The 1932 Coup in Thailand: An Account of a Participant in the Coup

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THE 1932 COUP IN THAILAND: AN ACCOUNT
OF A PARTICIPANT IN THE COUP

by

Perasant Ratanakul Serireongrith

A Thesis
Submitted to the
Faculty of The Graduate College
in partial fulfillment of the
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THE 1932 COUP IN THAILAND: AN ACCOUNT OF A PARTICIPANT IN THE COUP

Perasant Ratanakul Serireongrith, M.A.
Western Michigan University, 1983

This study is a discussion of the 1932 military coup d'etat in Thailand and the economic, political, and social conditions that contributed to that coup. A brief historical background of the absolute monarchy of the nation is included. There is a discussion of the coup participants and their motives, as well as their planning and execution of the coup on June 24, 1932. Throughout the study is information acquired through recent taped interviews with General Charoon Ratanakul Serireongrith, a participant of the coup.
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the bad.

Perasant Ratanakul Serireongrith
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Purpose of the Study

Thailand is known to many Westerners as a land of beauty and friendly people. It is also known as a country which still has a monarchy highly respected by the people. Yet politics in Thailand is uncertain.

Political instability has particularly been a characteristic of Thai politics since 1932 when a military coup d'etat introduced a new pattern of power in the country. The former absolute monarchy was overthrown; a constitutional government was then established. The coup became a major catalyst for the spread of democratic idealism in Thailand, and the people have become increasingly politicized. The people have become aware of their democratic rights and duties as never before.

This thesis is about the 1932 military coup in Thailand. Much has been written about it, but this thesis is unique because it is based on personal interviews with General Charoon Ratanakul Serireongrith, a participant of the coup. At the time of the coup, he was only a first lieutenant, but his memory of what took place at that time and thereafter is still vivid. In
this thesis, the writer hopes to recapture the 1932 coup as seen by a young officer who participated in it at the time and his hopes and expectations. While attempting to review the causes and impacts of the coup on Thailand in this thesis, the writer wishes to preserve General Charoon's side of the story—how, as a young officer, he happened to be part of the 1932 coup, and what he thinks about it now as he looks back over the years past. General Charoon is one of the very few original participants of the 1932 coup who are still living and his experiences are worthy of preserving. The present writer had a special privilege of talking with and interviewing him.

Review of Literature

In addition to the personal interviews of General Charoon, the writer has referred widely to various English and Thai sources to place the interview materials in proper perspective. Indeed, there are many English-language publications on the coup d'état of 1932, but they appear to be based on Thai publications.

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1The Thai people refer to each other by their first name on all occasions including formal introductions.

2General Charoon happens to be the present writer's father and I have been encouraged by Professor C. I. Eugene Kim to write about him. In the final days of preparing this thesis, my father passed away on July 10, 1983, at 88 years of age.
Furthermore, they tend to be rather brief in their discussions as compared with Thai sources. Monographs on the 1932 coup in Thailand are lacking in English.

Wilson's (1962) *Politics in Thailand* may be the most useful book on Thailand in English. Wilson analyzed the general characteristics of political relationships within Thailand. His emphasis was on the power structure and he characterized Thailand as a quasi-parliamentary system. In Chapter 1 of the book, Wilson began his discussion of Thai history with a brief description of the Bangkok Era, also known as the Chakkri Dynasty (the present name of the ruling family). The remainder of the chapter concentrates on the years from the coup d'état of 1932 through the end of World War II. He saw the origins of the 1932 coup basically due to three causes: the diminishing psychological power of a monarchy; the increased professional expertise among officials, especially those educated in the Western world; and the growing financial difficulties the government found itself in as a result of the world depression at the time in addition to the previous extravagance of Rama VI. He covered the coup itself in some detail, noting its leaders (i.e., Colonel Phraya Phahon Phayuhasena, Field Marshal Phibunsongkram, Pridi Phanomyong, and Khuang Aphaiwong), along with a discussion of the actual event. He referred to the 1932 coup throughout the book because of its significance to
post-coup Thailand.

Wilson made two separate trips to Thailand to compile data for the book. His sources included personal observations, numerous interviews with Thai politicians and officials, Thai newspapers and books, government reports, and prior scholarly research.

Thailand in Transition: A Brief Survey of Cultural Trends in the Five Years Since the Revolution of 1932, written by Landon (1939), describes the modern trends in Thailand resulting from the 1932 revolution. Landon surveyed a number of areas in Thai life, including political, economic, ethnic, and education trends as well as medical, communication, and religious trends. The 1932 revolution is dealt with in Chapter 1, covering the causes, leaders, and results of this particular coup d'état. Landon cited four major causes, according to Luang Vichitr Vadhakarn, for the 1932 coup. First, there was much dissatisfaction among the people because of extensive changes made in governmental positions by Rama VII. Under Rama VI, eight of the 12 ministries were governed by high-ranking commoners. But Rama VII reversed this balance of power, making the people feel they were ruled without adequate representation. A second cause was the secretive methods used by the government. The rulers deliberately kept their actions hidden from the people. The people felt that what was secret must, therefore, be bad and, as a
result, misunderstandings arose between the people and the government. The fact that the government chose not to take the newspapers into its confidence was a third cause. Reporters had to rely on gossip for their information and then print as much as they dared to. The fourth cause included the dismissal of many officials from the government and the levying of a new salary tax. Rama VII dismissed many government officials in his attempt to balance the budget. For his book, Landon drew heavily from Thai sources, newspaper articles, pamphlets, interviews, and official government reports.

There are other interpretations of the causes of the 1932 coup. In a personal interview with Landon, a "member of the royal family" viewed the revolution as a cause basically promulgated by Thai students, both those studying at home and those studying abroad, who read about and interpreted an absolute monarchy as being evil. Another viewpoint of the revolution was offered by Luang Pradist Manudharm, who felt the coup was not a movement of the people, but instead inspired, carried out, and known by only a small group of people in Bangkok. Landon (1939) felt that in the years directly following the coup, changes had not taken place as quickly as they should have. Although the average citizen was allowed more privileges under the new constitution, the government tilted toward a mildly Fascist regime. Riggs (1966), in
his book *Thailand: The Modernization of a Bureaucratic Polity*, also observed that the new government failed to meet its expectations effectively. He saw 1932 merely as a dividing line between the old regime and the new.

An analysis of Thailand's foreign policy since World War II is the subject of *Thailand and the Struggle for Southeast Asia* written by Nuechterlein (1965). An emphasis in the book is placed on Thailand's diplomatic history, which includes a brief description of the revolution of 1932. Nuechterlein viewed the causes of the 1932 coup in much the same light as Wilson (1962) and Landon (1939). Financial difficulties which Rama VII faced when he came to the throne again were cited as a major reason for a change in government. Nuechterlein (1965) also believed that the weaknesses of Rama VII himself helped facilitate the onset of the coup. Rama VII succeeded his brother as king without adequately preparing himself to rule as an absolute monarch because he had never expected to attain that position. The Thai army also felt cheated as a result of Rama VI's private military corps, the Wild Tigers. This group was given much attention and money from Rama VI, whereas the regular army felt this money should be used to strengthen the country's defenses. Rama VII tried to restore faith back into the army, but he was not able to overcome the general discontent among many of the army officers. Nuechterlein pointed out that
probably the most significant cause of the 1932 coup was the determination of a small group of Western-educated Thais who felt that this was the time to end the absolute monarchy which was led by none other than Pridi Phanomyong. Much of Nuechterlein's (1965) research and analysis was based on his residence in Bangkok for 3 years plus additional research at the University of California at Berkeley the following year.

Books of general history on Thailand are quite abundant. Two which stand out as particularly meritorious are Thompson's (1941) Thailand: The New Siam and Hall's (1981) A History of South-East Asia (4th ed.). In her book, Thompson (1941) studied the people, history, and culture of Thailand. She traced the immigrations of a number of tribes which eventually settled within the present boundaries of Thailand. This book was used widely as a reference for its historical background data. Hall (1981) described the history of Southeast Asia for the last 1,000 years, closely linking Thai history with that of other peoples, including the Mons and the Burmese. The book is based mainly on three separate sources of information: university lectures delivered in London, Rangoon, Singapore, Djakarta, and Bangkok; research compiled by other scholars; and research conducted by the author himself. Hall (1981) attempted to report the history of this area as seen from the Southeast Asian
perspective, not as seen from a Westerner's point of view.

Thai publications regarding the coup of 1932 have been written by some who had been involved in the coup and by others who have written on the subject who were interested in propagating their beliefs regarding the coup and its results. Setabut's (1974) *Military and the Modernization of Thailand* perceives the military as a major promoter of development in Third World countries. The military is a principal organizer of modernization, according to Setabut, because they are a unit that is in a constant state of change, mainly due to the fact that they are continually upgrading their corps to keep up with new technology (e.g., weapons and strategies). Setabut believed that the military was the major factor in the success of the 1932 revolution. This was achieved mainly because the army had legal control of weapons plus the knowledge and intellectual capabilities of devising the plan and carrying it out. He looked at the intentions of the military before the coup takeover and then their method of administration afterwards. By looking at their economic, educational, and political development plans, he pointed out it is true that the coup group did aim for democracy. Another reason why Setabut viewed the military as a modernizing element was that, as a group, military personnel are better educated than the average
citizen. In order to keep up with their technology, many officers went abroad to study. While away, they gained not only the information they set out to learn, but also became acquainted with Western ideals and beliefs, including those dealing with a democratic form of government.

A collection of independent writings by Thai political scientists is found in Kerittavin's (1978) *Armies*. The book is comprised of a number of articles which help explain many aspects in the political development of Thailand. The article most useful for this thesis was written by Thongthammachat and entitled "Revolutionary Life." Thongthammachat studied the causes of the 1932 coup d'état. He believed there were two basic reasons for the coup's occurrence and success. First, the leaders of the coup received their training and socialization in Western countries, different from previous military leaders; he felt these leaders were influenced heavily by their Western contacts. He felt that the coalition of civilians and the military also helped the coup succeed, for it showed a widespread feeling concerning the outmoded administration of the absolute monarchy. Bringing an end to the monarchy was a great risk to all who were involved. Any challenge against the royal institution was met with severe and immediate punishment. Thongthammachat concluded that the 1932 coup occurred because the leaders' intentions were to develop the country.
and it was based on ideals, not for the self-propulsion of individuals to gain and maintain their own power and interests.

In his book, *The Changing of Thai Politics*, Samutavanit (1979) analyzed the foundations of political science. This analysis is used as a basis for studying the Thai political system. Samutavanit utilized an abundance of historical information in his research. This book includes an analysis of changing Thai politics starting from the reign of King Rama IV (1868) until present day (1976) by looking at the roots of political reforms in Thai politics. Also, Samutavanit studied and analyzed the obstacles which were present in the development of Thai politics, including the revolution of 1932. Samutavanit did not agree with the revolution because he felt the only ones who benefited from this action were the coup participants. His argument was that most of the country was illiterate at the time and unable to gain anything as a result of the coup.

Another person who disagreed with the act of the 1932 coup, but whose research is important, is Pongpanit (1962). He expressed his feelings in his thesis entitled *The Revolution of the 1932 Coup*. He viewed the objectives of the coup as twofold: to abolish the absolute monarchy and establish a constitutional monarchy, and to introduce and create a democratic state. The coup failed,
he argued, because only one small group of people gained governmental power as a result of the coup: those who were involved. The average person had no fundamental understanding of the governmental system. Also, the Revolution Party organized by the coup leaders represented only themselves, not the majority of people. Pongpanit saw the frequent shift of power within the coup group and their lack of an attempt to politically educate the people as main obstacles to the political development of democracy in Thailand. The majority of people in Thailand have never experienced the right to determine their own political destiny.

For additional information on the 1932 coup d'etat, several other books by Thai scholars have been found to be quite useful: *Behind the Revolution of June 1932* by Saipradit (1962), *Lord of Life* by Chakabhong (1962), *34 Years of Democracy* by Thainoi (1966), *Colonel Khuang Apaiwong: Four Times Prime Minister* by Srisawat (1957), and *Politics and Government of Siam* by Vadhakarn (1932). The book by Vadhakarn (1932) is helpful in understanding the economic and psychological backdrops leading to the 1932 uprising.

These source materials provide significant and valuable general information on the social and political backgrounds prior to and after the coup. They reveal the ideological stand and political sentiments of King
Prajathipok (Rama VII) concerning democratic government in Thailand. They also shed light on the actual planning and execution of the coup d'état and are used as sources for verification and substantiation of the primary interview material for this thesis.

Methods

This thesis is based primarily on the information provided by a participant in the historical event under study. One hundred and twenty-five detailed questions were submitted to the interviewee prior to the actual interviews. The question/answer sessions were recorded on audio tapes for reference and verification. It is strongly believed that data obtained through these interviews have brought to light valuable information regarding the participants, plans, and motives behind the most important episode in contemporary Thailand's political development, the coup d'état of June 24, 1932.
CHAPTER II

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The early history of the Thai people is vague and obscure. In the pre-Christian era, ancient Chinese records mention the Thai as a nomadic race who were drifting southward from the Altai Mountains in Mongolia, where they are presumed to have originated. Through the centuries, the Thai and Chinese continually waged battles against one another. At times, the Thai were able to conquer large areas of Chinese territory, but on many other occasions they found themselves in the position of a vassal state. To escape this Chinese domination, many Thais drifted further southward to the present area known as Southeast Asia (Suphamartra, 1963).

In studying Thai historical development, Thai historians generally agree that the Sukhothai Era (1238-1350 A.D.) is the best starting point. Sukhothai had been part of the Cambodian domain and, therefore, under the rule of the Cambodian ruler. In the middle of the 13th century, two Thai leaders, who at the time were chiefs of towns under the Cambodians, led a revolt against the Cambodians and seized the town of Sukhothai proclaiming its independence. Sukhothai, to most Thai today, not only is their first historical dynasty, but also marks
their origins as a people. Their former homeland in Southern China has long been forgotten.

The first king of Sukhothai, popularly known as Phra Ruang, is regarded as the liberator who delivered his people from the Khmer (Cambodians). Among his descendants was his son, King Ramkhamhaeng, a great warrior who came to the throne in 1275. Paternalism was a way of life during Ramkhamhaeng's reign, where he, as ruler, had a duty to control and protect his people and see that they were happy; and the people of the kingdom, in turn, had a duty to be loyal to their king.

During the reign of Ramkhamhaeng, the history of the Thai was for the first time documented. The Thai devised an alphabet for their language, adapted from the Cambodians, for them to print the spoken word. The earliest document of Sukhothai is a stone pillar, inscribed during Ramkhamhaeng's reign, which showed the prosperity of the kingdom:

During the lifetime of King Ramkhamhaeng, Mu'ang Sukhothai was prosperous. In the water there was fish; in the fields there was rice. The lord of the country did not levy taxes on his subjects. . . . Whoever wanted to engage in commerce of elephants could do so; whoever wanted to trade in horses could do so; whoever wanted to engage in commerce of silver, or in gold, could do so. If a common man, a noble, or a chief fell sick and died, the home of his ancestors, his clothing, his elephants, his family, his rice granaries, his slaves, the areca palm plantations of his ancestors were all transmitted to his children. If the common people, the nobles, or the chiefs got into disagreements,
the king made honest inquiry and then settled
the affair for his subjects according to what
was right. (Pendleton, 1962, p. 9)

The continuation of the process of Indianization was
one of the most important cultural developments which
took place in Sukhothai. The principal source from which
the elements of Indian culture were adopted were from the
Mons. Theravada Buddhism was prevalent (adopted from the
Mons) and not Cambodian Brahmanism. Mon art also had a
strong influence on the Thai at this time (Blanchard, 1958).

Under Ramkhamhaeng, Sukhothai had expanded into a
large empire; its domain extended south into the Malay
Peninsula down to Nakhon Sithammarat and covered most of
what is now central Thailand. Because he ruled such a
large area, Ramkhamhaeng divided his administration into
three categories. First was Hua Muang Chan Nai, or "Sur­
rounding City." The king directly controlled the city of
Sukhothai plus the smaller towns and villages close to
the city. Hua Muang Chan Nuk, or "Outlying City," were
smaller cities further out which were indirectly con­
trolled by the king. He appointed a governor to rule in
his name. Lastly are Muang Pratetsraj, or "The Colony,"
which were distant areas ruled by their own kings, but
who still paid homage to the king of Sukhothai
(Tunchaleyn, 1960).
Sukhothai was the capital of Thailand for a century until 1350 A.D. After the death of Ramkhamhaeng, his state fell apart. Sukhothai was invaded and conquered by Phra Chao Utong, the ruler of the Thai principality of Utong. Phra Chao Utong (the prince of Utong) was then crowned as King Ramadhribati and established a new kingdom at Ayudhya. This kingdom lasted slightly more than 400 years (1350-1767 A.D.). The new capital city was strategically located on an island in the Chao Phraya River, with easy access to both the Gulf of Siam and the Malay Peninsula.

At Ayudhya, Ramadhribati developed his kingdom into one of the most powerful and influential states in Southeast Asia. His major goal was the destruction of the Khmer empire based at Angkor Wat and Angkor Thom. The Thai frequently attacked the Khmer throughout the 14th and early 15th centuries and eventually, in 1432, they overthrew the Khmer capital. The Khmer then moved their capital to Phnom Penh and withdrew into what is now present-day Cambodia.

Throughout this period, the Thai absorbed many elements of Khmer civilization into their own traditions and culture. This process involved a major infusion of Brahmanism, which was introduced to the Khmers by Indian merchants and missionaries early in the Christian era. The Brahman influence gave absolute political and
religious power to the king. Thai rulers developed a highly stratified system of their own, adopted from the Khmer, and established their own absolute monarchy. The king became Deva Raja or God-King. He assumed the title of Chao Chiwit (Lord of Life) and held complete power of life and death over his subjects. He was also called Chao Phaendin (Lord of the Land) and theoretically owned all the land in the kingdom.

A form of Ayudhya administration introduced by the Khmer, referred to as Chatusdom, was based on the four-chamber (Krom) system: the "Chamber of Local Administration" (Krom Wiang), the "Chamber of the Palace" (Krom Wang), the "Chamber of Finance" (Krom Klang), and the "Chamber of Land" (Krom Nar) (Rajanubhab, 1928). This "four-chamber system," however, was loosely organized until the reign of King Trailok (1448-1488), a great reform-minded monarch of Ayudhya. Under King Trailok, administrative reform based on functional lines was introduced, and two offices were established for this purpose. One was the Great Minister of Civil Affairs (Samuha Nayok), responsible for all civil matters over the four Kroms; the other was the Great Minister of Military Affairs (Samuha Phra Kalahome), in charge of all military affairs of the kingdom. The chiefs of the four Kroms were required to report all matters of civil affairs to the former Ministry, whereas matters of military administration
were reported to the latter Ministry.

King Trailok also began the system of Sakdi Na, a hierarchical structure based on degrees of dignity or rank (Rajanubhab, 1928). Each member of the kingdom was assigned a number according to his rank and land was distributed accordingly—the highest officials were awarded thousands of acres each, while the commoners were given 10 acres. A person's Sakdi Na determined many aspects of his social status, including the manner in which he was treated in the courts.

The 16th century witnessed the coming of the Europeans, which was to have a great influence on Thai society. The Portuguese were the first Europeans to establish trade relations with the Thai in 1511. The Dutch followed a century later and began trade relations in 1608. The English came in 1612 and the French in 1663. The Portuguese, Dutch, and English each went to Ayudhya in search of profit and trade, while the French mixed their trade interests with religion and military affairs.

At the end of the 17th century, all trade with the Europeans was halted. Most of the Europeans were banished from the country because of a plan to convert the country to Roman Catholicism. A number of members of the royal family disliked what was happening, so they incited a revolt to rid themselves of the Europeans (Rajanubham, 1928).
Shortly after this, the Burmese once again renewed their attacks against Thailand. In 1759, they conquered the northern provinces. A siege against Ayudhya was initiated in 1766; the Thai were able to hold out for a year, but eventually the Burmese overthrew and destroyed the capital city.

During this time, a counter-battle was organized by Phraya Taksin, a former general, who had escaped from Ayudhya before its downfall. He gathered men in the southeastern provinces and fought and defeated the Burmese, thereby declaring Thai independence. For the next 15 years, he attempted to regain the territory previously held by Ayudhya. He assumed royal power and moved the new capital to Thonburi on the west bank of the Chao Phraya River (across from present-day Bangkok).

In 1781, King Taksin was overthrown by his own people. Hostility arose against him because his father was Chinese, and his mental state was questionable for he claimed he was another incarnation of the Lord Buddha (Pendleton, 1962). One of King Taksin's generals, Phraya Chakkri, was named as the new ruler. He moved the capital to Bangkok on the east side of the Chao Phraya River, in order to better protect itself from further Burmese attacks. Phraya Chakkri assumed the title of Rama I and started the Chakkri dynasty, which is the present ruling family of Thailand. Rama IX is the present king.
The early rulers of the Bangkok era continued with the traditions from the Ayudhya period. Rama I gradually restored great power to Thailand and united the outlying provinces back under the king's control. By 1800, Thailand enjoyed its greatest influence to date. The Burmese attacks were continually defeated and control was extended over the Laotian kingdoms at Luang Prabang and Vientiane. Rama I also controlled many of the Malay states in the south and fought with Vietnam for control over Cambodia.

The power of the Thai monarchy remained essentially the same during the reigns of Rama II (1809-1824) and Rama III (1824-1851). During this time, European merchants and diplomats, after 150 years of inactivity, attempted to reestablish trade relations with Thailand. Finally, in 1826, Britain was able to obtain a modest treaty with Thailand, but was unable to realize any profitable trade. The United States signed a similar treaty in 1833 (Serichon, 1962). All requests by Western nations for formal diplomatic relations with Bangkok were refused at the time.

King Mongkut (Rama IV) reigned from 1851 to 1868. He was in line for the throne in 1824, but he was opposed and stepped aside to allow an older half-brother to reign. During the reign of Rama III, Mongkut became a Buddhist monk and also avidly studied about the Western world.
He assisted many Protestant and Roman Catholic missionaries and learned much of the West from them. Because of his knowledge of Western advances and their effect in surrounding countries which had contact with the West, Mongkut realized how much more superior the West was in administrative and technical areas. He felt that for Thailand to strengthen and preserve its kingdom, it should adopt Western techniques. Therefore, shortly after his coronation, Mongkut began opening Thailand back up to the West. New treaties were negotiated with most of the European nations and the United States. Many European advisors became members of his administration.

Like his predecessors, King Mongkut continued with the traditional monarchial system and opposed any attempts which would limit his absolute power. Yet, his monarchy did change in a number of ways. The King showed more concern for the welfare of his people and personal interest in his subjects. He abolished the custom which required the people to kneel and not to look at him and reinstituted the practice of hearing petitions directly from aggrieved persons.

When King Mongkut died in 1868, however, few tangible changes had actually taken place in the modernization of Thailand. By Western standards the country still had no education, health, or welfare service, and there was yet no systematic legal code; neither was there any
formal military organization to defend the country against attack. Although Mongkut could claim no concrete changes in modernization, he did begin the long and arduous process toward that progress.

Prince Chulalongkorn (Rama V) was only 16 years old when his father died and he did not ascend the throne until 1873. During the period prior to his coronation, Chulalongkorn traveled to other areas of Asia to observe the Western advances which had taken place there. His decision to travel abroad was the first step in his reform plan for Thailand. Chulalongkorn felt that the only way for Thailand to be considered as an equal by the Western world was to adopt the West's technology and administrative practices.

Shortly after his coronation, King Chulalongkorn put his ideas to work. He instituted a primary education program for children of the royal family and built several government schools to train civil and military officials. He initiated the construction of railroads and irrigation projects. By 1900, King Chulalongkorn had a unified administration for the entire kingdom and was able to maintain more effective control over diplomatic and foreign affairs.

Chulalongkorn is regarded as one of the greatest kings of Thailand. During his reign, he turned his country from a "backward" nation to one which was
progressively becoming modernized. Like his father before him, Chulalongkorn aspired to learn as much as he could from the West. He was, however, strongly opposed to the adoption of Western democracy for Thailand. He felt his people were not ready to play a large role in their own governing because of their lack of education. Instead of democracy, Chulalongkorn used his absolute power to speed the process of modernization in Thailand.

Chulalongkorn's reforms were for the people, not for royalty. He was always concerned for his people's welfare. He ended slavery and issued a proclamation for religious freedom. The collection of taxes was necessary only for the country, not to add to the wealth of the royal family (Thompson, 1941).

Upon King Chulalongkorn's death, his eldest son Vajiravudh ascended the throne as Rama VI. This was Thailand's first Western-educated monarch. During his studies abroad, Vajiravudh became detached from his family and also from Thailand's affairs. For these reasons, Vajiravudh was ill prepared to assume the throne as an absolute monarch in 1910. He concerned himself mostly with personal affairs during his reign and tended to ignore governmental matters. He caused a decline in the prestige of the absolute monarchy and for the first time in modern Thai history some leaders dared to openly criticize the royal institution.
Vajiravudh was also opposed to the adoption of Western democracy because he, like his father, King Chulalongkorn, felt the people were still not ready for this change of government. However, a number of individuals, namely, army and navy personnel and educated civilians, were steadily growing impatient while waiting for a constitution to appear. Upon ascension to the throne, Vajiravudh stated that he would carry through with plans for a constitution which his father had drawn up, but he always felt the people were never adequately educated for the change (Saipradit, 1962).

In addition to being upset about the lack of a constitution, these new emergent groups were dissatisfied with the Wild Tiger Corps, a quasi-military group established by Vajiravudh, believed to be for his own protection. The military group was also angry because of an incident involving a high-ranking military official and a Wild Tiger corpsman: The military official was publicly whipped in uniform, by orders of the king, because, during a disagreement with the corpsman, the military man struck him.

The military group and educated civilians were eager for the conversion to democracy. The young military members were especially anxious, as they believed that they were ready to help the country prosper. Since the king never made it possible for the country to have the
eagerly-awaited and hoped-for constitution, these men persuaded one another to attempt a coup in 1912 to change from an absolute monarchy to democracy.

Although the 1912 coup was a failure, an increasing number of young people at the time aspired for democracy. They felt the absolute monarchy to be an outdated institution. There was a need to change the political system to keep up with the changing times. These democratic tendencies of the young in 1912 had a strong influence on the thinking of those involved in a later coup in 1932.

The period of Thai history which most heavily leaned toward democratic thought was during the reign of King Prajathipok (Rama VII). During this time, more and more young people went to Western countries for their education and absorbed more democratic ideas from the West. Even Prajathipok himself felt the necessity to improve the political system of the country and catch up with world progress. The King went as far as to consult with Mr. Raymond Steven, an English advisor to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and stated that: "I want to give a constitution to the citizens as soon as possible; I want to have it done by April 6, 1932, which is the anniversary of the Chakkri dynasty" (Saipradit, 1962, p. 41). Although he was fully behind the idea of a democratic Thailand, however, the King found a great deal of opposition from his royal advisors and the other members of the
royal family.

As 1932 approached, the educated people of the country were becoming more and more impatient for a democratic political system for Thailand. At the time, the economic and social conditions of the country worsened. On June 24, a small group of military personnel and civilians took over the government and put an end to the absolute monarchy, thus starting a new era of Thai politics.
CHAPTER III

COUP PARTICIPANTS AND COUP MOTIVES

As a measure of modernization of the country since the reign of King Chulalongkorn (King Rama V), the government had followed the policy of sending students abroad. At first, this policy was limited to royal princes and sons of high officials only, but later it was extended to talented students from all social classes through the provision of scholarships. The number of students who studied abroad, both on government scholarships and with private funds increased substantially, especially during the reign of King Prajathipok (Rama VII).

In the 1920s, a group of young Thai students who studied in European countries, especially France, England, Switzerland, and Denmark, eagerly imbibed the Western idea of democratic freedom. The more they learned about democracy, the more they became excited about it. This, in turn, caused them to find the stagnant life and the royal monopoly of power in their home country intolerable. Paris was the place where students who studied in other neighboring European countries liked to spend their summer vacations, and this gave them free time and opportunity to meet each other and discuss politics. They were
impressed by the democratic governments of the countries they had seen. They came to the conclusion that the absolute monarchy was a sign of backwardness and was long out of date; it should be replaced by democracy, which would bring progress and modernization to the nation. Although the students enjoyed discussing politics, the truth was that they did not really understand democracy except in a vague way. It was Western-type modernization that impressed them greatly and was the major drawing power for them joining in the revolution.

It is reported that in 1930 there were about 200 Thai students in England, 50 in the United States, 25 in the Philippines, 40 in France, three or four in French Indo-China, and a few others in Germany, Belgium, Switzerland, and Denmark (Pongpanit, 1962). While these students were expected by their government to learn Western techniques necessary for the modernization program in their country, it was inevitable that they also acquired some Western political ideas. Nevertheless, it would be gross oversimplification to assume that all foreign-educated Thai students were revolutionary-minded, or were opposed to the monarchy.

Now let us examine the characteristics, personal backgrounds, and motivations of some of the leaders of the coup. The ideological leader of the group was Pridi, also known as Luang Pradit-Manudharm. He was born in
1900. He came from a typical lower-middle class family whose occupation was small trading and farming. He went through the regular Thai schools and finally received the degree of Barrister-at-Law from Chulalongkorn University. In 1920, he received a government scholarship from the Ministry of Justice to further his study in France, where he received the degree of Doctor of Law and also a high degree in economics.

At the time of his study abroad, Pridi was popular with his fellow Thai. He was first elected secretary and later president of the association of Thai students in France. This position afforded him the opportunity to spread his democratic ideology and to get acquainted with many students who later became partners with him in the revolution.

Impatient with the anachronistic rule in his home country, Pridi had planned in Paris with a few of his friends to overthrow the absolute regime. He is said to have associated also with many Annamese students in France who sought to overthrow the French yoke in their land. He shared their revolutionary ideology, often attended their secret meetings, and joined them in discussing revolutionary plans. Being the most well-informed student of government and politics among the Thai group, he earnestly sought to advise them about political affairs and democratic ideology through his
activities in the Thai club. He was given the nickname "Professor" by his friends. However, he was extremely careful in seeking revolutionary partners, and his plan was known only among a few close friends. He wanted to change the system so as to bring about a change in the economic and social life of the nation. Unless there was such a change, the revolution, he said, "would merely replace the system of one king with a system of many kings" (Sutthipitak, 1959).

The first person to whom Pridi revealed his revolutionary ideas was Prayoon Phamonmontri. Prayoon went to Switzerland to be treated for tuberculosis. Later on he studied in France. Prayoon was born in 1900. He was the son of a Thai middle-level official and a German mother, who received his early education in Bangkok and later became a student at the Thai Military Cadets' Academy.

Prayoon was one of the most active and also one of the most important of the partners whose efforts brought the People's Party into existence. He later stated that his reason for joining the coup was that he, as a young man, wanted to seek progress in life, and that, having great admiration for Western-type modernization, he thought the revolution would bring about such progress in Thailand (Phamonmontri, 1949). After he had agreed to carry out the revolution in Thailand, he set out to do the most important task, which was recruiting new members
for the group. Pridi cautiously remained in the background.

After Prayoon was fully involved, Lieutenant Luang Phibunsongkram, a young army officer, also decided to join the plot. His original name was Plaek Kitasangka. He was born in 1897. His father was just a simple farmer, but he also had considerable means. After his regular education, he entered the Thai Military Cadets' Academy and was the classmate of Prayoon. After his graduation in the year 1914, he was appointed a second lieutenant at the youthful age of 17 in the artillery regiment in Pisanuloke province. Later he was selected to attend the General Staff Academy in Bangkok, where he won a scholarship to study military science in France. He soon succeeded Pridi as the president of the association of Thai students in France.

Phibun's biography, written by his son Amnooay Phibunsongkram (1968), mentions one of the reasons that made Philbun join the camp. This was that during his education in France, he had seen and studied about the democratic government of the countries that he went to, and he was very impressed with the system. Once he looked back to his own country and compared it to those that he had seen, he could clearly see that the absolute monarchy system was outmoded and needed to be changed to democracy which could bring modernization to the country as it did...
Another original planner of the coup was Lieutenant Luang Tassai Miyomseuk. He, as a talented officer in the Cavalry Division, also attended the General Staff Academy and won, in the same year with Luang Phibun, a scholarship to study military science in France. It was mainly due to his clever maneuvering that the revolutionary group succeeded in gaining the backing of the First Guard Cavalry Regiment, which was regarded as the most important unit in seizing power. He was also influenced by his education in France in the same manner as Pridi was (Miyomseuk, 1971).

These four young men were the original planners and leaders at the forefront of the revolution. At first their conspiracy against the absolute monarchy was wishful thinking. They had no control over a large enough group in order to overthrow the government in a coup d'etat, and knew they could not rely on the masses at home to overthrow the government in a revolution. Therefore, it was necessary to find new members who would sympathize with their cause and agree to join the plot.

A quarrel had occurred between the Thai association in Paris under the leadership of Pridi, and Prince Charoonsakdi, the Thai minister in Paris and educational supervisor of the Thai students in France, which helped to convince many young students of the inefficiency of
the royal monopoly of power. After this event, such men as Tua Lapshanukrom and Nab Phaholyothin decided to join the revolution.

Another young man who was drawn into the group and who later became the forefront leader of the revolution in the navy faction was Lieutenant Luang Sinthu Songgramchai. He was born in 1902. He was graduated from the Thai Naval Academy, and later studied at the military academy in Denmark. He was a very cautious man. As Prayoon recalled, it took him 3 years before he succeeded in persuading Luang Sinthu to join the plot.

The men who provided the leadership and forces for the revolution of 1932 were relatively high-ranking army officers. These officers were familiar with government affairs and, therefore, became impatient with the inefficiency of the absolute government and its incapability in dealing with political and economic problems, especially during the early 1930s, as well as to the monopoly of power of the incompetent high princes. In addition, they also felt displeased with some unjust actions of the royalty. They finally came to the conclusion that the solution for this problem was the establishment of a democratic regime which would cure the inefficiency and injustice of the administration and bring about progress and modernization to the nation.
Another man who was regarded as the leader of the People's Party was Phraya Phahon Phayuhasena. The son of a Colonel in the Thai Army, he was born in 1887 in Bangkok. In his youth he was a hard-working, bright student. Following his studies in the Thai Military Cadets' Academy in 1904, he was awarded a scholarship to study military science in Germany. After 1 year, however, he was summoned back to Thailand. He did not think that his allowance was enough to meet the cost of living in Germany, and he petitioned the Thai government asking for an increase. The petition was viewed by Prince Chakrapong, the Minister of Defense, as a daring and improper action unbecoming to subordinates.

Back in Thailand, Phraya Phahon's first assignment was that of a Lieutenant in the 4th Artillery Regiment in Rajburi province. After a few years in the province, he was transferred to the Artillery Section in Bangkok. Thereafter, his career had experienced successive promotions with remarkable progress. In 1926, he was appointed the Director of the Artillery Training School at Koke Katiam in Lopburi province, and a year later was installed as a professor in Army Intelligence in the Educational Section. In 1928, he became a Colonel in the Army as well as a royal guard officer of King Prajathipok. In 1930, shortly before the revolution, he was appointed Deputy Inspector of the Artillery Section in Bangkok, and
he remained in that position until the revolution took place.

According to General Charoon (Serireongrith, 1982), one of the participants, Phraya Phahon had a very polite and modest manner. He might appear very humble and submissive to his superiors, but behind this outward softness lay great courage and a deep resentment against every kind of injustice and tyranny. He was a man of virtue and principle. When he was unjustly criticized, he used to argue bitterly with many powerful princes, such as Prince Chakrapong, Prince Boripat, and even King Prajathipok, who was only a prince at that time. It was his sense of justice and honesty that led Phraya Phahon to accept a leading role in the revolution.

Although Phraya Phahon was quite successful in his career under the absolute regime, he was still restless and discontented with the royal monopoly of power, which he thought could not effectively deal with the modern affairs of state. The royal elite, to make matters worse, arrogantly ignored the advice of competent, professional officers. Phraya Phahon came to the conclusion that only by the destruction of the royal monopoly of power could the country be moved toward Western-type modernization.

Being aware of the power of the absolute ruler and of his own weakness as a staff officer who did not
command a troop unit, however, Phraya Phahon could not at that time bring himself to conceive of the violent overthrow of the absolute regime which had lasted for several hundred years. The only thing he could do was to express his anxiety about the fate of the country to his close friends in the army, namely, Colonel Phraya Song Suradej and Colonel Phraya Srisiti Songgram, both of whom had also studied military science in Germany (Saipradit, 1962).

Phraya Song Suradej was born in 1891 in a family of considerable means, and also graduated from the Thai Military Cadets' Academy. Because of his academic distinction, he was sent to Germany for further study. In Germany, he became a Lieutenant in the German Army. When he returned to Thailand, he was assigned to work in the Engineers Section, was later promoted to the rank of Colonel, and became the Director of the Educational Section in the Thai Military Cadets' Academy. This position proved to be of the greatest assistance to the success of the revolution, for it gave him the opportunity to indoctrinate and persuade many of his subordinates and officer cadets to take part in the seizure of power.

Phraya Song Suradej was a very ambitious man of great intelligence, whose tactical genius largely accounted for the successful overthrow of the absolute monarchy by the People's Party. He was widely respected
in military circles. Being a patriot and feeling dissatisfied with some incapable but powerful princes, he joined the revolution when persuaded by Phraya Phahon, and accepted a leading role in the seizure of power.

Another leader was Phra Prasas Pitthayayudh. He was born in Bangkok; his father was a junior official. He finished his studies in the Military Training School before he went to study military science in Germany, where he met Phraya Phahon and Phraya Song as fellow students in the same school. Upon his return to Thailand, he worked as a staff officer in Ayudhya province for 2 years. He later was transferred to the General Staff Division, and also became a professor in its Educational Section. At the time of the revolution, he was a Lieutenant Colonel and Director of the General Staff School. As a close friend of Phraya Phahon and Phraya Song, and having been impressed by the democratic regimes he saw abroad, he unhesitatingly joined the revolution when persuaded to do so by Phraya Song. Phra Prasas, together with Phraya Song, was largely responsible for final planning for the coup. Phra Prasas wrote:

We took part in the revolution in order to transfer the power from the King to the people. Under the absolute monarchy, the King was surrounded by sycophants, and the national income was used to feed many people who actually did not work. In addition, the national decay and the inefficiency in the administration was due to the fact that there were many incompetent men in high positions. Hence, the
absolute monarchy was the cause of this in-
justice. Nothing could be done to solve these
problems, so long as the King had absolute
power. (Sukhumwatana, 1968, p. 48)

The leaders of the revolution professed their will-
ingness to die for democracy. However, their common de-

cire to break through the barriers to the ruling power
was their prime motivation. This desire was reflected in
their resentment against the royal monopoly of power as
well as in their contemptuous attitude toward the in-
capability of the royal elite. This was clearly ex-
pressed by Phraya Song, who had been cited for his valu-
able assistance in planning which brought success to the
coup group. He said:

It cannot be denied that King Prajathipok
failed to rule for the progress of the nation.
His chief interest was to promote the status
of princes who had been obscure under King
Rama VI. That is why he appointed many
princes to high positions. Finally, all im-
portant posts in the government were in the
hands of royal princes, and this certainly
was a measure to protect royal interests. In
fact, I would have had no objection if the
high positions had been filled by capable
princes. But it was not so. It seems to me
that if a man were a prince, he got the
appointment. (Kaowmart, 1947, p. 32)

Another leader was Phraya Ritthi Akaney. He was
born in 1889 in Thonburi province. His father was a
relatively high-ranking official. He went to the Mil-
tary Training School and was subsequently commissioned a
Lieutenant of Artillery. Later he was transferred to be
in charge of the artillery at Nakorn Rajsima, and then
was sent back to Bangkok. At the time of the revolution, he was a Colonel and the Commander of the First Guard Artillery Regiment in Bangkok. His position was to command the troop units, and the revolutionary leaders, especially Phraya Song and Phra Prasas, tried hard to persuade him to join the revolution.

At the first meeting with other leaders of the revolution, Phraya Ritthi rejected the plan to storm the palace and hold King Prajathipok a hostage. This was due to the fact that he was a typical soldier of the old regime who did not have the opportunity to study abroad and, therefore, was not influenced by Western ideas. He was still loyal at heart to the monarchy. He joined the coup only with the idea that Thailand should follow other countries in having a democratic regime, which he thought was a sign of progress. His idea of democracy was that there should be a limited monarchy, with the King preserved and revered as before.

According to his own statement later, he protested against a violent plan because it would mean bloodshed and disrespect to the monarch. He made it clear in the meeting that if it was followed, he would fight against the plotters to protect the king.

Phraya Ritthi was never again asked to the meetings of the plotters because of his differing opinion, or as other leaders of the revolution saw it, his wavering and
indecision. They would ask him to take part in the coup only shortly before the revolution was scheduled to take place, in order to leave him no time for wavering and indecision. Had Phraya Ritthi refused to join them, they would have seized the command of his troops by force. However, a few days before the revolution Phraya Song and Phra Prasas came to his home and succeeded in persuading him to take part in the revolution. By that time, a date had been set for the revolution.

The plotters of the revolution were full of aspirations. They were hopeful of the beneficial effects that a successful coup would bring about for their country. "I believe that democracy is the best system," a coup leader stated. "The clear evidence is that the nations which have adopted this rule have become so progressive and strong that they are now the world powers" (Sukhumwatana, 1968).
CHAPTER IV

THE CAUSES OF THE COUP

King Prajathipok's (Rama VII) unanticipated accession to the throne heralded the beginning of a reign that brought about momentous political and administrative events in Thailand, because during his reign, there was a transformation of the pristine governmental system into a modern one, which was completely different in form. The trends of political dissidence against the absolute monarchy rule began to take shape and were gathering momentum among the new generation. General Charoon Ratanakul Serireongrith (1982) was a member of the Revolutionary Party that overthrew Thailand's traditional monarchical system. According to him, the general conditions prevailing in Thailand at that time were rapidly deteriorating, and he and the others in the Revolutionary Party took matters in their hands to correct the situation.

Economic Conditions

Towards the end of King Vajiravudh's (Rama VI) reign, the Royal Court's expenditures were exorbitant and the Royal Treasury had to increase greatly the funds allocated to the Privy Purse. King Vajiravudh's preoccupation was with the arts and drama, and he effectively
removed himself from national administration. General Charoon was emphatic in pointing out the sorry state of affairs in Thailand at the time as he personally experienced it.

At the time, General Charoon was in his last year of military school. He was chosen by the king's palace to be a military attendant for the king. He was to carry a lighter (to light the king's cigars) and follow the king everywhere. He said that in the palace they always had plays and many gambling games; many of the high-ranking officials liked to participate in them both for their own enjoyment and to be sycophants of the king. These officials were so busy trying to please the king that they neglected their duties.

King Vajiravudh never used anything more than once. For example, the king would wear one pair of trousers a day and after he wore them he would not wear them for a second time, or if he opened a bottle of something he would only use what he wanted and give the remainder away. King Vajiravudh was so absorbed with his own personal interests in the arts and gambling that he ignored the country's affairs. He was also spending much of the country's money for his own personal expenses and not considering the consequences of such actions. General Charoon, who at that time was just a young military school student, was convinced that something should be
done about the way King Vajiravudh was ruling the country. His experience in the palace made him an anti-
monarchist.

The national expenditures at that time also greatly exceeded the national revenues, as can be seen from the national budget allocations which reflected Thailand's deteriorating financial condition up to the time of King Prajathipok's accession to the throne (Pongpanit, 1962, p. 4).

1920 Budgetary Act
Revenues 72,500,000 Baht
Expenditures 82,130,126 Baht
Deficit 9,630,126 Baht

1921 Budgetary Act
Revenues 77,800,000 Baht
Expenditures 82,032,582 Baht
Deficit 4,232,582 Baht

1922 Budgetary Act
Revenues 79,000,000 Baht
Expenditures 87,416,713 Baht
Deficit 8,416,713 Baht

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1923 Budgetary Act
Revenues 80,000,000 Baht
Expenditures 90,216,043 Baht
Deficit 10,216,043 Baht

1924 Budgetary Act
Revenues 84,000,000 Baht
Expenditures 93,125,688 Baht
Deficit 9,125,688 Baht

1925 Budgetary Act
Revenues 91,000,000 Baht
Expenditures 94,875,238 Baht
Deficit 3,875,238 Baht

1926 Budgetary Act
Revenues 94,000,000 Baht
Expenditures 93,788,188 Baht
Surplus 211,812 Baht

King Prajathipok acceded to the throne on November 26, 1925. After his accession, King Prajathipok made attempts to resolve the nation's financial problem of balancing the budget by cutting down on all expenditures. Hence, it came about that early in his reign there were reductions in the number of government officials of various ministries, which meant the dissolution of superfluous positions and dismissal of a large number of the
officials who were holding the dissolved posts. This naturally affected the welfare of those who were dismissed, but all of them were requested to take this as an indirect self-sacrifice for the sake of the nation.

The next event which exacerbated Thailand's financial plight was the universal economic depression which had begun its deteriorating effects since 1929 and had become worse in 1931. During that period Thailand was also suffering greatly from the depression. The people were suffering from a high cost of living everywhere at that time. The general situation during that period was that no one knew where all the money had gone to. The wealth was in the hands of foreign capitalists, princes, and noblemen. The assets for investment belonged to capitalist landlords. The government was not able to resolve the problems. They were unable to dig up the root-cause of the chaotic economy. They had only one choice, and that was to earn sufficient income to care for the national budget. In 1931-1932, the national budget was still 8,534,890 baht in deficit (Surukaca, 1964). The government was unable to resolve the existing financial difficulties.

The principal method used to solve these problems was the most drastic policy of expenditure reductions, including the dismissal of a large number of government officials and the abolition of per diem and hardship
allowances for the officials. Such measures created intense dissatisfaction in the official circles.

This reduction in number of official personnel in order to balance the national budget was one of the rifts that made the dismissed officials discontent because of the injustices done on the part of the government. The majority of those who were dismissed were the low-ranking officials, while the princes and the high-ranking officials not only retained their high positions, but they were also promoted and even received salary increments. The dismissal measure failed to balance the national budget. Instead it created many discontented officials.

King Prajathipok should not be blamed for what he did, according to General Charoen (Serireongrith, 1982), because the state of the economy he inherited from King Vajiravudh forced him to take these drastic actions. The blame should be placed on King Vajiravudh because he had carelessly spent a lot of the country's money as was shown previously in the Budgetary Acts of 1920-1926. In General Charoen's opinion, however, King Prajathipok erred because he only dismissed low-ranking officials that were not in the royal family and let all members of the royal family maintain their positions. This practice, according to General Charoen, was injustice.

Another dire event that occurred which had political repercussions causing discontent among the military
faction was that General Prince Bovoradej, the Minister of Defense, felt dejected that he was forced to dismiss a large number of military officers at the time. In protest, he himself resigned from every position that he was holding, thus making the soldiers and the military personnel love and respect him. At least one member of the royal family was sympathetic to them. The royal family seemed to have been divided. Their discontent was focused on King Prajathipok's Privy Council. Furthermore, some drastic changes in the governmental system was widely felt (Thompson, 1941).

The discontentment among the military groups who were dismissed as a result of the economic depression was spreading far and wide. Phra Prasas Pitthayuyudh, one of the revolutionary initiators, expressed his objection against the dismissal of officials to his colleagues:

There were three of us (Phraya Phahon, Phraya Song, and Phra Prasas) who were equally burning with intense desire to rectify the national retrogression. When King Prajathipok's Council of Ministers could not cure the grievous economic depression of the time, how could we stand there and watch the destruction of our own nation right in front of us? The economic means to resolve the problem was not through indiscriminate dismissals, which was only too easy to do when the absolute power rested in the hands of the monarch. (Thainoi, 1968, p. 16)

A more oppressive experience was the increase of the Poll Taxes, especially the one imposed on the officials who derived their income from the government called the
"Salary Tax," promulgated on May 17, 1932. The government issued the following statement:

Regarding the necessity to impose this tax, it is noticeable that the Government has promulgated many Revenue Acts, including the Salary Act. The Government's aim in increasing the tax or issuing a new one is to raise funds to make up for the depleting national reserve in order to balance up the Budget. Even though the Government has drastically cut down on the expenditures, the nation's financial position is still precarious. (Thainoi, 1968, p. 17)

General Charoon stated that such a confession on the government's part demonstrated that the government was unable to resolve the economic and financial situations. The government was leaving everything to go free and easy. There were neither proper improvements nor controls on the economic system, and even after the promulgation of the Salary Act, there was no way of improving the economic and financial conditions at all, thus making the misfortunes of the general population and government officials worse.

At the time, there was also a rumor that the government was going to promulgate an act to collect taxes of roof tops. This added further discontent to the population because they believed that the government was aiming only to put the squeeze on the people without attempting to help them out in any way. The common people had to endure hardship, poverty, and privations. They had always been left to die amidst such poverty, and how long
into the future they would have to endure it was beyond prediction.

According to General Charoon, the government's financial difficulties and the universal depression at that time were the bases of the general discontent, coupled with the fact that the measures used by the government to rectify the national economic and financial conditions failed to achieve their objectives. There was also a lack of local factories causing further unemployment. Most of the major commercial transactions were furthermore entirely in the hands of foreigners.

What really brought about the coup, according to General Charoon, was not the universal depression itself. The depletion of Thailand's currencies had existed prior to King Prajathipok's accession to the throne. The principal cause that brought on Thailand's revolution was the fact that various measures used by the government had hastened to create an irreconcilable rift among the government officials and the people. The inherent class disparities between the princes, the noblemen, and the common people, together with the existing economic conditions at the time, caused the smoldering political unrest to ripen, and the revolutionists saw at last that it was the proper time to act.
There were many factors that brought about general discontent at that time, especially among the educated and the military groups who subsequently became the coup initiators who revolutionized Thailand's governmental system. First of all, the excitement about democracy had already existed. For instance, a revolution had been attempted in 1912 by a group of army officers who called themselves "The 1912 Revolutionary Party." Although the 1912 Revolutionary Party's plot was discovered beforehand and the plotters were arrested, the news of this revolution became a principal key that opened that gateway through which the democratic influence was flooding rapidly into Thailand. Soon after that, the military officers, including General Charoon (who was still in the Cadets' Academy), together with well-educated civilians began to take more interest in politics. At the time, more and more foreign countries were beginning to revolutionize their governmental systems to democratic systems. Democracy appeared a worldwide movement. This apparently motivated the well-educated Thai citizens to take interest in politics and want to participate in administrating the country in order to bring prosperity and progress to their own nation, just like the governmental systems of other countries.
Secondly, General Charoon, when interviewed, stated that one of the causes that instigated the army to contemplate a revolution was an incident involving an army officer at Sanam Luang. He was decommissioned by having his epaulets stripped from his shoulders, then he was whipped. All these were just for the crime of hitting the king's page on the head. Such a punishment had never before been recorded in the annals of Thailand. The incident sent a shock through the entire military establishment.

Thirdly, given the political and economic situations existing at the time, the coup plotters were convinced that if they launched the revolution, they would have the people behind them. Furthermore, they were convinced that the old governmental system was obsolete, and was bringing progress to the nation too slowly. The prosperity of the nation rested solely in the hands of the absolute monarch and the nobility. The common people had no opportunity to decide their own political destiny along the democratic lines. The old form of the governmental system must be changed in order to lead the nation into prosperity along the lines of the governmental system of other civilized countries, and the administrative power should be delivered into the hands of the people in accordance with the democratic principles and ideals.
Social Conditions

In prerevolution Thailand, there was obvious class distinction between the nobility and the plebians. This class distinction created a psychological dissidence over the untold privileges bestowed upon the nobility, but none of which the plebians ever had.

A commoner, no matter how high his rank, was subject to the laws of the land and might be tried in the law courts. A royal prince, no matter what he did, was regarded as above the law. He could not be brought to trial without the specific consent of the king. Royalties were like gods of the land, the heaven born, in the eyes of the common people. They were a class apart, responsible only to themselves and the king. One class of people thus had power to rule another class which was without legal means of redress even when grievously wronged.

General Charoon had his own experience where he was discriminated against only because he was a commoner. It occurred while he was a student at the military school. At that time, many members of the royal family also attended the same military school. (In the old days, the majority of students who studied in military school or studied abroad were members of the royal family.) Because they were royalty, some family members thought they
could do whatever they wanted to the "common" students. They saw nothing wrong with making fun of the other students, pushing them around, hitting them, or whatever else they could think of doing. Instances like this happened all the time. One time it happened to General Charoon. One student at school, a member of the royal family (the present queen's father), poured ink on General Charoon's uniform; General Charoon got mad and kicked him. The student went to the teacher to give his side of the story and the teacher punished the "victim"—General Charoon. The reasoning behind this was that it did not matter what the other student had done to General Charoon, he could not kick him because he was a member of the royal family and General Charoon was only a commoner.

Psychological reactions such as this created discontentment in General Charoon and his fellow plotters. Moreover, in an interview, Major General Prayoon Phamonmontri referred to this psychological reaction of discontentment as another principal cause of their grievance on the Divine Rights of the king-type of government and that the King's Court and the great palaces were rife with sycophants. Everything had to depend entirely on the courtiers and their henchmen, who received promotion in ranks in rapid succession. The military sector was steadily deteriorating, while the King's Court was flourishing with prosperity. The differences between the
nobility and the plebian were the cause of disunity within the nation.

The personal conflicts between the royalty and General Charoon himself, together with other revolution initiators, the class distinction, and royal favoritism that General Charoon had experienced himself incited him to decide to join in with the coup of 1932.
CHAPTER V

GENERAL CHAROON RATANAKUL SERIREONGRITH
AND THE 1932 COUP D'ETAT

General Charoon (later referred to in this chapter as Captain Luang Serireongrith) was born on October 27, 1895, in Bangkok, Thailand, the son of Lieutenant Chit of the Thai army and Chung Ratanakul. His parents both died when he was still a baby and he was raised by his uncle, Phraya Ummarinruechai. He received the title "Luang Serireongrith" because of his contributions to his country.

His uncle took good care of him. He sent him to elementary school in the temple, which was the only school available at that time to children. They were taught by the priests. In his youth, Charoon was a hard-working, bright student. After he finished his elementary school education, he entered the Thai Military Cadets' Academy. After his graduation in the year 1915, he was appointed a second lieutenant at the youthful age of 20 in the Military Engineer's Department in Bangkok. Shortly after this, he married Earp Komolwanna. While many military officers preferred to live in Bangkok, Second Lieutenant Charoon requested to be transferred to the Engineering Section in Korat province, northeast of
Bangkok. He felt he would be able to make faster progress outside the city. Later his career was distinguished by successive promotions with remarkable progress.

The Preparation and Planning of the Coup

Upon Lieutenant Phibunsongkram's return from France, he took up residence near Captain Luang Serireongrith's home. Lieutenant Phibun was then stationed in the Artillery Department, which was also under the Ministry of Defense. Captain Luang Serireongrith and Lieutenant Phibun used to walk back and forth to work together. This created an excellent opportunity for them to discuss and share their concerns about their country's current situation. The more Captain Luang Serireongrith discussed about Thailand's social, economic, and political problems, the more trust Lieutenant Phibun put in him. Since Lieutenant Phibun found that Captain Luang Serireongrith had the same common concerns as himself, he asked Captain Luang Serireongrith if he would want to join the coup. Captain Luang Serireongrith did not hesitate to accept the invitation at all, because his desire was also to change the absolute monarchy to a democracy.

Captain Luang Serireongrith was told that the process of the revolutionary plot had to be kept top secret. Nothing could even be shared with his own wife. Only the
top leaders of the coup knew who were involved in their plot. All contacts were made on a one-to-one basis so as not to leave any traces of evidence.

According to the plot, the coup was divided into three unit forces: the army, under the leadership of Colonel Phraya Phahon Phayuhasena, Phraya Song Suradej, Phraya Ritthi Akaney, and Major P. Phibunsongkram; the navy, under the leadership of Admiral Sin Kamolanavin; and the civilians, under the leadership of Pridi Phanomyong. All unit forces agreed that Colonel Phraya Phahon would be the coup's commander-in-chief. Each unit had its own duties and responsibilities. One of these responsibilities was to persuade more trusted people to join the coup.

Captain Luang Serireongrith was then an instructor at the military school for the Department of Military Engineers. He also held the title of Chief Commander of the Signal Division of the Military Engineer's Department. As an instructor, Captain Luang Serireongrith had the opportunity of talking to his military students about the political aspects and intragovernmental systems of the country. He also taught them about the advantages of a democracy over the disadvantages of an absolute monarchy. Most students seemed to understand the principles behind these two governmental systems very clearly, which was a distinct advantage to the revolutionary People's Party.
As a result of the students understanding the basis of democracy, it was easier for them to accept the actions of the coup members later. Because of his success as a teacher, Major Phibunsongkram wanted Captain Luang Serireongrith to become one of the coup's leaders.

Captain Luang Serireongrith rarely attended a major meeting concerning the formation of the coup. As stated before, communication was done on a one-to-one basis, so Major Phibunsongkram would stop by his home occasionally to keep him informed of what his responsibilities would be.

Only a handful of the leading coup members ever met for discussions. Small-sized meetings were regarded as a precaution against suspicion or arrest. Meetings were held mostly at Prayoon's house, and when they met they used to keep a deck of cards handy so as to be able to claim they were meeting for entertainment rather than political purposes.

The plan of the coup group was aimed at the seizure of power only in Bangkok, not the entire country. The leaders felt that Bangkok, as the center of the political, economic, and financial affairs of the country, was the center of real power. They maintained that if they could seize the power in Bangkok, the absolute regime would certainly collapse.
According to Phraya Song's plan, all important military units necessary for the coup would be mobilized to overthrow the government by giving them false orders to suppress a fictitious rebellion. The First Guard Cavalry Regiment in Bangkok was their principal concern, since it possessed the weapons and armored cars essential for a swift seizure of power. To prepare for this task, Phraya Song asked Phra Prasas to request authority from the government to inspect the First Guard Cavalry Regiment; Phra Prasas pretended that it was necessary for him, as a professor in the General Staff School, to make a study of every new weapon (Sukhumwatana, 1968).

Phraya Song intended to request the presence of military units at a show of military training of the officer cadets that he, as a professor and the Director of the Educational Section in the Thai Military Cadets' Academy, would arrange on the grounds of the Throne Hall on the day when the revolution was scheduled to take place. This show was to be a camouflage for his plan to use the officer cadets in seizing power. These officer cadets were not aware of the revolutionary movement. But Phraya Song's faction, the professors and instructors in the Thai Military Academy, had taken care to insure that their students, the officer cadets, were imbued with democratic ideology in order that at the critical moment they would spontaneously become the forefront
revolutionary forces.

The coup leaders realized that a purely military demonstration was not enough. They knew that the final success depended on the arrest of key figures of the absolute regime as political hostages. They therefore considered measures to insure that all important members of the absolute regime were taken into custody at the actual time of staging the coup.

The revolutionaries kept a close watch on those key figures, especially on Prince Boripat, the Minister of the Interior, the most powerful member of the government because, as the immediate heir to the throne, he was thought to have full control of the armed forces as well as of the civilian branches of the government. King Prajathipok, however, was to be left untouched; the plotters did not wish to arouse the indignation of the nation by humiliating the king.

According to the first plan, the revolutionaries would storm the king's palace and force him to affix his signature to a draft constitution prepared by Pridi. They feared, however, that this plan would lead to bloodshed and fighting for which they were not prepared because they did not command any reliable troops. For these reasons, this plan was abandoned before it was ever carried out (Saipradit, 1962).
As previously stated, the three groups who seized power were the army, the navy, and the civilian forces. The two military organizations were responsible for seizing power from the monarchy; the civilians were the backup political supports. The date for the revolution was set for June 24, 1932, as the king would be out of town on a royal trip to Klai Kungvon Palace in Hua Hin district.

The last meeting of the coup leaders took place on June 23, 1932. The final preparations for the coup took place at this time. Later than evening while the city was asleep, all telephone lines of key members of the government were disconnected by a group of revolutionaries under the direction of Captain Luang Serireongrith.

Early on the morning of June 24, 1932, Major Luang Phibunsongkram left his home and headed toward the Military Cavalry Department. Soon after his arrival, Phraya Phahon and other military officers who were involved in the coup also arrived. Thus began Thailand's first revolutionary takeover in recorded history.

Tanks, artillery, and weapons were withdrawn from the armory under the guidance of Major Luang Phibunsongkram and his revolutionary colleagues. These fully-armed military troops departed for the Military Cavalry
Department-1 in order to unite with the artillery troops; together they then proceeded to join a battalion of military engineers under the command of Captain Luang Serireongrith. The united military force then moved on to the Throne Hall. When they arrived at the Throne Hall, these military units were then joined by the Infantry Battalion-6, commanded by Colonel Juang Virayotha. These forces joined with the naval forces, commanded by Luang Supatchrasai, which had been waiting for further instructions.

A large group of fully-armed officer cadets, soldiers, and sailors assembled on the grounds in front of the Throne Hall. They were unaware of being surrounded by the troops under the command of the rebel officers. At this critical moment, which was to decide the fate of the coup, Phraya Phahon mounted a tank to declare to the assembled troops that the People's Party had already seized power from the absolute regime in order to establish a democratic government. The announcement that was read stated:

In order to have a monarchy constitution in the Siam Kingdom, the King of Siam has to give freedom and equality to his people. There will be no royalty, no inferiority, no noblemen, and no discrimination between classes of people on this land of the Siam Kingdom. From this temporary time forward the country shall be governed by the military of which I will be the Commander-in-Chief. (Thainoi, 1968, p. 75)
After the announcement, the military officers separated to carry out their respective responsibilities as previously planned. Some of the military students went to take over the Throne Hall and use it as command headquarters. In addition, soldiers were posted as guards at all the major routes to the command center. The remaining soldiers were assigned to keep order, peace, and tranquillity throughout the major strategic locations in Bangkok, such as the foreign embassies, banks, and communication stations. The civilians' responsibilities were to post the announcement of the revolutionists, written by Pridi Phanomyong, and to read the announcement to the public at the schools, universities, and recreation places.

At the same time, Pridi himself was sailing on a boat in the river in front of the Bovonnivate Temple handing out flyers to publicize the event of the revolution to the people.

The most urgent task, however, was to arrest key members of the royal family and also those superior military officers who were supporting the monarchy. The most important person that had to be arrested was Prince Boripat, the most influential government figure. In that arrest, Major Phibunsongkram was ordered by Phraya Phahon to join Lieutenant Colonel Phra Prasas Pitthayayudh with a truck full of soldiers to inform Prince Boripat of the
arrest at Bangkrumphrom Palace.

After Major Phibunsongkram and Lieutenant Colonel Phra Prasas Pittayayudh had successfully captured Prince Boripat, they brought him to the Throne Hall. Phraya Phahon then assigned Captain Luang Serireongrith to protect the prince. Captain Luang Serireongrith had to be very careful in his protection of the prince to ensure that His Highness was perfectly safe. Each meal was thoroughly checked for poison by Captain Luang Serireongrith. For this kind of a job, Phraya Phahon had to place much trust in the person who was to perform this task; for this reason he chose Captain Luang Serireongrith.

After all leading members of the government in Bangkok were taken into custody, the leaders of the revolution worked quickly to legalize the authority of the People's Party. They understood full well the psychology of the government officials who, being accustomed to receiving and following orders from the government, would not dare risk their safety and positions in resisting an authority which appeared legal. They therefore asked Prince Boripat to affix his signature to a public announcement requesting that all military and civil officials and employees cooperate in preserving law and order so as to avoid unnecessary bloodshed. Later on, they issued a communique claiming that the authority of the
People's Party had already been recognized by Prince Boripat.

At the same time, a letter made public and signed by Phraya Phahon, Phraya Song, and Phraya Ritthi, was sent to King Prajathipok at Hua Hin. It read as follows:

The People's Party consisting of civil and military officials have now taken over the administration of the country and have taken members of the Royal Family, such as H.R.H. the Prince of Nagor Svarga [Prince Boripat] as hostages. If members of the People's Party have received any injuries the Princes held in pawn will suffer in consequence. The People's Party have no desire to make a seizure of the Royal Possessions in any way. Their principal aim is to have a constitutional monarchy. We therefore enjoin Your Majesty to return to the Capital to reign again as King under the constitutional monarchy as established by the People's Party. If Your Majesty refuses to accept the offer or refrains from replying within one hour after the receipt of this message, the People's Party will proclaim the Constitutional monarchical government by appointing another Prince whom they consider to be efficient to act as King. (Landon, 1939, pp. 9-10)

After a long anxious wait for the king's answer, on June 26 the People's Party received the king's telegram from Hua Hin stating that he accepted the end of his absolute power and the establishment of a constitutional monarchy (Landon, 1939, p. 10):

June 25th, 1932

To the Military in Defence of Bangkok:

I have received the letter in which you invite me to return to Bangkok as a constitutional monarch. For the sake of peace; and in order to save useless bloodshed; to avoid
confusion and loss to the country; and, more, because I have already considered making this change myself, I am willing to cooperate in the establishment of a constitution under which I am willing to serve.

Furthermore, there is a possibility that, if I decline to continue in my office as king, the foreign powers will not recognize the new government. This might entail considerable difficulty for the government.

Physically I am not strong. I have no children to succeed me. My life-expectancy is not long, at least if I continue in this office. I have no desire for position or personal aggrandisement. My ability to advance the progress of the race alone constrains me.

Accept this sincere expression of my feelings.

PRAJATHIPOK
CHAPTER VI

THE REAL MEANING OF THE COUP

The seizure of the administrative power on June 24, 1932, was successful within less than half a day. It was almost a miracle in that it took place without defense, without resistance, and without loss of life when it is realized that the action was done against the monarch who had ruled the country with absolute power in succession from previous monarchs who ruled all together for 150 years. The king was supposedly surrounded by princes and princesses of the Chakkri Dynasty and nobles of various ranks who had made vows by drinking the sacred water promising to be loyal and ready to sacrifice their lives for him with every breath they took.

It is worthwhile to carefully consider why the Revolutionary Party succeeded so well in changing the form of government in Thailand. It is not the reason that Abhaiwong (1971) has stated:

The success is due to the help of the Siam Deity protecting the country. You can see that it is not the ability of the revolutionary party. The preparation was not ready at all, but it could go through nicely. I think it is the fate of the country forcing the event to occur so. Other people prepared more and they failed. We had nothing ready.

(p. 63)
I believe, if the Siam Deity were to help any party, he would not have helped the Revolutionary Party to change the form of government, but helped King Prajathipok more, because the city of Bangkok was built by the past monarchs of the Chakkri Dynasty, starting from cutting down the trees, clearing the land, placing the city pillar, and improving the country successively for more than seven reigns.

According to the plan to seize the administrative power, everyone of the Revolutionary Party was assigned with a given duty under the direction of the leader. The military personnel had one duty, the civilians had another. Neither party overstepped the duties of each other and no one was told what other people were doing; that was to keep secrets from leaking out. Mr. Kuang Abhaiwong, under the orders of Captain Luang Serireongrith, had the duty of cutting off the telephone lines at the Central Post Office at Wat Liap; he, therefore, was not in a position to know what the other revolutionary members were doing, especially what duty was entrusted to the military members.

On the morning of June 24, 1932, the administrative power of the country was absolutely in the hands of the military men protecting the metropolis of Bangkok with the cooperation of all the military sectors in Bangkok and with the certain support of the people of the entire
country.

I believe the success of the seizure of the adminis-
trative power on June 24, 1932, was the result of the plan carefully and cautiously developed by the Revolution­ary Party and done correctly in accordance with war strat­agem in every respect, starting from the first meeting of the seven initiators on February 5, 1924, at the hostel on Rue de Sommerad in Paris up to the last minute when the coup began to explode.

The Revolutionary Party had fixed the time and the day correctly according to the principle of attacking ac­tion; that is to say, not to delay the time too much, be­cause at that time there were some movements of the police to arrest some of the leaders. King Prajathipok was residing at Klai Kungvon Palace in Hua Hin for a change of air with the Minister and the Deputy Minister of Defense, including the General of the First Division. The government of the absolute monarchy had no strong men to defend Bangkok, giving an advantage to the military Revolutionary Party.

The tactical plan was laid out to lead the military force with armored cars, tanks, and lorries carrying gun­men to meet in front of the Throne Hall in preparedness according to the principle of stratagem.

At Bang Sue there was an assembly of military men, armored cars, small tanks, and transportation of
ammunitions from the armory, together with an invitation of the princes and the princesses and the important officials to stay at the Throne Hall. All these were done promptly, creating extreme surprise to everyone who saw the events take place. It was the action of attack.

Before the change of the government, no one knew whether the change of the regime would actually occur, by whom, when, and where—not even parents, wives, and children. The seizure and the maintenance of order at the various points of Bangkok, the arrest of important persons as a precautionary measure were carried out in accordance with the principle of security.

In collaboration with the military men on duty, the revolutionary civilians made an announcement to let the people know of the reason and the purpose of the People's Party. It was a psychological performance to claim the support of the people.

With the plan and the method unexpectedly easy to execute, using precaution and the principles of war in every respect, without any further reasoning the Revolutionary Party succeeded rapidly in the seizure of administrative power on June 24, 1932, without resistance, without counter-attack, and without loss of life.

The members of the armed forces who participated in the change of regime of 1932 were the leaders which changed the society to a modern one. One should
visualize the intentions of the individuals before the seizure of power and their performance thereafter. The seizure of the administrative power only, if there is no change in society to the modern way, would be merely seizing of power and nothing else. Here we shall analyze the intentions and the work of the revolutionists or the People's Party comprising this group of officers.

When considering the aim of the Revolutionary Party of 1932, one can see that this party which consisted of military officers and civilians were aiming at changing the administrative regime of the country from a monarchy to a democracy, similar to that of the Western regime where the people have more rights and a greater voice in the administration.

A monarchy is a political system in which the people have no hand in government and it is a regime of tradition and custom practiced for many years, the monarch exercising absolute supreme power. There are no written principles to show the limitations of the monarch's powers in the administration of the absolute monarchy. The monarch's authority reigns supreme. (Chaiyanam, 1974, p. 95)

In fact, the idea of improving the administration of the country with a constitution or "law of the land" to restrict the administration was conceived in Thailand before 1932. Even the Thai monarch King Mongkut (Rama IV) agreed that democracy would be socially profitable for the country (Chaiyanam, 1974). The revolutionists were
more educated than the common people, having gone to Western countries to further their studies, so they had progressive viewpoints and saw the importance of changing the form of government.

Phraya Song Suradej, a member of the Army General Staff, who assisted in plotting the seizure of the government on June 24, 1932, related that the senior officers, such as Colonel Phraya Phahon Phayuhasena, Colonel Phraya Ritthi Akaney, Lieutenant Colonel Phra Prasas Pitthayayudh, and himself used to converse and express their ideas to change the form of government. When seeing the notes and the statements of the military revolutionists, one can see their viewpoints expressed as to why they believed the form of government should be changed. From reading his personal documents, it is obvious why Phraya Song Suradej had stated the necessity of changing the form of government:

The first reason was that the King was not able to exercise his absolute power to lead the nation to prosperity.

The second reason was that the high-ranking officials intended to please and to win favors from the King in any manner whatsoever, including the sacrifice of their honors.

These two reasons combined became important causes in rendering the nation to remain in its current condition or deteriorate. It was advisable to allow the people to govern themselves and to be responsible for the progress or the decline of the country, instead
of throwing the responsibility to the King alone which would not bring any prosperity. (Setabut, 1972, p. 27).

Phraya Phahon Phayuhhasena, to whom the leadership of the Revolutionary Party was entrusted, saw that the political regime of that time was not right:

The high-ranking officials and the nobility exercised their own free will, neglecting their subordinates' opinions that might be good and reasonable. They tended to act only on the opinions of those lower officials which pleased them the most. (Saipradit, 1962, p. 55)

His concerns were also expressed in a statement made to his wife that "what is a great concern is that the country may encounter disaster and ruin if the form of government is not changed now. Therefore, it is necessary to risk my life" (Saipradit, 1962, p. 64).

General Charoon (Serireongrith, 1982) stated that the military coup members were the modernizers of the country. Their goals were to seize the administration of the country with the intention to reform society and pattern the new governmental structure after those of the Western democracies of Europe and the United States of America. This would open the door to the people to participate in the administration of the country with a constitution as the fundamental law and also a parliamentary system.

Consequently, the military officers, the civil officials, and the people who had known the vices committed
by the government formed a People's Party and seized the government. The People's Party concluded that changing and improving the country could only be done through the establishment of a parliament to govern the country where the best thinking of many minds, rather than the thinking of one man, would be utilized. The People's Party had no intention to seize the king's throne; therefore, they invited the present king to continue his reign, but he should be under the constitution governing the country and could do nothing without the consent of the assembly. By this system, the people could hope for the best economic well-being. Everyone would have work because the country is fertile by nature. The People's Party would set up an administration with certain plans based on sound principles; it would not rule blindly as the government under the absolute monarch did. The People's Party laid down the following platform (Landon, 1939):

1. The freedom and equality of the people in politics, in the law courts, and in business, must be maintained.

2. Peace and quiet, with no harm to anyone, must be assured.

3. A national economic policy must be drawn up to guarantee remunerative work to everyone.

4. Equal privilege for everyone must be guaranteed. No one group shall enjoy any special privileges at the expense of others.

5. The people shall have freedom and liberty except in those cases where freedom and
liberty disagree with the above four (4) points.

6. The people must be given the most complete education possible. (p. 13)

Besides the previous six principles, the People's Party also set up 10 additional commandments for their own group (Pongpanit, 1962):

1. There must always be a king.

2. All actions must be done for democracy.

3. Respect the opinions of others.

4. You must have "straight" opinions.

5. All actions must be done for the progress of the country.

6. You must not be a traitor to your country.

7. You must be honest.

8. You must never forget your background and where you came from.

9. You must be considerate of others.

10. You must perform your duties in a businesslike manner. (pp. 109-110)

The aforesaid are the goals and intentions of the People's Party.

The next step is to observe the performance of the People's Party after the seizure of the royal government and see how their efforts reformed society.

After the successful change of government, the monarch at that time was King Prajathipok (King Rama VII).
He consented to reign under the constitution as clarified in his reply to the statement of the People's Party on June 25, 1932 (Landon, 1939). The People's Party temporarily appointed 70 people's representatives to perform legislative functions. The members of this House consisted of government officials and important persons of that time, both members and nonmembers of the People's Party. From the list of the first 70 representatives, it was found that there were not more than 10 military coup officers within this group, including Phraya Phahon who was the leader of the People's Party. The majority of the representatives were not directly involved with the coup itself. The reasoning behind this action was that the People's Party did not want to rule the country but wanted the people to do so. This was the first step of the People's Party in leading Thailand to a democratic administration modeled after the parliaments studied by the leaders of the People's Party in the Western countries.

The People's Party laid down developing measures for the modern government of Thailand to be divided into three periods as follows (Changlean, 1972, p. 41):

During the first period, the Assembly would be composed of 70 members who were to be appointed by the military controllers of the country (composed of the leaders of the People's Party—namely, Colonel Phraya Phahon,
Colonel Phraya Song, and Colonel Phraya Ritthi) who assumed for themselves the right to exercise power on behalf of the people. During this period, the People's Party drafted the provisional constitution which was said to give more power to the House of the People's Representatives than ever before (Thongthammachat, 1972). Apart from having power to make laws and to nominate the government, the people's committee could remove from office fellow committee members, could depose any governmental servants (Clause 9), and investigate and question the king in a criminal case (Clause 6). The first period would end within a period of 6 months or would last "until the time when the affairs of the country are properly in order."

The second period would be a period of political tutelage by the Revolutionary Party. The provisional constitution contained temporary clauses prescribing that the House of the People's Representatives of that period should consist of two kinds of members. The first type of members were to be elected by the people in the proportion of one representative to 100,000 people; if the remainder were more than 50,000, the province should elect one more representative. The second type of members were classified as "second category" members, appointed in accordance with Clause 65 of the constitution stating that if Thai citizens who had the right to vote
but had not completed their primary education numbered more than one-half of those who had the right to vote, it was then necessary to have members of this second category appointed to sit in Parliament. The members of this second category were those whom the king appointed, but in fact, they were persons chosen by the People's Party.

During the third and final period, a complete political democracy would be attained. The Assembly would then be entirely composed of members directly elected by the people. The constitution stipulated that this final stage would begin at a time when more than half of the population of the country had completed their primary education, and within a period not exceeding 10 years after the constitution came into force.

The provisional constitution for governing the country in 1932 was prepared in advance by the People's Party. It allowed the people to participate in the administration of the country with some rights and votes. The constitution gave rights to any Thai citizen, male or female, who was 20 years old, who was not insane, and who had not been deprived of such a right by the court of justice.

Later the constitution of the kingdom was put into effect on December 10, 1932. It was the first constitution of Thailand. It included a section on the rights and duties of the Thai citizens. The constitution
committee formulated in writing that it was the promise and the intention of the People's Party to concern itself with the equality of the people under law, and it was considered that the titles and ranks by birth or by appointment or announcement should not create any special privilege (Phanomyong, 1933).

Economically speaking, the People's Party wanted to change and to improve the economic system. Before the revolution and the change of government, a depression occurred worldwide, including Thailand. The economic depression of Thailand was caused by two factors as has been previously stated, namely, the world economic crisis, and the superfluous expenses of King Vajiravudh's reign, which caused a great burden to the succeeding king and the dismissal of a number of government servants.

The coup takeover was not a short-sighted plan to seize political power only. An economic policy was also a project of the Revolutionary Party, aiming at the improvement of the economic condition of the Thai people. Some of the economic changes which the People's Party put into effect are the acts dealing with the confiscation of agriculturalists' properties and of overcharging of interest.

The act governing the confiscation of the agriculturalists' properties of 1932 was promulgated on September 21, 1932. The intention of this act was to limit the
confiscation of the agriculturalists' properties so that the agriculturalists could proceed in their farm work. According to the text of the act, the creditor could not confiscate the agriculturalists' property, which included the property of cattle ranchers as well. If already confiscated, these properties should be returned as follows (Suphamartra, 1963):

1. Fields not yet harvested.
2. Seeds to be used in the following year in a fair quantity in comparison with the cultivated land of previous years.
3. Grains reserved for family maintenance for 1 year.
4. A sufficient amount of cattle and agriculturalists' tools to continue their work.

The act forbidding the overcharging of interest of 1932 was promulgated on October 26, 1932, with the intention of preventing the debtor from paying interest beyond the limit allowed by law, with a penalty imposed on the creditor or a person demanding interest beyond the limit fixed by the law, including both fines and imprisonment (Suphamartra, 1963).

These two cases seem to be small matters because they were not laws reforming the economic system, but at least it was a beginning by the People's Party. These laws were made to relieve the suffering of the people and
to provide for their welfare, especially the poor and indebted agriculturalists.

The effort to change society was only by reformation and not the revolution of the social structure. The words "reformation and revolution" had a different meaning, the definition of which was analyzed as follows:

The definition of "reformation" is the limitation of the powers of the privileged people, while the society of the underprivileged people was improving. The "revolution" was the immediate basic changes in the trust and the values of the society, of the political institution, of the social structure, of the leader, and of the actions and the policies of the government. (Setabut, 1974, p. 37)

The work performed by the People's Party under the leadership of Colonel Phraya Phahon showed the intention for the social reformation according to the said definition, because the original powers of royalty were reduced. At the same time, economical improvement was also attempted.

The view on the family such as allowing a Thai man to have many wives was changed to allow a man to have only one wife. This matter was looked upon as a small one, but it showed that the government was developing toward Western ideas.

The People's Party believed that a college education was very important for the development of democracy. Because they felt that a college education for the people should be widespread, the government set up the
University of Moral and Political Science to become an educational institution for economics, politics, and laws, with a view to imparting more knowledge in these fields to the people. As a result of their college degrees, these people became candidates for public office, both local and national, endeavoring to model their society after that of a Western democratic society.

The foregoing reasons show in a number of ways that the officers of the revolutionary party desired to change the structure of society to a modern one. General Charoon (Serireongrith, 1982) felt the importance was as follows:

The change of the regime occurred on that significant day by the common people. The absolute monarchy disappeared and democracy and a lasting constitution (though not yet fully complete) were born instead. If there was no June 24, 1932, the constitution would not be born for a long time. Though the constitution had been altered many times and was now being drafted again, the action of 1932 was fruitful in taking root in Thai hearts causing them to adhere to democracy up to the present day.
Looking at the revolution of 1932, one can conclude that the ideals of democracy were a motivating force which prompted the coup members to initiate a revolution. They were seeking an end to the absolute monarchy and were searching for equality and freedom for all. Prior to the reign of King Vajiravudh (Rama VI), only princes and sons of high-ranking officials were sent to study abroad in Western countries. Later, however, the sons of commoners were also allowed a Western education. Without their exposure to Western education, the coup leaders would not have felt the need to organize an overthrow of the monarchy at that time.

The idea for the coup originated in France where most of the coup leaders attended school, such as Phibunsongkram, Pridi Phanomyong, and Prayoon Phamonmontri. After returning to Thailand from the West, these people remained in contact with one another and sought additional supporters for their coup by propagating Thailand's necessity for a democratic regime. They said the absolute monarchical regime was outmoded and that a modern organization for the prosperity of the country was needed. The impulse behind this coup was based more on ideals.
than on personal aspiration alone, because bringing an end to this monarchy was a great risk to those involved. Any challenge against the royal institution was met with severe and immediate punishment, which usually meant death.

General Charoon (Serireongrith, 1982) felt quite honored that he was one of the participants in the 1932 coup. Although he never had the opportunity to study abroad, he read about the concepts of democracy and later heard about them from Luang Phibunsongkram. He was just as eager as the Western-educated men to see the absolute monarchy ended.

In many ways, the coup of 1932 was a success. According to General Charoon, democracy was the goal the coup group was striving for, but even more importantly they wanted an end to the absolute monarchy. As a result of the coup, a constitutional monarchy was set up, with the king now under the law of the land instead of above it.

General Charoon said that during preparation for the coup and immediately afterward, the coup members had high ideals and aspirations for democracy and they were united among themselves like brothers. The coup was secretly organized and each not only took an oath of 10 commandments to always tie themselves together to one another and to always remember the ideals of democracy, but also
they abided by them.

After the coup, many youthful ideals for democracy seemed to have faced the hard fact of their life. The coup leaders quarreled among themselves and each felt that he was most important. As a result, the group split up into smaller cliques, each setting out to seek their own self-interests and political gain.

According to General Charoon, the coup opened up doors to high political positions for many of the coup members, but all the members of the coup were young (no one was older than 40 years old) and inexperienced to run the machinery of democratic government. As a result, they suffered from many blunders and their government suffered from inefficiency and many of the coup ideals had to be sacrificed. But still, General Charoon was proud of his participation in the coup. He was unswerving in his conviction that through the coup and thereafter, he was devoting his life for the betterment of his country. His personal aspiration had always been to see Thailand prosper. He was emphatic in restating: "In 1932 I risked my life in order to end the rule of absolute monarchy and to see the beginnings of democracy. I did it, and I'm proud of it."
BIBLIOGRAPHY


