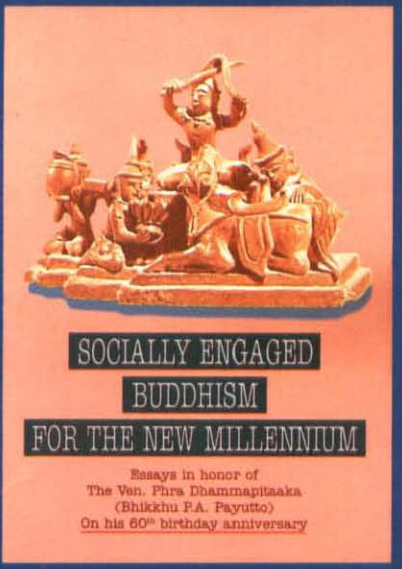
POWERS THAT BE : PRIDI BANOMYONG

through the rise and fall of Thai democracy

by Sulak Sivaraksa

Translated with introduction by S.J.



A collection of essays in honor of the Venerable Phra Dhammapitaka (Bhikku P.A. Payutto) this volume deals with the many facets of engaged Buddhism which run from the philosophical to the very practical, even at times political, but always intensely relevant to the situation in which Siam, Asia and indeed the world finds itself in this dawning new millennium.

Ven. Bhikkhu Payutto himself contributed his wisdom to a wide range of topics but always with the intention that his intellectual feedback would result in beneficial action for people. That also is the aspiration of this book. Bringing together the wisdom of many different authors under one banner it hopes to be a rough sketch of the arena that is engaged Buddhism and the ideas and aspirations of the many bodhisattvas who devote their lives to try and help lead the way to a saner existence for people in Asia and the world over.

Many interesting and provocative articles appear in this volume. It is a mosaic of the color of suffering in the world and the strokes of those who try their best to confront it and relieve what is unjust or unnecessary. The skillful means of wisdom and compassion is a two edged sword however. It calls for awareness of injustice in the world at large and sensitivity to suffering. It also calls for critical self-awareness and a willingness to look at our own flaws and contribution to the suffering around us. This book has both elements and will be an eye opener for all that wish to explore ways to engage the struggles we face at the dawn of a new millennium.

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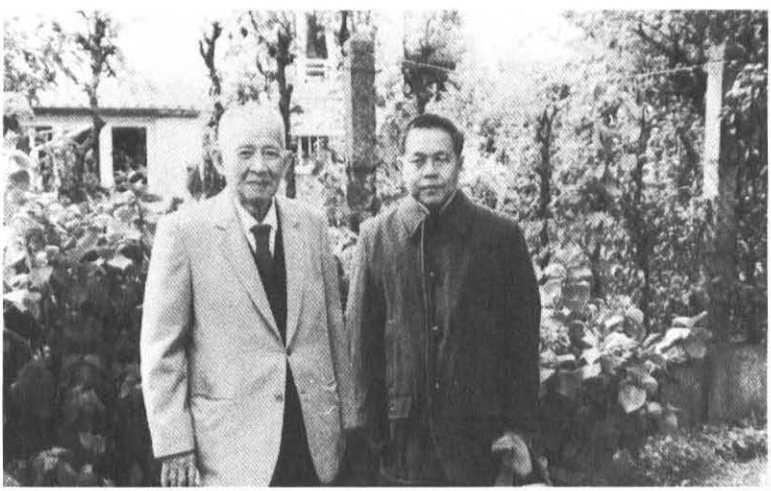

Pridi and Sulak in Paris

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Lady Poonsukh and Sulak in Bangkok

Dedication

As the original essay was dedicated to the late Senior Stateman, Pridi Banomyong, I should like to dedicate this English version to Lady Poonsukh Banomyong, whose love, care and understanding of her husband has supported and encouraged him throughout his life. She is a fine example of Siamese women at their best in femininity, companionship and wisdom. She cares for freedom, democracy and the welfare of the people no less than her husband.

Note to the English Edition

I should like to thank S.J. for rendering my Thai essay on Mr Pridi Banomyong in a concise form, within a short time. To do a proper translation, one needs more time and effort as Prof Akagi Osamu of Osaka University of Foreign Languages has done so splendidly with his Japanese translation and a scholarly introduction of my book on Mr Puey Ungphakorn.

For those who want to know more about Mr Pridi Banomyong, there will be a number of books, articles etc. plus website (http:\\www.pridi.org.th) in connection with his centennary in the year 2000. *The Revolutionalist*, a play written by Kamron Gunatilaka, has been translated by S.J. and is now available in print. This volume too provides appendices on relevant matters.

For those who wish to know more about the author, they are referred to the list of his books in English at the end of the volume. Two titles are specially related to this one : *Loyalty Demands Dissent : Autobiography of an Engaged Buddhist* and *Modern Thai Monarchy and Cultural Politics*.

Lastly I should like to thank Chris Walker for his editorial work.

S.S.

24 June 1999

Introduction

"All men are intellectuals, one could...say: but not all men have in society the function of intellectuals," Antonio Gramsci perceptively observed many decades ago.[i] What is the social function of the intellectual? Aside from being a competent member of his or her social class or profession, the intellectual also plays a specific public role. Edward Said put it very well when he described the intellectual as "an individual endowed with a faculty for representing, embodying, articulating a message, a view, an attitude, philosophy or opinion to, as well as for, a public. And this role has an edge to it, and cannot be played without a sense of being someone whose place it is publicly to raise embarrassing questions, to confront orthodoxy and dogma (rather than to produce them), to be someone who cannot be easily co-opted by governments and corporations, and whose raison d'être is to represent all those people and issues that are routinely forgotten or swept under the rug."[ii] Simply put, as Noam Chomsky argued, "It is the responsibility of intellectuals to speak the truth and to expose lies."[iii] By disseminating the (often times embarrassing) truth, the intellectual hopes to improve the moral climate of society, making it more sane, humane, and compassionate.

Arguably, in twentieth century Siamese history, no two figures have better exemplified responsible intellectuals than the late Pridi Banomyong and Sulak Sivaraksa. For the bulk of this century, absolute monarchy and military dictatorships had

paralyzed all forms of intellectual honesty and responsibility in Siam. Against the backdrop of the politico-cultural straitjacket of Siamese society, it can be said that the late Pridi and Sulak have acted as badly needed aberrations. Both figures have voluntarily and courageously pursued an adversarial role albeit realizing the great personal risks it involved, ranging from social ostracism to exile, from 'disappearance' to imprisonment.

Pridi was of the revolutionary-intellectual genre. He played a crucial role in transforming the country's system of governance from absolute monarchy to a constitutional one in 1932. (He then became Siam's only Senior Statesman and held a long list of high-ranking government positions.[iv]) Put differently, Pridi was the progenitor of Siamese democracy. Back then, empowering the farmers and poor and installing a modicum of equality in society was a hitherto unheard of practice and concept. Jealous of their preponderant power and privileges, the ruling elites violently struggled to preserve the yawning two-tiered social system. In his lifetime, Pridi failed to realize his vision of a better and more democratic society. However as Sulak Sivaraksa writes below, Pridi's democratic ideals had served as a wake-up call to the Thai masses, promising them with a new, bright morning of liberty and justice. Once awakened, the Thai people have always nursed democracy in their hearts."

Sulak, Nobel Peace Prize nominee and winner of the prestigious Right Livelihood Award, humbly claims to be merely an "engaged Buddhist" and social critic. He is, of course, that and much more for he is an "institution," one of the few voices serving as the moral conscience of Siamese society. For decades Sulak has been serving as a crucial linchpin of Siamese social movements and non-governmental organizations' networks. He is active both nationally and internationally, promoting, inter alia, compassion, spiritual growth, voluntary simplistic lifestyle, and

justice.

Risking overgeneralization, Pridi and Sulak share broad similarities. They both are iconoclasts and "rebels" in defense of human nature[v] and, ironically, of Siamese tradition; for example, they are nationalistic and are devoted to the monarchy and Buddhism. As iconoclasts, they are not easily and immediately understood. They rigorously reject or refuse to be swayed by mainstream ideas and often find themselves in the minority of even the minority. An observer astutely pointed out that "Sulak identifies himself with the alternative elements in every system." "He is rejected by all systems so that he is outside any system, unaccepted by all systems.... He is at the center of the intersection because he does not enter any road."[vi] The same remark can also be said of Pridi, who in his quest for a meaningful democracy was misunderstood, deserted and condemned by all sides, royalists, communists, fascists, and neutralists.

As Buddhist rebels, they preached compassion and often identify themselves with and outspokenly represent the oppressed and marginalized. They are not bogged down by 'professionalism:' not desiring to rock the boat and thus appearing 'objective.'[vii] Both figures are not tempted by power and privileges to become, to paraphrase Gramsci, experts in legitimizing the crimes of the ruling class or state—even though they are nationalistic.[viii] It can be said that the act of rebellion is an important sinew that (metaphysically or otherwise) links them with other human persons: "I rebel, therefore we exist."[ix]

In sum, their idiosyncrasies are a unique mixture of old and new, of change and preservation, of radicalism and conservatism, and of Dhamma and Western philosophy. This allows them to have a double perspective on most issues, to see things not in isolation but in a wider picture. Indeed this is a suitable quality for the intellectual, for the 'marginal' figure who is driven by honesty and

seeks to transcend dogmas and myths.

Judging from their broad similarities, one is easily led to the impression that Pridi and Sulak were from the start the best of friends, fighting shoulder to shoulder and back to back against the encircling injustice. In the courageous and illuminating personal essay in this volume Sulak suggests otherwise. He recounts in vivid details his discord and ultimate unity with Pridi. Sulak's essay not only provides us with a valuable glimpse of Pridi's ideas and personality but also of his own background and intellectual development (more precisely, of an important turning point in his intellectual growth).[x] Above all Sulak, in this essay, intends to disperse the dark, malicious clouds that have blackened Pridi Banomyong's reputation, hoping that the Thai people will ultimately come to recognize and appreciate the vital contributions of this man.

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The publication of this book is part of the multi-faceted Centennial Commemoration of Pridi Banomyong Project. Some academics and scholars have accused the whole Project of showing a pro-Pridi bias, implying that it is a cheap propaganda trick. Indeed Pridi had flaws and had made mistakes. To be fair to him however, his good deeds and beneficial contributions are rarely discussed in mainstream discourse, by and large, because of willful historical amnesia. And he has done immensely for his compatriots and country. For example, an essential fact that is shredded down the memory hole is that Pridi was the father of Siamese democracy and that his conception of democracy was well ahead of his times.[xi] On the contrary, deceits are fogging and tainting his name and reputation. He is wrongfully accused of being communist, of masterminding the death of King Rama VIII, of bringing chaos and disruptions to Siamese society (i.e., the society was not yet ready

for democracy), etc. As Pridi's vital contributions became twisted or faded from the national memory, history is simultaneously being fabricated and whitewashed to suit the interests of some in the ruling circle. For instance, brutal dictators are being portrayed as wise protectors of the country's national security, obligating all citizens to garland them with roses. Does not whom a society celebrates in part reflect the nature of its political culture?

S.J.

i Antonio Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks: Selections* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1971), edited and translated by Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith, p. 9.

ii Edward W. Said, *Representations of the Intellectual* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), p. 11.

iii Noam Chomsky, "The Responsibility of Intellectuals" reprinted in *The Chomsky Reader* (Serpent's Tail, 1987), edited by James Peck, p. 60.

iv He served as Minister of Interior (1933-1935), Minister of Foreign Affairs (1936-1939), Minister of Finance (1939-1941), Regent (1941-1945), and Prime Minister (1946-1947).

v For an elaboration of this idea, see Albert Camus, *The Rebel* (Penguin, 1951), translated by Anthony Bower, especially pp. 19-28 and pp. 243-57 but also passim.

vi Kasean Techapeera, "Sulak Sivaraksa: Warrior in the Field of Cultural Politics" in *Modern Thai Monarchy and Cultural Politics* (Bangkok: Santi Pracha Dhamma Institute, 1996), edited by David Strekfuss. Kasean elaborates his point. "The right asks what kind of rightist is he [Sulak] who fights against dictatorship, denounces the military junta, and supports Pridi Banomyong, the father of Thai democracy? The left says what kind of leftist is he who loves the monarchy, loves religion, denounces the communist party, condemns Marxism and rejects violence? The conservative says what kind of conservative is he, who drinks Kloster beer, criticizes monks, is critical of the monarchy and promotes

nonviolent revolution? The radical says what kind of radical wears traditional clothing and searches for Thai roots?" p. 84. Sulak chooses to call himself a "radical conservative."

vii See Said, Chapter 4 *and passim.*

viii For example, Pridi despite being a Cabinet member spoke out against the Thai expansionist ambition during the Franco-Thai border disputes in the late 1930s and early 1940s. Both he and Sulak have been trenchant critics of the country's military dictatorships. Sulak has also fearlessly criticized the Thai monarchy, an institution that most Thai view too sacrosanct to castigate publicly.

ix Camus, p. 28 *and passim.*

x Of course, a more complete account of Sulak's life can be found in his autobiography, *Loyalty Demands Dissent* (Berkeley, California: Parallax Press, 1998).

xi He wanted a meaningful as opposed to a nominal democracy: a mass-based and participatory one in contrast to a top-down democracy where the ruling class (the self- designated best and brightest) sets the agenda and 'engineers consent.'

Preface to the Thai Edition

On 2 May 1983, the devastating news of Pridi Banomyong's death reached and haunted me. The Senior Statesman and voice of reason and compassion was gone. I knew all along that Pridi was very old, but he seemed healthy and energetic. Therefore, I found it difficult to accept with composure what I felt was his untimely death. Several newspapers and magazines immediately asked me to write articles paying tribute to the late Pridi, which I gladly did. Soon, I gave small lectures and participated in many seminars on Pridi at academic institutions throughout the country. At the moment, I felt it was the least I could do for an honorable man who had done so many beneficial things for his country and people, for a visionary man who despite his great sacrifices had been grotesquely betrayed, ridiculed, and abused by many of his compatriots.

Naturally, I encountered a chorus of protests and denunciations from Pridi's enemies or individuals who preferred the miasma of lies to the gentle, luscious breeze of truth and justice. They perceived the truth too embarrassing and too thorny to swallow, and hence deliberately continued to mummify themselves with special oils of myths and cloth wrappings of lies. In good ultraconservative tradition, they tried to stone me into submission with their flak in the mainstream mass media.

Their action reminds me of the nasty responses I received when I wrote a scathing article on King Vajiravudh (Rama VI) in

the monthly *Art and Culture*. The old guards and courtiers, who excelled in the art of deception, spontaneously lambasted the article without even first considering whether or not the facts and arguments I presented were sound. They implied that I was an unpatriotic and anti-royalist renegade whose work deserved no serious attention. How can one know that a work is not serious without first taking it seriously? How can we arrive at the truth without first engaging in some form of discussion or debate? Annoyingly, the conservatives always cite patriotism to stonewall any criticism of the monarchy. However raising patriotism as an issue is like rolling a loaded dice; the result is already rigged. How can the Thai monarchy replenish its diminishing vitality without first admitting its flaws or excesses? Is trying to rejuvenate the monarchy an unpatriotic act?

On King Vajiravudh, new evidence and historiography suggest that, despite his many talents, he was a deeply flawed monarch. Here we must try to row the boat of history away from the dock of myths into the lake of truths. One historian convincingly argued that Rama VI had "another side," a dimension that is rarely explored or touched on. He wrote, "Inheriting none of his father's self-discipline and modesty, pragmatism and sense of proportion, deft touches with men and natural flair for politics, the son was insecure, temperamental and irresponsible, fanciful and vainglorious...." In other words, King Vajiravudh severely lacked the qualities "which had been the hallmark of the Chakris and which had enabled them to contribute with considerable success and rare distinction to the Kingdom's past progress."

Undoubtedly, Rama VI' s weaknesses "were reflected in his conduct of government." His "obsessive suspicion and fear of people or things he did not directly control" led to his immense "distrust [of] his relatives" and dogmatism. King Vajiravudh "refused to listen to any criticisms of his own conduct of govern-

ment or to take heed to any advice," a habit that was constantly reinforced by sycophants who surrounded him. As a result, "the royal family's psychology and conceptual environment [was] a closed one," relying on "a small coterie of royalists with similar conservative beliefs and predispositions" for information, advice, feedback and analyses. In the final analysis, it can be said that during King Vajiravudh's reign, "the business of government became conducted in accordance with one man's temperament and willfulness...."

Aside from his arbitrariness, Rama VI had a penchant for divine grandeur. He was a consummate actor who "turned the Kingdom into a massive stage for his extravagant and well rehearsed theatrical showmanship." Vajiravudh's pompous lifestyle and conduct of government, by any standard, were costly, comprising over ten per cent of the government's budget. In retrospect, it seems that he was so busy indulging in his opulent way of life that he neglected the fundamental "task of providing good government...." Indeed, the king did not rely on benevolence and compassion to win the hearts and minds of his subjects, to foster national unity. "He steadfastly and obstinately stuck to his familiar chosen course, developing Thai nationalism as a means of uniting the people behind him and promoting his favorites and the Wild Tigers [read, the threat or use of force] as a means of safeguarding his throne." Small wonder, by the time Rama VII ascended the throne the country was in a state of administrative and financial disorder and "the monarchy had... fallen into disrespect."

Returning to the controversy on Pridi Banomyong the conservative mythmakers, perhaps running out of innovative ideas to invent 'facts' out of thin air, continue to implicate him in the death of King Ananda Mahidol or Rama VIII. Pridi had peacefully passed away, but the enlightened conservatives still

take sadistic joy in abusing his name and reputation, still love flagellating someone who can no longer defend himself. Their action is no different from that of thugs beating up toddlers in a nursery playground. Numerous courts had proven Pridi's innocence, a fact buttressed by new historical evidence. Yet these facts are insufficient to rock or crack the solid prejudices and hatred of the conservatives.

In a memorandum dated 14 June 1946 Charles W. Yost, the American Charge d' Affaires, reported to the Department of State about his meeting with Prime Minister Pridi Banomyong on the day after King Ananda's death. Yost informed the State Department that Pridi spoke to him "very frankly about the whole situation and ascribed the King's death to an accident, but it was obvious that the possibility of suicide was at the back of his mind. [Pridi] was violently angry at the accusations of foul play leveled against himself and most bitter in the manner in which he alleged (without doubt justly) that the Royal Family and the Opposition, particularly Seni Pramoj and Phra Sudhiat, had prejudiced the King and especially the Princess Mother against him." Yost continued, "[Pridi] said that...King [Ananda] had always behaved most correctly as a constitutional monarch and that their relations had, in spite of the prejudice implanted in the King's mind, been friendly and correct. He admitted frankly, however, that *his relations with the Princess Mother were hopelessly bad* and he feared greatly that his relations with the new King would be poisoned in the same manner as had his relations with King Ananda [emphasis added]." Nevertheless, Yost concluded, Pridi still "intended to continue to endeavor to work with the new King and his mother."

The next day Yost met with Foreign Minister Direk Jayanama who had just had an audience with the new King. In his report to the State Department the Charge d' Affaires noted, "King

Phumiphol...informed the Foreign Minister that he considered... [the widely circulated] rumors [on the late King's death] absurd, that he knew his brother well and that he was certain that his death had been accidental." However Yost added a qualification, "While what the King said to Direk does not necessarily represent what he really believes, it is nevertheless interesting that he made so categorical a statement to the Foreign Minister."

Then Yost raised an important issue: the conservatives and opposition were exploiting the death of the late King to undermine Pridi and bolster their own political fortunes. He wrote, and it deserves to be quoted in full, "The Department may also be interested to know that within forty-eight hours after the death of the late King two relatives of Seni Pramoj, first his nephew and later his wife, came to the Legation and stated categorically their conviction that the King had been assassinated at the instigation of the Prime Minister. It was of course clear that they had been sent by Seni. I felt it necessary to state to both of them in the strongest terms, in order to make it perfectly clear that this Legation could not be drawn into Siamese political intrigues, that I...considered the circulation at this time of fantastic rumors unsupported by a shred of evidence to be wholly inexcusable." Yost also stated that some members of the opposition had approached the British Minister with similar tall tales, but that the latter had discarded all of them.

In mid-1948 during a meeting with Field Marshal Phibunsonggram then the premier, US Ambassador Edwin Stanton wanted to know the former' s view on the impending trial of those suspected of being involved in the 'regicide.' Stanton asked Phibun "whether he thought the court would be able to resolve the mystery of the late King's death," and the Field Marshal replied that he was really doubtful. Phibun then voluntarily said that he "personally doubted whether Nai Pridi was

directly involved for two reasons: firstly...Pridi is a very clever politician, and secondly...he has a 'kind heart.'" Thus Phibun concluded that he "did not think [Pridi] would cause anybody to be murdered." Madame Phibun, who was also present at the meeting, whole-heartedly seconded her husband's observation. However, according to the Field Marshal, Pridi might be guilty of covering up or destroying "some of the evidence thinking thereby to protect his present Majesty." In short Phibun, the self-styled defender of the throne and nation, implied that Pridi, contrary to conservative propaganda, might have even attempted to protect the monarchy.

I dedicate the essay below to the memory of the late Pridi Banomyong who took his fellow citizens on the endless journey towards freedom and democracy.

S. SIVARAKSA

27 MAY 1983

A Note About This Essay

Over the past few decades, I have commented on various personalities in numerous essays and books. My diverse subjects ranged from members of the highest social echelon to those in the lowest rung and from respectable and honorable individuals to mendacious and repulsive persons. As interesting and, at times, complex as my subjects were, I wrote about them with relative ease.

Things however are incomparably more difficult this time because my topic is none other than Pridi Banomyong. None of my previous subjects was as controversial, brilliant, intelligent, and thoroughly misunderstood as Pridi was. None had more hordes of enemies than he did. Admittedly, for a significant period of time, I was even an 'enemy' of his. Ultimately, unlike any of my earlier subjects, Pridi elicited a fundamental and radical shift in my attitude towards him and the world. Of course, I have always adjusted my perception of individuals and events in the light of new facts. Nevertheless, they were often minor adjustments. On the other hand, concerning Pridi, it seems as if my whole world has finally turned right side up. For too long, like many in Thai society, I have been inclined to uncritically accept some of the grossly unfair tirades against Pridi, and regrettably I did not shy away from using them to denounce or abuse him. My prejudices against him were a turbulent whirlpool that tumbled and destroyed reason and logic, were a tyrannical shroud that clouded my mind-heart. Now, I believe I have achieved a fuller and more balanced

view of Pridi and his ideas.

Let it be clear from the outset that I do not attempt to write a biography of Pridi. Rather, this work is about my changing perceptions of him. In part, this essay is intended as a mea culpa. In part, it charts my arduous and tumultuous intellectual journey from an advocate of conservative elitism to that of meaningful participatory democracy. Directly or otherwise, Pridi played a central role in this journey. More significantly, I attempt to pierce through the intricate web of dark lies and intrigues that have been spun around Pridi, hoping that society will finally come to appreciate his legacy and see the light.

I

I have always given Pridi Banomyong full credit for his vital and courageous role in the Seri Thai movement, in contributing to the liberation of the country from Japanese occupation during the Second World War. Unfortunately, two factors that I then found abhorrent predisposed me to keep a wary eye on Pridi: his advocacy of democracy and alleged role in the death of King Rama VIII. These two broad factors would strongly influence me to despise Pridi, a feeling I found too overwhelming to simply secretly nurture in my bosom. Consequently, Pridi and I had a number of heated exchanges; most of them were initiated by me. In the end, coming to my senses and recognizing the gratuitous nature of my verbal savagery against him, I apologized to Pridi. A true Buddhist and gentleman, Pridi not only accepted my apology but also lamented that he had unfairly attacked me in a work of his.

To better understand my initial contempt towards democracy and hence towards Pridi, one must first know my background and upbringing. I was born into a middle class Thai-Chinese clan that had settled in Thonburi province for several generations. It can be said that our clan was completely apolitical.

Career-wise, we were mostly merchants and business employees of local and foreign companies, and thus were solely interested in commerce. My father, for instance, was an accountant for the British-American Tobacco Monopoly. Some in my father's generation went on to work for the government, but they were low ranking officials. Put another way, disinterested in state affairs, we opted for the status quo; that is, an elitist society dominated by the royal family and aristocracy.

The society was handsomely replete with hierarchies of power, status, and reward, but we were doing fairly well. Moreover, we had befriended some aristocratic luminaries, and it filled us with pride and joy to be able to brush our shoulders against theirs. We voluntarily became the guardians of the aristocratic society. Naturally, we shared the elitist conviction that the masses are ignorant and dangerous and that they are drowning in the unhappy consequences of poverty because they are lazy and extravagant. We saw poverty as resulting from serious personality flaws rather than from structural deficiencies. It was a crime to be poor we implied.

If only they were more diligent and frugal like us then they would not be suffering we quipped. To strengthen our case, we often cited the success of our ancestors who were virtually penniless when they first came to Siam from China. Understandably but quite unforgivably, we were suffering from amnesia. We seemed to have forgotten that our clan became wealthy in part through the blatant exploitation of poor Thai farmers and Chinese manual laborers.

Strangely, even when we suffered from bankruptcy we never doubted the legitimacy of the prevailing socioeconomic and political structures. Instead, we blamed destiny and ourselves. When we were wealthy we had generously pampered our aristocratic superiors and friends with lavish gifts. When Shipwrecked in

a violent sea of financial troubles, we pleaded for their sympathy and aid. Generally, they rewarded us with indifference, or at best, financial aid at extremely high interest rates. Nevertheless, we still doggedly respected most of the members of the aristocracy.

Criticisms of members of the royal family and aristocracy gradually gained momentum during the reign of King Rama VI. By the last years of King Rama VII' s reign, the time that I was born, these criticisms became even more prevalent and virulent. They failed however to sway our firm conviction that the King had impeccable credentials and that the aristocracy served as an indispensable pillar of Thai society.

Small wonder why we did not greet the revolution on 24 June 1932 with open arms. My father had friends among the revolutionaries, some of whom he greatly respected for their honesty and ability such as Direk Jayanama, Sim Viravaithaya, and Banjong Sricharooen. In spite of this, he could not overcome his disdain for the opportunists who had bandwagoned with the revolutionary tide in order to reap personal benefits in terms of wealth or status—not infrequently by corrupt means. In retrospect, it also seems that we distrusted most of the People's Party members who engineered the revolution in 1932, generally seeing them as inherently inept and corrupt. On the flip side, we looked up to our Western employers as embodiments of honesty and integrity. Undoubtedly, we left out the fact that our foreign employers earned several times more than the average Thai did and were granted numerous special privileges. When the foreign company where our clan members worked in became a Thai State enterprise, Thai citizens were able to assume high-ranking positions. We then feared that corruption would sooner or later reveal its hideous face.

One of my father's close relatives was implicated in the

Bowaradej counter-revolution. This added another obstacle for us to sympathize with the 1932 revolutionaries. Furthermore, we romantically expected vast and rapid improvements in our livelihood. After all, had not the revolutionaries promised greater wellbeing to the middle and lower classes? Quickly disillusioned, we castigated what we perceived to be their deliberate policy of foot-dragging.

More importantly, as a direct result of the intense disagreement over the economic restructuring program, the Manopakornitidhada government*, employing cheap and dirty tricks to forestall any drastic economic reforms, denounced Pridi Banomyong as a communist stooge. Immediately, Pridi was silenced and exiled to France. The government's scare tactics worked effectively on us. In addition, King Rama VII' s rebuttal of Pridi's proposed economic reforms further undermined our trust in the latter. Although we were completely unfamiliar with Pridi's economic proposals we, in part because of our blind adulation for royalty, held the king's words in high esteem. In his message, the king seconded the government's groundless assertion that Pridi was a communist. He added that Pridi's economic reforms, if implemented, would deprive the people of all their wealth and property. This corroborated and confirmed our belief that Pridi posed a threat to everything that we held dear.

No doubt, the conservatism and prejudices of my family much influenced me initially. But society at large was also conservative. Arguably, Thai society then was even verging towards proto-fascism. In the early 1940s as a young boy, I remember visiting a constitution festival. I saw soldiers and

* Phya Manopakorn was the first prime minister from 1932 to 1933. In fact, the position was more or less offered to him by Pridi Banomyong.

police officers solemnly guarding the pedestal tray supporting the constitution. This misled me to believe that the constitution and democracy were divine and transcendental things in the manner of religion and the kingship. Schools did not teach the virtues of democracy, did not collectively act as a paragon of democratic ideals. In fact, teachers behaved dictatorially in classrooms. Nationalism and militarization were wildly promoted in schools. Leaders who vowed to greatly augment the national strength and security were widely extolled and were gaining ascendancy. An extra-legal judicial tribunal was created, leading to the arrests and, in some cases, execution of members from the old absolute monarchy order.

All these ugly events, we incorrectly believed, were a natural part of living in a democracy. The Department of Information (read, Propaganda Department) and schools constantly assured us that this was the case. Therefore, as a child, I did not have a very good impression of democracy. My family and I realized that Pridi was not responsible for these disturbing events. We knew that if someone were really to be blamed, fingers should be pointed at the sinister triumvirate of Field Marshal Phibunsonggram, Luang Promyothi and Luang Vijitvathakarn. Nevertheless, we blamed Pridi for catalyzing the revolution that contributed to these woeful consequences. Without him, we reasoned, our lives and society would be more peaceful and orderly. We would all be living happily and prosperously under absolute monarchy. Under the old system, even though the king was above the law and people, he was benevolent we argued. We insisted that both Ramas IV and V were honorable kings. Rama VI paved the way for democratic reforms in the country, we continued. We took Rama VII by his words when he stated during his stay in the United States that he was in the process of granting a more democratic constitution to the Thai people.

In other words, the 1932 revolutionaries—Pridi, in particular—had simply behaved rashly and illogically. Thus we contended that the motive of the revolutionaries was not to bring democracy to the people, but to selfishly install themselves in power.

Members of the royal family and aristocracy did not fare well after the revolution. Many were arrested or exiled. Their property were confiscated and redistributed, generally falling into the hands of the revolutionaries. Additionally, many government officials from the old order were either demoted or expelled. We felt nothing but sympathy for their wretched fate and condemned the revolutionary People's Party for inflicting such misery on them. At the same time, we felt nothing but contempt for the arrogance of some of the revolutionaries. We assumed that the People's Party was a cohesive entity, and hence we saw greater coherence in its policymaking process than was the case. In reality, the Party was divided into two broad groups, the military and the civilian, i.e. the autocrats and the liberals.

My disenchantment with democracy and exposure to conservatism was however merely beginning. In 1945 when I was ordained as novice monk for one and one-half years, I breathed in the air of conservatism, or rather ultraconservatism, daily. Archconservatives from the old order frequented the temple where I studied, for the head monk of my temple was a prominent astrologer. None of them had kind words to say about democracy and, much less, about Pridi Banomyong. A familiar sight was that of Phya Srivisarnvaja.* Not only was he educated in Britain, he was also, to date, the youngest permanent undersecretary of state in the Ministry of Foreign

* Phya Srivisarn was in fact a British subject and was only registered as a Thai citizen at the Siamese legation in Paris during the reign of Rama VI. In 1932 he was permanent under secretary of state under Prince Devawongvarothai, the Minister.

Affairs. He seemed to be widely respected in society. How could I have treated lightly his constant denunciations of Pridi? (It was only much later that I found out from reliable colleagues that Phya Sri was not as capable and respectable as was commonly believed to be the case. One only has to witness his subservience to the Sarit Thanarat dictatorship.)*

Needless to say, when Khuang Aphaiwongse broke with Pridi in 1945 these archconservatives suddenly found themselves as supporters of the Democratic Party. After all, they reasoned, an enemy of our enemy is our friend. The ascendancy of Pridi as prime minister in 1945 much enraged the conservatives and their hatred died hard. Even when Pridi stepped down and Thamrongnawasawat [hereafter called Thamrong] became premier, they still insisted that the latter was simply a puppet of Pridi. Since the conservatives predominated in Bangkok and Thonburi, these two provinces elected only Democrats into Parliament. For the conservatives, including myself, it did not matter that the Democrats were spending an awful lot of time bickering among themselves.

Worse, although the 1945 constitution was much more democratic than the 1932 one, we had issues against it because Pridi was its drafter. We believed that Pridi was merely twisting the law in order to undermine his political opponents, failing to see that the new constitution attempted to empower the underprivileged and marginalized in society. The new law facilitated the elections of politicians from small progressive political

* After the June revolution, Pridi asked the People's Party to invite him to be Minister of Foreign Affairs. Both he and Phya Mano, then Prime Minister, told the British Minister in Bangkok that they took the jobs at the threat of the bayonet. In 1933 both polled with the military not only to exile Pridi to France, but to get rid of democracy altogether. Hence another coup led by Phya Paholpolpayuhasena in 1933 ousted the Mano cabinet and recalled Pridi from abroad.

parties into Parliament. Put differently, it enabled the poor, especially from the northeastern provinces of the country, to better voice their concerns and interests. Perceiving the situation in a different light, we contended that the poor, ignorant farmers from the Northeast were bribed to elect those progressive MPs. Moreover, we felt that the MPs from these backward provinces were not as qualified in both birthright and intellect as the ones from our provinces, the urban areas. For us, the elitist Pramoj brothers* were the quintessence of good and respectable politicians.

The Second World War had already ended by the time I disrobed and left the temple to pursue secondary education. In the series of elections that took place after the war, the civilian and military conservatives took every opportunity to discredit and insult Pridi, the Senior Statesman. The conservatives onslaught against Pridi escalated when he, after resigning from the post of Regent, became prime minister. The spiteful Democratic Party led the charge in the attack with beast-like fury.

My family and I were practically unfamiliar with the political platform of Pridi's electoral campaign. Notwithstanding, we, allowing our prejudices to prevail over objectivity and common sense, adopted the criticisms and standpoint of Pridi's conservative opponents virtually wholesale. The conservatives condemned Pridi for failing to mitigate poverty in the country (resulting from postwar inflation) and for political nepotism (Pridi's cohorts assumed important cabinet positions in successive postwar governments). Pridi's alleged maneuvering to deny Khuang Aphaiwongse the premiership particularly incensed the conservatives. Khuang went at great length to

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* Seni and Kukrit were sons of Prince Kamrob, whose grandfather was Rama II. Both brothers ultimately served as prime ministers.

depict himself as the savior who rescued Siam from the iron fist of Field Marshal Phibunsonggram after the war, and we naively believed him. In addition, the conservatives accused the Thamrong government of corruption. The reduced power and privileges of leading military figures also disgruntled them.*

Some of my clan members and teachers even nostalgically yearned for the proto-fascist era of Field Marshal Phibunsonggram. With starry eyes, they praised the Field Marshal's role in expanding and improving the country's infrastructures. On the other hand, they ridiculed the postwar governments' inability to guarantee the availability of running water and electricity daily. They lamented over the run-down state of roads. Funny, they seemed to have forgotten that, among other things, the war had destroyed many of the country's important electricity generating plants, that the country was in a turbulent transitional phase from war to peace, and that it lacked the necessary funds to finance infrastructural restoration. Some of them—and I am not making this up—even missed the Phibun-imposed customs of saluting the national flag twice daily, of forcing youths to wear military uniforms, and of compelling women to wear hats or bonnets.** Put starkly, they wanted an orderly, dictatorial, and militarized society. It did not matter if military boots were trampling down the democratic rights of the majority of citizens.

This suggests that the middle class served as the buffer between the ruling elites, whether they were aristocrats or military figures, and the masses. The middle class was apolitical

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* Please see Appendix I on dates of various cabinets from 1932.

** These decrees came about in 1939 when the name of the country was changed from Siam to Thailand. Phibun immitated Kemal Pasha of Turkey by attempting to sever the county from its past tradition. Also, he adopted fascist western model after Hitler & Mussolini.

and apathetic, and hence they were disinterested in broad issues of liberty and justice; disinterested, that is, unless their parochial interests were being seriously undermined. Strangely, even Catholic teachers in my secondary school thought of Phibun positively. In the early 1940s, during the Franco-Thai border disputes, Field Marshal Phibunsonggram expelled a number of French Catholic priests from my school. Furthermore, he had forced Thai Catholics to reconvert to Buddhism. To cite another example, many prominent monks in the country implied that they were more satisfied under absolute monarchy or dictatorship even though in the democratic interlude they were granted more liberty and rights. To sum up, even teachers and monks were not immune to the prevailing illiberal creed of the middle class.

Consequently, the 8 November 1947 military coup, which eventually restored Field Marshal Phibun to power, did not terribly disturb my family or the middle class in general. Through various means, the coup group craftily assuaged our fear and bought our support. One, the coup leaders initially granted nominal power to the Democratic Party, since they knew that the Party was popular among urban dwellers and was the archenemy of Pridi. Two, the coup group implicated Pridi in the mysterious death of King Rama VIII in 1946, trying to undermine his support and power base. Because of sheer political opportunism and expediency, the Democratic Party was also involved in this conspiracy. Many in the middle class hence saw the coup leaders as the defender of the royal throne. Three, the coup group revived or invented several royal ceremonies and practices. For example, prostration before royal figures, hitherto an unknown practice, suddenly became en vogue. They denounced the 1932 revolutionaries, who had abolished or modified these ceremonies, for diluting the country's 'national

character.' The military coup leaders also patched up their relations with many aristocrats and royalists, some of whom we, the middle class, greatly respected. For instance, they invited Prince Bowaradej* back from exile. Lastly, the coup leaders farcically portrayed themselves as clean-handed corruption busters. According to one story, Field Marshal Phin, a leading coup member, even broke into tears upon learning of the corruption of the previous civilian government. To further win our hearts, the coup group exercised their dictatorial power and drastically reduced prices of several basic amenities. But prices of these goods soon skyrocketed. Field Marshal Phin went on to become one of the country's richest persons. If one takes the four aforementioned factors into consideration, it is quite understandable why we did not oppose the coup group and could not care less when police brutality was used to crush political opponents; in other words, Pridi's political supporters.

I began to read voraciously when I entered high school. Instead of inoculating myself against conservatism, reading further exposed me to it. The market was lush with books, but their range of subjects was narrowly defined. To my knowledge, most were either hagiographies of the ruling elites (e.g., of King Rama VII, Prince Bowaradej, etc.) or exaltations of the absolute monarchy epoch. They blamed the woes that society was experiencing on the 1932 revolutionaries, meaning, by and large, Pridi.

As mentioned above, the coup group granted the Democratic Party, headed by Khuang Aphaiwongse, nominal control of the government. We found it soothing that many capable

* He led the counter coup to restore absolute monarchy in 1933 but failed and fled to live in Saigon.

aristocrats from the old order, through political appointments as opposed to elections, populated the civilian (virtually) puppet government. Carried away by our fantasy, we hallucinated that the new government, largely purged of revolutionary elements, would restore peace and prosperity back to the country, would restore a semblance of the *status quo ante*. Hence, we favored the 1949 constitution over the more democratic 1945 one. After all, it took the 1949 constitution to remove the revolutionaries, whom we long detested, from power. In various degrees, the revolutionaries had dominated the Thai political scene for fifteen years, but little had improved in our livelihood. We felt that fifteen years were more than enough for the country's political experimentation with democracy. As parochial and myopic as we were, we overlooked the fact that democracy brought many boons to Thai society, rural or otherwise. Under the umbrella of democracy, all Thai people became full, dignified citizens or owners of the country; previously, they were only slaves or, at best, pariahs in the eyes of the ruling caste. At least, democracy allowed the people to voice their concerns and interests through the popularly elected members of parliament.

In 1948 when Field Marshal Phibun hijacked the Khuang government, he made it known that he favored the pre-revolution era or the *status quo ante*. For instance, he maintained that members of the senate would be politically appointed. He saw to it that elites from the old order were appointed to cabinet positions. Prince Wiwatchai, Phya Thephasdin and M.R. Kukrit Pramoj were among the beneficiaries of this policy.

The great powers, particularly the United States and Britain, sanctioned our conviction that the Phibun takeover was reasonable and legitimate, because both Washington and London

recognized the new Thai government.* Local newspapers also held a pro-Phibun line for advocating otherwise generally led to a hard choice, suffering closure or facing death squads. To sum up everything in a nutshell, although the autocratic practices of the Phibun government occasionally raised our eyebrows, we were on the whole relatively satisfied with its conservative policies.

No wonder, when Pridi launched the Royal Palace rebellion in 1949 in order to topple Phibun, I sided with the incumbent dictatorial government. For a fleeting moment, like summer days in polar regions, the tide of the armed conflict seemed to favor Pridi. His forces seized the capital's radio broadcasting station and named Direk Jayanama the new premier. As a friend of my father, I knew Direk personally and respected him. Nevertheless, I could not help but worry about the fate of the Phibun government and, more important, of Thai society. The Phibun government embarked on a counter-propaganda spree, groundlessly insisting that if the rebellion was successful Pridi would install himself as president and would butcher all the royal family and aristocrats. Those lies scared the hell out of me.

Soon after, I grew disillusioned with the Phibun government. The dictatorial nature of Phibun became increasingly apparent and repulsive to me when he discarded the 1949 constitution for the 1932 one and when he dissolved Parliament. Phibun carried out this political blitzkrieg in December 1952 when the young King Rama IX was on a warship anchored close to the coast of the Gulf of Siam. In my view, it was an act of sheer political opportunism that reflected Phibun's disrespect for and disloyalty to the king. *L'etat c'est moi*, Phibun assumed. It

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* For more information, please refer to *A Special Relationship: The United States and Military Government in Thailand*, 1947-1958 by Daniel Fineman (Honolulu : University of Hawaii, 1997)

gradually became clear that corruption in the Phibun government was on a far greater scale than in the previous ones, including the Pridi government. Worse, human rights abuses abounded, setting the precedent or benchmark for subsequent Thai dictators to match. I found the triumvirate of Phibun, Phao, and Sarit repellent and unsavory. It seems that the triumvirate was a shaky marriage of convenience, for the members used every means available, legal or otherwise, to counterbalance one another's power.

I easily and correctly concluded that the Phibun government was, despite its rhetoric, quickly squeezing the last gasp of democracy out of the country. Admittedly, however, I still had some qualms about democracy. Though I felt that democracy was superior to dictatorship, absolute monarchy was my most preferred political and social system. To some extent, I had reservations about democracy because I associated it with one man, Pridi Banomyong. As evident above, my conservative upbringing and surroundings helped engineered my prejudices against Pridi and against everything he stood for.

My appreciation of democracy did not grow any stronger when I was studying in Britain (between 1953 and 1961), the progenitor of constitutional monarchy. True, I took a course on constitutional law in my first year. However the atrocious stench of conservatism and aristocracy predominated in the atmosphere of the university and student bodies. In addition, perhaps through indoctrination and inverted racism, I became convinced that only Anglo-Saxons are fitted to rule by democracy. My English tutor at the university unrelentingly dumbed me down, adamantly exaggerating the merits of aristocracy. He insisted that Britain became a great power because of the brilliance of its ruling elites, its aristocrats. British aristocrats, he maintained, were impeccably schooled in the just and fair

administration of the state. There was no room for the three shibboleths from the French Revolution—liberty, equality, and fraternity. My tutor prophesied that the more Britain democratizes its society, the more enfeebled it will be nationally and internationally. I myself was taught to idolize the conservative Churchill and Eden, and therefore my tutor's logic much swayed me. We agreed that the aristocrats or ruling elites could easily rise above their class interests and clearly discern the public interests. The ruling elites should even dictate what is in the best interest of the public because the masses are generally too apathetic and ignorant.

Another point worth mentioning is that in those days I was an avid reader of Edmund Burke, a staunch opponent and critic of the French Revolution. As a social organicist, Burke venomously attacked all changes that threaten to eradicate the 'social tree.' Burke's works corroborated what my French priest teacher taught me when I was young: Voltaire and Rousseau were heretics or fanatical atheists. They should have been burnt at stake or guillotined, he implied. Also, he pointed out that Lenin and Marx were both imps of Satan. Since the Phibun government was not only exorcising the specter of democracy but also of Communism, I, for a long while, tolerated it. It can be said that my antipathy towards democracy was representative of the attitude of other British-educated Thai students.

When I completed my education and returned to Siam in 1961, my friends and associates were all aristocrats or conservatives, including Thai students I had befriended while in Britain. Individuals with progressive ideas never found their way into my immediate entourage: I had intellectually isolated myself. Back then, I could not understand why someone would risk jail or execution for the sake of justice and liberty. Later,

when I witnessed the abuses of power by the ruling elites and the sufferings of ordinary citizens, I understood that principles such as liberty, justice, and equality are worth fighting for.

During the civilian government of Sanya Dhamasakti in 1973, it dawned upon me that unless the masses are empowered to influence policies and issues that affect their lives, the ruling elites, no matter how able or benevolent, can never bring the country an inch closer to democracy. Indeed, the rulers' philanthropy and benevolence sometimes mask brutal exploitation. Furthermore, a benevolent act is sometimes intended to perpetuate the politics of dependency and the unjust *status quo*. A meaningful democracy requires structural and legal changes. In a way, democracy cannot be taught or imposed from above. It is a way of life, and hence only when we live democratically will we know what democracy is. Also, an incumbent civilian government does not necessary equate to a reign of democracy. The civilian government of Thanin Kraivixien in 1976, to cite just one example, was as corrupt and perhaps even more dictatorial than that of his military predecessors.

As evident above, my intellectual journey towards democracy was long and winding. Seriously reading the voluminous works of Pridi Banomyong might have greatly smoothened and shortened this trip. But, back then, Pridi did not command my respect and interest. In general, I deemed his works—the few ones that I cared to read—tasteless. Largely through firsthand experiences, I gradually and painfully recognized the virtues of democracy. Not only had I the chance to witness and empathize with the misery of the oppressed, I eventually felt the white fangs of successive dictatorial governments sinking deeper into my neck.

However, many in the ruling class, those who prided themselves for their education and special privileges, were

still intoxicated and mesmerized by the allures of absolute monarchy or military dictatorship. They perceived the withdrawal pain, concomitant in any democratic reform, too tormenting. Predictably, they struggled to abort any democratic change and strove to legitimize or sanctify the appalling faces of illiberalism. They unequivocally heralded the past under absolute monarchy as glorious and heroic. They insisted that a Sarit Thanarat, however unsavory and corrupt, is sometimes needed for the sake of national security and politico-social stability. In lay terms, this meant perpetuating the inordinate power and privileges of the ruling caste at the expense of the lower classes. Deluding themselves, the rulers seemed to believe that the masses fatalistically accept their subaltern positions and rejoice at being ruled by the privileged minority. Once in awhile, the rulers would descend from the clouds and answered the lower classes' agonizing cries of pain resulting from, say, natural calamities. The rulers would then overrate their action as unparalleled magnanimity—enough to justify their continued dominance. The masses would interpret it simply as a pat on the back given after delivering a series of heavy blows. To sum up, the efficiency and stability that are associated with autocracy only benefit the rulers. In fact, by trying to legitimize autocracy in the first place, one has already lost one's humanity.

Once I began to recognize the virtues of democracy, I slowly appreciated the ideas and contributions of Pridi. He was, and this point cannot be overemphasized, the first to sound the democratic bell in Siam. The first declaration Pridi delivered on 24 June 1932 in the name of the revolutionary People's Party served as a wake-up call to the Thai masses, promising them a new, bright morning of liberty and justice. Once awakened, the Thai people have always nursed democracy in

their hearts.*

For us the more educated or privileged, by and large because of accidents of birth, we must both work for and with the poor and marginalized. We must return power to the masses and enable them to exercise their rights and power. Only through cooperation and compassion will we have any chance of successfully raising democracy, peace, and justice in the country. That is, we need to minimize and eventually eliminate social antagonism and exploitation resulting from selfishness and cutthroat competition. Perhaps, religious teachings should serve as an important basis for our interpersonal as well as international conducts.

After rereading Pridi, I believe that at the heart of his conception of democracy is cooperation and compassion; a meaningfully democratic society cannot survive amidst hatred and selfishness. Adherents of absolute monarchy or autocracy, with their depraved lifestyle and inherent disdain for the common people, found it difficult to believe that Pridi preached the gospel of love, trust, and compassion. Of course, since a good part of Pridi's proposed reforms leaned towards democratic socialism, they threatened to undermine the vested interests of the ruling class, threatened to correct the social balance that tilted heavily towards the rich and powerful. Now to discredit Pridi, the ruling class found it much easier to resort to mud-slinging than to engaging in a logical, formal debate—which they were not intellectually equipped to do. At first they condemned Pridi as a Kremlin agent or worse a communist terrorist, meaning he was a personification of evil on earth. Later, when the communist label failed to stick, they implicated Pridi in the 'regicide.' Although Pridi was proven

* See Appendix IV

innocent in numerous court decisions, his opponents, to this day, continue to associate Pridi with the death of King Rama VIII. For a long while, I myself was not immune to this belief.

II

On 9 June 1946, during the Pridi government, King Rama VIII was found dead in his chamber with a bullet in his head. My family and I somehow managed to merge the death of the young monarch with our prejudices against Pridi. Although we respected Pridi for acting as Regent during the war and for helping organize the Seri Thai movement, his political ascendancy *vis-a-vis* Khuang Aphaiwongse, the leader of the Democrats, much tormented us. We believed that Pridi plotted the downfall of our beloved Khuang in order to further his own lustful political ambitions. Widespread rumors along similar veins cemented our groundless conviction.

By nature, I am highly critical of any incumbent government or any concentrations of power, whatever its political color. Though I was only thirteen I had many issues against the Pridi government, despite the fact that some cabinet ministers were close friends of my father. I had even known them personally. Also, I am inclined to side with the underdog or the vanquished. Such a personality predisposition has its pluses and minuses. In this case, the consequences of this attitude were more negative than positive. In other words, I sympathized with Khuang and the Democrats and lambasted the incumbent Pridi government. Along with my conservative background and upbringing, my personality inclined me to hold Pridi in low esteem.

The news of the king's death shattered, vexed, and confused us. On the one hand, we were genuinely heartbroken by the passing away of the young monarch. Amidst tears and

sobs, we lamented that once again the country was deprived of a unifying factor. On the other hand, we found it incredulous that his death was, as the government declared, an accident. Subsequent events would soon lead us—sad and perplexed as we were—to accuse the government of attempting to cover up the tragedy.

In an open forum, several members of parliament condemned the government for failing to provide a careful autopsy for the dead monarch. The Thai Red Cross pointed out that the late king suffered from various other physical injuries, which the government failed or neglected to mention in their report. The possibility that the king was assassinated or that he committed suicide was also left lingering in the air. Rumors and doubts eventually culminated in a most sordid act: in a popular movie theatre, someone cried out that Pridi had murdered the king.

The culprit who accused Pridi was subsequently caught, and it was traced that M.R. Kukrit Pramoj (Democrat), among other notables, was behind this act. Since we often looked at the Democratic Party with starry eyes and since Kukrit was one of our political favorites, we surrendered to the conspiracy theory that Pridi assassinated the king. True, by then he was no longer in power, but we perceived that the successive civilian governments were merely political pawns of Pridi, the chess master. Simply put, their leitmotif was to whitewash the conspiracy behind the king's death, to prevent their master from being convicted of a felony. A people's tribunal was erected to investigate the tragedy, but its findings were inconclusive. Worse, a rumor spread that Pridi was really manipulating the tribunal behind the scene.

We now know that the Democratic Party had the most to gain in the political destruction of Pridi. Put another way, if Pridi was banished from the political arena, the power of his

two supporting political parties, then forming the majority in Parliament, would be undermined. Once their political opponents were demolished, the Democratic Party could proceed to organize a new government. Back then, however, I was too young to fathom the cynicism, selfishness, and opportunism involved in politics. Moreover, the Pridi government's faltering popularity further waned when it imposed strict censorship on any newspapers that was critical of its role in handling the 'regicide' affair.

A military coup d'ètat erupted on 8 June 1947. We condoned the coup makers because, among other things, they promised to rigorously reinvestigate on the death of the late king. As expected, with the aid of the Democratic Party, the coup makers declared that the king was assassinated and none other than Pridi Banomyong was the main culprit. Although Pridi did not fire the fatal bullet that killed the king, he was the mastermind behind the assassination plot. Anti-Pridi and Democrat-owned newspapers—the lapdogs of the conservatives—quickly adopted and extensively disseminated this conspiracy theory. Admittedly, back then, I even admired these newspapers for having the courage to speak the truth to power.

Additionally, Tangai Suvannathat, our Thonburi MP from the Democratic Party, produced a play and showed it in our side of the city instead of in Bangkok. (The Chaophraya River separates Bangkok and Thonburi.) He argued that he was unable to find any playhouse in Bangkok to present his work. Anyhow, his play dwelled on the regicide theme and implicated Pridi in the murder, adding another crest to the waves of unfair tirades against Pridi.

Although I had left the novice monkshood to pursue secondary education, I still frequented the temple that I was ordained in. There I had plenty of opportunities to keep up with

the latest rumors and lies on Pridi because a small coterie of aristocrats was using the temple as a conference hall to exchange diatribes against him—their favorite pastime, it seems. Allowing their grotesque imagination to run amok, they fabricated stories of numerous attempts on the king's life by Pridi and the Seri Thai. To cite just one example, they insisted that the Seri Thai (read, Pridi) maliciously kindled the king's interest in firearms so that on the day of the assassination the royal entourage would mistake the gunshot sound for gun practice. In fact, the gun that slew him was a Seri Thai present. It did not matter that such a story was full of half-truths and distortions. Since it was repeatedly told by a number of prominent aristocrats, it was credible enough for me: an aristocrat made a lie sound respectable.

Before long three individuals allegedly involved in the "regicide" were arrested. Phra Pinitchonkadi [hereafter called Pinit] assumed the task of state prosecutor. I had always admired Pinit and when I learned that, after falling out with the People's Party, he was squeezed out of the government, my respect for him grew even stronger. In my eyes, he was perfect for the prosecutor role despite the fact that he was the Pramojs' brother-in-law.

Together Kukrit Pramoj and Pinit embarked on a two-pronged attack to rig the outcomes of the trial. The former daily loaded his newspaper *Siam Rath* with propaganda, heralding the virtues of an elite-ruled society (especially through the beautiful novel *Four Reigns*) and stirring up the public hatred of the three alleged murderers. The latter frenziedly doctored evidence to meet his ends. For example, neither the king's two attendants who buried his blood-spattered pillow and meddled with his head wounds, nor the persons who had ordered them to do so were held in custody and interrogated. The farcical trial

climaxed in the capital punishment of the three alleged culprits. A kangaroo court could not have done any worse. With my bloodlust satisfied, I, as a good Buddhist, rejoiced at the court's decisions. Also, I seconded the court's ruling, by implication, that Pridi's hidden hands could be felt in the 'regicide.'

I could not have known that political opportunists and archconservatives infiltrated the whole judicial system, leading many lawyers to turn down the offer to prosecute this case. In part this was because I placed too much faith in *Siam Rath* newspaper and in the country's judiciary system.

The nature and course of the trial was still a matter of great interest for us Thai students in Britain, often engendering stimulating debates and lively arguments. I learned from a friend that the chief prosecution witness, Tee Srisuvan, had been raised by Phra Pinit and, undoubtedly, was coached to testify before the court as he did. The court virtually bought every word this witness said. Then learning British law, I had to admit that this witness lacked credibility. But when I realized that this friend of mine was related to an associate of Pridi, I gradually dismissed his skepticism of the judiciary process.

While working for the British Broadcasting Corporation, several of my fellow workers were members of the Thai aristocracy, relating to the royal family. I grew to like one of them and we became fairly close. She told me that, with due respect to Pridi, the fact that Pridi refused to return to Siam to face charges of regicide meant he was guilty. Clarifying her point, my aristocrat friend added that Pridi had nothing to fear of the Thai judiciary process because, as a renowned lawyer and professor, he had a lot of proteges in the Justice Department. They could always help and rescue him.

The logic of my aristocrat friend greatly impacted my perception of Pridi and the trial. Nevertheless, I still had

difficulty accepting the reasons why Pridi might have wanted to assassinate the king. Initially, I found three reasons adequate enough to explain Pridi's monstrous decision. None of them was original. Rather, they had been widely disseminated through the conservative ruling class's grapevines. The first suggested that the slain king had been greatly dissatisfied with the composition of bureaucracy and the government, all stacked, it was said, with Pridi's incompetent quislings. The second argued that the king had intended to abdicate in favor of his brother in order to run for premiership. Knowing the political appeal the king would have on the masses, the People's Party, worried about their political future and reforms, decided to eradicate the threat before it was conceived. The third rumor, equally groundless, stated that a jealous Pridi feared that he would soon be out of the international limelight because the young monarch was drawing a lot of attention and respect from the great powers.

These three reasons (read, fabrications) lost their appeal when I was studying in Britain. And I was unable to come up with new and convincing arguments to replace them. However, as they say, old habits die hardest. My conservative upbringing, hatred of any incumbent government, jaundiced view of democracy, and faith in absolute monarchy and aristocracy tyrannically gangpressed me to blame Pridi for the king's death. Whatever the case, Pridi must be responsible for the tragedy, I insisted. He might not have triggered the fatal shot, but he must have impressed his anger at the king on his henchmen. As a result, I concluded, in a Thai replay of the murder of Thomas a Becket, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Pridi playing the role of Henry II led his loyal goons to believe that he wanted the king dead.

In retrospect, throughout the past two decades, I have been a consummate royalist. This statement however needs

qualification. I have striven almost by all means to preserve the monarchical system. But I desire a monarchy that rests on the foundation of honesty and justice. No less important, I want a constitutional monarchy, one that complements and bolsters democracy. In spite of my relentless efforts, many conservatives and royalists, since 1967, have accused me of trying to bring down the monarchy. I can now better fathom the frustration Pridi must have felt. In my view, if the monarchical system falls, the conservatives only have themselves to blame. They are the ones who have been exploiting royal connections to selfishly benefit themselves and to rise above others. Masquerading as arms and legs of the king—the king himself has no official power—they have been, speaking metaphorically, joyfully drinking nectar from the skulls of the oppressed. In sum, these self-professed royalists are exercising 'royal' power even beyond the king's. Therefore if the royal institution were extinct, these royalists who are out-regaling the Royal would—and it is impossible to do otherwise—have to be blamed. A Pridi Banomyong cannot lead to the demise of such a pillar I must now admit.

Jumping back in time, after eight years of studying and living in Britain, I returned home. Field Marshal Phibunsonggram had already fallen out of favor and power since 1957. Subsequently, I found out that towards the twilight of his dictatorship, the Field Marshal repented a bit and attempted to correct his wrong doings. I was told that Phibun strove to bring the exiled Pridi back in the country. (As expected, the ultraconservative *Siam Rath* newspaper used every dirty trick available in its bag to oppose Pridi's return such as unimaginatively re-linking him with the regicide.) He also struggled to steer Thai foreign policy, then unabashedly and unequivocally pro-US, towards the shoals of neutralism and nonalignment. For example, Phibun wanted to recognize Communist China.

Moreover, I came upon documentary evidence suggesting that Phibun, on behalf of the accused in the 'regicide' trial, thrice appealed to Rama IX for clemency. In all three separate instances, the king turned down the appeal.

Phibun's slight policy reversal was unbearable to the conservatives. Led by Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat, and perhaps with tacit royal collaboration, they united and successfully toppled Phibun in 1957. For one, Kukrit Pramoj effectively used his *Siam Rath* as the mouthpiece of the conservatives, propagating fictitious 'facts' whenever he deemed appropriate. The long tentacles of the US government could also be felt in the Sarit military coup.

I returned to Siam in 1958 for my vacation break. When I arrived, Thanom Kittikachorn was still the country's premier. Soon after, Sarit successfully launched his coup and ruthlessly exercised his newfound power. Though I was yet to become a firm advocate of democracy, the Sarit coup sent shivers down my spine. Sarit ruled the country as his personal fiefdom. Pursuant to the time-honored Cold War custom, he raised the specter of Communism as a pretext to rule with an iron fist. Sarit tied Pridi to the 'regicide' in order to obstruct his return. The Field Marshal additionally revived the fear that Pridi planned to return to Siam and install himself as president; that is, Pridi contrived to eliminate the monarchy. Throughout this period, *Siam Rath* served as Sarit's lapdog. Since the authoritative voice of *Siam Rath* backed Sarit's allegations of Pridi, I too opposed Pridi's return.

For the second time, I returned to Siam in 1962. To my knowledge, most Thais had already forgotten about Pridi and King Rama VIII's untimely death. During this trip, several members of the royalty granted me an audience. The diversity of opinions on Pridi and on the death of the late king surprised

me. None of them, at least in my presence, engaged in *ad hominen* attacks against Pridi. Some even had kind words to say about Pridi.

Between 1943 (or earlier) and 1983, it seems that the country's military and some of its civilian elites—its unethical ruling class—failed to achieve an iota of intellectual and moral breakthrough. Beginning with Sarit Thanarat in 1957, the long and sustained period of military dictatorship had crushed or blunted virtually all forms of intellectual honesty in the country. Speaking out or, more precisely, speaking the truth to any concentrations of power was a shunned practice. Individuals who thought out loud often found themselves incarcerated or forcefully exiled. For reasons of personal security, intellectuals maintained a low profile or became experts at legitimizing the crimes of the ruling class. Against the backdrop of this intellectual desert, I launched *Social Science Review* in 1963. To many people, this magazine had no clear political standing; it was not meant to have one. Instead the burning quest for honesty and essential Thai qualities drove the magazine. Perhaps by default, the magazine achieved a modicum of success right in the first year of its inception. As editor of *Social Science Review*, I faced little, if any, external interference. This might have been because I was a relatively new face in the literary and intellectual scene; I was yet to be blacklisted. Moreover, one of Sarit's deputy prime ministers was on the board of trustees of the scholarly society that bore the magazine's name.

In early 1964 Cassell publishing house airmailed me from London a book written by Rayne Kruger called *The Devil's Discus: An Inquiry into the Death of Ananda, King of Siam*. I asked A. C. Pointor, my former colleague at the BBC, to review it in *Social Science Review*. However I was skeptical of the themes of the book, and therefore after reading it, I wrote

my own review. (Kruger discounted the assassination theory and pointed to suicide.) In it, I, unable to suppress my prejudices, facetiously and brutally denounced Pridi. The gist of my review is as follows:

"The author suggested that undeniably the younger generation of Thai people, particularly those with university degrees, are wearied by a dearth of democratic rights in the country. For them, the voice of Pridi Banomyong still reverberates in the air, forcefully calling for freedom and social justice. Pridi stands tall as a democratic icon, despite once having the communist label stamped all over his face. As part of this new generation, I share their convictions and concerns. I too yearn for social liberty and justice. But, speaking on behalf of the majority in my generation, we do not want Pridi back. The author has completely missed this crucial and elementary point, highlighting his dismal understanding of contemporary Thai society and lack of intellectual vigor. We then must not take his analysis of the events surrounding the king's death—as labyrinthine and complicated as they were—seriously. On the whole, this work merits little attention. That such a book is even written and published perhaps suggests that someone has secretly funded the murder of history."

The implication was clear enough; one only had to replace 'someone' with 'Pridi'. Anyway, largely because of this book review, *Social Science Review* earned widespread readership and quickly became a household name, for different reasons of course. To Pridi's friends and proteges, this article represented the nadir of intellectual integrity and honesty. Among other things, they accused me of being elitist and of basing my article on personal prejudices as opposed to facts and evidence. In retrospect, most of their reproaches were fair and quite accurate. On the other hand, many big shots in the

Thai ruling circles gave me high scores. One went as far as suggesting that I be granted an audience with the king. Many invited me to their homes or, to be precise, palaces. To them, I was a bright and rising servant of power.

My article disturbed and disappointed Direk Jayanama, whom I long knew and respected. He penned me a mild and polite reproach. It still greatly wounded me however. He reminded me that as a good Buddhist and lawyer I must, before engaging in any criticism, raise two questions. Is it the truth? Is it fair to all concerned? Direk added that I must base my criticisms on facts and evidence. If facts and evidence are to be found wanting, I must give the benefit of doubt to the accused. Finally, he suggested that rather than stereotypically categorizing a group I should appraise its members on an individual basis. He mentioned that, like in any family or organization, the People's Party had both good and bad members.

I later discovered from Puey Ungphakorn that my article had understandably inflamed Pridi. I doggedly stood with the position held in the article for quite awhile. It was only much later that I realized the relevancy of Direk's admonitions and insights. In 1967, Direk passed away. In an essay I wrote that while I greatly respected Direk, I could not bestow the same deference on the civilian leader (i.e., Pridi) of the political party he once belonged to. Interestingly, in spite of our long friendship, I had never asked Direk about Pridi in great details. I was too mired in my own prejudices to seek or listen to opposite views. Although Direk respected and loved Pridi, he never tried to impose his views on me. When Direk was hospitalized and morbidly sick, I visited him. He promised me that if he got better he would, for my own benefits, frankly tell me whatever I wanted to know about Pridi or other politicians. He stated that he was willing to delve in political matters or secrets that most

people were too inhibited to talk about. Direk never recovered, and I was robbed of a rare opportunity to learn about Pridi from the very mouth of his right hand man.

Subsequently, in a pleasant surprise, I ran into Duen Bunnag (eventually one of Pridi's biographers) on a vessel that the Bank of Thailand was using to receive dignitaries from the Rockefeller Foundation. He approached and warmly greeted me. Duen said that he first knew me from the bombastic book review I wrote. He offered no criticism on the article, but went straight on to praise Pridi. Duen briefly dwelled on the personal antagonism between Pridi and Field Marshal Phibun and then shifted to the break between the former and Khuang Aphai-wongse. On the Pridi-Khuang schism, he argued that the latter was angered by Pridi's failure to support him for premiership immediately after the Second World War. When Khuang finally became prime minister, he appointed Phya Srivisaravaja a cabinet minister. Pridi felt betrayed, for Phya Sri had once tried to destroy the People's Party during the Mano government. Why invite the enemy in again? Khuang's decision suggested that he had severed his relationship with the People's Party to join or return to the side of the conservatives. All in all, I found our conversation very illuminating and enlightening. Duen himself was a member of the aristocracy but had always sided with Pridi and the People's Party.

Prior to my encounter with Duen, I had read several of his works on Pridi. In fact, I have been familiar with Duen's works since 1958. Admittedly, I have secretly admired Duen for his courage in publicly lauding and siding with Pridi, a highly unpopular and widely despised figure in the ruling circles. Moreover, Duen was one of the very first that, in book form, compared the virtues of Pridi's proposed economic restructuring program, then seen as verging on communism, with

those of the conservative government. I brought this point up with him in our conversation. Duen said that Luang Vijit, Field Marshal Sarit's brain trust and right hand, told him that was it not for that book the Marshal would have appointed Duen as one of the constitution drafters. Duen added that he was not the least disappointed however. Lastly, he reminded me that, like Pridi, he was accused of being a communist. Dismissing the allegation, he mentioned that his Bunnag clan, though aristocritic, was married to the Chinese merchant and land-owning class. Pridi's wife, Lady Poonsukh, was also from the fairly well to do nobility, Duen continued. Under communism we would be the very first to suffer, he could have wondered and laughed out loud.

When I was still under the intoxicating dark spell of the *Siam Rath* newspaper, I was led to believe that, while studying in Paris, Pridi had a terrible row with Prince Charoonsak, the Thai Minister in France. The years only intensified and accumulated Pridi's hatred for the Prince, I was told. Licking his festering angry wound, Pridi minced personal vengeance with revolutionary zeal, striving to bring down the whole royal family symbolized by Prince Charoon. Hence the 1932 Revolution erupted first and foremost because of Pridi's attempt to settle an old score with the Prince. And the masses were to suffer because of this personal animosity.

A book by Duen eventually acted as an antidote to *Siam Rath*'s poisonous lie. It was like a rush of caffeine that jolted my long numbed nerves back to their senses. Furthermore, when I visited Pridi at his house in suburban Paris he, in more than one instance, praised Prince Charoon. Pridi confessed that he had had arguments with the Prince, but they were over broad principles and policies. He assured me that the Prince and him were on good personal terms.

If my 1964 review of Kruger's *The Devil's Discus* branded me as a wild-eyed henchman of the conservative ruling

class, my provocative article on Kukrit Pramoj the following year re-balanced my reputation scale. Direk Jayanama, who had found my Kruger article rather tasteless, commented that the essay was "the talk of the town." He declared that for too long no one had dared touch Kukrit, a leading member of the aristocratic establishment, granting him a free hand to distort reality and facts in order to strengthen the sinews of the conservative class. Though complimenting my feat, many well wishers worried that wily Kukrit would not leave me at peace for what I did. I was told that the king even knew about the brewing antagonism between Kukrit and me.

Still nursing his mutilated reputation Kukrit, the Grand Inquisitor, did not forgive me for my sins and heresy. In 1967, I wrote an article in *Social Science Review* entitled "Where does the future of Siam lie?" In the article I solemnly observe the downfall of Ayutthaya, the former capital, exactly two hundred years ago. I attempted to derive lessons from the past to shed light on the country's present and future. Since the article mockingly mentions about the king and one of his favorite hobbies, sailing, Kukrit, smelling blood, snatched the issue as his trump card to hunt me down. Adding fuel to fire, he accused me of *lese-majeste* and pleaded the government for my arrest. To Kukrit's chagrin, the government did not have me arrested.

At this point in time, I was thirty-five years old. My negative attitude towards Pridi had yet to substantially subside, especially on his role in the 'regicide.' In addition, I accused Pridi of catalyzing an era of meaningless, and at times brutal, democracy, in which I was one of its suffering victims. This democracy was a far cry from my ideal version. Yet, I allowed Voraput Jayanama to publish his article on Pridi's economic restructuring program in *Social Science Review*. (I was no longer the magazine's editor then but I still exercised some influ-

ence from my position in the editorial board.) Voraput's article was an important tribute to Pridi.

At the time of Voraput's article, I had already switched jobs. I took over the editorship of another magazine, *Withayasarn Parithat*. When I learned that the exiled Pridi had permanently left China in 1970, I front-paged the November issue of the magazine with a picture he and his wife took with Lord Mountbatten while on a tour in England. A friend also wrote a brief article on Pridi in the magazine that can be summarized as follows. (It turned out that Pridi eventually read the article and was pleased with it.)

Pridi visited London some three weeks ago. He had an opportunity to speak before a crowd of Thai students. Even the Thai ambassador there, who had initially shown or feigned disinterest, was present at the gathering. A friend who was there informed me of the content of Pridi's talk. To my surprise, he said Pridi frequently cited Buddhist scriptures. When asked who was involved in the death of the previous king, Pridi insisted that the evidence was riddled with loopholes and hence inconclusive. He firmly stated that he was certain of one thing: he was not responsible for or involved in the king's death; and he had ample evidence to prove his innocence. Asked why he fled the country during the regicide trial, Pridi declared that it was largely for the sake of personal security; the coup makers had attempted to level his residence or burn it to a cinder. He informed listeners that the British and American embassies in Bangkok had facilitated his escape to China, then still under the unstable rule of Chiang Kai Shek. One of the very last things Pridi mentioned was that he would soon bring M.R. Kukrit Pramoj to court for having hired someone to exclaim in a theatre that Pridi had murdered the king and for having connived with Phra Pinit to twist and manipulate the proceedings

of the trial. As a final remark my friend stated that, despite his advanced age, Pridi seemed more far astute and sharp than the Thai ambassador in London was.

Withayasarn Parithat was also a magazine with no distinct political color, largely interested in the free exchange of ideas and information and in issues of truth and justice. Therefore, the magazine was not a forum to promote mindless hatred and propaganda. Once an author submitted an article asserting that Puey Ungphakorn was endeavoring to sneak Pridi back in the country so that the latter would assume the presidency. Finding the story less than credulous, I carefully queried the author, desiring to know his sources and evidence. As expected, he was not able to come up with any. Finally, he conceded that his boss at *Siam Rath*, M.R. Kukrit Pramoj, asked him to write up this fictitious story. Vainly trying to add weight to a horribly fantastic fiction—for that is what it is—the author argued that, according to Kukrit, the king, informed by Western sources, told him about the imminent Pridi-Puey blitzkrieg. The author ultimately lowered his guard and retracted the article, admitting that it was a deliciously concocted story and that Kukrit had a strange penchant for lying. Briefly afterward, I was told that Kukrit had fired him from *Siam Rath*, possibly for insubordination and for refusing to spread a malicious deception.

At this moment, the time seemed most opportune for me to reach an understanding with Pridi. Unfortunately our roads, largely because of my own doing, forked once again. A book commemorating the seventy-second anniversary of Pridi landed in my hands, and I felt an uncontrollable urge to review it. *Withayasarn Parithat* was now defunct, so I wrote a review article in another magazine, *Common People*. As usual, I attempted to provide a different analysis; that is, different from

various other book reviews on the same topic.

I started off the article extolling Pridi, particularly for his indispensable role in the Seri Thai movement. Urging public respect, I ranked him favorably in the country's long genealogical records of 'liberators.' As an act of gratitude, I suggested Pridi be allowed to return to the kingdom, be granted the luxury of spending his last breaths in his own country. Then however my tone began to shift; I began throwing a number of irritant punches at Pridi. I insisted that Pridi had paid for his mistakes and sins while living in exile. Perhaps he had repented a bit. But if readmitted into the country, he should not be allowed to "play" politics.

That the ruling class was prohibiting the younger generation to learn and discuss about Pridi was dangerous, I continued. Doing so would simply heighten Pridi's popularity or would even inflate it to mythical proportion. To strengthen my case, I contended that similar measures by the Taiwanese central government were leading their youths to become increasingly attracted to Mao Tse Tung. I appealed to the Thai ruling class not to insult the intelligence of the masses; they knew who was respectable, who not.

Lastly, I went on to argue that the ruling class had been woefully misusing Pridi. For reasons of political expediency and sheer opportunism, they were using Pridi as a, if not the, scapegoat for all sociopolitical ills. Even the viability and durability of the royal family was said to rest solely on Pridi's shoulders. I proposed that the government must learn to use and benefit from Pridi's wisdom and vast experiences. Pridi, for instance, could provide valuable insights on China and North Vietnam, two countries he knew intimately.

It is clear that compared to this *Common People* article, my *Devil's Discus* book review was far more uncompromising

and brutal, as if I was foaming with rabid saliva. However, this latest article was like adding insult to an already injured Pridi; after weathering several heavy blows, he could understandably no longer tolerate my pinpricks and nips without responding in kind. On 24 June 1972, Pridi published a slim, fifty-five-page book, *On the Origins of the People's Party and Thai Democracy*. He devoted approximately seven pages to denounce me, calling me, among other kind words, "a hated debris of the corrupt aristocracy, a social parasite, and an arrogant, selfish scavenger." In retrospect, these were fair descriptions of me. Back then, however, I was fuming like a beast when I read Pridi's remarks. As a result, I fired an angry salvo of counter-denunciations in an article in *Future*, a magazine where I served as editor. The die was cast. It seemed that there would be no *modus vivendi* between Pridi and I in the near future.

At the time of this messy affair, Puey Ungphakorn was teaching at Cambridge University, and I visited him. He said that Pridi was more responsible than I was for parting the curtains to this ugly drama: Pridi should not have initiated a personal attack on me. Puey informed me that my *Devil's Discus* article had immensely infuriated Pridi. Nevertheless, he reproached me for wantonly responding to Pridi's assaults, for escalating the tension. In our conversation, Puey intermittently talked about Pridi. He stated that "as far as he is concerned Pridi is completely uninvolved in the death of the king." "But," he continued, "you have every right to believe otherwise. Our diametrically opposite views [on Pridi] should not prevent us from being friends. In reality, I believe we have different standpoints in numerous other areas; they only need to be spelled out."

Throughout our friendship, Puey never compelled me to drop my stubborn conviction that Pridi played a role in the king's death. I learned more about Pridi from him during the

Thanin dictatorship; at that time we were both living in exile in Britain. On one occasion, he even queried whether I wanted to join him to Paris and visit Pridi. Jeered by my prejudices, I naturally turned down his offer. Deep down, I also feared that upon my visit, Pridi would chase me out of his residence.

Eventually I realized that I knew a lot of Pridi's friends and associates. Why not exploit their rich firsthand knowledge of him, I wondered? As a matter of great importance I wanted to know their views on the king's death. Simultaneously, I began reading and rereading numerous primary and secondary sources on the 'regicide.' New evidence also surfaced. For instance, Tee Srisuvan, the chief prosecution witness in the 'regicide' trial, admitted that he had lied in his testimony. Furthermore, I interviewed numerous individuals, including the wife of the first postwar US ambassador to Siam and the American surgeon who had examined the king's dead body. The American surgeon assured me that the king was not assassinated and hence the trial was a farce. This evidence, and several others that I later discovered, pointed that my analysis of the *Devil's Discus* was fundamentally incorrect.

The nightmares of 14 October 1973 and 6 October 1976 highlighted the urgent need for compassion and Dhamma in the country's political governance. Increasingly, I began questioning the virtues and integrity of the ruling circles, where corruption, deception, and abuse of power seemed to have been institutionalized. At least, I concluded that a return to absolute monarchy and aristocracy would not contribute to social betterment and justice.

I did not maintain direct contact with Pridi, but news of him often reached me via my friends (who were incidentally also Pridi's). My friends informed me that some of Pridi's children had criticized him for angrily denouncing me in his

book. In their view, their father was wrong in making an enemy out of Sulak Sivaraksa, an individual who was similarly fighting for truth, liberty, and justice. They pointed out that Pridi was merely accentuating his isolation by befriending only persons who mostly agreed with him. Despite vast differences, this fellow called Sulak might be a worthy ally in the struggle for a better society, they told him. I was told that Pridi heeded the advice of his children, an honorable act reflecting the openness of his mind-heart. Subsequently, in the name of his wife, Pridi regularly sent me his latest written works. Occasionally, I would be the first to receive them.

Pridi had tacitly extended an olive branch to me, and I gradually understood why he had to constantly defend his reputation through legal procedures or written works. It dawned upon me that he was a victim of the ruling class's sadistic brutality, on a scale that defies comment, and social injustice. I empathized with his predicaments. At that time, chronologically speaking in the 1970s, I was suffering from a similar fate: my reputation was severely tarnished; my bookstore was burned down; my wife was on the verge of being arbitrarily imprisoned; I was exiled; etc. These injustices were however miniscule compared to what Pridi had had to face or to what he was facing. And I was already wincing and finding them intolerable.

During the Thanin dictatorship from 1976 to 1977, the wind of exile carried me hither and thither to Britain, the United States, and Canada. I was allowed to return to Siam in 1978. Back home, I immediately found myself unemployed. Fortunately, a grant from the American Council of Social Science Research enabled me to pursue post-doctorate studies on Prince Damrong who was a great historian and the right hand of Rama V. This research culminated in book form, which I cursorily but—for the

first time—favorably mentioned about Pridi in the preface. Needless to say, my favorable remarks were derived from personally accumulated facts and evidence.

Since 1978 I began reading works by or on Pridi more extensively. I have to admit that some of his works are terribly difficult to comprehend, while others are intellectually fulfilling as well as written with good humor. I do not always agree with his views however. A greater exposure to his works and ideas together with illuminating new evidence that I had gathered gradually lessened, and ultimately erased, the vestiges of my prejudices against him.

In May 1980, I received a copy of the book *New Rulings on the Death of King Rama VIII*. The book was published to commemorate the eightieth anniversary of Pridi who was born in that month. I was told that Lady Poonsukh made sure that I was the first one to receive it. It was late afternoon, May 11, and I had just returned from a trip to China. Though still slightly fatigued, I read the whole book with great care and interest until the early hours of the new day. The book acted as the final nudge that freed me from the tightening noose of deceits and bigotry that, for too long, had been asphyxiating my mind and heart; no doubt, a noose that the old cowboy in *Siam Rath* was partly responsible for tying and pulling.

I spent the bulk of the next day painfully and guiltily contemplating how I had misunderstood and done wrong to Pridi and how I could at least mitigate their effects. As a result, I gathered myself and wrote Pridi an apologetic letter, which I mailed on May 13. In the letter, I wished Pridi a long and healthy life so that he could continue to fight for truth and justice for the sake of humanity. Also I lamented that successive Thai governments had failed to tap his vast experiences and knowledge. Then came the heart of my letter. I wrote:

"Regrettably, I have to admit that in both thoughts and words I have inconsiderately mutilated your integrity.... Although I never firmly believed that you hideously and deliberately murdered the king, I placed too much faith in the country's judiciary system and was easily led astray by some rumors that depicted you in a monstrous light. My ignorance and prejudices against you are well evident in my article on The Devil's Discus. Then, I was too callous to realize that my thoughtless article had inflicted immeasurable agony on you. Also, I was informed that Direk Jayanama had been greatly infuriated and hurt by my article. Perhaps unforgivably, I failed to listen to Direk in order more intimately about you. Nevertheless, I have subsequently researched quite extensively on the king's mysterious death, reading piles of primary and secondary materials and interviewing scores of individuals. I believe I have gained a clearer picture of what had happened. The reversal of Tee Srisuvan's testimony was particularly helpful for I had always doubted the integrity of this witness....[This along with other new evidence] point to the arbitrariness and unreliability of the Thai judiciary system...."

"I seek your pardon for having abused your reputation... in various instances. If possible, and if time permits, I would like to profusely apologize and pay homage to you in person at your residence in Paris."

I sent copies of this letter to several individuals who had served as "links" to Pridi such as Puey Ungphakorn, Supa Sirimanon, and Karuna Kusalasai. Respectably, they had never imposed their views on me and had never belittled me for my convictions. One simply told me that a single hair in the eye might prevent a person from perceiving a great range of mountain, no matter how intelligent that person is. I am happy to say that I have removed that hair from my eye. Indeed, Pridi

symbolizes a majestic mountain range.

Several weeks later, I received Pridi's written response dated on June 23. He said that he was 'elated' by my warm wishes and, equally important, by my recognition of his innocence. As a salve to my guilty conscience, he stated that he not only forgave me for my wrong doings against him, but also lauded me for my repentance. Pridi insisted that not many persons are willing to accept and correct the negative consequences of their actions or misunderstandings. In the conclusion of his letter, Pridi wrote, "I feel that I have done you wrong in using inappropriate measures to counter your charges. I hereby ask for your forgiveness." It is clear that Pridi was admirably gentle, kind, and thoughtful—in sum, a true Buddhist gentleman.

From then on, Pridi regularly sent me new books and articles to read; this time, using his own name. We still did not have a chance to meet each other in person. While in Europe in late 1981, I ran into an old acquaintance in Brussels. Coincidentally, my friend was close to Pridi and his wife. He encouraged me to call up Pridi in Paris. I followed my friend's advice and telephoned him on November 1, while waiting in the transit lounge of the Paris airport. For a fairly long time, I talked to both Pridi and Lady Poonsukh. Among other things Pridi admonished me, for reasons of my personal security, to keep a wary eye on the Thai military and their covert operations. At the end of the conversation, I was beaming with joy and contentment. (I was later told that Pridi regretted not having met me in person and not having talked to me for a longer period. And he declared that the tenor of my voice suggested that I am a man with great power. Pridi probably thought twice when we finally met.)

Jumping slightly back in time again, in 1980 I discovered that Pridi re-edited a film, *The King of White Elephant*, which he had written and produced during the Franco-Thai border disputes in the

1930s. Several copies of the re-edited film found their way into Bangkok. As a child, I had seen the film. I wanted to play the new version of the film at ***The Siam Society,*** a very conservative club, which expatriates used to link them directly with the aristocracy and the royal family. But I was then in charge of its program and was once editor of the *Journal of Siam Society*. I wrote Pridi for permission and was granted. Many at ***The Siam Society*** were unaware of the budding friendship between Pridi and I. They commonly asked me why I did not oppose the showing of the film at the ***Society.*** Pridi ultimately allowed the Society to make its own copy of the film and granted me full authority to decide where and when to show it. Since then I have been displaying the film at the Society every year.

In 1982 I wrote and published a book called *Living Like the Thai in the Third Century of the Rattanakosin Era.* I dedicated the book to Pridi and paid tribute to him in its preface. In a nutshell, I argued that the Thai people should begin the new century of the Rattanakosin era with compassion, honesty, and tolerance—some essential human qualities. I then lambasted the immense injustices the ruling class had done and was doing to Pridi. Finally, I demanded that the ruling elites allow the return of Pridi, the country's only elder statesman, to Siam. I pointed out that even Burma's strongman, Ne Win, allowed U Nu back in the country.

Via a friend of mine, Pridi received a copy of the book. To show his gratitude, he wrote me a letter dated on 11 February 1982, thanking my efforts. As it turned out, I eventually visited Pridi at his Paris home in August of that year. Apparently, he was very eager and happy to receive me. It was a very memorable encounter. We discussed a wide range of issues, mostly past events. Despite in his eighties, Pridi's mind was still razor sharp, and I was duly impressed. As expected, Pridi was also very modest. On the second and final day of our meeting, we agreed that, as part of the fiftieth

anniversary of Thai democracy in June 1982, all of Pridi's major literary works would be compiled and reproduced in accessible multi-volumes form. In the end, he permitted the reprinting of all of his works except the one entitled *On the Origins of the People's Party and Thai Democracy*. He told the publishers that this piece of work was written under the spell of prejudices and misunderstandings. More important, the work portrayed "a good friend" of his in a bad light. Pridi remarked that he did not have the time to rewrite the book in a more acceptable form and therefore had to withhold its publication.

Although I had met Pridi only twice, I feel that the following observations are relevant. One, he was virtuous and far too trusting in others to be a durable politician for all political weathers. Two, Pridi's ideas and beliefs were far ahead of his times. Even his students were unable to fathom and penetrate the core of his thoughts. Three, since he was a social luminary, and above all a highly intelligent and almost unfathomable one, he earned the envy and enmity of others. Others might not have necessarily hated him—like in the case of this fellow named Sulak—but they deeply resented what they could not understand and find faults with. Four, Pridi had a profound understanding of Thai society; that is, of both the masses and the ruling circles. Five, he wanted a meaningful participatory democracy peppered with socialist-libertarian ideals. Also, he wanted a more 'rational' society that is not bogged down with the ruling class's superstitions and myths—fairy tales that legitimized the abusive and exploitative nature of the elites. Lastly, Pridi belonged to a rare, endangered breed of responsible intellectuals, unwilling to kowtow to any concentrations of power and to get ahead at the expense of the majority. All his life, he served as a voice for the marginalized and underrepresented, hence leading to his own 'marginalization'.

In early 1983 I finished and published another book. As in

my previous works, I paid homage to Pridi in it. Unfortunately, Pridi passed away before the book was completed, but he had read an early draft. My so-called recent reversal of stance on Pridi surprised and confused some book critics. One pointed out that I was writing about Pridi as if we had been best friends all along. Another critic, Prajak Daoreung, writing in *Book World* (March 1983 issue), was more in tune with the dynamics of my intellectual history. He correctly highlighted the fact that I had made up with Pridi, that, on the one hand, my prejudices and conservative upbringing, and, on the other hand, rumors and state propaganda at the time fostered my initial negative attitude towards the latter.

One of the very last things that I asked from Pridi was an autographed picture of his. He wrote a commentary on the back of it, the longest he had ever written to anyone he explained. This autographed picture is one of my prized possessions. More invaluable however is the inspiration I received from his vision of a better society. I vow to continue his struggle against injustice, so that peace, liberty, equality, and compassion will reign in the country. Only when Siamese society is more liberated will Pridi Banomyong be widely respected and understood.

I offer this photograph to Khun Sulak Sivaraksa on his 50th birthday, with my wishes that he may be happy, with a long life, without sickness or misfortunes. May he be successful in serving the nation and the Thai people, and let him live contentedly according to the dharmocratic principles.

Pridi Banomyong

APPENDIX I
Siamese Governments

After Ayuthaya ceased to be the capital of Siam, a new capital was established in Thonburi, across the river from Bangkok. The king of Thonburi reigned from 1767 to 1782, after which the capital was moved to Bangkok and the Chakri Dynasty was established. The nine reigns of the Chakri Dynasty are as follows:

1782-1809 Rama I (Phra Buddhayotfa)
1809-1824 Rama II (Phra Buddhaloetla)
1824-1851 Rama III (Phra Nangklao)
1851-1868 Rama IV (Mongkut)
1868-1910 Rama V (Chulalongkorn)
1910-1925 Rama VI (Vajiravudh)
1925-1935 Rama VII (Prachadhipok)
1935-1946 Rama VIII (Ananda Mahidol)
from 1946 Rama IX (Bhumipol Adulyadej)

Up until 1932, Siam was ruled by an absolute monarchy. From June 24 of that year until the present, the government has been a constitutional monarchy. The prime ministers since 1932 are listed below. Most of these prime ministers have had several administrations, but these are not noted.

1932-1933 Phya Manopakonnitithada (Kon Hutasing)
1933-1938 Phya Phahonphonphayuhasena (Phot Phahonyothin)

1938-1944	Luang Phibunsongkram (Plaek Phibunsongkram)
1944-1945	Khuang Aphaiwongse
1945	Thawi Bunyaket
1945-1946	Seni Pramoj
1946	Khuang Aphaiwongse
1946	Pridi Banomyong
1946-1947	Luang Thamrongnawasawat (Thawan Thamrongnawasawat)
1947-1948	Khuang Aphaiwongse
1948-1957	Plaek Phibunsongkram
1957	Phot Sarasin
1958	Thanom Kittikhchorn
1959-1963	Sarit Thanarat
1963-1973	Thanom Kittikhchorn
1973-1975	Sanya Dharmasakti
1975	Seni Pramoj
1975-1976	Kukrit Pramoj
1976	Seni Pramoj
1976-1977	Thanin Kraivichien
1977-1980	Kriengsak Chomanand
1980-1988	Prem Tinsulanond
1988-1991	Chatichai Choonhavan
1991-1992	Anand Panyarachun
1992	Suchinda Kraprayoon
1992	Anand Panyarachun
1992-1995	Chuan Leekpai
1995-1996	Banharn Silpa-archa
1996-1997	Chavilit Yongchaiyut
1997-	Chuan Leekpai

(From ***Loyalty Demands Dissent Autobiography of a Socially Engaged Buddhist***, p.218
by S. Sivaraksa, Parallax Press, 1998.)

Appendix II
Comparison of Controversial Issues in Thai Constitutions

Promulgation Year / Controversial Issues	1932 provisional	1932	1946	1947	1949	1952	1959	1968	1972	1974	1976	1977	1978, 1985, 1989, amendment	March 1991	December 1991 amendment 1992	Total number
1. PM appointed from MPs										/					/	2
2. Majority of Cabinet members must be MPs		/								/						2
3. Active bureaucrats ineligible for cabinet Posts					/					/			/		/	4
4. Senators or part of MPs appointed by PM		/		/	/	/		/		/			/		/	8
5. All MPs appinted by PM		/					/		/		/	/		/		6
6. President of House of Representatives is President of Two-chamber Parliament																
7. Vote of confidence required immediately after policy statement		/	/	/	/					/						5
8. Vote of confidence not required immediately after policy statement													/		/	2
9. All MPs of Two houses eligible to cast vote of no-confidence															/	1
10. Only elected MPs eligible to cast vote of no-confidence										/			/		/	3
11. PM empowered to dissolve House of Representatives			/	/	/	/		/		/			/		/	8
12. Party membership required for elected MPs											/		/		/	3
13. Minimum number of candidates set for political parties to fill in general elections													/		/	2
14. Uni-cameral system with elected & appointed MPs		/			/											2
15. Bicameral system with MPs elected directly & indirectly			/													1
16. Bicameral system, one house elected and another appointed				/	/			/		/			/		/	6

From : Thailand in Crisis : A Study of The Political Turmail of May 1992. By Klien Theeravit

Appendix III
Nature and Sources of Members of Parliament

	Constitution	Nature of Parliament	Sources of Members
1.	1932	Single House	Appointment
2.	1932	Single House	Elections + Appointment
3.	1946	Bicameral	Direct + Indirect Elections
4.	1947	Bicameral	Elections + Appointment
5.	1949	Bicameral	Elections + Appointment
6.	1952 Amendment of 1932	Single House	Elections + Apointment
7.	1959	Bicameral	Elections + Appointment
8.	1968	Bicameral	Elections + Appointment
9.	1972 (provisional)	Single House	Appointment
10.	1974	Bicameral	Elections + Appointment
11.	1976	Single House	Appointment
12.	1977	Single House	Appointment
13.	1978	Bicameral	Elections + Appointment
14.	1991 (provisional)	Single House	Appointment
15.	1991	Bicameral	Elections + Appointment

Source : Poothan Rassadorn (People's Representative) Monthly Magazine, May 1992, p. 3.

APPENDIX IV
First Declaration of the People's Party

Fellow citizens,

When the present King inherited the throne from his brother, some citizens had hoped that he would reign benevolently and judiciously. Subsequent events have proven that such hope is illusory and groundless. The King still esteems himself above the law [and] still hedonistically indulges in nepotism, appointing incompetent relatives and sycophants to assume important government positions. Furthermore, the King has refused to heed his citizens' cry for justice, allowing government officials to continue to abuse their power. [For example, they] have taken kickbacks from [numerous] construction contracts...; they have amassed [immense] personal wealth by [arbitrarily] changing and fixing prices [of goods]; they have plundered the state's coffers [i.e. the people's money]; they have [increased the hierarchies] of rights and privileges; they have oppressed their compatriots...; and they have irresponsibly and indifferently left their country wading in dire economic and financial troubles a fact that is now apparent to most citizens.

In sum, a system of governance like the present one can never mitigate and alleviate the misery of the masses because it is not geared towards serving them. Rather, it is based on the contemptible premise that the masses are merely hordes of vicious animals or, at best, slaves that must be constantly towed

in line. [To the rulers] the citizens do not appear as human beings. As a result, the rulers are farming on the backs of their compatriots [i.e. exploiting and oppressing them]. The government's tax policy is particularly oppressive. [But tax revenues are not being used to benefit the citizens.] The King annually sets aside millions [of baht] for his own personal expenditures...while the majority of citizens are struggling to make a decent living. If the people are unable to pay taxes, their property is confiscated or they are compelled to work on public projects. The majority of citizens are suffering, but the royal family and aristocrats are basking in wealth and special privileges. There is no other country on earth that grants so much money to the royal family. [In the past the royal houses of Russia and Germany enjoyed similar extravaganzas] but both the Czar and the Kaiser have been toppled.

The government under absolute monarchy has not been honest to the people. For instance, the government has promised to raise the people's standard of living. Believing the promise the people have patiently waited, but in vain. Worse, the government has always looked down on the masses, deriding them as imbeciles. The rulers often argue that the majority of people cannot and must not participate in the country's political life since they are inherently ignorant [implying they lack the proper genes]. Well, if the majority of the citizens are ignorant, the rulers are also stupid for both groups are from the same stock. That the masses are not as learned as the rulers is not because they are idiots but because the rulers are depriving them of proper education. [The rulers are in fact content that most people are ignorant.] They fear that if the majority of citizens are armed with knowledge and intelligence they would not be easily exploited and would not accept their subaltern status.

Fellow citizens, we beseech you to realize that the country

belongs to you all, not to the King as the rulers like to argue. Your ancestors had sacrificed their lives to maintain the country's sovereignty and independence. But by sheer [political] opportunism and selfishness, the aristocrats and elites [have dominated the country and turned it into their personal fiefdom.] [In the process] they have accumulated hundreds of millions [of baht]. This money belongs to the people....

The [socioeconomic condition of the] country is in serious health. Many farmers and parents of soldiers [facing bankruptcy,] have been compelled to abandon their plots of land. The government refuses to ameliorate [the condition in the agricultural sector]. The government has laid off countless workers. Students with degrees and discharged soldiers are unable to find employment.... These are the direct consequences of having an absolutist monarch, a King who is above the law. He has squeezed low-ranking government officials and military officers out of their jobs without providing them with welfare or compensations. Frankly, he should have diverted a significant portion of his personal expenditures to help to the people, to help the economy, to help create employment. This would be an appropriate way to repay the people for their tax money. This very money is, on the other hand, enriching the rulers. However, this is not the case. The rulers continue to overburden [the people with tax demands]. Many [in the ruling circle] have transferred their money to foreign accounts [as if to imply that] they are prepared to leave whenever the country collapses. Of course, the majority of the citizens will be left behind to suffer....

Therefore we citizens, civilians, government officials, and military officers,who are well aware of the crimes and misdemeanors of the government have united and created the People's Party and have already taken control of the absolutist monarch's government. The People's Party feels that the only

way to prevent future abuse of government power is through the creation of a parliament. The parliament will serve as a forum for freely exchanging and debating ideas and policies [for creating accountability].... Concerning the King of the country, the People's Party has no intention to rob him of his throne. Hence, we have invited him to remain King, but this time he shall be under the law of the constitution. He cannot act unilaterally and must be accountable to members of parliament. The People's Party has already informed the King about his new position. We are still waiting for his response. If the King [jealous of his own power,] refuses to accept his new, more limited role or if he fails to respond within the set time period, it can be said that he has betrayed his people and country.... Under this scenario, we must—and this is inevitable—transform the country into a democracy. In other words, the head of state will be a civilian and commoner elected by members of parliament. The head of state will remain in that position for a specific duration of time. Have faith in democracy, fellow citizens. Everyone will be well taken care of and will have employment because our country is rich in natural resources. When we have confiscated the wealth and property of the ruling circle, which they had illegally and exploitatively accumulated, and redistribute them to develop the country, our country will certainly become more prosperous. The People's Party will govern the country in a logical and systematic fashion, not blindly and capriciously like under absolute monarchy....

Excerpts from *First Public Declaration on 24 June 1932*

APPENDIX V
Short Biography of Pridi Banomyong

Pridi Banomyong was a great Thai, one of the greatest of this century. Great, that is, in strength of character, vision, achievement, and nobility of purpose. Like all great personalities in history, Pridi continues to live posthumously: Much of his ideas, because they are embedded in universal values, are still very relevant today, inspiring many in the younger generation. The Thais often find themselves returning to or rediscovering Pridi's ideas and vision of a better society, especially when they had initially rejected them.

The Upbringing of a Visionary Statesman and Democrat

Pridi Banomyong was born on 11 May 1900 in a boat-house off the southern bank of Mueng Canal in Ayudhya, the former capital of Thailand. He was the eldest son of a relatively well to do farming family. At the young age of 14, he completed his secondary education. Too young to enroll in any institution for higher education, Pridi stayed with his family for an extra two years, helping them in rice farming before darting off to law school in 1917. Two years later, he became a barrister-at-law and was simultaneously awarded a scholarship by the Ministry of Justice to study law in France. In 1924, he obtained his Bachelier en Droit and Licencie en Droit from Universite de Caen and two years later his Doctorat d' Etat and Diplome d' Etudes Superieuse d' Economique Politique from Universite de Paris. Pridi was the

first Thai to earn the appellation Docteur en Droit. In November 1928, he married Miss Phoonsuk na Pombejra. They had six children in all.

The Beginning of a Political Life

In February 1927, while still in Paris, Pridi and six other Thai students and civil servants created the People's Party and held a historic meeting. They vowed to transform the Thai system of governance from absolute monarchy to a constitutional one. The group elected Pridi as their provisional chairman. As their guiding stars, the People's Party laid down the so-called "Six Principles" to put Thailand on the road to spiritual and material progress:

1. To maintain absolute national independence in all aspects such as politically, judicially, and economically;
2. To maintain national cohesion and security;
3. To promote economic wellbeing by creating full employment and by launching a national economic plan;
4. To guarantee equality to all;
5. To grant complete liberty and freedom to the people, provided that this does not contradict the aforementioned principles; and
6. To provide education to the people.

Later in 1927, Pridi returned to Thailand and joined the Ministry of Justice where he served as judge and subsequently as assistant secretary to the Judicial Department. He also became a lecturer at the Ministry's law school. However the hope for progressive sociopolitical and economic changes in Thailand never faded from Pridi's mind. The 1932 Revolution opened the avenue for Pridi to realize his vision of a better, more just society.

At dawn on 24 June 1932, the People's Party, consisting of government officials, military officers, and ordinary civilians rapidly and bloodlessly took control of the government, changing it from absolute to democratic, constitutional monarchy and installing the 1932 provisional constitution as the supreme law of the land. Pridi, the civilian leader of the People's Party, was the progenitor of this provisional constitution.

The 1932 provisional constitution served as a solid and fertile foundation for the growth and development of democracy in Thailand. It introduced two fundamental, hitherto unknown ingredients to Thai society and political culture: 1) the supreme power rests with all Siamese people; and 2) there must be a clear separation of legislative, executive, and judicial powers. Together, these two unprecedented principles brought about a complete transformation in the nation's power structure, planting the seeds of democracy in Thailand.

The Prophet and Architect of Democracy in Power

Between 1933 and 1947 Pridi held many major political positions, including Minister of Interior, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regent and Prime Minister. By the appointment of King Rama VIII, he also became, to date, the country's only Senior Statesman. Throughout these years as government official and leader, Pridi assiduously worked to realize the "Six Principles." Among his notable accomplishments, some of them having long-term impacts, are: the drafting of the nation's first economic plan; the founding of the University of Moral and Political Sciences (Thammasat University); the proposal of the 1933 Municipality Act, which allowed the people to elect their own local governments; the revocation of unequal treaties that Thailand had been forced to sign with foreign powers; the reformation of the unfair tax system; the compilation of the country's first

revenue code; the founding of, what ultimately became, Bank of Thailand; and the resistance to Japanese occupation during World War Two by creating and leading the Free Thai Movement (because of the Movement, the United States government subsequently recognized Thailand as an independent country that had been under Japanese military occupation as opposed to a belligerent state subject to postwar Allied control).

Throughout these turbulent years, Pridi never lost sight of what democracy as a way of life meant. He never tired of nurturing and protecting the infantile Thai democracy gurgling in its cradle. Unlike most of his genteel contemporaries, Pridi never related to the masses with distrust and trepidation. On the contrary, he had great faith in them. In the essay (1973) "Which Direction Should Thailand Take in the Future," Pridi vividly and passionately reiterated his conception of participatory democracy, one that guided him all his life. He wrote, "Any system favoring a small section of a community will not last. In any community the majority must shape its future. [Here the majority includes] the deprived people, poor farmers, low-budget entrepreneurs, and patriotic capitalists who place the public interest above their own... and who want a new social system which provides a better living standard to the majority of people.... Social injustice [must be] abolished or reduced."

Pridi realized that a society is more democratic to the extent that fewer people are denied human rights and opportunities. He knew that political freedom without socioeconomic opportunities is a devil's gift. He tried to reduce and eventually to remove hierarchies of reward, status, and power in order to improve society. He wanted to foster solidarity and compassion among his compatriots, enabling them to develop themselves, come to care about, promote, and benefit from one

another's wellbeing as opposed to embarking on a cutthroat competition—a completely wasteful energy. Pridi envisioned a society where all citizens helped contribute to the enrichment of the lives of all.

As Pridi neatly put it, "A society exists because of the participation of its members, and a social system which enables most people to legally influence decisions and move society forward is a democracy." He added that since every society has political, economic, social, and cultural dimensions, it is essential for a democratic society to not only promote political democracy but also "economic democracy" (e.g., fewer people are being denied economic opportunities) and democratic thoughts (e.g., compassion).

For instance, to promote economic wellbeing, Pridi advocated the creation of local cooperatives to undertake economic activities for the benefits of their members. The people should have direct control over their livelihood rather than being dependent on the ruling circles' charity or philanthropy, he believed. Not infrequently, magnificent philanthropy masks brutal economic exploitation and charity becomes a pretext for maintaining laws and social practices which ought to be changed in the interest of justice and fair play, Pridi implied.

Pridi and his colleagues deemed it necessary for the people to fully understand the system of democratic governance and to be aware of their new rights and, hence, responsibilities under the newly-found system. As a result, in 1934 Pridi, then Minister of Interior, founded the University of Moral and Social Sciences. He was also appointed its first chancellor. The University was designed as an open institution offering numerous courses, including law, economics, human and social sciences. Reflecting his ideals, Pridi, in the speech made at the University's opening, declared, "...A university is, figuratively,

an oasis that quenches the thirst of those who are in pursuit of knowledge. The opportunity to acquire higher education rightly belongs to every citizen under the principle of freedom of education.... Now that our country is governed by a democratic constitution, it is particularly essential to establish a university which will allow the people, and hence the public, to develop to their utmost capability. It will open up an opportunity for ordinary citizens to conveniently and freely acquire higher education for their own benefits and for the development of our country...." Indeed Thammasat University has been a leading institution in helping to promote and protect democracy in Thailand.

Pridi also firmly advocated international peace. As a minister in Field Marshal Phibunsonggram's government, Pridi consistently expressed his disagreement with the government's irredentism: the plan and aggression Thailand embarked on to reclaim former territories in Indochina from France while Paris was lying prostrate under German occupation during World War Two. Another evidence worth citing is his effort to tell the international community the uselessness of international violence through the English-dubbed film he produced, *The King of the White Elephant.*

Not surprisingly, Pridi supported self-determination and independence for all colonial peoples. This was particularly apparent when he served as prime minister. Such a foreign policy was merely the international counterpart of his domestic, democratic reforms. After all, they attempted to empower the people, granting them with the essential freedoms and rights necessary to manage their own destiny.

Again, Pridi was the architect of the 1945 constitution. The adoption of this constitution reflected the culmination of Pridi relentless efforts to establish a meaningful, as opposed to

nominal, democracy in Thailand. The constitution guaranteed universal suffrage to both men and women and enabled the people to elect members of parliament in both the upper and lower houses. Human rights were recognized and upheld, for example in Articles 13, 14, and 15.

The Prophet Exiled

In June 1946, the young King Ananda Mahidol or Rama VIII was found dead in his chamber with a bullet in his forehead. Pridi was then prime minister. Intending to undermine his political popularity and power, Pridi's political opponents opportunistically trumpeted that the late King was murdered and that Pridi was involved in the regicide; however numerous court decisions had later proven Pridi's innocence. On the night of November 8, 1947, a group of military leaders and civilians staged a coup d'etat, using the regicide as one of the pretexts to destroy the Pridi government. Their tanks stormed Pridi's residence in Bangkok, forcing him to flee to Singapore. On 26 February, 1949, Pridi, aided by a number of naval officers and Thais who favored a democratic government, unsuccessfully staged a counter-coup. Once again, he was banished from Thailand—this time never to return. Between 1949 and 1970, Pridi resided in China. Subsequently, until his death from a heart attack in 1983, he lived in Paris. While in exile, he wrote profusely and gave numerous speeches, continuing to share with later generations his conceptions of democracy and peace. The seeds of democracy that Pridi planted in Thailand more than six decades ago are beginning to sprout. Whether or not his tree of liberty will continue to grow and branch out, to some extent, depends on how the Thais apply and learn from his thoughts.

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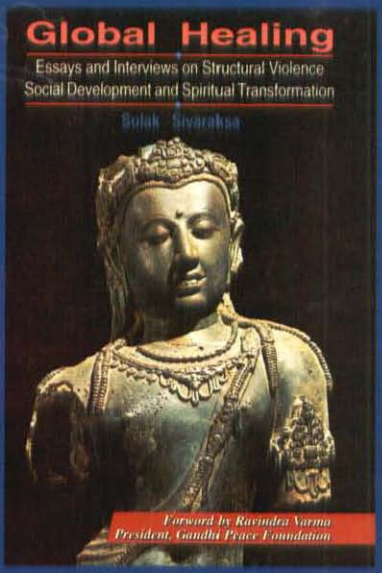
Fax. (662) 2225188
E-mail: sop@ffc.co.th



"Buddhists should bring the message of the Buddha home.
This has always been the aim of my work:
to understand Buddhist teachings in their proper sense
and apply them
in the complicated system of the modern world."

In *Global Healing: Essays and Interviews on Structural Violence, Social Development and Spiritual Transformation,* Sulak Sivaraksa—Thailand's leading social critic and 1998 UNPO Human Rights Award winner—further outlines his vision to effect global change. In this wide ranging collection of interviews, essays, lectures and reflections, Ajahn Sulak details the root causes of consumerism and suggests reforms that will lead to a sustainable society.

"'I buy therefore I am' is the slogan of the modern age," Sulak explains to his readers. "We must understand consumerism as a new demonic religion and find a spiritual alternative." *Global Healing* is the author's search for alternatives. Within its 160 pages are examples of ordinary people making a difference in their own life and in society.

US$ 15

Judging from their broad similarities, one is easily led to the impression that Pridi and Sulak were from the start the best of friends, fighting shoulder to shoulder and back to back against the encircling injustice. In the courageous and illuminating personal essay in this volume Sulak suggests otherwise. He recounts in vivid details his discord and ultimate unity with Pridi. Sulak's essay not only provides us with a valuable glimpse of Pridi's ideas and personality but also of his own background and intellectual development (more precisely, of an important turning point in his intellectual growth). Above all Sulak, in this essay, intends to disperse the dark, malicious clouds that have blackened Pridi Banomyong's reputation, hoping that the Thai people will ultimately come to recognize and appreciate the vital contributions of this man.

S.J.

POWERS THAT BE : PRIDI BANOMYONG
through the rise and fall of Thai democracy
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To celebrate the centennial anniversary
of Pridi Banomyong
(11 May 1900 - 11 May 2000)