural extension officer, you go and look at the work, say in the health service, for people in the rural areas, the education people in the rural areas, they just sit in their office instead of going out to help the people. Something needs to be reformed in this field.

The second part of my question, (the moderator intervenes to say, "we have four minutes left, so if you could please, make it in four minutes.") What happened from 1973 to 1976 with these rural programs?

DR. PUEY: They went on, but the students, again I'm talking about students, although I'm criticizing them, the students went on to work in the rural areas on top of what the government would have provided. Well, I was involved in a scheme of three universities working together, called the Maeklong Project, that sent students out to help the countryside.

Moderator: *Thank you. Just one more question.*

Dr. Puey, what kind of restrictions, if any, have been placed on faculty in the different universities since the takeover. What they can teach, what they can't teach.

DR. PUEY: Well, they cannot teach any political theory. They cannot teach comparative economic systems. Of course, the whole Socialist literature, I'm talking about the range between Social Democrat and Communist, is totally banned and books are burned or confiscated. They are not to allow any student

union in their University. In general, it's more like universities in Singapore, a bit more.

Moderator: *Well, I've promised Dr. Puey and all those who have participated this evening that I would end this at seven o'clock. I'd like to thank Dr. Puey very much for giving us his personal point of view about the situation in Thailand and the future of Thailand and thank you very much for coming and participating in this seminar. (Applause)*

February 15, 1977

*At The Center for Strategic & International Studies,
Georgetown University, Washington D.C.*

Moderator: Dr. Serino Carlson