

## PART III: AFTER THE REVOLUTION

13. Excerpt from: *Concise Autobiography of Nai Pridi Banomyong*
14. Speeches (1934–36)
15. Establishment of the Anti-Japan Resistance Movement and Seri Thai (1981)
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*Senior statesman Pridi on his return from a tour of China, USA, and Europe,  
20 February 1947*

# INTRODUCTION

## LIFE

After the 1932 promoters had made a second coup in June 1933, Pridi returned to Siam in September and was cleared of the charge of being a communist. Between 1934 and 1941, as minister of interior, then foreign affairs, and then finance, he tried to implement some of his vision of a country free of colonial pressure, being led by enlightened and efficient bureaucracy towards a more prosperous and equitable future. But from 1935–36 onwards, the People's Party became more seriously divided—partly over domestic strategy, but more drastically over how to manage the split in the developed world between liberal and fascist camps. On 8 December 1941, Japanese troops occupied Thailand. Eight days later Pridi was pushed out of the Cabinet and appointed one of the regents for the young (and absent) king. He became the local leader of the Seri Thai resistance movement against the Japanese. In 1946, Pridi and his allies were briefly in the ascendant. Pridi became prime minister. Parliament accepted the constitution which Pridi claimed finally fulfilled the promise of the 1932 revolution. The People's Party was dissolved. But after June 1946, royalists began to blame Pridi for the mysterious death of King Rama VIII. In 1947, the army seized power, and scrapped Pridi's constitution. For the next four years, Pridi tried to organize his Seri Thai remnants in armed resistance to military dictatorship. In 1949, he escaped to China.

## WRITINGS

The first piece, from the *Concise Autobiography*, is Pridi's own brief record of his achievements as a minister in the mid and late 1930s. As in the earlier extract from this book, the note style of the original is preserved in the translation. The following three speeches were broadcast by radio on the anni-

versary of the first constitution (27 June 1932) in 1934, 1935, and 1936. The *Establishment of the Anti-Japan Resistance Movement and Seri Thai* was printed in the 1981 memorial volume of Pramot Phungsunthon, a 1932 promoter, MP, and aide to Pridi in the 1930s, member of Seri Thai, publisher of many of Pridi's writings, and the first manager of the Ratchadamnoen boxing stadium. "What Happened inside the Regency Council" was the first of Pridi's retrospective pieces on Thai politics to appear, published by the Nittivet press of Pramot Phungsunthon and Proeng Siriphat in 1972. The 1946 speech was delivered in the Assembly after the passage of the 1946 constitution, just a month before the death of King Rama VIII. "Uphold the Aim for full Democracy of the Heroes of 14 October" was written in the two months following the student revolution of 1973, and sent to be included in a Thammasat student publication in December of that year. The final excerpt is taken from *Ma vie mouvementée et mes 21 ans d'exil en Chine populaire*, which was published privately in Paris in 1972, subsequently distributed in Thailand by UNESCO and the *Bangkok Post*, and translated into Thai as *Chiwit phan phuan khong khaphachao lae 21 pi thi liphai nai satharanarat Chin*.

## PREFACE

Again this section contains a mix of contemporary documents on the one hand, and later attempts to reflect and interpret on the other. As brief records of a political career spanning seventeen critical years for both Siam and the world, they offer a very fragmentary view. But a handful of themes stand out.

Siam at the time of the 1932 revolution was still a very undeveloped country, even within the Asian context. Its economy was based on agriculture (in the outline economic plan, Pridi devoted only a handful of paragraphs to the modern urban economy). The monarchic state was oriented to defence, control, extraction. Against such a background, the ideals which Pridi had summarized into the six principles translated into an intensely practical challenge for the post-1932 government. The three speeches from the mid-1930s trace a nice progression. The first is largely a lecture on the importance of the constitution and the rule of law, with some comments on economics and education. The emphasis is on principles and ideals. The second is a laundry list of projects and practical achievements—statistics of crime reduced, mental hospitals built, electricity plants funded, law codes completed, numbers of medical staff trained, length of water pipes laid. The climax of the speech is a list of road construction projects and an announcement on the reduction of electricity tariffs. The speech presents

constitutional democracy as a more efficient and effective form of social management. The third speech switches to Siam's position in the world, and the interaction between domestic progress and international pressures. This speech presents constitutional democracy as Siam's calling card in the modern "civilized" world. It anticipates how much Siam's fate over the next decade will be decided by international rather than local forces. Over the course of these three speeches, Pridi has progressed from philosophy, to administrative practicality, to global realism.

Pridi saw that the enemy of progress was not monarchy or any particular king, but the corrupting reign of privilege which sheltered under the umbrella of monarchy and blocked any programme of progress for the mass of the population. Pridi was consistent on this. In the announcement of 24 June 1932, he denied any aspiration to "snatch" the throne, but inveighed against the *chao nai* who "farm on the backs" of the population. From the reflective standpoint of his later years, this point took on even greater importance. He painted the ideal framework for Thailand as a constitution-based democracy with the king at its head. After Thailand's post-war experience of military dictatorship, he became more aware than ever of the important role the monarchy could play in blocking the aspirations of dictators. But the danger was that monarchy and monarchism could also be manipulated to serve dictatorship. In later life he stressed that the 1932 objective of a constitutional monarchy had not been enough; the proper aim was "constitutional democratic monarchy". The most vituperative passages in his later writings were reserved for those who perverted constitutions and sought personal advantage by manipulating the power and prestige of monarchy.

This conviction has to be seen in the context of the three-way battle which developed through the 1930s and 1940s. The People's Party (at least in Pridi's imagining) had conducted a revolution against privilege and inefficiency in the name of law, constitutionalism, equity, rights, and progress—the outline programme of new nationalists the world over in this era. But in the 1930s, this nationalism underwent a split—again on a world rather than a local scale. Some were attracted to the "strong state" version of emergent fascism. Others clung to a "liberal" model based on the supremacy of elected parliaments as the best possible expression of a popular will. Within Thailand, this led to increasing estrangement between Pridi and Phibun, between (roughly) the civilian and military elements of the People's Party. This estrangement was exacerbated by the difficulties of managing Thailand's position in a global war between the two nationalist tendencies.

Even so, this estrangement was manageable in the local arena. Despite these strains, the People's Party stuck together and managed its own internal conflicts reasonably well through to 1946. But the situation changed in the immediate post-war period. Many of the royalists who had fled or lain low since 1932–33, now returned or re-emerged. The political struggle now became a more complex three-cornered fight. The focus became the full restoration of monarchy following King Rama VII's abdication, the long minority of his successor, and the resulting fifteen years without a resident, reigning king. The issue was not so much the restoration itself, but rather in the service of what political cause the restoration would be carried out—Pridi-style democratic constitutionalism, military-led dictatorship, or the revival of aristocratic norms and privileges. Pridi tried to build an alliance with the royalists in opposition to militarism. He invited Seni Pramoj to return and become prime minister; released many royalists held as political prisoners; restored ranks and titles; and lifted political restrictions on royal family members. But these overtures were rejected. "What Happened inside the Regency Council" may be read as a rueful and angry account of his attempt to work with the royalists. The 1946 speech in the Assembly shows Pridi at the point of realizing that the royalists will not help him defend democracy against dictatorship.

Ultimately, Pridi's vision was defeated by an alliance of the other two. This royalist-military alliance took a decade or so to work out its terms and conditions, and required an American helping hand. But the decisive point was the political turmoil of 1946–47 marked by a revolving door of premierships, the mysterious death of King Rama VIII, and the first in a long series of classic military coups.

This is why Pridi returned again and again in his later writings to this period, and particularly to the contrast between the 1946 and 1947 constitutions. The 1946 constitution made both chambers elective. The 1947 constitution substituted an appointed senate. The military dictators were able to appoint a tame senate, while claiming that the appointments were officially made by the king. This tame senate allowed the dictators to control and manipulate parliament. Only in 2000 has the senate again been made elective. At times, Pridi's reiterations about the age limit of electoral candidates, the appointment of senators, the drafting of clauses on the royal signature, and the ranks of appointees, can seem obsessive. But for him these were the means by which his constitutionalist ideal was not just hijacked, but turned into the basis of a pact between dictatorial nationalism and aristocratic privilege which shaped Thailand's political course for a generation.

This conviction in turn framed Pridi's reaction to the 1973 student uprising. For a quarter-century, the political tide had been running against

him. In 1973, he seized immediately on the hope that the student uprising signalled that the tide had turned. "Uphold the Aim for Full Democracy of the Heroes of 14 October" appeared within two months of the event. It was followed by a stream of pieces through which Pridi hoped to pass on the lessons of his experience to the student leaders, politicians, and makers of the new constitution. These messages ranged from discourses on general constitutional principles down to detailed plans on how to divide the country up into electoral constituencies. Like the two essays on 1932 in part 2 above, "Uphold the Aim" dwells on the question of why the ideals of the People's Party were blocked and reversed by military dictatorship. But the hope engendered in Pridi by the 1973 uprising makes the tone different and the analysis deeper in this piece. Perhaps emboldened by the king's alignment on the student side in October 1973, he is more detailed in his account of King Prajadhipok's role in 1932–33, and more explicit about his own ideal of a constitutional democratic monarchy as a bulwark against dictatorship. And finally, he is also more explicit and more acid about the corrupting influence of lingering aristocratic privilege.