

# Oppositional Forces in Thailand<sup>1</sup>

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## ABSTRACT

There are many and varied oppositional forces in Thailand that range from the outlawed Communist Party of Thailand (CPT), which seeks to overthrow the Thai government, to the Thai Parliament which is usually legitimized as part of the government for brief periods between military coups. This paper focuses on the CPT, Parliament, and Thai labor movement by presenting in historical perspective the origins, nature, and influence of each as an oppositional force in Thai politics. Special attention is given to the role of these oppositional forces during and after the dramatic shifts in Thai politics precipitated by the student revolution of 1973, the military coup of 1976, the increased hostilities between China and Vietnam in 1979, and the abortive coup by the Thai "young turk" military faction in 1981.

## Specification of Terms and Purpose

In Thailand oppositional forces are viewed as groups of people mobilized to oppose and/or change the Thai government as represented by the monarchy, the bureaucratic elite, and the military. Opposition can take the form of parliamentary opposition, which has been legitimized for brief periods between military coups, or the more violent form, such as that of the Communist Party of Thailand. Between these two extremes there have been and are various groups organized to oppose the Thai government on specific issues and for particular periods of time. This article will not identify and explain the nature of all these groups, but rather will focus only on one of these broadbased "progressive" forces, namely the labor movement, which gained significant momentum after the student revolution of 1973.

Other significant oppositional groups, such as the separatist movement of the Malay Thai in the south, and the Meo tribes in the north, have been reasonably successful in

sustaining their movements for relatively long periods of time. However, these oppositional groups are regional and ethnic in origin and nature, and are seen as oppositional forces only in the broader strategy and context of the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT).

This paper deals only with those Thai oppositional forces represented by the CPT, workers, and Parliament and will explain briefly the origin, nature, and influence of each in Thai politics.

#### THE COMMUNIST PARTY of THAILAND (CPT)

The CPT can be traced as far back as 1925, when a Chinese Communist agent was sent from China to work with overseas Chinese in Thailand. When the Chinese Communists and the Kuomintang split in 1927, similar ideological disagreements developed among the overseas Chinese in Thailand. During this period, many Marxist-oriented university students fled to Thailand from China to escape arrest by Kuomintang officers. These young Communists set up a number of new organizations, the most important of which was the Association of Communist Youth of Siam. According to some sources, during the years 1928-1931 the Communist movement in Thailand also gained momentum from the Vietnamese Communist Party under Ho Chi Minh (La Couture, 1967).

After the 1932 Revolution in Thailand in which the absolute monarchy was overthrown in a bloodless coup organized by the military and Pridi Phanomyong, the Thai Communists began to expand their propaganda activity under the name of the Siam Communist Committee. This new organization by its support of

three Marxist-Leninist newspapers attracted the attention of military officials in the new Thai government. The Thai government began to crackdown on this and other budding Communist groups and continued to suppress them until Japan invaded China in 1935. During World War II indigenous Thai Communists became part of the broader anti-Japanese alliance and supported the Free Thai movement. It was also during this period that the Communist Party of Thailand was officially established.

The "Chinese Connection" with the Thai Communist Party continued with the emergence of the People's Republic of China. The PRC provided training of cadres for the CPT (i.e. approximately 700 between 1952-1969) and provided a haven for Thai exiles which included the former Prime Minister, Pridi. Moreover, almost all of the leaders of the CPT during this period remained Chinese-Thai. After 1962 the "Vietnamese Connection" with the CPT increased, and North Vietnam began "graduating" over 100 Thai and Thai-Lao a year from the Han Bin School near Hanoi (Gurtov, 1975: 14). This division of labor, in which the Chinese provided training for the leadership and the North Vietnamese training for low-level cadres and ordinary soldiers, persisted until 1976, when major differences between China and North Vietnam caused serious problems of unity for the CPT.

#### The CPT Shift in Strategy 1965-1973

After 1958 with the increasing American military role in Thailand and the rise of Field Marshal Sarit, the CPT created a proliferation of front organizations and fighting units. In 1968, the CPT sought to consolidate these various front organizations throughout the country under the Thailand Patriotic Front (TPF)

and in the following year on January 4, 1969, officially established The People's Liberation Army of Thailand (PLAT). While clandestine radio stations monitored from southern China and Communist controlled areas of Laos continued to denounce the Thai Government as "lackeys and running dogs of American Imperialism," during this period, 1968-1972, the CPT placed less emphasis on propaganda and a greater concentration on acts of violence against the Thai government. Table I indicates the extent of the increase in Communist activities during the period 1966-1972.<sup>2</sup>

TABLE I  
INCIDENCE OF INSURGENCY (1966-1972)

Nature of Incident	1966	1967	1968	1969	1970	1971	1972
Fighting	155	232	362	290	258	365	680
Attacks		5	5	5	37	36	57
Ambushes	10	21	48	57	53	106	111
Provocations	47	109	226	322	214	217	487
Psychological & Propaganda Warfare	112	133	73	47	50	88	47
Intimidation	170	154	213	201	332	420	411
Sabotage	11	7	12	7	11	12	57
Shooting	3	5	33	39	30	60	108
Forced Logistic Support	39	112	102	59	32	46	68
No. of Communists Killed	93	182	141	109	96	190	362
No. of Communists Arrested	1,440	1,260	613	226	326	713	1,132
No. of Communists Surrendered	1,458	693	554	384	191	834	899

The insurgents' success in the armed struggle for remote areas of Northern Thailand increased at an unprecedented rate and the "statistics of death" began to favor the Communist fighting units throughout the country. Moreover, the ratio of government officials killed to insurgents killed dropped from 1:2.8 in 1967 to 1:0.7 in 1972.

The sharp increase in the incidence of insurgency was combined with a CPT effort to intensify the armed struggle in support of the expansion of local fighting units throughout the country.

#### The CPT After the Student Revolution of October 1973

Incidents of insurgency and overall CPT strength increased at a dramatic rate in the aftermath of the student revolt of 1973. Communist insurgents under arms increased from an estimated 3,500 in 1973 to 5,000 in 1974, and to 8,000 in 1975. The CPT was particularly successful in increasing its strength in North and Northeastern Thailand. But significant increases were also recorded in the Central Plain and in the southern provinces bordering Burma and Malaysia. Moreover, the dramatic increase in number of insurgents was apparently combined with a new sophistication of weapons. By mid 1975, almost all insurgents were armed with the latest model of the AK-47 or M-16 rifles, while some units possessed mortars and B-40 rockets, similar to those used by the insurgents in Vietnam. The attacking "fighting units" of the insurgent forces also increased in size, and assaults which previously lasted for only a few minutes now began to last hours and even longer. Government casualties continued

to be more than 50% higher than insurgent losses in most of these battles. Similar attacks continued until 1979, when dramatic changes in the leadership and tactics of the Thai government caused the CPT to change its strategy.

#### 1976 -the CPT Shifts Strategy

The period 1973-1976 marked an unprecedented proliferation of protest groups. Farmers, workers, and students had for the first time an organizational base and a political environment of mobilization and protest which lasted longer than any previous period in Thai history. This extended period of liberalization came to an abrupt halt in October 1976 when a bloody battle involving radical students at Thammasat University gave rise to the extreme right wing government of Thanin. The subsequent suppression by Thanin of all outspoken members of the new "progressive" forces caused many to flee to the jungle seeking refuge. The CPT seized this opportunity to woo many of the outcast and disillusioned leaders of the various oppositional forces to join in the creation of a new front organization called the Committee for Coordinating Patriotic and Democratic Forces (CCPDF). The CPT was particularly successful in recruiting well-known activists among the farmers, workers, students, and the outlawed Socialist Party of Thailand to join the CCPDF.

Labor leader, Theraphun Chaidee, student activist leaders Thirayudh Bonmee and Seksan Prasertjul, and former MP from the Northeast, Thongpak Priangvat, gave the CCPDF credibility of being more broad-based than any other front organization created by the CPT in the past. These leaders were not obscure Thais in

"exile", but rather people who were played up in the media as "heroes" during the 1973-1976 period.

In contrast to previous CPT drives to establish fronts, the CCPDF included the creation of international links with Thais abroad and sympathetic foreigners. These new groups, formed primarily in the U.S. and Europe, demanded a return to democracy and an end to the repressive regime of Thanin (Marks, 1980:15).

The CPT success in these efforts was short-lived because of dramatic shifts in internal and external events. Internally, the Thai government shifted to the more moderate regime of Kriangsak and a call for elections which eventually took place in April of 1979. Externally, China invaded Vietnam over differences regarding Kampuchea. The latter event, and the subsequent hostilities between the Chinese and Vietnamese Communists, caused a kind of "schizophrenia" for the CPT with regard to origin, loyalties, and strategy.

Already faced with the enormous organizational problem of the new recruits of the broad-based CCPDF, many of whom were not Communist or even socialist, the CPT was now confronted with a choice between the Chinese vs. Vietnamese connection. This problem was further complicated by factions within the CPT's Thai-Lao Communist units of the Northeast, many of whom received their training from Hanoi. At first it seemed as if the Chinese faction would prevail, since the leadership of the CPT central committee was still dominated by Chinese trained cadres. However, the CCPDF Socialist and Communist members were split into Chinese-oriented and Vietnamese-oriented factions. When Vietnam invaded Kampuchea in 1978, the CCPDF initially took a "united

Thai" position against Vietnamese expansionism and even offered, through the VOPT (Voice of the People of Thailand ) to cooperate with the Thai government in order to resist the Vietnamese. But when China invaded Vietnam, the pro-Vietnamese factions among the CCPDF demanded an end to the anti-Vietnam propaganda. In 1979, the CPT, in a new effort to hold a neutral posture in the dispute between China and Vietnam, began to play down VOPT denunciations of Vietnam. The Chinese Communists responded by closing down the VOPT which was based in Southern China, and ended abruptly the most effective CPT radio broadcasts.

On the other hand, the pro-Peking faction of the CPT which had for ten years used border areas in Laos as a sanctuary and supply route in its skirmishes with the Thai counter insurgency, was ordered by the Vietnamese-backed Lao government to return to Thailand and to stay out of Laos. The matter became further complicated for the Chinese faction of the CPT in view of the increasingly close ties between the "imperialist" government of the U.S. and that of the PRC. After considerable soul searching and debate, the Chinese factions of the CPT and CCPDF declared that they were not pro-Peking and would act independently of mainland Chinese directives. The new pro-Hanoi factions of the CPT and CCPDF, likewise, claimed that indigenous Thai interests would take precedence over Vietnamese interests.

Regardless of the disclaimers offered by both factions, the old line pro-Chinese faction has continued to pursue a Maoist-oriented struggle in the rural regions, while the newer and relatively younger pro-Vietnamese factions drawn primarily from



the outcasts of the 1976 coup have pursued a new strategy of influence and sabotage in the urban areas of Thailand. The latter has been a strategy developed by the pro-Vietnamese faction ever since the CPT's unsuccessful efforts to disrupt the elections of April 1979. During the 1979 election campaigns, the government officially recognized Communist influence in rural areas and designated 931 "danger zones." Candidates insisting on campaigning in these areas were required to give a 48 hour advance notice to district officers (Bangkok World, 3/10, 1979:3). Table II provides a breakdown of the number of danger zones by region and province.<sup>3</sup>

TABLE II  
"DANGER ZONES"

Province	Region	Number of Dangerous Areas
Loei	NE	162
Nakhon Phanom	NE	123
Ubon Ratchathani	NE	52
Chiyaphum	NE	50
Roi Et	NE	43
Nakhon si Thammarat	S	42
Phattalung	S	42
Buri Ram	NE	40
Surin	NE	36
Khon Kaen	NE	33
Surat Thani	S	32
Mae Hong Son	N	29
Samut Prakan	C	27

Phetchabun	C	22
Phrayao	N	21
Ratchaburi	S	20
Nakhon Sawan	C	20
Uttaradit	N	19
Nan	N	18
Prachin Buri	E	16
Nong Khai	NE	15
Yaso Thon	NE	12

Table II Con't

Province	Region	Number of Dangerous Areas
Trang	S	9
Prachuap Khiri Khan	S	7
Kanchanaburi	W	6
Kampaeng Phet	C	6
Trat	E	6
Krabi	S	5
Nakorn Sawan	C	5
Ang Thong	C	5
Uthai Thani	C	5
Phang-nga	C	2
Suphan Buri		1

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N: North NE: Northeast S: South C: Central W: West

Even with the split between the pro-Hanoi and pro-Peking forces within the CPT, militarily the Thai People's Liberation Army in 1979 remained around 13,000 strong and, up to 1980,

seemed to be able to enlist new recruits in excess of losses. Incidence of insurgency increased dramatically from 1973-1979 but dropped off significantly in 1980-1981. Moreover, according to Thai government sources, the armed guerrillas decreased from 13,000 in 1979-80 to 10,000 in 1980-81. There is much speculation that this was due as much to the split in the CPT as it was to the new counter insurgency measures of the Thai government. Perceiving this new split in the CPT as a dual threat, the Thai government under Prem responded with an "open arms" program which by July 1981 was successful in the defection of nearly half of the estimated 4,000 dissidents who joined the CPT movement in 1976. Most of these defectors were radical elements of the labor unions (e.g. Theraphun), the farmers, students, and the Socialist Party of Thailand and included prominent figures in the pro-Hanoi faction of CCPDF such as Thirayudh and Seksan.<sup>4</sup>

The "open arms" program is only one aspect of a broadbased counter insurgency effort conceived by General Saiyud Kerdpol, which also includes the CPM (Civil-Police-Military) joint operations concept, various socio-economic measures directed at the poor, and an expansion of the self defense units in the villages. Throughout 1982, rural-based CPM counter insurgency operations increased with relative success. In early December, over 3,000 CPT members and sympathizers from operational zone 444 in Tak province, surrendered en masse (Bangkok Post, 12/2, 1982:1).

However, urban unrest, particularly in Bangkok, reemerged in 1980 and began to spread throughout 1982 among students and

workers due to a renewed attempt by old line labor leaders to mobilize workers.

#### THE WORKERS

Labor associations in Thailand began as early as 1897 with the establishment of the Association of Tramway Workers and other associations among workers in the transport, shipping, and rice milling industries (Pasuknirunt, 1959:23). However, few other union groups were established until the 1920's with the strongest unions being formed among self-employed workers such as motortricycle drivers and peddlers, rather than among wage earners. Several were also established in larger factories. But outside Bangkok even factory workers were organized in unions by region rather than by industry and their membership included varied occupations.

The Communist-oriented General Labor Union and Young Workers General Labor Union were established in 1924 and grew steadily in strength, until 1933 when the Thai government enacted anti-Communist measures which limited their activities and greatly reduced membership in these two unions. However, Communist-oriented unions were given a temporary reprieve during world War II, and the trade unions joined in establishing the Bangkok Federation of Trade Unions in 1944 and in 1947, merged with the Communist-dominated Central Labor Union to resist the Japanese. By May 1947, the Central Labor Union had 51 member unions. The strongest units were those organized among railroad and streetcar workers, bus drivers, and among workers on the waterfront, in rice mills and in sawmills.

However, after the war, the Thai government attempting to

counter the activities of the Central Labor Union either sponsored or financed other labor union organizations, such as the Thai National Trade Union Congress, The Free Workmen's Association of Thailand, and the United Thai Federation of Labor.

The Thai National Trade Union Congress which was composed of occupational and regional unions, adopted a constitution in 1951 which supported cooperation between labor and capital. The strongest unions in the TNTUC were the Union of Motor Tricycle Drivers, peddlers, and an organization of small shopkeepers. Congress membership included employees in government-oriented factories and extended to miners, rubber tappers, and plantation workers in the south, to tobacco and teak workers and some farm and plantation laborers in the north.

The Free Workmen's Association of Thailand (FWAT), registered with the government in 1953, was formed in order to draw Chinese workers away from the Communist-dominated Central Labor Union. The FWAT received considerable financial support from the Director General of the National Police Department and, like the TNTUC, was linked to the political ambitions of Prime Minister Phibun Songkram. According to some sources, Phibun having observed that all "democratic" countries had trade unions, decided to allow trade union movements to develop as part of a return to a constitution and elections. It was also at this time that the Phibun government enacted the Labor Law of 1956.

#### Labor Law of 1956

For a society which was principally agrarian based this statute was idealistic in many respects. However, for an

economically developing nation, the three major divisions - labor protection measures, procedure for establishing a union or a federation, and rules governing industrial relations - were practical. Provisions under the protective measures division included prohibition of women under 18 years of age engaging in certain types of work, a minimum age for child labor of 12 years of age, equal pay for equal work regardless of sex, time and one half for overtime, and a maximum forty-eight hour week (which was in accordance with International Labor Organization standards in effect at the time).

However, the liberal provisions of the law did not reflect the more conservative actions taken by the government. As the trade unions developed, trade unions in Communist countries quite naturally invited many labor leaders to visit their countries. Many of the leaders responded to the invitation and went to Moscow and Peking, only to be thrown in jail upon their return to Thailand. These actions on the part of the Phibun government only increased union demands for broader, more general "workers' rights".

Basically, there were two substantial deficiencies in the Labor Law. First, there was no provision for a minimum wage. Second, there was no effective method of mediating employer/employee disagreements. Disputes between employers and employees continued to be settled through intervention by local administrators, police, central government ministries, or direct action by the Prime Minister. Ironically, even with these deficiencies, the Labor Act of 1956 was found to be too liberal by the military junta in power at the time and it was

subsequently abrogated in October 1958, by order of Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat. Sarit led a successful coup against the Phibun government, banned the trade union movement completely, and arrested most of its leaders.

Elimination of the Labor Law of 1956 resulted in the termination of all labor organizations. Authority for formulation of protective labor legislation was transferred to the Minister of Interior who was further charged with the responsibility for settlement of labor disputes and inspection of the labor establishments (Wit, 1969:33). Under Sarit's rule, any striker could be jailed and work stoppages due to strikes and lockout were minimal until 1969 (Yearbook of Labor Statistics, 1970:202-3).

Although trade unions were effectively banned during Sarit's administration, there were some workers' strikes. In 1962, there were seven very short strikes in which demands were limited to better wages, facilities and conditions. During the six years of Sarit's rule the longest strike involved workers at the Firestone Tire Company, which lasted two months. Many of the leaders of this strike were jailed for terms ranging from 6 to 8 years. This was in sharp contrast to the over one hundred strikes that occurred in the aftermath of the Student Revolution of 1973, in which none of the leaders were jailed, and most of the workers' demands were met.

#### Thanom and the Labor Law of 1971

Thanom, who replaced Sarit as Prime Minister, promulgated a new labor law in April of 1971, when the country was once again

experimenting with democratic institutions after the elections of 1969. The Labor Law of 1971 allowed workers to form Employees' Associations. It was surmised at the time that Thanom wanted to build support from the labor movement once legalized, to meet the eventuality of elections in the future. It was thought that Thanom would win over worker votes through these associations. However, workers were rather suspicious at this sudden change of attitude on the administration's part and only three Employee Associations were registered at first.

Six months after this labor law was passed, pending labor disputes were once again temporarily "solved" by direct government action. In November 1971, Thanom decided to put the country under martial law and rule by executive decree. It was not surprising, therefore, that the most articulate labor leaders were of the opinion that periodic government supported labor laws were not the solution to the workers' problems. Instead of laws without adequate implementation, some labor leaders felt that in-country training for workers was the most important need to spread and maintain a labor movement.

#### Worker Training Programs

Snan, labor leader of the Brotherhood of Asian Trade Union (BATU), was instrumental in the organizing of in-country training programs which included over 400 workers from the railroads, and the tobacco and textile industries.

Included in these training programs was an important educational component to increase the political awareness of the workers, and help sustain the momentum of the movement. Also discussed in these sessions were strategies of collective



bargaining, including strikes, walkouts, and the viability of the "students-workers alliance."

Just prior to the October 1973 uprising, various student leaders (e.g. Sekan, etc.) had been in contact with labor leaders and some students even assisted in the development of the political education aspect of the worker training programs. Also during this time, it was the students who helped warn various worker movements that the police were planning a complete crackdown on the political activities of the workers. The Special Branch of the Police Investigation (CID) in Bangkok had already begun monitoring the training activities. As one labor leader stated in an interview in 1974, "They (the police) used to follow us to our training sessions and would be waiting for us outside when we finished."

#### Students' Role in the Worker Movement

Students were a great help to the workers' cause after 1971. But in a 1974 interview, labor leader Snan recalled of the October 1973 revolt "... It was not all students; whatever they may say, the students did not drive the buses at the time of the demonstrations and confrontations - workers did!"

The successful efforts of the collaboration between the students and workers became particularly evident about eight months after the October revolt of 1973. During the months of May and June 1974, Bangkok witnessed a series of student-supported strikes. In mid-May, Thailand witnessed its first strike by public school teachers. One teacher cut his wrist while addressing a crowd of protesting teachers demanding the

resignation of Education Minister Abhai (Nation, 5/19, 1974:12). Three days later Abhai resigned and teacher demands were met. On May 23rd, three hundred Bang Kae Transportation Company bus conductors went on a five hour strike demanding a pay raise and a paid holiday. One bus conductor was clubbed and stabbed to death while trying to get the conductors to return to work. Eventually the bus company yielded to the demands of the strikes. Thereafter, a small group of bus conductors staged a brief strike stranding hundreds of passengers. Within hours the transportation company yielded to the demands of the strikes.

About one week later (June 4, 1974), garbage collectors went on strike leaving 200 garbage trucks standing idle. Workers' demands included a one year retroactive wage increase, a shift to a permanent public payroll to replace the then day to day basis of payment, and three months compensation for the high cost of living (Bangkok Post, 6/5, 1974:1).

These strikes were only a slight indication of what was fast becoming a formidable student-worker movement. The organizational ability and political strategy of this new political force were particularly evident in the student-supported textile worker strike.

#### Textile Worker Strike

During the first week of June 1974, three Thai student groups, the National Student Centre of Thailand (NSCT), People for Democracy Group (PDG), and Thai Federation of Independent Students of Thailand (FIST), began assisting textile workers in their slowdown protest against mill owners. Textile manufacturers had requested government assistance in lowering the tax for raw

materials to compensate for the production slowdown. When the Thai government rejected the proposal for the tax cut, the textile mill owners then laid off 25% of the work force. Labor leaders and student groups rallied to the workers' cause and organized 3,000 mill workers to force the reinstatement of the laid-off textile workers. The workers went in bus loads to the industrial Phra Pradaeng area where major textile mills are located in an attempt to rally the support of some 10,000 workers there. The protesting workers had six demands, among them reinstatement of workers laid off jobs, revision of the labor law, and changing temporary workers to permanent status.

When the workers' demands were not responded to by the Minister of Labor, the protesters seized the Labor Department compound for an all-night vigil. Student leaders from Ramkhamhaeng University proudly stated to the press that "we are fighting not only for the textile workers, but for the benefit and security of workers throughout the country" (Bangkok Post, 6/10, 1974:1). By June 10th most of the workers' demands were met in principle by the employers.

However, there was still no agreement on a minimum wage increase, changes in compensation clauses in the Labor Law, and retroactive pay for striking workers.

The momentum of the movement increased at a pace reminiscent of the October Revolt, as Thailand's 400,000 strong organized labor force, represented by the 34 workers' associations decided to unite behind the strikes. Student groups also stepped up the pressures as student leaders and other activists continued their

speeches denouncing the "blood-sucking foreign capitalist" (Bangkok Post, 6/12, 1974:2).

In the meantime, striking workers were given a boost when workers from the railway, plastic producing factories and glass producing factories joined the protest. An effigy representing "Japanese Capitalist" was hung from a wooden pole during the protest at the Pramaine Ground. After six days of labor unrest, the government offered the striking workers an employment plan which among other things provided for unprecedented job security and a compromise minimum wage increase.

By all indications it became obvious that the workers, supported by the students, had won another victory. Unprecedented labor organization and tactics had produced unprecedented concessions on the part of the government and industry. Government and industry leaders soon experienced the implications of this victory for labor in Thailand, as was witnessed by a series of pro-labor legislation enacted in the two weeks following the strike.

The series of strikes and government response ushered in an unprecedented attitude toward change on the part of the many common Thai laborers. Though the average Thai worker was still basically culture-bound in the sense that his lowly position was perceived as his "karma" (destiny) for this life, many Thai laborers became aware of the advantages of direct confrontation as a means of change. Workers apparently were no longer completely intimidated by a tradition which demanded strict adherence to one's "naa tii" (duty) in occupational status and place in society vis-a-vis the "phuu yai" (superiors). In a

significant departure from previous labor movements in Thailand, workers demanded rights and privileges in addition to financial benefits. This attitude on the part of a significant number of the "phuu noi" (common laborers) in Bangkok, contagiously spread to other laborers in Bangkok and the provinces.

A good illustration of the example set by the textile worker strike is the case of the Hotel Workers union which emerged as a new and significant force in the Thai labor movement. Theraphun Chaidee, a former student of Thammasat University, became a dynamic and charismatic leader of the Hotel Workers Union which by June 1975, claimed over 5,000 members in Bangkok.

Labor leaders and many of their followers also sought representation through promotion of their own candidates in the general elections of 1975 and 1976. Protest marches and demonstrations, which became a prevailing mode of political participation during this period (1974-1976), were adopted by even the most unlikely civil service employees. Several incidents involving rank and file policemen and soldiers witnessed the use of slow-downs, strikes, and protest demonstrations. One such demonstration by soldiers in 1975 culminated in the looting and vandalizing of Prime Minister Kukrit Pramoj's private residence.

#### Problems and Limitations of Labor Unions Development

While the textile workers strike was a landmark in the Thai labor movement and subsequent union activity provided an impetus to labor union development, serious problems involving continuity and organization continued to plague the labor movement. Although the prevailing political environment was conducive to labor union

activity, there seemed to be, as one labor leader remarked, "more heat than light". Union gains were often paper promises without any agency to implement the newly enacted laws. Almost all major labor disputes were settled through government intervention at the Cabinet level. The Legislature, the Courts, and Ministries of Labor and Industry, were rarely involved in the process of mediation and arbitration. The labor unions were able to obtain a minimum wage law, but were not able to legitimize the process of collective bargaining with management. This was due as much to the failure of labor unions to organize themselves internally as it was due to the resistance of management to officially recognize the unions as representative of their employees. Intermediate union officials between the union president and the employees such as shop stewards, or their equivalent, were almost non-existent.

Most unions did not provide the customary manual of rules, regulations, or procedures to its members but rather distributed occasional pamphlets and leaflets describing a particular issue during a strike. Through such pamphlets, union leaders sought to make employees aware of their exploitation by management and that employees were in a position to get higher wages if they went on strike. Union membership was not required nor was its advantages completely understood by workers. This became evident after the author interviewed over 200 striking workers from Sony and other factories during the summer of 1975.

Another problem facing the labor movement, generic to most social movements, was the problem of cooperation among the various unions. The unity of purpose of the various labor unions and labor leaders which marked the success of the textile worke

strike unfortunately followed the process of disintegration that faced the NSCT several months after the successful student Revolt of October 1973. Power struggles for leadership positions within unions, as well as the lack of cooperation of leaders between unions, detracted from efforts on the part of some union leaders to achieve unity. Disputes between labor leaders ranged from petty personality conflicts to ideological differences involving the role of a labor movement. Ideological differences among labor leaders usually involved the different approaches to achieve workers' gains, and the Russian vs. the American experience was often cited as a model for development of the labor movement.

The gains of the Thai labor movement and the attempts at union organizational development came to an abrupt halt in the aftermath of the government's bloody battle with students at Thammasat University in October 1976. Worker training ses and strikes were outlawed, and all forms of union activity became suspect by the new right wing regime, which sought to attract new investments by appeasing the business sector. Previous labor legislation was superseded by the new regime's right to rule by "executive decree" which included the extended use of "Article

2 This article was used to arrest and "detain" several thousand student, worker, and farmer leaders in the aftermath of the bloody coup of 1976. Many worker leaders went underground, with some (e.g. Theraphun Chaidee) even joining the new front organizations created by the CPT.

#### Labor Reform Bill of 1978

In preparation for a return to constitutional rule and



elections, and after a series of strikes in 1978, the government established the National Labor Development Advisory Board which was fashioned after the U.S. National Labor Relations Board. The new Thai National Legislative Assembly (NLA), the members of whom were appointed by the government, passed a 62 article bill which removed labor disputes from the civil and criminal courts, and established a separate labor court to settle disputes. The new labor court was to have 3 judges; one selected by the employer, one by the employee or his representative, and one selected by the government. This bill also provided for the division of the various labor courts into three geographic jurisdictions, a Central Court for Bangkok and surrounding provinces, Regional Courts for the North, South, Northeast, etc., and Provincial Courts to hear cases in the various outlying provinces.

In response to the liberal labor legislation, unions emerged once again and began grouping together in various national labor federations. The four main groups of unions were The National Council of Thai Labor (NCTL) which claimed about 60 member unions, Labor Congress of Thailand (LCT) with around 44 member unions, The National Federation of Workers Congress (NFWC) with 30 members unions, and the Non-aligned Unions (NA) which numbered about 15 at the end of 1978.

Previously established unions resurfaced and new unions emerged, some under leaders who had been either arrested or detained by the Thanin government. For example, the Metropolitan Water Works Authority (MWWA) was now headed by Arom Pongpa-ngan, a former detainee in the October 6, 1976 military takeover. By September 1979, 60 unions including the MWWA had joined the Labor



Congress of Thailand (LCT) under the leadership of Paisarn Tawatchainand, a former worker leader. Snan, former worker-leader during and after the October 1973 revolt, became secretary-general of the newly formed NCTL, which also increased its member unions by the end of 1979.

As part of the new Labor Reform Bill, the government established a Labor Relations Committee which included representatives of the LCT, NFWC, and the NCTL. All members of the Committee, labor and management, were selected by the Minister of Interior. The selection process became a problem for the government. Immediately after the formation of the Committee, Paisarn, President of the LCT, and representatives of Non-aligned Unions staged a rally to protest the formation of the LRC and the process of selection. The dispute was resolved with Paisarn now included as a member of the Committee.

The National Labor Development Advisory Committee (NLDAC) was also established during this period to assist in labor-management disputes and advise on major labor issues. However, members of this Committee were considered leftist-oriented by government officials and the role of the NLDAC was minimal.

Workers in various industries began to re-emerge with an improved organizational base. For example, the militant protests of hotel workers of the 1973-1976 era were replaced by the organization of the first Hotel Labor Federation in Thailand. The new HLF organized all workers at Narai, President, Hyatt Rama, and Amarin Hotels.

In January 1979, the city's public transportation was

paralyzed when most of the 22,000 workers of the Bangkok Mass Transit Authority (BMTA) went on strike to protest the government's delay in adjustment of their wages. General Serm ordered the workers back to work "or else" (Nation, 1/30, 1979:1) and also met with government officials of the BMTA and Labor Department in an attempt to resolve the conflict. In the meantime, Secretary-General of the National Congress of Thai Labor (NCTL), Snan, claimed that the one day strike by bus drivers was incited by "malicious persons attempting to upset the upcoming elections" (Nation, 1/31, 1979: 1). Snan claimed that right wing elements, and not the NCTL or any other labor organization, were behind the strike in an attempt to convince Kriangsak that the elections scheduled for April should not be held due to labor unrest (Nation, 1/31, 1979: 1).

In February 1979, when workers of the foreign-owned Phranakorn Milk Industry staged a prolonged "slow down" over a dispute concerning fringe benefits, management dismissed 101 of the 125 employees. An earlier dispute had gone to the Labor Relations Committee which handed down a decision in January that supported management's position.

The establishment of the Labor Relations Committee and the rest of the dispute resolution apparatus set up as a result of the 1978 reforms were far-reaching on paper, but unfortunately never quite implemented as planned. The lower levels of the dispute resolution system, the 3 levels of labor courts, were still not set up to hear cases by the end of 1979. Hence, newly formed unions remained in constant conflict with management and normally resorted to slow downs, strikes, and protest marches.

In July 1979, the first major labor rally since martial law drew 10,000 persons including representatives of over 100 unions at Sunam Luang, a popular protest site in Bangkok. Throughout 1979, union growth and support in the private and public sectors gained momentum and "wildcat" strikes once again became the main weapon for unions in pressing for their demands and concessions. In the fall of 1979, strikes by government workers of the State Railway of Thailand (SRT), Telephone Organization of Thailand (TOT), and Metropolitan Water Works Authority (MWWA) were eventually joined by 11 other government worker labor organizations in demanding higher wages.

In the private sector, over 6,000 longshoremen walked off their jobs in a wage dispute. The strike paralyzed the movement of cargo of 32 shipping firms for two days at an estimated cost of 150 million baht. In the end, management conceded to worker demands of a 15 baht per day raise. In January 1980, a 10-day walkout by the government owned Thai Tobacco Monopoly (TTM) caused Prime Minister Kriangsak to cancel a visit to West Germany.

Throughout 1980, strikes among government and private sector workers continued. Slow downs and work stoppages in critical industries of transportation and energy were particularly disruptive. In February 1981, citywide deliveries of cooking gas and oil supplies were halted when the Summit oil workers walked off their jobs over a wage dispute.

By the end of 1981 the labor movement which played a very active role in Thai politics after 1973, once again began to

increase its influence. Two major differences were the absence of student participants in worker strikes and union leadership's focus on worker-related issues rather than the broader social and ideological issues which dominated labor activity from 1973-1976. This new focus was due in part to the government's lifting of the controversial strike ban, and the creation of improved methods of dispute resolution through the Labor Reform Bills of 1979. The ultimate success of the new collective bargaining arrangements may well depend upon economic progress in the private sector and the viability of the Thai Parliament as a check on the military dominance of the Thai government.

#### THE THAI PARLIAMENT AS AN OPPOSITIONAL FORCE

The periodic creation of political parties and national elections provide some basis for conventional types of political participation for the Thai. However, participation in elections, except for a very small group of the voting Thai population, has been characteristically ceremonial in nature. This is especially true of the campaigning and elections which take place in the provinces. Constitutionalism in Thailand, as elsewhere in transitional Southeast Asia, has served the country's political development by being a main element in the justification of political power (Phillips, 1958: 37). It has also been a symbol of the process of admitting broader groups into political processes while allowing the ruling bureaucratic and royal elite to maintain their traditional status (Lipset, 1958: 44).

Constitutions, although manipulated and remade to serve the regime in power, have created several basic institutions that

continue to have a certain vitality. The non-political king as a point of stability, the cabinet and national assembly are now, for the most part, established aspects of the Thai political system. National elections have been the most significant aspect of the development of constitutionalism and are usually carried out to meet specific constitutional provisions for the various national assemblies. The elections in April 1979 were the 15th in an irregular string of national elections together with various constitutions extending back to 1932.

The direct purpose of every election so far has been to return candidates to a national representative assembly. However, legislative prerogatives are carefully limited, and political discussions have had little relationship to political decision-making. Participants in the House of Representative have little realistic expectation of influencing events since elected representatives are balanced by appointed Senators presumably loyal to the governing group.

This persistent presence of appointed members in every assembly since the first one in 1933, has characterized Thailand's political development as a "tutelary democracy" (Stauffer, 1967: 3-12). The influence of an absolute, paternalistic government and autocratic bureaucracy cannot be underestimated, and has usually been reflected in the activities of the National Assembly, even though elected representatives did force three no-confidence votes upon the government from 1932-1939. This form of political action was successfully limited by the constitution of 1968, which prevented the House from calling a no-confidence vote at all. However, the 1974 constitution

reinstated this power to the House of Representatives. By 1970, Thai political parties were still in their beginning stages of development and were more like political clubs or parties of "individual representation" (Neumann, 1956: 404). Because of intervening periods of autocratic repression, political parties have not been active between elections, and only one, the Democrat Party, has maintained any continuity since its founding in 1946.

It should be noted that the Social Action Party (SAP) established in 1974 and headed by Kukrit Pramoj, and the Thai Citizens Party created in 1978 and headed by Samak Sundaravej, have made significant gains at the expense of the Democrat Party. Both Kukrit and Samak were once leaders in the Democrat Party and "broke away" to form their own political parties.

Most parties are still the personal followings of individual leaders, or fronts for the autocratic cliques who control political power, and tend not to be ideologically oriented. Political interest and the political process are still a combination of many loosely related functions within Thai society. The representation of specific opinions and aggregation of these opinions into sufficiently strong public demand for government action are concentrated within communal, personal, and social relationships.

Opposition groups face a pervasive belief by those in power that their independence will result in factionalism and separatism. In the past, opposition politicians' high priced demands for cooperation with the government contributed to the

charge of corruption and served to justify the 1957-1968, and 1971, coup d'états. The factionalism displayed during previous brief periods of political activity has continued to the present. The 1968 constitution provided less opportunity for democratic opposition to the government than previous versions, and the various restrictions became one of the centers of controversy between the ruling group and elected representatives, and helped precipitate the coup of 1971.

The 1975 and 1976 elections, based on the relatively liberal constitution of 1974, provided the first coalition of existing opposition parties to take charge of the government. However, the civilian governments of both Seni Pramoj in 1975 and Kukrit in 1976 were short lived and martial law replaced the fragile parliamentary governments after the October 1976 coup. The military has continued to resort to the coup when its interests are perceived to be threatened by any form of opposition, even in the absence of ideological contention in the Parliament.

The following analysis of the 1969 and subsequent elections up to the last election in 1979, and the role of oppositional parties in the government formed after each election must be placed within the perspective of Thai politics which is dominated by military politics.

#### 1969 Election

In 1969, as in 1975, there was a confusing array of candidates, including party members who attacked the other government candidates, independents who supported the government, and others who fit neither pro-government nor opposition groups. Voters faced a difficult choice even while it heightened their



interest in the elections.

The results of the 1969 elections established in the House of Representatives at least two opposition political groups: those who were elected as non-government candidates, about 72, and the large group of 72 independent politicians who could be expected to support or object to various government policies. The government party won about 35 percent of the seats, 75 out of 219 total. If the Assembly was to function, the ruling group had to come to terms with one or both groups to gain support. The non-government political parties divided into two tentative positions. The Democrat Party with 57 members had served as both government and opposition, but campaigned in 1969 as a loyal opposition party. It had gained solid support in Bangkok where the party won all 21 available seats, and also won most of the seats in the Northern provinces and a reasonable share in the Northeast and South. The party members used good organization, campaigned on their policies rather than as individual candidates, and pledged to try to amend the constitution to make it more democratic. Thus, they presented a conservative opposition, reasonably widely known and respected.

Close to the policy position of the Democrat Party was the Democratic Front Party which elected seven members, the third largest political party. It claimed to possess a large political party membership but nominated only 54 candidates. In parliamentary maneuvering after the election, the leader shifted his alignment away from the conservative Democrat Party towards more extreme splinter parties and interested independents. This



group included about 30, with approximately 50 percent from the smallest parties and the rest from the independent House members.

In 1969, opposition parties had criticized the constitution and during the campaign had promised to attempt its amendment. With this purpose in mind, the Prime Minister was questioned during the opening parliamentary debate on government policy. Visibly controlling his anger, Thanom stated that it would not be amended since it was presented by His Majesty to the people (Bangkok Post, 3/25, 1969: 1). In later comments to the press, oppositions elaborated on their criticism that the government is not of the people until the elected representatives are allowed to decide on its legitimacy through a vote of confidence or no confidence (Bangkok Post, 3/28, 1969: 1).

Maneuvers among the extreme opposition aimed at unifying a position on a constitutional amendment proposal and other "unreasonable demands" by House members eventually led to the 1971 coup which settled the constitutional issue by declaring martial law and dissolving the Parliament.

#### The 1975 Election

The elections which took place in January 1975, were to be a significant departure from all previous attempts at parliamentary democracy in Thailand in that they were precipitated by a student-led civilian revolt. However, in the midst of the student and labor movements and increasing domestic trends toward socialism, it was the Phuu Ying Yai, "old important people", that resumed control of the government. There was generally a more liberal trend with a plurality victory for the old "loyal opposition" (Democrat Party), and a surprising number of seats

(15) for the new (SPT) Socialist Party of Thailand. However, the military and industrialists re-emerged with significant influence in the new government, as candidates associated with the old UTPP (United Thai People's Party), which had been previously led by the deposed Prime Minister Thanom Kittikachorn, won over 100 seats under the banner of new party names. The four major parties backed by former UTPP members included the Social Justice Party which won 45 seats, Chart Thai with 28 seats, and the Social Agrarian and Social Nationalist parties, which won 19 and 16 seats respectively.

The problem of "independents" who had played a significant role in the 1969 elections and previous elections was solved by the 1974 constitution which banned independent candidacies. This new constitutional provision - and the absence of a government party - helped to generate the emergence of over 40 political parties, 21 of which won seats in the Parliament. Moreover, the plethora of political parties produced Thailand's first coalition government, the viability of which became crucial to the success of the new Thai experiment with democracy.

In 1969, the third largest party had just seven members elected to Parliament, while the 1975 elections resulted in nine parties with at least ten seats and seven parties with fifteen or more seats. Another significant difference was the trend toward socialism, with socialist parties winning over 30 seats in the new Parliament. Even the Democrat Party, which won a plurality of 72 seats, advocated "mild-socialism" as the path to solve Thailand's economic crisis.

The multitude of parties added confusion to the election process, even for the urban Thai in Bangkok. Although all 42 parties did not contest seats in all the provinces, the voter was confronted by more candidates and parties than ever before. In Ubon Province, for example, 95 candidates representing over 20 different parties ran for the nine available seats.

While there were many new candidates, familiar faces associated with the military and industry still appealed to voters in the provinces. Overall, about 50% of those candidates elected had been closely associated with the old military establishment, while around 20% had won seats in previous elections under the former military party banner.

Seni Pramoj, leader of the Democrat Party and new Prime Minister, was burdened with the responsibility of forming a government. As Seni struggled with the terms of alliances with the leaders of loosely structured parties, the old UTPP groups began forming a cohesive voting block. Even though the Democrat Party won the most seats (see Table III) (Bangkok Post, 1/28, 1975:1) and had the apparent support of the liberal New Force Party and the leftist Socialist Party of Thailand and the United Socialist Front, it was the old UTPP groups which emerged as the dominant force in the new Parliament.

After the new National Assembly convened for the first time to elect the Speaker and Deputy Speaker, it became apparent that the "Allied Parties" (made up of several smaller parties) the Chart Thai, the Social Justice, Social Agrarian, and the Social Nationalist, were in control of the Parliament.

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In attempting to seek a compromise within the House of

Representatives, Seni was at first pressured by his leftist supporters to make a policy commitment of U.S. withdrawal from Thailand. The first policy statement to the public was that withdrawal would take place "as soon as possible". The next day, after much alarm expressed by supporters of the U.S. defense programs, this statement was changed to "withdrawal in 18 months time". When reporters pressed Seni for an explanation of the sudden policy change, none was given. Thereafter, when Seni presented his government's policy package to the Parliament, a "no-confidence" vote was requested by the opposition. The result was a 151 - 111 verdict which ended the brief tenure of the left-of-center coalition government. It is noteworthy that the heated debate which took place just before the crucial vote of "no-confidence" centered around Seni's pledge, in his policy manifesto, that all foreign troops would be withdrawn in 18 months.

There was considerable apprehension on the part of many Thai in Bangkok that the fall of Seni's government would provide an opportunity for the military to stage a coup. However, the members of the House of Representatives in an orderly manner, elected M. P. Kukrit Pramoj, leader of the Kit Sakom (Social Action), as Prime Minister to head the new government.

There was something very characteristically Thai in making this selection. Kukrit, cousin of the King and Seni's "nong chai" (younger brother), seemed to be a wise and "safe" choice. Though an outspoken critic of the military government for many years, Kukrit was also very critical of socialist-oriented policies. He

had already effectively served as Speaker of the House under Sanya's temporary government. As Speaker he played a significant role in the drafting of the new constitution and the rules which guided the new Parliament. As leader of an aristocratic party supported primarily by bankers, Kukrit posed no serious threat to those of the upper and middle-class who support a capitalistic economy. As leader of the Social Action Party which secured only 18 seats in the election, he posed no real threat to the military backed parties. It was no surprise when the military backed parties joined in a coalition with the Social Action Party. Kukrit, unlike Seni, was not committed to a socialistic program of reforms, and according to one report in a Thai newspaper, "even the CIA would not object to Kukrit as Prime Minister" (Ban Muang, 5/21, 1974: 2). Although Kukrit's coalition government had to meet the challenge of the new Communist governments in Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam, as well as the internal problems of growing violence between new groups of militant rightist and leftist, he somehow managed to survive as Prime Minister until he was pressured to resign in early 1976. This prompted another election in April 1976.

#### The 1976 Election

During the campaign, violence, which was primarily directed against socialist-oriented parties and candidates by various right-wing groups, (e.g. NAVAPON, Red Gaurs, etc.) did have an effect on the election results. Left-wing parties such as the SPT, United Socialist Front, and the New Force, which together had captured 37 seats in 1975, won only 7 seats in 1976. Some parties on the right such as the Chart Thai doubled their 1975

seat total (28 to 56). This gain was mainly at the expense of their right-wing rivals, the Social Justice Party, whose seat total decreased from 45 to 28 and the Social Nationalist Party which went from 16 seats in 1975 to 8 in 1976. Kukrit's own party increased its seat total from 18 in 1975 to 45 in 1976, but Kukrit lost his bid for a seat and any chance to lead the new coalition government. The biggest winner of 1976 was the Democrat Party which captured a surprising 115 seats in the new Parliament, 43 more than the 72 they had won in 1975. The Democrat's large plurality was the result of a sweep of the 28 seats in Bangkok and strong support in the North, South and Northeast regions of the country. The Democrat Party captured seats in traditional socialist strongholds in the Northeast as well as right-wing party strongholds in the North and South.

The campaign violence perpetuated largely by the right, and the flood of Laotian, Cambodian, and Vietnamese refugees who carried lurid stories of communist rule to the villages and towns of Northeastern Thailand, were apparently important factors in the Democrat's victory. Voters seemed inclined to reject both extremes and opt for a return to the middle path.

#### Coalition Government Re-visited

The overall election results meant Thailand would have its second coalition government in scarcely more than a year. While the Democrat Party had won a convincing plurality of the vote, its 115 seat total was still 25 short of the majority needed to form a government. Thus the game of negotiations and compromise began once again, as various scenarios on possible groups of

parties were proposed.

The general feeling among most political observers was that the resulting coalition might be unstable, but would be "more stable" than the preceding Kukrit coalition government, if for no other reason than the fact that fewer parties (4) had any real bargaining power. It was generally surmised at the time that unless parties holding less than 10 seats in the new Parliament formed an effective coalition, three of the four major parties (i.e. Democrat, Chart Thai, Social Justice, and Social Action) would most likely form a solid majority. However, the "Under Ten" coalition drive was a failure, and most of the candidates of these parties were forced to join in a loosely organized opposition with Kukrit's Social Action Party.

After a week of negotiations, Seni Pramoj, leader of the Democrat Party, formed a coalition government with the Chart Thai (55 seats), the Social Justice Party (28 seats), and the Social Nationalist (8 seats), which represented a solid 206 of the 279 seats in the parliament.

#### The Issue of U.S. Troops

Interestingly enough, the status of U.S. troops, which was a factor in the demise of Seni's feeble coalition government in 1975, again became the major source of controversy surrounding Seni's 1976 coalition government. There was much speculation that Seni would reverse the order handed down by the previous government of Kukrit, which demanded that all American troops except 270 advisers leave Thailand by July 20, 1976. Prior to the 1976 elections, military leaders and various right-wing groups had demonstrated in support of a policy which kept at least 4,000



U.S. troops in Thailand, while students and various left-wing groups held a series of anti-American protests to get all U.S. troops out of the country. Some expected that Seni would at least modify the policy on U.S. troop withdrawals to approach a compromise between the forces on the right, some of which were part of his new coalition government, and those on the left. Instead, Seni held firm to the policy put forth by younger brother Kukrit. Announcing his official decision in a formal address to the public, Seni emphasized that "the total withdrawal of American forces will be the right thing and a good thing in the furthering of peace in Southeast Asia". Moreover, Seni stated that removal of U.S. troops was in keeping "with the trend of the times," and this action did not necessarily mean that other powers would fill the vacuum created by the U.S. withdrawals (Bangkok Post, 4/15, 1976: 1).

When Kukrit was asked to comment on Seni's surprising policy statement, as well as his own poor showing in the elections, the ever-witty former Prime Minister simply stated that he "was not surprised" by Seni's statement, nor was he worried by his own election defeat because "after all, it is all in the family" (Bangkok Post, 4/16, 1976: 3).

The Pramoj family arrangement notwithstanding, the Seni coalition government still faced critical social and economic problems which were left unresolved by the previous Kukrit government. Inevitably, in October 1976, the military again resorted to the coup and martial law, and halted the demonstrations, riots, bombings, assassinations, and strikes

which continued virtually unabated throughout Kukrit's tenure as Prime Minister and culminated in the bloody battle between government and students at Thammasat University.

#### The 1979 Election

After nearly three years of martial law, Thailand continued its experiment with democracy and elected 301 candidates to the new Parliament in April. As expected, Kriangsak Chamanand was retained as Prime Minister and head of the new Thai government, one month later. Kriangsak's success was the result of the solid support of the appointed Senators comprising the upper-house of the Thai Parliament. Although only 89 of the 301 popularly elected members of the House of Representatives supported Kriangsak, he was not required to share power in a coalition government as was the case in Thailand's two previous elections in 1975 and 1976. This was largely due to the special provisions of Thailand's 10th constitution, which was passed during martial law by the National Legislative Assembly and signed by the King in December, 1978.

Many provisions of Thailand's 10th constitution were "new" only in the sense that they were absent from the relatively liberal previous constitution of 1974. Key provisions of the 1978 constitution were actually retrieved from the 1968 constitution which was also drafted during the period of martial law under Thanom. While some Thai officials felt that the status quo oriented constitution was necessary to insure a stable government, opposition political party leaders were particularly dismayed by the constitutional provision which gave the Prime Minister the power to appoint, with the King's approval, all 225

Senators to the bicameral upper house of Parliament.

The 1979 election was characterized by low voter turnout, due to the overall lack of enthusiasm generated for the election in general. Although the customary crowds would gather at the usual places to hear speakers from the various parties, there was a conspicuous absence of university students.

Students had assumed a low profile ever since October, 1976, when the bloody battle with the police and right wing groups at Thammasat University precipitated the military coup which eventually brought Kriangsak to power. The combination of the relatively non-involved Thai middle class and apathetic students and intellectuals opened the door to the common poorer Thai ("phuu noi") in Bangkok.

As election day approached, these "phuu noi" began attending rallies in greater numbers than ever. While election rallies of all parties had always been an inexpensive source of entertainment for many of the "phuu noi" of Bangkok, they were always followed by a particular pattern of voting that resulted in Thailand's oldest and most respected opposition political party, the Democrats, winning most or all of the seats in the capital city. This was the case in all three previous elections, and a similar pattern was predicted by all the "experts" during the campaign.

However, Samak, who broke away from the Democrat Party to start his own Thai Citizens Party, captured the imagination and votes of the "phuu noi". Through astute oratory and techniques of mass appeal, he captivated the huge crowds at his rallies with a

verbal barrage against Kriangsak, the Democrat Party, and the Social Action Party. The result was a surprising landslide victory for Samak and 28 other Thai Citizens Party members in Bangkok. Thanat Khoman was the only member of the Democrat Party who managed to win a seat in Bangkok. The other two seats went to Kukrit and Dr. Kasem, both leaders of the Social Action Party. Several virtual unknowns of the new Thai Citizens Party swept aside many prominent politicians and former government officials. The losers in Bangkok included Boonying, leader of the Seri Tham Party; Bhichai Rattakul, former Foreign Affairs minister; Damrong Lathapipat, former Minister of Commerce; and Chalermphan Srivikorn, all of the Democrat Party.

The defeat of the Democrat Party to the upstart Samak and his Thai Citizens Party in Bangkok was only the beginning of what was to become a complete collapse of the Democrat's strength throughout the country. As the results began to come in from the provinces, it soon became apparent that voters in the traditional Democrat Party strongholds shifted to Kukrit's Social Action Party. The Social Action Party eventually won 86 seats in the provinces, and 88 seats overall.

Voter turnout in the provinces at approximately 48% was about the same as previous elections, and more than twice that of Bangkok. However, the low voter turnout was not a contributing factor in the demise of the Democrat Party. The SAP's success in the provinces was due largely to the personal appeal of Kukrit who gave numerous speeches in provincial towns in support of his party's candidates.

Kukrit's "Tamboon fund", which began when he was Prime

Minister in 1975, was a new plan for rural development that allowed farmers to borrow money from banks without collateral. This lending scheme enjoyed wide popularity among the farmers. Borrowing for agricultural pursuits required only a "character interview," and was designed to free farmers from loan sharks and high interest rates. Although the plan was not completely implemented and had only moderate success, Kukrit and the SAP's association with the plan became well known among farmers who represent the majority of voters in the provinces. Moreover, Seni Pramoj's Democrat Party suffered from the usual complacency after the success of the 1976 election, as well as the misfortune of leading a seemingly powerless government when the military took over by a coup in October 1976.

The net result of the Democrat losses to the Thai Citizens Party in Bangkok and to the SAP candidates in the provinces was a decrease in party strength in Parliament from 115 seats in 1976 to just 35 seats in 1979. Other new parties which benefited from the Democrat's collapse, as well as their own organizational efforts in support of Kriangsak, were the Seri Tham Party which gained 26 seats, and the Chart Prachachorm (National Democrat Party) which won 10 seats. Several "old" parties also gained in strength, even though some of their leading members lost in their bid for reelection. Such was the case with Dr. Krasae, leader of the Palang Mai ("New Force"), who lost in his bid for a seat in Khon Kaen even though his party increased its strength to 8 seats. The Chart Thai decreased its seat total only slightly from 56 in 1976 to 47 in 1979. Other smaller parties such as the

Social Agrarian Party (Kaset Sangkom) remained the same as the last election with 8 seats.

Complete results of the 1979 elections in Bangkok and the provinces as well as a comparison with results of the 1976 elections are shown in Table III.

In all, 41 independents won seats, many of whom eventually formed the basis for a Kriangsak supported coalition with the Seri Tham and other smaller parties in the House of Representatives. As expected, Kriangsak became head of the new government after he was nominated to that post in a "special"

TABLE III

A COMPARISON OF THE RESULTS OF THE 1976 AND 1979 ELECTIONS

	1976			1979		
	B	P	T	B	P	T
Isara (Independents)	-	-	-	-	41	41
Prachakon Thai (Thai Citizens Party)-	-	-	-	29	3	32
Seri Tham	-	-	-	-	26	26
Prachatipat (Democrat)	28	87	115	1	34	35
Chart Thai (Thai Nation)	-	56	56	-	47	47
Kit Sangkhom (Social Action)	-	45	45	2	86	88
Dharma Sangkhom (Social Justice)	-	28	28	-	1	1
Sangkom Chart Niyom (Social Nationalist)	-	8	8	-	-	-
Kaset Sangkom (Social Agrarian)	-	8	8	-	8	8
Palang Mai (New Force)	-	3	3	-	8	8
Palang Prachachom (Populist)	-	3	3	-	-	-
Sangkom Niyom (Socialist Party of Thailand)	-	2	2	-	-	-
Patthana Changwad (People Development)	-	2	2	-	-	-

Prachatippatai (Democracy)	-	1	1	-	-	-
Naewruam Sangkom Niyom (United Socialist Front)	-	1	1	-	-	-
Pithakthai (Protect Thai)	-	1	1	-	-	-
Thai Sangkom (Thai Social)	-	1	1	-	-	-
Dharmathippatai (Merit is Right)	-	1	1	-	-	-
Sangkom Kaona (Progressive Social)	-	1	1	-	-	-
Siam Mai (New Siam)	-	1	1	-	-	-

Table III Con't

	1976			1979		
	B	P	T	B	P	T
Naewruam Prachathippatai (United Democracy Front)	-	1	1	-	-	-
Rang-ngarn (Labour Party)	-	1	1	-	-	-
Chart Prachachon (Nation People)	-	-	-	-	10	10
Ruan Thai (Thai Unification)	-	-	-	-	2	2
Kit Prachatipathai (Democrat Action Group)	-	-	-	-	2	2
	28	251	279	32	269	301

B: Bangkok    P: Provinces    T: Total

session of Parliament. Kriangsak received only 89 of a possible 301 votes from the elected members of the lower House of Representatives. The bulk of his votes came from members of the Senate (222 out of 225), all of whom he had appointed only months before.

The call for a "special" session by Kriangsak resulted in a boycott by the four major parties in the House: the SAP, Chart Thai, the Democrats and the Thai Citizens Party. Therefore,

Kriangsak's successful nomination was marred by the absence of nearly 200 of the 301 elected MPs.

The timing of the "special" session remained a much debated issue among the opposition parties and was even referred to as "a plot to create enemies and topple the government itself" by SAP leader, Kukrit Pramoj (Asiaweek, 5/25, 1979: 16). In a much calmer atmosphere, SAP's Deputy leader, Boonthing Thonswat, was unanimously elected as Speaker of the House.

With Kukrit's deputy in control of the House, and the SAP forming the basis for opposition to Kriangsak and his hand picked Senate, the lines for future conflict in the "new" government were already drawn.

#### The "New" Government

While the SAP led opposition was able to exercise some leverage regarding future policy matters, its influence in the formation of a new government was almost nil. This was due largely to the limitations placed on the elected MPs by the 1978 Constitution. In the 1975 and 1976 elections, a coalition of various members in the House comprised a majority and therefore had the right to form a new government. However, the 1978 Constitution prevented a majority of the elected MPs in the House to form the government and instead required a majority of the entire Parliament, including the appointed Senate. The new Constitution also allowed the Prime Minister to select members to the cabinet with only the approval of the President of the Parliament, who was also the speaker of the Senate. According to the new constitution, cabinet members did not have to be selected



from elected MPs as was required in all previous constitutions' emphasis on the appointed Senate. And the Speaker of the Senate in the formation of the new government not only paved the way for Kriangsak as Prime Minister, but also provided him with a "rubber stamp" approval process in the selection of his cabinet.

While there still existed hard bargaining for cabinet seats among Kriangsak's supporters (e.g., the Seri Tham Party ), the disruption which characterized the haggling for positions in the three previous coalition governments was greatly reduced. This was due not only to the absence of a coalition government, but also to the fact that the constitution enlarged the cabinet to 44 posts and, therefore, provided Kriangsak with seats with which to reward his supporters.

In the months immediately following the 1979 elections and the formation of the "new" government, a more liberal trend evolved as labor and other groups began pressuring Kriangsak for reforms. In the meantime, Kukrit, relying on his widespread popularity and wit, undermined Kriangsak's efforts to increase support for his military dominated government among the elected MPs. In July, only three months after the election, Kukrit managed to rally the House to unanimously censor Kriangsak for not replying to a Parliament proposal for reforms. Kriangsak, conscious of his dwindling popularity, made a series of concessions to government and private labor organizations on wage adjustments, bonuses, and changed several aspects of the Labor Law. He also signed into law several Parliament proposals which deleted the discriminatory "alien father" clauses of the Election Bill and repealed the infamous "danger to society" bill which had

allowed the arrest and indefinite detention of anyone suspected as "dangerous", without due process.

The delicate balance of the Kriangsak government shifted dramatically only ten months later when, in February 1980, a series of controversial oil price policies resulted in a near no-confidence vote in the House and Kriangsak's resignation.

General Prem Tinsulamond, a friend and advocate of the royal family, agreed to form a new government. Prem replaced the military dominated cabinet, including positions of deputy premier, with respected civilians such as Boonchu Rojanasthien and Thanat Khoman. Choosing talented civilian and familiar military leaders was expected to increase the likelihood of solving Thailand's crucial economic problems, and to help Prem win a broader base of support in the House of Representatives.

However, Prem, the honest and capable military leader, was unable to transfer his skills of leadership to his position of Prime Minister. Expected to solve problems of inflation, corruption, rural underdevelopment, etc., he instead displayed an ineptness for making decisions in any of these or other critical issues. His attempt at "consensus" by distributing cabinet posts among the major coalition parties - Social Action, Chart Thai and Democrats - created bitter rivalry. In March, the SAP quit the coalition after bitter disagreement with the Chart Thai secretary general who was the agricultural minister. Prem's hesitance on critically needed social and economic domestic programs, and his aloofness with regard to the open rivalry among his cabinet members, prompted impatience and finally a coup in April, 1981,

by the "Young Turks" of the Thai military.

The coup, which was led by General Sant Chitapatuma and masterminded by Col. Mnoon Rupekachorn both of the most prestigious First Army in Bangkok, lasted less than three days. The traditional takeover by the First Army in Bangkok, which was usually followed by the commanders of the 2nd and 3rd Armies in the Provinces, did not occur. Instead, King Phumipan in an unusual move, gave support to his friend Prem by flying to Korat where the 2nd Army was based. This move prompted most of the military forces to remain loyal to the Prem government. The "Young Turk" faction, not wanting to engage in an actual battle in opposition to the King's apparent choice, disbanded in favor of Prem's counter-coup after several tense hours of a stand off between the two military factions.

Prem returned as Prime Minister in the midst of mixed loyalties among many military officers. He offered amnesty to the coup leaders but stripped them of their military status, replacing them with officers who remained loyal during the coup. Prem also reshuffled his cabinet to reward loyal factions of the military which included the appointment of right-wing extremist, Maj. General Sudsai Hasdin. The aftermath of the abortive coup gave rise to a staunchly military dominated government, with a volatile but powerless Parliamentary opposition led primarily by Samak and his Thai Citizens Party.

#### CONCLUSION

The military politics of the abortive coup resulted in the weakening of several key military commands in rural Thailand

hrough the removal of capable "Young Turk" officers on General Sant's supporters list, and their replacement by Prem loyalists. Also, some of Prem's most capable officers (i.e. Gen Pichit) were shifted from the battle front to the 1st Army in Bangkok. This temporary disorganization in the Thai military ranks may give the CPT strategists the reprieve they need in view of dramatic losses suffered on both political and military fronts since 1980.

Ironically, the viability of the Thai Parliament may well depend upon the continued success of military-backed parties such as the Chart Thai in the House to protect the military's budgetary and other "interests". The Thai labor movement as well as the entire economy are affected by military politics which protects its corporate interests through membership on various Boards of Directors and constrains labor disputes through control of key positions in the cabinet (i.e. Ministry of Interior). Therefore, as long as Thai politics remains military politics, legitimate oppositional forces such as the Parliament and labor union movements will only be as influential as the prevailing military leadership will tolerate.

If significant splits in the military, such as the "Young Turk" upheaval continue to reoccur, various oppositional forces may temporarily benefit from the rivalry among the military leadership. However, none of these oppositional forces except Kukrit's Social Action Party, or to a lesser degree the Chart Thai or Democrat Party, could possibly fill the vacuum through democratic processes, while only the CPT, with possible Vietnamese backing, stand ready to fill the vacuum through force.

The latter scenario seems unlikely, as long as the CPT Central Committee remains dominated by Chinese trained leaders and the dispute between China and Vietnam continues.

The various political party leaders readied themselves for the 1983 April elections amidst rumors that a coup by General Athit was inevitable. Part of the concern was the new election laws that provided for a "winner-take-all" in each district by the political party whose candidate received the most votes. It was widely believed, as the political campaigns began to unfold in 1982, that Kukrit's Social Action Party would be the main benefactor of the law.

Another concern of the military backed government was the growing support for an elected, rather than an appointed upper house in Parliament, which was in accordance with the "12 Year Plan for Democracy" that was first officially enunciated during Thanin's regime in 1976. Any move to limit this means for direct military involvement in the upper house of Parliament was seen as a threat to the military itself.

A third and somewhat unrelated concern was the reemergence of student activism in the fall of 1982. Student activists from Thammasat and Ramkamhaeng University began to mobilize, protest, and demonstrate in a manner reminiscent of the early 1970's. In the fall of 1982, a student protest and hunger strike at the Government House eventually led to various concessions by the Prem government which included the reduction of the bus fare in Bangkok.

Some observers believed that the events in late 1982 were a genuine revival of the student movement and would eventually

precipitate a coup. However, in an interview with the author in December 1982, Kukrit revealed that based on his knowledge of the situation, "those people who were threatening a coup (i.e. Athit) were probably the same people who were behind the student activists in order to create the conditions for a coup."

#### FOOTNOTES

1. Some of the background material and data for the oppositional forces presented in this article also appeared in articles by the author in Asia Quarterly between 1975-1980. (See references for details)
2. The source of the Tables is Com Ti Rak ("Communist Darling"), a book published in Thai in 1974 by Colonel Han Phongsitanon, Colonel Wicharn Songhaprawan, Police Captain Manas Satayarak, Police Major Anand Senakhan, Wirun Tanchareon, Police Captain Varasith Sumon, and Police Sargeant Wichit Sirikun, all officers of the CSOC (Communist Suppressive Operations Command). Most of these persons were subsequently indicted for printing almost verbatim secret reports of the CSOC.
3. Table II was adapted from figures which appeared in Bangkok World March 10, 1979. p.3.
4. Thirayudh is presently in the Netherlands with his wife and child pursuing post-graduate studies, while Seksan is pursuing a graduate degree in the U.S. at Cornell University.

5. Article 21, which has long been a part of martial law in Thailand, allows the police to arrest and jail without trial anyone, at anytime, who is suspected of disturbing the peaceful order of the Kingdom, or is believed to be a threat to the country.

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