



## SIAM TRIES A PEOPLE'S PARTY

BY ST. CLAIR MCKELWAY

After the Siamese military coup, in which he had no active part, Phya Manopakarana (center, with black arm band) was appointed chairman of the Senate Executive Committee. He is here delivering an address to the troops

WHEN His Majesty King Prajadhipok of Siam was in the United States last year, he told his interviewers that all movements and improvements in his country came from above. At the time I thought it was one of the wisest and most profound remarks I had ever heard about Siam, and so, I imagine, did many other observers of the national scene. But the very important Siamese movement now in progress (and it has the look of being an improvement as well) did not come from above—or at least not from the Princes of the Royal Family.

Bangkok awoke on Friday, June 24, to find that the rule of the Princes of the Royal Family had been overthrown and a new government set up. At four o'clock that morning the civilian leaders of the so-called People's Party had met the military leaders who were to furnish whatever force was necessary to make the contemplated coup a success. The meeting place was the plaza in front of the Throne Hall, an imposing marble building of European style, which stands at the end of the widest and most prosperous-looking avenue in the capital, adjacent to the King's personal residence. The military leaders, comprising colonels of the army and high officers of the navy, had brought with them motor trucks, armored tanks, machine guns and several detachments of armed soldiers, whom, however, they had not yet taken into their confidence. Then, on the wide plaza, in the stillness and the heat of the hour that precedes the tropical dawn, there was read to the assembled troops a simple but eloquent manifesto setting forth the purpose of the gathering

and the ideals of the leaders for a constitutional monarchy "of the people, by the people and for the people." Few extravagant promises were made; only the most reserved accusations were voiced against the ruling Princes. The soldiers answered with an enthusiastic "*Jaiyo!*"—the national equivalent of "Hurrah!" Thereupon explicit orders were given against undue exuberance, against looting of any sort, against the use of guns except through absolute necessity and at the direct command of an officer. Then Siam's unique "revolution"—the People's Party objects to having its peaceful procedure so labeled—got under way.

The leaders had chosen an opportune moment for the coup. The King and Queen were at Hua Hin, a seaside resort several hours distant by railway from the capital. With Their Majesties were H.R.H. Prince Sinha, Minister of Defense, and H.S.H. Prince Alongkut, Vice Minister of Defense in charge of the army. Also with them, as it happened, was H.R.H. Prince Svasti, father-in-law of the King and an uncle as well. The absence of this shrewd elder statesman meant little to the revolutionists one way or the other; for Prince Svasti has long been known to favor a change in the direction of democracy in the government and said as much during his visit to the United States last year.

It remained for the revolutionists merely to seize the remaining members of the Royal Family, along with a few high army and gendarmerie officials, and take charge of all the key positions in the government. They did so with amazing despatch and with even more amazing



As Prince Regent, H.R.H. Prince Paribatra was generally regarded as logical heir to the Siamese Throne



The father-in-law of the King, H.R.H. Prince Svasti, long advocated constitutional monarchy for Siam

gentleness and restraint. Next to the King the most important man in the now superseded government was H.R.H. Prince Paribatra, Minister of the Interior (and, as such, commander of the national police force), member of the Supreme Council and, as Prince Regent, logical heir—in the popular mind—to the Throne. While truck loads of armed soldiers and sailors set out from the Throne Hall rendezvous to occupy the railway central office, the Post and Telegraph Department, the Treasury, the Ministry of Justice and so on, another truck load went to the great riverside palace of Prince Paribatra and placed him in custody. With Prince Damrong, Prince Narisra and other important members of the Royal Family, the Prince Regent was removed to the upper floor of the Throne Hall and placed under guard. Meanwhile the Director General of Local and Provincial Gendarmerie, Phya Adhikarana Prakas, a favorite of Prince Paribatra, had been similarly captured and was enjoying the questionable honor of being treated like a Prince of the Royal Family. Eight generals of the army had also been placed in custody.

The Throne Hall itself was turned into a fortress, with machine guns mounted in its high windows and armored cars and tanks patrolling the plaza around it. All streets leading to the plaza were heavily guarded by soldiers and sailors with fixed bayonets. Other armored tanks and trucks loaded with soldiers and sailors, also with bayonets fixed, were to be observed in all sections of the city—merely on guard in case disorder should break out.

The only member of the Royal Family present in Bangkok who escaped custody on the first day was H.R.H. Prince Purachatra, Minister of Commerce and Communications, one of the most brilliant of the Princes and by far the hardest worker among them all. Arrogant, erratic and impatient of ignorance, this member of the Royal Family was perhaps the one most hated by the commoners. Chiefly, I think, because of his arrogance and his reticence, all sorts of legends had grown up about

him. He was reputed to be tremendously wealthy and to have transferred most of his fortune to a foreign country in order to be able to live abroad when he was finally discovered and exiled. Pure fiction—all that—probably; I believe he is really a poor man.

On the morning of the coup, Prince Purachatra was having a Turkish bath in downtown Bangkok. When the soldiers came to arrest him at his palace, a faithful servant found out what they were after and rushed by motor car to tell him. Prince Purachatra at first decided to hand himself over. He dressed and motored to his palace. But by this time the soldiers had gone to look for him at the Turkish bath establishment. Then the Prince made up his mind to escape. He went to the railway station, seized one of the new Diesel engine locomotives with which the railway is now equipped, packed his family into it and started down the south-

ern line toward Penang. But it is significant that he did not go to Penang, although he could have done so very easily. Instead he stopped his special at Hua Hin and was the first to inform His Majesty of the state of affairs that afternoon in Bangkok. The King was playing golf at the time, and the Prince, oily and dirty, stepped out of the Diesel and rushed across the tracks to the first tee, a few rods away, where His Majesty was in the act of driving off.

The Prince is now being investigated. The special committee charged with the task is expected to prove or else disprove the scandalous rumors concerning his administration of the Ministry of Commerce and Communications. Brilliant, energetic, he is a man whose exclusion from the government is a loss to the country, but it is a necessary loss.

By the time Bangkok awoke that Friday morning, the revolutionists were able to inform the public and the legations that the People's Party



H.R.H. Prince Purachatra escaped arrest and was the first to break the news of the "revolution" to the King

was in full control of the government and that life and property were not in danger, since the sole object of the People's Party was to bring about the establishment of a constitutional monarchy under His Majesty the King. (So far as I have been able to discover, only one single effective shot was fired in the revolution with the idea of injuring a human being. This shot sent a bullet into a non-vital portion of the anatomy of a general of the army who refused to take part in the movement. He is recovering from the wound. Another man—a private watchman in the compound of the palace of Prince Paribatra—was reported dead but has fully recovered—not from a wound, but merely from fright. He first resisted the soldiers who had come to place the Prince in custody and next collapsed, when, at the order of an officer, they fired a rifle volley ten feet above his head.) In an eastern country in times of tension the status of the foreigner, especially the Westerner, is often not to be envied. In this connection one need only recall numerous incidents in China and the notorious butchering of Koreans and other foreigners in Japanese cities during the great earthquake less than a decade ago. In Bangkok on the day of the coup I motored all over the city, and so did many other foreigners. I went as close as any outsider could get to the Throne Hall, I talked with soldiers who were standing guard there, I tried to persuade them to let me go in. Foreigners from the West noted not the slightest evidence of ill-feeling, and the large Chinese city in Bangkok was unmolested.

Knowing that serious disorder in Siam would mean foreign intervention and that foreign intervention would, in all probability, mean the end of independence for the country, the leaders of the revolution took every precaution against undue public exuberance and against the possibility of a counter movement. The proclamations of the new government were couched in quiet phrases, to the effect that the leaders thought the Princes had not been serving the best interests of the country and that they believed a limited constitutional monarchy under His Majesty the King would prove more satisfactory for all concerned. Sailors and soldiers made speeches at times during the first day to street-corner crowds, but

three of these, I can testify, were absolutely lacking in the blood-and-thunder rhetoric one usually associates with revolutionary speeches. A month before the coup the ammunition held by all provincial garrisons had been transferred to Bangkok, a colonel who was a leader in the movement having issued a circular request that the

ammunition be sent back for the purpose of being changed. All gun and ammunition shops in Bangkok—and throughout the kingdom as well—were on the appointed day placed under military guard. Police, commanded by the usual officers but knowing that the unpopular chief had been placed in custody along with the Princes, patrolled the city during the first day and the days succeeding without a break in the regular routine. Not a single case of looting by soldiers or sailors was reported.

The action of the leaders in regard to the King was conspicuously courteous. A battleship was despatched to Hua Hin on June 23 with orders to stand by for further orders. When the coup had been accomplished, the commander of the vessel was so informed and, acting on previous orders, he went ashore to acquaint the King with the details and to request that His Majesty would return to the capital as soon as possible to take his Throne under a constitution, which was being drafted

by the leaders of the movement against the Princes.

Promptly the King indicated his willingness to do so and added in his message that he had long been considering some form of constitution that would give the people the franchise but had been unable to accomplish his aims. This statement was received on all sides with great enthusiasm; for it was taken to mean—and correctly, I think—that His Majesty had been unable to carry out his plans because of the opposition raised by certain of the Princes, particularly Prince Paribatra, whose well-known intention was to place his son—if not himself—on the Throne to succeed the present King. I was so fortunate as to be in the room that served as headquarters for the provisional government when the King's reply arrived at the Throne Hall on the day after the coup. "The King accepts!" was shouted with high emotion by the leaders, and the word was passed out to the soldiers on the plaza, to be followed by resounding cheers all down the broad



Ralph Hayes

Since June His Majesty King Prajadhipok of Siam rules over a constitutional, not an absolute, monarchy. The revolutionists treated him with conspicuous courtesy

avenue. It was soon after that I was able to meet the brilliant young civilian leader of the movement, Luang Pradit Manudharm, an official of the Ministry of Justice, who, in answer to my questions concerning the future, replied simply, "We are now awaiting the arrival of our King."

When the King arrived, late the next night, he came not on board the battleship, as had been planned originally, but by a special train, despatched to Hua Hin by the provisional government. It was explained that the battleship did not afford the comfort to which His Majesty was accustomed. At the Bangkok station no military display was permitted. Only the usual police guard met the train to serve as escort. With the King and Queen returned also Prince Alongkut, Prince Sinha, Prince Svasti and Prince Purachatra. Prince Svasti and Prince Purachatra elected to remain with Their Majesties and accompanied them to the palace without molestation, although Prince Purachatra, as I have said, was one of the most unpopular of the Princes and was regarded, justly or unjustly, as one of the most dangerous. Prince Alongkut and Prince Sinha left the special train at a different station, were promptly recognized and were taken to the Throne Hall to join their relatives.

No effort was made by the leaders of the movement to approach the King that night. The next morning His Majesty sent word through the Minister of the Royal Household that he desired to confer with the leaders of the People's Party. Then began the conference that ended in the afternoon with the announcement that the King approved in principle the constitution drafted by the People's Party. Within a few days all the Royal Princes had been released, with the exception of Prince Paribatra, who agreed, after a conference with the leaders and with the concurrence of the King, to leave the country for an indefinite period. He has departed for Germany, where he was educated and where he has an estate. With him went his entire family, including the son who was to have been the next absolute monarch of Siam. Thus ended in quick tempo the first stage of the popular movement toward a Siamese "government of the people, by the people and for the people."

It is necessary, in order to try to evaluate this emergence of something new in Siam, to consider for a little the background. For a century and a half the country has been an absolute monarchy under the Chakri Dynasty. Until the beginning of the present reign the

government had the form of a one-man rule. The ministers of the various departments would submit their plans to the king for decision, and the king would decide then and there, without any conference, without any council of state and with no formal advice from any source whatsoever.

His Majesty King Prajadhipok, democratic at heart, as he has shown by his delighted acceptance of the popular movement, wished to relieve himself and the country of the dangers of this system. But he knew that in the reign of his predecessor, Rama VI, many men from the titled class, but not of the Royal Family, had been dis-



On the upper floors of the Throne Hall, in Bangkok, a number of the Princes of the Siamese Royal Family were kept in custody during the early days of the "revolution," while armored cars and tanks patrolled the surrounding plaza, maintaining order. Only one man in the city was injured

honest and had acted to the detriment of the people: several of these nobles he had been forced to order out of the country when he assumed the Throne. And he knew that his father, King Chulalongkorn, had tried without success to institute an advisory board of common citizens and had abolished it one day during a session, turning upon the too-respectful commoners and shouting, "'Yes! Yes!' all you can say is 'Yes!'" But a single choice, seemingly, remained—the help of the Royal Family.

So King Prajadhipok set up a Supreme Council of State composed of his own uncles and brothers and half-brothers, and to this board he informally delegated a great deal of power. On the whole the gravest charge to be made against the Princes was not the failure to be honest; their chief fault was incompetence. They had been born with all they wanted in this world, and, with a few brilliant exceptions, they took no keen interest in the task of governing, though they occupied key positions as ministers of state or as members of the Supreme Council or as both. Some of them accepted favors from foreign merchants but not with the greed that had marked such transactions in the reign of Rama VI. They practised nepotism as a natural right, extending it even to relatives of their concubines. They glanced at Japan and decided unanimously that extensive public education was

too dangerous. Public health they encouraged but without the energy needed in a country where many diseases are endemic. In short, they regarded worry over the common weal as the King's private heritage.

The King, not very fit physically but, though nervous and erratic, shrewd at times and utterly sincere, was not satisfied. Yet most of the foreign advisers, envisioning careers of comfort, pooh-poohed everything smacking of change, and even the men of talent among older Siamese officials, influenced by the Princes who had appointed them, were lackadaisical in their attitude. All the while the youths who ten years ago had been students in Europe and America were wondering at the lack of opportunity in their own country, compared with the countries in which they had spent their school days, and were growing vaguely discontented. Further, the economic depression throughout the rest of the world, forcing down the price of rice and the price of teak, was preparing to confront this easy-going, listless government with the first really difficult problem it had ever had to solve.

It is unnecessary here to discuss in detail the fumbling answers that it gave; the record is broadly comparable to that of the other governments of the world. Suffice it to say that the traditional nepotism had gone so far that the Princes could not face the idea of cutting down administrative expenses through correction of this abuse. Consequently many competent but uninfluential officials were dropped, and many incompetent but happily born officials were retained. There was levied a salaries tax which hit all government employees and all other employees but which did not touch unearned incomes or professional incomes or business profits. That the Princes wished to establish a real income tax was vaguely evident, but to devise the necessary machinery was simply too much for

them. They made a sincere though belated attempt to tax themselves by the promulgation of a land tax. But this measure, which applied only to part of Bangkok, placed an unbearable burden upon the small house owner and upon the small farmer on the outskirts of the city. The Princes rightly put heavy duties on most foreign imports in an effort to keep a favorable balance of trade, but in a moment of characteristic sulkiness they made an exception of unexposed cinema films, for no other known reason than that one of the royal hobbies is amateur cinematography. They hired as an adviser in the Ministry of Commerce and Communications, of which, it will be remembered, Prince Purachatra was head, the manager of the biggest and most powerful European trading firm in Siam, and, since he was a competent executive, they turned over to him some of the most important and most secret tasks of the government, including the task of deciding whether Siam should go off the gold standard as a stimulus to the rice trade.

They perhaps did the best they could, but they completely ignored the fact that there were in Siam a considerable number of well informed Siamese of varying ages who could have done a great deal better. And they completely ignored the effect on public opinion of such matters as the exception of cinema films from the increased duty, the hiring of a local business man as an important adviser and the patent unfairness of a salaries tax not complemented by an income tax.

The problems before the new government, aside from the staggering problems that face even highly developed democracies today, are numerous and difficult, and this the leaders very well recognize. But they are making the attempt with quiet courage and confidence, and I think they have a chance of success, even in the face of world



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economic depression. They are functioning under a "People's Constitution." This constitution, which will serve during the present transitional period, sets up, as a Senate, a committee of seventy citizens, appointed by the leaders of the coup. An Executive Committee of the Senate, composed of fourteen members and a chairman, constitutes a sort of board of administrative control. The status of the King is comparable to that of the King of England. The ministries continue, with minor changes, the same, but ministers are to be appointed by the Senate.

It is significant that the civilian leaders of the movement did not seek important posts for themselves. Luang Pradit Manudharm, the outstanding personality of the revolutionary civilian group, is merely a member of the Senate and a member of the Executive Committee of the Senate. Despite his French education, his special qualifications for dealing with legal problems and his past services in attacking ministerial corruption, he asked no high place for himself. All the high places have been filled with elderly commoners, some titled but none of royal blood, who have had previous experience in the art of governing and who had no part whatever in the original coup. Phya Manopakarana, chairman of the Executive Committee, who also has taken over for the time being the portfolio of the Minister of Finance, was a chief justice of the Supreme Court, a man of unquestionable honesty, as well as ability.

When the Ministry of Defense was reorganized, immediately after the formation of the new government, dozens of high generals (who actually were mere figure-heads) were retired on pension, and the military leaders of the coup established themselves as the commanding officers of the army and the navy. But they did not promote themselves or raise their own pay: they remain colonels or the naval equivalent. Thus far in all their appointments to lesser positions honest and capable officers who had no part in the movement have been treated on the same basis as similar officers who did take part. The new government definitely is not a military dictatorship.

The Senators have not had time as I write, at the end of the first month since the revolution, to consider establishing a payroll for themselves. At this moment they are actually working for nothing. Not a cent of government funds has been spent thus far in the activities of the leaders of the original movement, except for the necessary use of military equipment. During the days of the censorship, when I had to be at the Throne Hall daily, I was deeply impressed by the fact that the leaders, many of them minor officials in the old government, with modest salaries, took no advantage of the opportunities afforded them for vulgar self-assertion. For instance, they rode to the Throne Hall each morning in their own little cars or the cars of their friends, or even rode in street cars to the nearest stop and walked the rest of the way, although at the palaces of the Princes who were then in custody, as also in the garages of the ministries, there were scores of comfortable automobiles.

In the matter of franchise, the "People's Constitution" provides that in about six months, or as soon as the more urgent problems before the government have been disposed of, the people of the various *changvads* (comparable roughly to our American states) shall elect representatives to the Senate. It is fully recognized,

however, that, until they have had some experience, these elected representatives will not be able to meet their responsibilities without assistance. For this reason it is provided that a number of appointed Senators equal to the number elected shall be retained in the Senate. Meanwhile a general primary education scheme is being worked out. In ten years' time, it is stated in the constitution, the appointed Senators will retire (unless they have been elected meanwhile), and the Senate will actually be a body of elected representatives of the people.

The new government is vitally interested in the tax problem. It plans for the near future a general income tax, which will distribute the burden of taxation among all classes. Already the unfair salaries tax has been abolished. The unsatisfactory land tax has also been given up for the present. A remnant of an ancient salt tax has been canceled, along with a few other small but inequitable taxes relating to vegetable farms, fruit farms and so forth. Fees for slaughtering cattle and pigs—increased not long ago by the old government—have now been reduced on a reasonable scale.

At the same time the various branches of the government are being reorganized for the sake of economy, and the elimination of useless employees has begun. There has been no attempt, however, to confiscate the property of the wealthy Princes. Phya Manopakarana in a press conference the other day urged newspapers to refrain from unfair attacks on members of the Royal Family. "The new government," he said to me in English, "is certainly friendly to the people; but that does not mean that it considers the Princes its enemies. Confiscation of personal property has ceased to be a practice in the civilized world, and it has never been considered by the new government of Siam."

It has been officially announced that Prince Paribatra, despite the general belief, "is not, was not and never has been the Heir Presumptive to the Throne of Siam." Under the law of succession, as a matter of fact, he is not; for the law provides that the king shall name his successor from among the Princes eligible, in the event that he himself is childless. Although Prince Paribatra served as Prince Regent in the absence of the King, he never has been formally named as the successor.

It is generally expected now that one of the sons of H.R.H. the late Prince Mahidol, who was also a half brother of the present King but who outranked Prince Paribatra, will be named as the Heir Presumptive. Prince Mahidol, had he lived, would have been the logical successor to the present King. The fact that he married a commoner probably would not have prevented his accession to the Throne although it did serve as a stimulus to Prince Paribatra's tacit claim to be the logical successor in preference to a son of Prince Mahidol. Prince Mahidol was one of the most popular of the sons of King Chulalongkorn. He was educated in the United States and devoted his life to medical science. He was even more democratic at heart than the present King. It was openly said during his life that, as a possible heir to the Throne, he had often suggested a change in the form of government to that of a limited monarchy, with a franchise for the people. The boy who will probably be named as the successor of the present King is now about ten years old. The mother, a young woman of culture, also educated in the United States, is most sensible and democratic. The choice of her son as Heir

Presumptive, if it is made, will be popular from every point of view.

Meanwhile His Majesty King Prajadhipok is very evidently pleased with the turn of events. The responsibilities of a benevolent monarch are tremendous in any case, but, when the public is inarticulate, when there is no expression of public opinion, when the monarch actually must determine what the people want and then give it to them, the task becomes almost superhuman. This has been His Majesty's task until now. Hence the most dramatic moment of the revolution came, perhaps, when he received the leaders of the coup on the day after his return to the capital. He was sitting at a broad desk in a room of his palace when the two civilian representatives and two military men were shown in. He rose and smiled at them. "I rise," he said, "in honor of the People's Party." This the greeting to the "rebels" from the next-to-the-last absolute monarch in the world! Today he has, in my considered opinion, more influence over events, more actual power, than he had during the régime of the Princes, despite the fact that the new constitution takes away virtually all his theoretical power.

He has remained in the background since the revolution, but—I know for a fact—he has had an active part in the organization of the young government. A new constitution, to take the place of the temporary, rather sketchy "People's Constitution," is now being drafted, and His Majesty has actually had a personal share in this laborious enterprise. He is dealing with sincere, hard-working patriots, and they know that they are dealing with a sincere, hard-working ruler, whose only object in life is to be of service to his people, as he has demonstrated on innumerable occasions. He trusts the leaders of the new government; and they trust him. It is difficult to imagine a surer foundation on which to build.

I know of only one of the foreign residents in Bangkok who really thought that the Siamese people would ever revolt against the rule of the Royal Family. This was the Financial Adviser, a brilliant young Englishman who had lived in Siam for less than two years. He had left the country, as it happened, before the revolution took place, having resigned when the Princes refused, or were unable, to adopt a sane attitude toward revenue and

expenditure and when most of the other less brilliant but more influential advisers offered stubborn resistance to his plans for meeting the people halfway. This man firmly believed that eventually the Siamese people would revolt against the rule of the Royal Family, but I am sure that he had not even the vaguest notion that they would do it so soon or that they would meet with

success. Everybody else familiar with the Siamese scene, as far as I know, was surprised to find that the Siamese people could even make the attempt. The fact that it not only was made but was made with success and without diminution of respect and loyalty to His Majesty the King is so staggering that, weeks afterward, most of us befogged foreigners in Bangkok are still rubbing our eyes to make sure it has not been a mere fantastic dream.

A few of us, however, are conscious that there must now be added to the recognized qualities of gentleness, charm and modesty in the Siamese people another and less definite racial trait—a kind of strength. This quality has been expressed in idealistic terms by the leaders of the People's Party. When a membership call was issued a few days after the coup, it was stated that only men of good character, living honorable lives and willing to sacrifice those lives, if need should arise, were invited to become members. If the present spirit of the Siamese movement is maintained, it cannot fail to have an influence on progress elsewhere on the Asiatic continent. And there are indications that this spirit will be maintained. Siam is a small country; for a continental Asiatic country, it is cohesive. So it seems to me, at least, despite the alien

elements—the large Chinese element conspicuous among them—in the population. This means a great deal in a movement whose success depends so much upon the support of the masses of the people.

At any rate the Siamese people, having resolved to try a People's Party, emerged this summer from the cloying mass of popular legend that has been woven about them by western observers. The western world has been lightly content with the gaudy beauty of Bangkok's temples, the charm of the Siamese canals, the brilliance of the Siamese jungle, and has paid little attention heretofore to the people who live in the country. The Siamese deserve now to be taken more seriously.



Keystone

Siamese policemen went about their work as usual during the trouble, though their unpopular chief was in custody along with the Royal Princes