

## 16. WHAT HAPPENED INSIDE THE REGENCY COUNCIL

[Translators' note: In section II of this piece, we have simplified some of the elaborate royal names and titles. Please see appendix 3 for a description of most of the titles and ranks mentioned. From section VI onwards, Pridi consistently refers to Phibun as *chom phon po*, Field Marshal P., the usual Thai contraction of his name. We have rendered these as "Phibun".]

### I

When King Prajadhipok travelled to Europe in January 1934, the Assembly passed a resolution to approve the royal wish to appoint Somdet Chaofa Kromphra Naritsaranuwatiwong as regent from 12 January onwards by royal decree.

### II

Later King Prajadhipok abdicated the throne on 2 March 1935 at 13.45 (British time). Somdet Chaofa Kromphra Naritsara hence was relieved of his duty as regent.

The government of prime minister Phraya Phahon Phonphayuhasena proceeded according to the constitution of the kingdom of Siam 1932 clause 9 which runs:

The succession to the throne will proceed according to the intent of the Royal Household Act on the Succession, 1924 and with the approval of the Assembly.

It was the grace of King Vajiravudh (Rama VI) to have issued the Royal Household Act, 1924 which was re-enacted by the provisional constitution of 27 June 1932 and the constitution of the kingdom of Siam 1932.

Students who have studied the royal chronicles of Ayutthaya, Thonburi, and Rattanakosin will remember that previously after the death of a king very serious problems arose over the choice of a successor because there was no royal household law with a clear ruling. In the case that the *upparat* ("front palace" or heir apparent) was still alive, then the custom was followed

for him to succeed. But there were many cases in the past when the heir apparent died before the king and no heir had been established.

When King Phutthaloetla (Rama II) ruled the country, he appointed Somdet Phra Anuchathirat formerly called "Chaofa Chui" as *upparat* with the name Somdet Phra Mahasenanurak. He had sons with various consorts. For instance, with Chaochom Samli, the daughter of King Taksin, he had many sons including Phraongchao Phong-itsaret, the founder of the Itsarasena family. With Chaochom Sap, he had Phraongchao Phumarin who was the founder of the Phumarin family (Momratchawong Chiak Phumarin entered the na Pombejra family as the mother of Phraya Chaiwichit Wisitthammathada, the father of Thanphuying Phoonsuk Banomyong). But this *upparat* died before his brother King Phutthaloetla (Rama II) who did not appoint another prince as *upparat*. Thus when King Rama II died, his son Krommun Chetsadabodin, who at the time held the rank of *phraongchao*, arising from the fact that his mother had been born as a commoner, ascended the throne before Somdet Chaofa Mongkut whose mother had the rank of *somdet chaofa*.

When King Phra Nangklao (Rama III) died without having appointed a son or any prince as *upparat* in place of Somdet Phra Mahasakdiphonlasep who had died earlier, members of the court and senior officials together invited Somdet Chaofa Mongkut to ascend the throne as King Mongkut (Rama IV).

When King Mongkut died without having appointed a son or any prince as *upparat* and successor in place of Somdet Phra Pinklao who died before the king, members of the court and senior officials together invited Somdet Chaofa Chulalongkorn to ascend the throne under the name King Chulalongkorn (Rama V), and later invited Phraongchao Yotyingyot (who had another name as Phraongchao "George Washington"), son of the late *upparat*, to have the title as *upparat*.

This *upparat* passed away. Then King Chulalongkorn issued a decree abolishing the position of *upparat*, and appointing his son Somdet Chaofa Vajirunhis, son of Queen Savarintra, as crown prince. When this prince died, King Chulalongkorn appointed his son Somdet Chaofa Vajiravudh, son of Queen Saowaphongsri. The king later elevated her to a higher rank than Queen Savarintra, the mother of Somdet Chaofa Vajirunhis who had passed away already.

When King Chulalongkorn passed away, members of the court and senior officials together invited Somdet Chaofa Vajiravudh to ascend the throne as King Vajiravudh (Rama VI).

King Vajiravudh appointed Somdet Chaofa Chakrabong, his younger brother from the same mother, as heir. But he passed away before the king.

Hence he appointed Somdet Chaofa Atsadang, another younger brother by the same mother, to be heir. But he also passed away before the king. So he appointed Somdet Chaofa Prajadhipok, younger brother by the same mother, as heir. Somdet Chaofa Chuthathut, another younger brother born to the same mother before Somdet Chaofa Prajadhipok, had passed away earlier.

### III

The cabinet deliberated for five days from 2 to 7 March [1935] over which member of the Chakri royal family was appropriate for the government to propose for the approval of the Assembly as the future king. The constitution stated the succession must proceed "according to the intent (*doī nai*) of the royal household law". At that time there were several princes with the rank of *phraongchao*, sons of several different *somdet chaofa*. Many ministers had not studied the royal household law to gain a clear understanding. I had studied it somewhat in order to teach the course on administrative law at the law school of the Justice Ministry in 1931. So I explained the major principles of the royal household law which prescribed the order of succession for various cases, that is: 1. where the king has sons or grandsons; 2. where the king has no son or grandson but has younger brothers by the same major queen (*phraratchachonnani*), or sons of such a brother; 3. where the king has no son, grandson, or younger brother by the same major queen, but has elder or younger brothers by another major queen, or sons by such brothers; 4. where the king has no son, grandson, younger brothers by the same major queen, or brothers by another major queen, but has other siblings (*prachao phiyathoe* or *phrachao nongyathoe*) or sons by such siblings; 5. where the king has no son, grandson, younger brother by the same major queen, or brother by another major queen, or other siblings, but has uncles (who are sons of kings) or sons of such uncles.

But the details of the succession order (which the royal family calls *pochiam*), were unknown to almost every minister except Phraya Woraphong (M.R. Yen Itsarasena), minister of the palace, who had knowledge about these things. The others did not know the details of the sons and fathers of each prince; whether they had ranks as *momchao*, *phraongchao*, or *somdet chaofa*; how some sons of the king were *phraongchao* and some were *somdet chaofa*; how sons of a *phraongchao* might be *phraongchao* or *momchao*. So it took some time to study before they could grasp royal custom. The rank on the mother's side also had to be taken into consideration. The son of a king whose mother has the rank of *phraakkarachayathoe* or above had the rank *somdet chaofa*. Then among *somdet chaofa* there were different levels of

seniority, depending on whether the mother was *somdet phrabaromma ratchini*, *somdet phranangchao phrabarommaratchathewi*, *phranangchao phra-ratchathewi*, *phranangthoe*, or *phra akkarachayathoe*.

As for sons of a *somdet chaofa*, the mother had to be taken into account. If she was *phraongchao*, the son became *phrachao worawongthoe phraongchao*. If the mother was a commoner, the son of a *somdet chaofa* used to be ranked *momchao*. But on 8 November 1927 King Prajadhipok made an announcement raising the existing and future sons of many *somdet chaofa* to be "*phra worawongthoe*" *phraongchao*, which was the royal rank below "*phrachao worawongthoe*" *phraongchao*.

As for sons of a ruling king (*phrachao lukiathoe*) who were born as *phraongchao*, if the mother was *phraongchao*, they received the title of *phraworawongthoe phraongchao* from birth. An example was Phraongchao Prem-purachat, son of Krom Kamphaengphet and Phraongchaoying Praphawasit. If the mother was a commoner, he would be only *momchao*.

Apart from that, there were still *momchao*, *phraongchao*, *somdet chaofa* in the household of the heir apparent and many other high-ranking royal family members.

The first point which the cabinet studied was whether King Prajadhipok had an elder brother by the same mother who had sons still living.

1. Phraongchao Chula Chakrabong was son of Somdet Chaofa Chakrabongphuwanat who had been heir to the throne during the Sixth Reign. The cabinet studied the phrase "according to the intent" in the royal household law of 1924 to see whether Phraongchao Chula Chakrabong should be excluded according to clause 11(4) of the royal household law on grounds that his mother was of foreign nationality. According to a strict reading, the law excluded only successors who had a foreign wife (at the time Phraongchao Chula Chakrabong had no foreign wife). Some cabinet members considered that the exclusion had been applied to other heirs but had not been applied in the case of Somdet Chaofa Chakrabongphuwanat who was appointed heir by King Vajiravudh when he already had a foreign wife who had been properly accepted as a royal daughter-in-law. However, the majority of the cabinet interpreted the words "according to the intent" to indicate that the exclusion should also apply in the case of a successor who had a foreign mother.

2. Phraongchao Waranon was son of Somdet Chaofa Chuthathut, who was brother of King Prajadhipok by the same mother. But ministers considered that his mother was a commoner and not the major wife of Somdet Chaofa Chuthathut, whose major wife had been a *momchao*, had been granted a royal wedding ceremony, but had had no son. The cabinet meeting left Phraongchao Waranon out of consideration.

Then it was discussed whether the case following King Prajadhipok's

abdication was a case “where the king has no son, grandson, or younger brother by the same major queen, but has elder or younger brothers by another major queen, or sons by such brothers”.

At that time, Chaofa Boriphat Kromphra Nakhonsawan Woraphinit was still alive. But he had gone to live abroad at the request of the People’s Party. Hence the cabinet did not consider him and his many sons, by referring to the words “according to the intent”. Thus the meeting discussed the sons of King Prajadhipok’s brothers by different mothers. Information was obtained from Chaophraya Woraphong that there were sons of Somdet Chaofa Mahidol and Somdet Chaofa Yukhon.

Between these two *somdet chaofa*, the mother of Somdet Chaofa Mahidol had the title of *somdet phrabarommaratchathewi*, which was higher than the mother of Somdet Chaofa Yukhon. But among their sons, the mother of those of Somdet Chaofa Yukhon was *phraongchao*, while the mother of those of Somdet Chaofa Mahidol was Mom [denotes a commoner] Sangwan (her name at that time), but she had been granted a royal wedding ceremony, properly accepted as a royal in-law, and elevated by Somdet Chaofa Mahidol as his only wife (*phrachaya*). Taking into consideration that Somdet Chaofa Mahidol had done beneficial deeds for the people, had been a royal family member who conducted himself as a democrat, and had been accorded love and respect by most people, the cabinet unanimously agreed to propose to the Assembly to approve inviting Phraworawongthoe Phraongchao Ananda Mahidol. On 8 November 1927, King Prajadhipok had already elevated Momchao Ananda Mahidol and many *momchao* born of *somdet chaofa* to be *phraworawongthoe phraongchao*. Hence on 7 March 1935, the Assembly approved the government proposal to invite Phraworawongthoe Phraongchao Ananda Mahidol to ascend the throne, with the resolution backdated so that he succeeded from the day and time that King Prajadhipok abdicated, that is 2 March 1935 at 13.45 (British time).

The backdating of the announcement of King Ananda Mahidol’s ascension to the throne followed the international royal practice which considers that the throne is not shaken by any circumstance even the death and succession of a new king. Thus people in many countries bless the king with the cry “*the king is dead long, live the king*” which means that the king has passed away but at the same time may the king prosper.

#### IV

At that time, King Ananda Mahidol was nine years old and still a minor. He could not administer royal affairs and he could not appoint a regent. Hence there had to be one or more persons to act as regents according to clause 10

of the constitution of the kingdom of Siam 1932. If the parliament has not yet appointed anyone as regent, the constitution allows the cabinet to undertake that duty temporarily.

The cabinet at that time had General Phraya Phahon Phonphayuhasena as prime minister and also commander of the army; General Luang Phibunsongkhram as minister of defence and deputy army commander; Com-modore Luang Sinthusongkhramchai as minister without portfolio and chief of staff of the navy; myself as minister of the interior with command over the police department because at that time Police General Adundetcharat was deputy director of police; and other ministers who had no part in overseeing armed forces. This cabinet did not in any way grasp the opportunity offered by the constitution to fail to propose regents, and carry out the duty itself. This happened on a later occasion. When King Bhumibol Adulyadej was travelling by ship from Singapore through the Gulf of Siam before reaching Bangkok around the end of November and beginning of December 1951, the Radio Coup took place. This caused the regents appointed by the king to relinquish their posts. The cabinet which had Field Marshal Phibunsongkhram as prime minister carried out the duty of regent. Hence Phibun attended in audience at Ratchaworadit pier twice—once as regent and again as a member of the cabinet. (At that time I was in Beijing. I turned on the radio to listen to the Bangkok station and heard these events which I still remember. I expect some in Bangkok can still remember.)

Phraya Phahon's cabinet decided it should propose to the Assembly to appoint a regent immediately after the Assembly on 7 March had approved inviting Phraongchao Ananda Mahidol to ascend the throne. In this matter they had to sound out in advance those whom the cabinet considered suitable as regent. They entrusted the prime minister and myself as minister of the interior to attend in audience on Somdet Chaofa Naritsaranuwattiwong to ask him to become regent for the new king. But Somdet Chaofa Naritsara said he had been a regent for King Prajadhipok. If he agreed to become regent for the new king, people would gossip that he wanted to be regent all the time. He asked the cabinet to consider other princes and suitable senior officials.

The cabinet met and decided there should be three regents as a council, with a royal family member as chairman, another as council member, and another senior official with knowledge and expertise about government of the realm.

In the discussion over which royal family member would be suitable as chairman of the regents, it emerged that most of the royal family members at that time had gone to live overseas following the event known as the Boworadej Rebellion. Those still in Siam apart from Somdet Chaofa Naritsara included one with a *krom* rank, that is Phraongchao Otsakanutit

Krommun Anuwachaturon, who was a son of Somdet Chaofa Chakraphatdiphong. General Phraya Phahon knew him well because they had served together as royal guards of King Prajadhipok. As for me, the prince knew me since I was a student in Paris. He accompanied Somdet Chaofaying Walai-alongkorn Kromluang Phetchaburi Ratchasirinthon, elder sister of Somdet Chaofa Mahidol by the same parents, on the occasion she went for medical care in France. Krommun Anuwachaturon asked me to take him sightseeing in Paris many times. I held him in very high regard as someone who behaved as an exemplary democrat and did not conduct himself like a prince of high rank. Sometimes he did the cooking in the embassy kitchen himself. I still remember that there were some delicious dishes which I learned from him by buying the fresh food he wanted and acting as his assistant.

When General Phraya Phahon and I went to his department to ask permission to propose his name to the Assembly for approval as chairman of the Regency Council, he gave his consent.

Then Phraengchao Athit Thippha-apha, the royal secretary in the time of King Prajadhipok, came to see Gen. Phraya Phahon and me at the Parutsakawan Palace, bringing various documents for Gen. Phraya Phahon and me to study. Gen. Phraya Phahon and I saw that he had cooperated well with the government so we sounded him out about proposing his name as another regent. He was pleased. (As for my part, he knew me from the time he was studying in England. He came to Paris many times and sometimes asked me to be his guide. I saw that he did not conduct himself like someone of high rank but acted as a model democrat, different from some people at the tail end of the royal court who puffed themselves up as royal family even more than the *momchao*.)

As for senior officials, the cabinet considered principal grand councillor, Chaophraya Yommarat Chatsenangkhanarin. He had previously served King Chulalongkorn and earned the royal confidence in important positions such as acting chargé d'affaires of Siam in London at the time Siam had a dispute with France in 1893, later commissioner of Nakhon Si Thammarat monthon which also administered the area of the seven Thai-Islam provincial centres, and later minister of public works in the Ministry of the Capital. While he was studying in England, King Vajiravudh elevated Chaophraya Yommarat to the status of his preceptor (*phra achan*) as detailed in the golden tablet (*suphannabat*) granting him a high rank. In the reign of King Vajiravudh, the Ministry of the Capital was combined with the Ministry of the Interior, and Chaophraya Yommarat was appointed as minister of the interior. In the new system, he continued to serve through to the reign of King Prajadhipok and then asked to resign. Hence he was the most senior among the high officials. Gen. Phraya Phahon asked me to sound him out,

but I asked to excuse myself fearing that people would criticize me for favouring my own relatives (see appendix [not included here, but the details are the same as those appearing in selection 3 above]). I asked Gen. Phraya Phahon to sound him out himself. After being sounded out, he was pleased to allow his name to be proposed to the Assembly for approval as a member of the Council of Regents.

After the Assembly on 7 March approved the government's proposal to invite Phraongchao Ananda Mahidol to become king, the Assembly approved the appointment of a Regency Council consisting of: Krommun Anuwachaturon, chairman; Phraongchao Athit Thippha-apha, regent; principal grand councillor Chaophraya Yommarat (Pan Sukhum), regent.

## V

News that saddened me greatly arrived at the time the ocean liner "Caen Verde" [Pridi transliterates this in Thai as *kong werde*; Caen is a guess] in which I was travelling to Europe to negotiate the reduction of interest on government loans and sound out foreign countries on amending the unequal treaties, docked at Brindisi in Italy on 13 August 1935. A foreign fellow passenger bought an English newspaper to read and came upon the headline that Prince Anuwat, regent of Siam, had committed suicide. This foreigner brought the newspaper for me to read. I did not believe the news was true and told him this news was not credible because before I left Siam I had gone to say farewell to him and saw no sign that he would commit suicide. The foreigner replied that the news from the reliable press agencies must be true. I travelled in that ship to Trieste in order to visit a shipyard where a Thai naval officer was stationed. Then I postponed my meeting with Mussolini and quickly travelled by train direct to Lausanne to attend on King Ananda Mahidol, his younger brother, Somdet Phra Anucha (Rama IX), and their mother. I requested Luang Siriratchamaitri, royal secretary, to show me the telegram from the government. The contents were the same as I had read in the newspaper already mentioned. There were no details on how or why he had committed suicide. So I hastened to Paris and received a report from General Luang Adundetcharat. Luang Adun himself had performed the autopsy on Krommun Anuwat. It appeared he had shot himself in the mouth by putting the gun in his lips and pressing the trigger with his own finger. The bullet had passed through the roof of his mouth killing him. Interrogation of his wife and people in the household revealed that before his death he had once said "now if we do anything even bending a finger there are people who complain". Later I had further information that some royal family members had disparaged him for becoming chairman



of the Regency Council with the support of the People's Party. Someone wrote an anonymous letter with various denunciations. (If the police department has kept its investigation records, they might be disclosed now. At that time almost every newspaper in Bangkok carried details of the suicide but people skilled at shouting in cinemas had not yet appeared in Siam.)

Later, on 20 August of that year, the cabinet proposed to the Assembly to approve appointment of Chaophraya Phichaiyenthara-yothin to the vacant post of regent, and the Assembly agreed. The Council of Regents from then on consisted of:

Phraongchao Athit, chairman

Chaophraya Yommarat, regent

Chaophraya Phichaiyenthara-yothin (Um Intharayothin), regent

Chaophraya Phichaiyenthara-yothin was descended from Chaofa Thonginthon who was son of King Taksin of Thonburi. He did not join the People's Party. By chance on the morning of 24 June 1932, he went for his usual morning walk (he had already left government service) and arrived in front of the railings of the Ananta Samakhom throne hall. He saw Gen. Phraya Phahon, who had already announced the seizure of power in the name of the People's Party, using an iron bar to force the lock on a chain around the gate in the railings. Gen. Phraya Phahon had very strong muscular arms. Chaophraya Phichaiyen walked up to look and said "this lot *are* capable". Then he went away. Later when the People's Party held merit-making ceremonies, he often took the trouble to attend. He thus earned the respect of the People's Party.

## VI

Later Chaophraya Yommarat passed away. The Assembly had not appointed anyone to the vacant post. The Japanese who had seized the country since 8 December 1941 informed Phibun, the prime minister, that I was obstructing friendly relations between Japan and Thailand, and requested the Thai government to arrange for me to relinquish the ministership and take a post which had no executive power. Phibun had Police General Adundetcharat inform me that I was requested to relinquish the post of minister of finance, and that if I agreed, a resolution would be proposed to the Assembly to appoint me to the vacant post among the regents. I agreed for my name to be proposed to the Assembly for this position, because I saw that the post of regent was really a small burden. This would give me time secretly to organize the anti-Japan resistance movement later known as the

Seri Thai movement. Also I would be relieved from taking part in a government which cooperated with the Japanese.

The Assembly passed a unanimous resolution to appoint me as regent on 16 December 1941. I took the oath before the Assembly to assume the new office on the 23rd of the same month.

Later on 21 July 1942 Chaophraya Phichaiyentharayothin passed away and the Assembly did not appoint a replacement. So only two persons remained on the Regency Council, namely Phraongchao Athit Thippapha as chairman and myself.

Later on 31 July 1944 Phraongchao Athit resigned for reasons described below.

The Assembly hence passed a resolution on 1 August of the same year to appoint me as sole regent.

## VII

King Ananda Mahidol reached his majority on 20 September 1945. But because communications were not easy, he could not travel back to Bangkok and could not appoint a regent. The Assembly exercised its power under clause 10 of the constitution of the kingdom of Siam 1932 by passing a resolution on 6 September of that year appointing me to continue as regent until the king returned.

I quickly sent a telegram requesting the king to return, and got the Allies agreement to provide an aircraft. A westerner has written a book about this and has printed a copy of my telegram and the royal reply in detail. These show my innocence in not clinging to the post of regent. King Ananda Mahidol returned to Bangkok on 5 December 1945 and graciously issued a royal command on 8 December conferring on me the post of senior statesman.

## VIII

The duty of looking after royal affairs belongs to the office of the royal household department which comes under the prime minister's office. The Regency Council does not have executive power but must work through the office of the Royal Secretariat which contacts the prime minister's office to and on behalf of the office of the royal household. But the royal secretary may agree to act on requests from the Regency Council, with the office of the royal household being responsible to the prime minister. Even Phraongchao Athit who was a member of the royal family and wanted to

help the royal family did not have direct power. For me it was even more difficult to get anything done through the official procedures.

The royal secretary at that time was Phraya Chardet-udom, and the deputy secretary was Nai Chalio Pathumrot, who was a fellow promoter of 24 June. Phraongchao Athit entrusted me with the duty of looking after the safety of Queen Savarintra, because he thought I could ask Nai Chalio Pathumrot to take over the work as Chalio was directly under the prime minister's office. If the queen had to travel to provincial towns there were places in the care of the crown property office, whose director was Nai Pramot Phungsunthon, a 24 June promoter. If she stayed in Ayutthaya, there was a place belonging to the division of royal property in the Finance Ministry, of which Nai Sanit Phiunuan, deputy under-secretary of finance, was the director. Apart from this, Phraya Thewathirat, division head in the office of the royal household, knew me well enough to help out further in affairs connected with the royal family.

Looking after the safety of the royal family during the war sometimes required prompt action because of danger from aircraft. I had to use shortcuts by asking those named above to help take responsibility to get things done at my request.

## IX

Phraongchao Athit and his wife Mom Kopkaew were sports players but I was not good at sport so I did not go to play with them much except a few occasions when they invited me to play badminton. But Phibun was a sportsman and had the opportunity to play with Phraongchao Athit. This helped them to become more friendly and sympathetic to each other.

I did not know that Phibun sent a letter of resignation from the prime ministership to Phraongchao Athit as president of the Regency Council. Athit thought that Phibun was hurt over some personal problems, not a government problem, so he sent the resignation letter back without letting me know.

Later around February 1943, Phibun sent another resignation letter direct to the chairman of the Regency Council, and left Samakkhichai House [his official residence] without anyone knowing where he had gone. Perhaps Phraongchao Athit knew that Phibun wanted to resign really in order to shuffle a new cabinet. So he sent the resignation letter on to me to consider. I thus wrote my opinion on the cover of the file as: "This resignation letter is correct according to the constitution. Agreed. He may resign." I signed at the bottom, leaving a space above for Phraongchao Athit to sign, which he did. I then invited over Nai Thawi Bunyaket, who was then a minister and

secretary of the cabinet, and asked him how Phibun would change the cabinet. He replied that Phibun probably would change it, and that he was looking for Phibun but could not find him. When the Regency Council forwarded the approval of Phibun's letter of resignation, the cabinet secretariat which oversaw the publicity department had Phibun's resignation announced over the department's radio.

Wherever he was at the time, Phibun was furious when he heard the publicity department radio announce the resignation. A number of military officers attended on Phraongchao Athit at Amphon Palace where he was staying at the time, and asked for the resignation letter to be returned to Phibun. It was natural that when Phraongchao Athit saw the mood of these military officers, his heart sank, because he could not return the resignation letter to Phibun. Hence he and Mom Kopkaew came to the house where I was staying which was on the bank of the river near the Tha Chang Wang Na, and asked to stay the night at my residence. I asked my navy friends to help give the protection he wanted and this gave me protection also. Navy friends sent a patrol boat under the command of Lt. Cdr. Watcharachai Chaisitthiwet to moor in front of my residence. The unit of Maj. Luang Ratchadecha, my official bodyguard, and Lt. Gen. Praphan Kulaphichit, the official bodyguard of Phraongchao Athit, came to help give protection also. We observed events until the afternoon of the following day but saw no army or air force officers come and make any threat. So Phraongchao Athit and Mom Kopkaew went back to the Amphon Palace.

Later Phibun retrieved his letter of resignation. He ordered the publicity department radio to announce that the broadcast of the resignation had been inaccurate, and that he still held the post of prime minister because the evidence of resignation had disappeared.

Phibun blamed Nai Thawi Bunyaket for broadcasting his resignation over the radio. Nai Thawi thus resigned as minister and secretary of the cabinet.

Then Phibun in his role as supreme commander of the armed forces sent an order to Phraongchao Athit and myself to go to the Supreme Command Headquarters. This was equivalent to having the regents take an order from the supreme commander to report themselves within twenty-four hours.

Phraongchao Athit went to report himself to Phibun as ordered.

As for me, I refused to go on grounds that I held the position of representative of the king who was the commander in chief (*chom thap*) according to the constitution. If I reported myself in submission to the supreme commander, it would be equivalent to reducing the royal authority of the king below that of the supreme commander. Some ministers advised Phibun to withdraw the order, and he agreed. Phraongchao Athit and I were hence able to continue carrying out our duty on behalf of the king as commander in chief according to the constitution.

## X

Later around July 1943, Phraongchao Athit went to rest at Klai Kangwon Palace in Hua Hin, and invited me to visit him at the weekend. I went once on this invitation.

At that time I heard the overseas radio broadcast the news that King Victor Emmanuel of Italy could no longer ignore Mussolini's deeds which had made the country experience defeat in war and had led Italy to disaster. The king thus commanded Mussolini to appear in audience at the Quirinal Palace. Those like-minded with the king arrested Mussolini, put him in an ambulance, put on the siren, and left the palace so that people on both sides of the road where the vehicle passed would not know that this vehicle was taking Mussolini to prison. Then the king appointed Field Marshal Badoglio as prime minister to establish a new Italian national government.

Phraongchao Athit and I discussed this event, and he observed that there was nobody in Thailand who would dare do such a thing. For fun I replied it needed someone old like Badoglio. I said further that in the afternoon on the train to Hua Hin, I saw Lieutenant General Phraya Wichitwongwuthikrai standing at Huai Sai station. He was as old as Field Marshal Badoglio and he could do it. Then we laughed over the joke.

One day after Phraongchao Athit had returned from Hua Hin, Nai Chalio Pathumrot rushed to see me and said that Phibun had called an urgent meeting of the 24 June promoters, and announced that Phraongchao Athit had reported that I was thinking of arresting Phibun just like Mussolini had been arrested, by arranging for Lieutenant General Phraya Wichit to lead the arrest. Phibun asked the meeting to consider charging me. The meeting requested to delay taking a resolution on grounds it could not believe Phraongchao Athit. It set up a committee to investigate me. The committee was already leaving Suan Kulap Palace making for Tha Chang. Before long the committee arrived. As far as I can remember, three people came: vice-admiral Sin Kamonnawin, General Chuang Chawengsaksongkhram and one other I cannot remember. The committee interrogated me. I admitted I had said those things but Phraongchao Athit had started the conversation and it was meant as a joke. If I were really going to arrest Phibun, I would not tell Phraongchao Athit because I had friends which I trusted much more than Phraongchao Athit. Also, how could I use someone old like Lt. Gen. Phraya Wichit to do what was claimed. The committee went back and reported to Phibun that Phraongchao Athit had reported some nonsense to him. And so the matter ended. Phraongchao Athit was rather embarrassed with me, and after that I had to be more careful in speaking with him.

After the war when Phraongchao Athit was badly ill one or two days before passing away, he had Nai Chalio Pathumrot invite me to visit him at

Rattanaapha Palace on Setsiri road. Before passing away he wanted to ask forgiveness for wronging me. I went to see him. He asked me to forgive what he had done. I replied that I had already forgiven him. I asked him to put his faith in Buddha's grace, cleanse his mind, and not worry about anything at all. Later he died peacefully. I did not harbour any ill feelings at all which might disturb his mind. If he has a special power of perception, he should know that I did nothing to disturb his mind.

## XI

Thai public opinion became more dissatisfied with Phibun. He wanted to make Thailand a great power by forcing men and women to wear hats in public places, forbidding the chewing of betel, moving the rafts on which people lived along the rivers and canals onto land on grounds that advanced countries did not live on rafts since rafts had no toilets. Labour was conscripted to construct roads. The cost of living rose many times above the pre-war level. Consumer goods were in shortage. MPs of both type 1 and type 2 became more dissatisfied all the time.

The publicity department radio broadcast praise of Phibun along with slogans and songs such as "Believe the leader, the nation will escape danger", "Wherever the leader goes, I will follow", features from Samakkhichai House, and so on. Instead of being popular with the majority of people, these made them even more dissatisfied. Then the "four pillars", the four people whose names people strung together as a phrase which meant they were supporting Phibun to act wrongly (those who want to know the names should ask those who can remember), suggested the authorities order cinemas to show a picture of Phibun after screening a film, and have those watching stand up in respect, as in the cinemas in Italy during Mussolini's time. The dissatisfaction of the majority of the people reached such a height that there had to be a change of prime minister. The majority of MPs of both type 1 and type 2 were aware that the people wanted Phibun's government to quit and be replaced by a new democratic government.

The Japanese did not sit quiet and watch without concern. They listened carefully to know when the Thai people became dissatisfied with Phibun, because Phibun had cooperated with the Japanese and this would mean that the dissatisfaction which the people already had with the Japanese would also increase. Hence the Japanese thought about finding a prime minister to establish a new Thai government. Police General Adun came to inform me that he saw something was up when the Japanese brought an ambassador from the time of the absolute monarchy into Thailand and he had gone to pay his respects to various members of the royal family and old aristocrats.

Also some former ministers who were in Japan had been encouraged to speak on the radio once in a while. Perhaps the Japanese were thinking of changing Phibun.

Then Phibun arranged a ceremony for the Japanese to swear an oath with him before the Emerald Buddha that they would be faithful to one another to the end. Most Japanese believe in Bushido not Buddhism. But they agreed to attend the oath-swearing ceremony at the Temple of the Emerald Buddha. A friend who had contact with the Japanese told me they were getting suspicious why Phibun had to invite them to swear an oath, and felt perhaps he was thinking of stabbing the Japanese in the back.

The British radio from Delhi used a stratagem to make the Japanese even more suspicious of Phibun by broadcasting a rhyme repeatedly for several days, and speaking slowly to allow listeners including the Japanese to write it down. The rhyme caught my ear so I still remember it was as follows:

Why does a field marshal act like a field mouse  
Has he made a mistake he can't hack  
Why does a great hero, the man of the house,  
Let his enemies dance on his back

I learnt from a Thai who had contact with the Japanese that they took down this rhyme and were more suspicious of Phibun. In addition, General Kat Katsongkhram travelled to China, and the Chinese had General Daili, head of the Chinese Gestapo in Chungking, welcome him. For their conversations they had an interpreter who had been born in Thailand. Even though General Kat told General Daili he had travelled to China of his own accord, this news made the Japanese suspect that Phibun had sent him.

The Thai who had contact with the Japanese rushed to tell me that the Japanese army was preparing to seize the Thai government.

## XII

In July 1944 Phibun proposed a draft law to approve the royal decree on the administration of Phetchabun and Phutthaburimonthon [a planned Buddhist city at Saraburi]. Phibun planned to build these cities in areas of forest infested with malaria. People would be conscripted to labour on public works. The majority of MPs of both type 1 and type 2, who were already aware of the people's dissatisfaction, voted not to approve this law.

The problem arose within the government whether or not this vote amounted to a vote of no confidence in the government. Most ministers took the stance that the government should resign in accordance with

etiquette, but the parliament might advise the Regency Council to reappoint it. Hence Phibun submitted his letter of resignation to the Regency Council.

On this occasion Phraongchao Athit did not sign accepting Phibun's resignation. He invited the speaker of the parliament to sound out MPs about who should be the next prime minister before he would consider the resignation letter. Leading MPs came to ask me who was suitable to become premier. I advised them to sound out Phraya Phahon. Later the speaker of parliament, acting on the majority opinion of MPs, proposed to the Regency Council that Phraya Phahon should be prime minister. The Regency Council asked Phraya Phahon whether he was willing, but he declined.

Then those MPs who had joined the Seri Thai movement came to consult me about who would be appropriate for the sake of the Seri Thai movement. Mostly they felt that Nai Thawi Bunyaket was the appropriate type to be prime minister. The MPs had once voted for Nai Thawi to be speaker but Phibun had opposed it. Nai Thawi was straightforward and capable, and was a veteran in the People's Party. He had joined since 1927 when he was still studying in Paris. (Nai Khuang joined the People's Party only in 1932 a few months before the 24 June. Nai Khuang admitted this fact in his speech at the Teachers Council.) But Nai Thawi was someone who spoke forthrightly. This made it difficult for Nai Thawi to put on a front with the Japanese. Hence they agreed to sound out whether or not Nai Khuang would agree to become prime minister and put on a front with the Japanese, while entrusting the work of the government to Nai Thawi as overseer of the prime minister's office. So I invited Nai Khuang to see if he was willing. He agreed to these conditions. Then a majority of MPs passed an internal secret resolution for the speaker to propose to the Regency Council to appoint Nai Khuang as prime minister. Phraongchao Athit quibbled, refused to make the appointment, and asked to see Nai Khuang's policies and the ministers he would invite to join the government. Nai Khuang replied that the Regency Council should appoint him as prime minister first and then he would propose the ministers in the new government. I agreed to appoint Nai Khuang as prime minister first. The matter dragged on for several days.

Do people with common sense think that from the time Phibun tendered his resignation until the appointment of a new prime minister, the Japanese sat around idly? In truth, the Japanese had a hand in things. As noted, the Japanese were already suspicious that Phibun was not playing straight with them. The military and naval attachés came to see me at the Tha Chang house, displaying the proper etiquette. Because the Japanese respect their emperor, they showed respect to me as representative of the king of Thailand. The Japanese asked me whether I had any opinion on the appointment of a new prime minister in place of Phibun. I replied that it



should proceed according to the Thai constitution. The Japanese should consider it as an internal matter, so that the Thai would understand that the Japanese did not interfere in Thai internal affairs. This would add to the good reputation of the Japanese. They replied that if that were the case, then I should proceed according to the Thai constitution. The Japanese would not get involved. Let the new prime minister cooperate with the Japanese in future. Then the Japanese asked me what Nai Khuang Aphaiwong was like. They did not know him. I replied he was cheerful and good-natured, and I expected he could cooperate with the Japanese.

So people of common sense should understand that the Japanese who were in control of Thailand would not easily have agreed to let the Thais change the government unless they had first been made to understand as described.

### XIII

Phraongchao Athit was still standing firm and refusing to sign the appointment of Nai Khuang as prime minister. But finally he asked to resign from the post of chairman of the Regency Council, as he felt that Nai Khuang would not go all the way, and before long Phibun would return as prime minister again, and I would have to leave so he (Athit) could return to the Regency Council.

The parliament passed a unanimous resolution on 1 August 1944 appointing me as the sole regent.

On that same day I signed the royal command on behalf of King Ananda Mahidol appointing Major Khuang Aphaiwong as prime minister, with the speaker of the parliament countersigning the royal command according to the practice.

Nai Khuang Aphaiwong appointed a cabinet with several ministers. In particular, in line with Nai Khuang's agreement with me, Nai Thawi Bunyaket became both minister of education and also minister overseeing the prime minister's office with the duty of processing the work of the cabinet in the background of Nai Khuang. Nai Khuang had also agreed that on any matter concerning the government and the Seri Thai movement, of which Nai Thawi was the commander of the forces inside the country, Nai Thawi would discuss and decide directly with me. Nai Khuang requested not to know anything about it unless it required legislation or an announcement to the parliament. Hence there were many matters which Nai Thawi discussed with me first and then informed Nai Khuang to carry out, such as the announcement that the declaration of war against Great Britain and the USA was null and void. Nai Thawi Bunyaket countersigned the royal

command as appeared in the government gazette, not Nai Khuang. Nai Thawi was the mainstay of drafting the law for pardon and amnesty of political offenders. Although I informed the Allies that there should be a pardon and amnesty for the sake of unity of the Thais who had the ideology to oppose Japan, as M.C. Suphasawat suggested, when it came to real implementation it was not an easy matter. Nai Khuang spoke at the Teachers Council saying that as soon as he became prime minister he ordered the release of political prisoners. In truth, Nai Khuang countersigned the royal command but the drafting of the law needed an understanding with Police General Adun, head of the police department, who was the person ordering the arrest of political offenders. He had to be made to see it was appropriate to give pardon and amnesty for the sake of unity between all the parties involved, and for the benefit of work on behalf of the nation. Police General Adun had the nickname "General Fierce-Eyes" because he was someone not easily outsmarted by anyone. If Nai Khuang, who had just become prime minister in the way described above, had wanted for no apparent reason to show his authority (*bunbarami*) by ordering the release of political offenders without consulting and coming to an understanding with General Fierce-Eyes who had arrested them, that would make Adun seem like the bad guy and Nai Khuang the good guy. This would make things complicated and would result in the political offenders, who were in the situation described by Nai Puey Ungphakorn in his article [on "Royal family members in the Seri Thai movement", included in the original volume with this piece], facing even more delay in getting released. Hence to secure a quicker release for the political prisoners in jail, Nai Thawi Bunyaket and I had to come to an understanding with General Fierce-Eyes. We called on Nai Puey Ungphakorn to explain the contents of the secret telegram I sent to inform the Allies. General Fierce-Eyes agreed in principle and entrusted Nai Thawi Bunyaket to draft the law of pardon and amnesty for all political offenders, omitting only those charged after the Japanese army entered Thailand. This was for their own safety, because the Japanese would catch them if they were released. As for Kromkhun Chainat whose rank had been withdrawn to become Nai Rangsit, apart from being pardoned, his old rank was restored.

Some of the offenders had the insight to understand the truth without I or Nai Thawi boasting to them. When they came out of Bang Khwang prison they came directly to see me at my house. For instance Phraya Udomphongphensawat (M.R. Prayun Itsarasak), former monthon commissioner, former minister of the interior and a leading poet, brought a present to give me. This was a small sheet of paper which he said he had written in Bang Khwang prison when he heard the news of the amnesty and pardon. His composition as far as I can remember was as follows:

Hail, the just regent!  
Amnesty for those accused  
Release from physical and mental hardship  
Escape from the jail of deepest hell

I informed him that he should thank Nai Thawi Bunyaket who was the mainstay of that pardon and amnesty. Please could he change the hail to Thawi Bunyaket and help inform all those released about the goodness of Nai Thawi.

Several days later, Phraya Thep-hatsadin came to tell me he had just learned the truth that Nai Thawi Bunyaket and I were the mainstays in this matter.

Nai Thawi Bunyaket made merit by "pasting gold on the back of the Buddha". He did not show off claiming what he had done in this matter. Nai Thawi has passed away now. Let me record his goodness in this affair.

#### XIV

We were not rough on Phibun because we had no desire to have a war among Thais. Hence when Phibun tendered his resignation from the prime ministership, I as regent approved his resignation in line with the constitution. Phibun still held the post of supreme commander. It was not announced immediately that he was dismissed from this position.

But Phibun gathered together troops at Lopburi to intimidate the new government. Vice Admiral Sin Kamonnawin, minister of defence and commander in chief of the navy, came to tell that we should quickly announce the dismissal of Phibun from the post of supreme commander and appoint General Phraya Phahon as army commander and Lt. Gen. Chit Mansinsinatyotharak as deputy. After sounding out Gen. Phraya Phahon and Lt. Gen. Chit to accept these posts, the navy arranged for an ambulance secretly to take Gen. Phraya Phahon, who had been suddenly taken ill, to the navy headquarters at the old palace in Thonburi.

As for me, for safety I secretly went to sleep at Thammasat University. I signed the royal command dismissing Phibun from the post of supreme commander and appointed him as adviser to the government (*thi pruksa ratchakan phaendin*), a post with high status but no command over troops. I also signed a royal command appointing Gen. Phraya Phahon as army commander and Lt. Gen. Chit Mansinsinatyotharak as deputy. To keep tight secrecy, this matter was told only to Nai Khuang who countersigned the royal commands and to Nai Thawi Bunyaket who drafted the royal commands and took responsibility for making a radio announcement in the

morning. He entrusted Nai Phairot Jayanama to have the publicity department radio broadcast ready early in the morning. The radio broadcast went according to this plan.

Gen. Phraya Phahon as army commander issued an order for the troops in Bangkok and Thonburi to assemble around Wat Phrasirattanasatsadaram. When these troops assembled as ordered, Lt. Gen. Chit Mansinsinatharak on behalf of the army commander, told the troops to listen for the orders of the army commander and to remain peaceful. The troops obeyed the orders of the army commander and deputy. The possibility of bloodshed among Thais hence did not arise. This was not a miracle performed by Nai Khuang as he said at the Teachers Council. Many soldiers still living at present may remember the incident.

As for Phibun, he obeyed the royal command and moved from Lopburi to Lamlukka amphoe for the remainder of the war. As regent I ordered the palace officials to provide Phibun, who held the post of adviser to the government, with all the facilities appropriate to his status.

After the war, Phibun sent a letter to me with the following contents.

Laksi

Date [unspecified]

Dear respected teacher,

I see that you have a lot of work and I don't want to bother you at all. But at present I'm out of luck. I don't know who I should turn to, so I must ask for your consideration. First, I want to alter your understanding. Some time you may think a bit kindly of me. If you feel vengeful towards me for some old matters, you may not have an understanding of the truth. Maybe you had understood that I helped to close the parliament and exile you in connection with the communism charge. I was not the person who did this. Phraya Mano called me to attend at the closing of the parliament [1 April 1933]. At that time I was very much a child in politics. He persuaded me to sign as the last person. I saw all the others had put their names. I feared that if I did not put my name with them it would be very dangerous. So I put my name following Phraya Phahon. As for exiling you, ask Luang Adun to see who fixed it up. You'll find it was really Phraya Songsuradet. Luang Adun and I were charged with being communists. One day I went to meet Phraya Song and he still asked whether Adun and I were becoming redder. When I opened the parliament, Phraya Ratchawangsan still phoned to ask what I was up to. I replied that I was opening the parliament. Then he said, so you are not red? Or you're red already? I put the phone down.

In the events of that time, four or five people held meetings with Phraya Mano as leader. Whatever they wanted to do, they just went ahead.

I always knew the truth later when nothing could be corrected, because I was very much a child in politics. Over the resignation of the four army tigers [Phahon, Song, Ritthi, Prasat: 10 June 1933], I did not know the cause at all. They just simply resigned. I did not know what they were up to. I only knew that people often came to tell me Phraya Song would quit. Apart from that, I didn't fix up anything. Then after resigning, I did not know anything. After the change to a new government, I was still weak in politics. Phraya Mano asked who was suitable to be supreme commander and chief of staff. I replied with the truth, that according to army principle it should be Phraya Phichaironnarong and Phraya Dintharap. He agreed and accomplished it with a royal command. The truth of these old matters is like this. When Phraya Song left, I was stationed at the Norasing Coffee at night. I remember I went with Luang Adun. I heard later that Phraya Ratchawangsan, Phraya Ritthi, and Phraya Mano wanted the navy to imprison me there. I understand that Maj. Gen. Khamhiran was persuaded. The truth of these old matters is like this. Please understand I was not someone to make trouble for old friends. Others did it themselves. I helped whenever there was an opportunity.

When the Japanese came in, it made trouble for you. Ask Luang Adun. I never contacted the Japanese or asked for the authority to make trouble for you. I proposed you as regent.

What I have said here, let the Buddha and holy articles be my witness that it is the truth in every respect. If you don't believe me, the future itself will be my witness.

I hope you will receive what I have said here somewhat kindly. In my politics, now or in future, I've learned a lesson. I feel stupid and not capable enough. Going on with it will bring danger to me again and again. I prefer to be a farmer. Please do not be worried about me in politics. I've learnt my lesson. Being an ordinary fellow is better for me.

I've said a lot already. If there is anything wrong which bothers you, let me apologize. I have written about dealings with the Japanese and sent it for the speaker of the parliament and friends to read. My sole intention is to help friends not be made war criminals, including myself, according to the human instinct for self-preservation. Please excuse me over this too. Because if I do nothing, people will not know the reasons why we acted and will always think of us as selling the country. Our reputations are gone. I'm glad that despite what we did, at least the Emerald Buddha is still here; the Japanese did not carry it off somewhere else.

With the utmost respect,  
P. Phibunsongkhram