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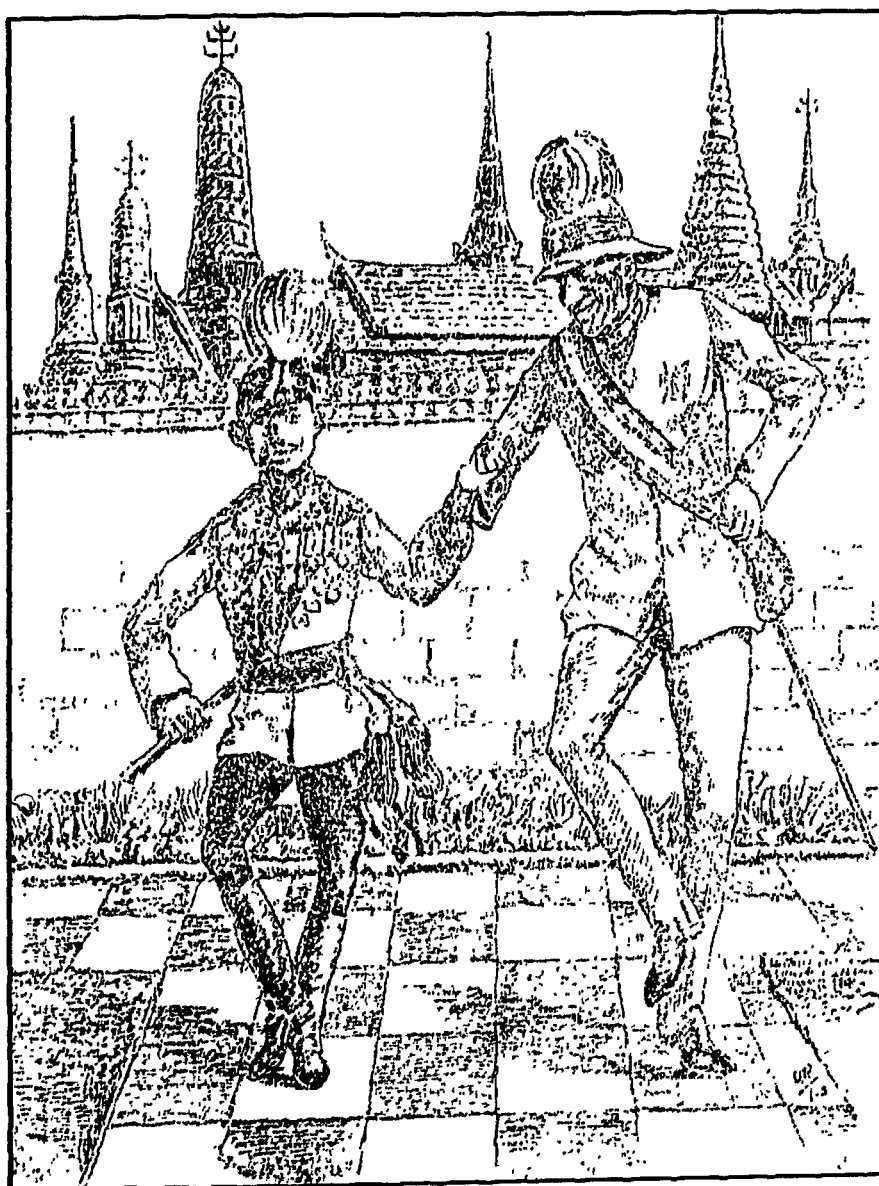
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Contested Nationalism

and

the 1932 Overthrow of the Absolute Monarchy in Siam



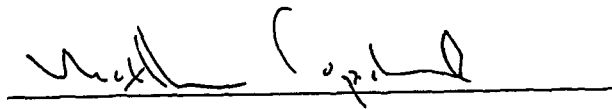
by

Matthew Phillip Copeland

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
of the Australian National University

November 1993

This thesis is the result of my own original work.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Matthew Phillip Copeland", is written over a horizontal line.

Matthew Phillip Copeland

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Abstract

In contrast to the other nationalisms of Southeast Asia, popular nationalisms engendered by the colonial experience which eventually served to undermine the basis of colonial rule, Thai nationalism has been frequently characterized as an elite discourse of political legitimation. Faced with the threat of European imperial advance in the region, a succession of Jakkri monarchs are thought to have formulated and disseminated the underlying tenets of an official nationalist discourse in a twofold effort to mobilize the Siamese populace and build popular support for the dynastic state. And in this endeavor, they are generally held to have succeeded, enhancing the legitimacy of the Siamese throne and creating an ideological framework for the emergence of the modern Thai nation-state.

Drawing upon a variety of press and archival sources, this study is an attempt to construct an alternate account of the Thai nation's early history. Its central thesis is that Thai nationalism evolved in much the same manner as the nationalisms of neighboring colonial states – emerging as the contested discourse of a ruling elite and a disenfranchised urban literati, gaining momentum and shape as an intellectual movement for popular sovereignty, and ultimately reaching a fruition of sorts with the overthrow of the absolute monarchy on 24 June 1932, an event which can be said to mark the figurative 'liberation' of the Thai nation.

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Introduction

1.1 Thai National Historiography and 1932. To lift a noun from the lexicon of Yul Brenner's *King Monkut*, the history of the modern Thai nation is something of a 'puzzlement'. On one level, it is a story of national salvation and the struggle for liberation, independence, and self-rule. On another, however, it is a glorification of imperial authority and an effort to justify a despotic political order. Within the kingdom's dominant historiographic tradition and indeed, in much of the critical historiography of more recent years as well, Jakkri dynasts are positioned as the central protagonists, at once the principal victims of European colonial advance and the heroes who 'awakened' the nation and 'saved' it from the imposition of foreign rule. With few exceptions, historians have depicted the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as a time of stunning royal accomplishment, a period in which the court at Bangkok successfully maintained the kingdom's independence, modernized the administrative apparatus of state, enacted a series of far-reaching social reforms, developed the country's economic infrastructure, laid the framework for an eventual transition towards democratic rule – and all under the aegis of an expanding royal authority.¹

¹ Historical appraisals of the Fifth Reign (1868-1910) have been so uniformly positive that it is perhaps easier to cite the few exceptions to the rule: *phra Sarasat's My Country Thailand: Its History, Geography, and Civilization*, (Tokyo: Maruzen, 1942) and a more recent study edited by Nigel Brailey (*Two Views of Siam on the Eve of the Chakri Reformation*, Whiting Bay: Kiscadale, 1989) – both of which present an image of Chulalongkorn as a man of prodigious sexual appetite, whose primary concern was with securing the future political and economic well-being of himself and his numerous offspring. For more conventional interpretations of the reign, see D. K. Wyatt, *The Politics of Reform in Thailand: Education in the Reign of King Chulalongkorn*, New Haven: Yale University, 1969; and Tej Bunnak, *The Provincial Administration of Siam 1892-1915: The Ministry of Interior Under Prince Damrong Rajanubhap*, Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University, 1977. With respect to the Sixth (1910-1925) and Seventh (1925-1935) Reigns, see Prayut Sitthiphan, *Phramahathiratjao* (The Great King), Bangkok: Sayam, 1974; W. Vella, *Chaiyo! King Vajiravudh and the Development of Thai Nationalism*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii, 1978; Sonthi Techanan (ed), *Phaen pattana kanmuang pai su kanpokkhong prachathipatai tam naeo phrarachadamri khong phrabatsomdet phrapokklao jaoyuhua 2469-2475* (Prajadhipok's Plans for Establishing Democratic Government 1926-1932), Bangkok: Kasetsart University, 1976; and B. A. Batson, *The End of the Absolute Monarchy in Siam*, Singapore: Oxford University, 1983.

Conversely, those characters who appear in the narrative to question the Jakkri 'right' to rule are almost invariably shown to have been operating under the influence of 'foreign' ideas. Consider, for example, the manner in which the noted historian D. K. Wyatt has undertaken to explain two of the principal affronts to dynastic authority in the pre-1932 period: an 1885 petition from members of Chulalongkorn's own court which called for the immediate formation of a constitutional government, and a 1912 coup attempt against the administration of King Vajiravudh. Under the heading "Internal Power and External Challenge", Wyatt discusses the origin and content of the sixty-page petition within the space of a single paragraph, describing its authors as "a small group ... [of] young men, almost all of them recently returned from abroad." Thereafter, two additional paragraphs are used to explain the ten-page reply of the king – the first containing a summary of its principal arguments and the second providing a supporting justification for Chulalongkorn's decision to retain complete control of the government.² In similar fashion, Wyatt's account of the 1912 uprising appears under the heading "King Vajiravudh and the Thai Nation" and the conspirators are depicted as "young men" of predominantly "Sino-Siamese ancestry" who transformed a "personal grudge" against king into "a fuzzily ideological critique of the absolute monarchy" after becoming "caught up in the political excitement of their own time, particularly the Chinese Revolution of October 1911."³

The flattering treatment which the monarchy has received at the hands of nation's biographers is partially explained with the recognition that the history of the modern Thai nation has been crafted as the story of an elite struggle to maintain the sovereign authority of a dynastic empire. It is, after all, the dynasty which was compelled to accept and adhere to the terms of Siam's unequal treaties with the West, forced to give up all claim to its neighboring tributary states, and obliged to judge and reconstitute itself in the light of Western conceptions of 'amicable relations', 'good government', and 'civilized behavior'. Moreover, it is the dynasty as well which was ultimately redeemed through a process of modernization and reform. This, one presumes, is the reason why the Thai National Archives, the central repository for the records of the modern Thai state, begins its collection in the late nineteenth century with the administrative reorganization of the Fifth Reign court – a legislative effort which eventually allowed for the renaissance of Jakkri absolutism in the aftermath of the court's disastrous confrontation with the French in 1893.⁴

² See D. K. Wyatt, *Thailand: A Short History*, London: Yale University, 1984: 199-200.

³ *Ibid.*, 226.

⁴ And the 'Jakkri Reformation' has been openly characterized as a 'renaissance' in the studies of I. Brown, *The Ministry of Finance and the Early Development of Modern Financial Administration in Siam, 1885-1910*, University of London PhD Thesis, 1975; D. Engel, *Law and Kingship in Thailand During the Reign of King Chulalongkorn*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1975; and Bunnak: 1977.

I suspect there is an additional reason for the Jakkris' prominence in the early history of the Thai nation as well, however – an unquestioned assumption that the subjects of the realm had almost nothing to do with the nation's development. Contained within the broader history of nationalism in Asia, one finds charted two alternate and mutually-exclusive paths to nationhood – a 'colonial' route and an 'imperial'.⁵ Most, but not all, of the nations in the region are held to have evolved along the first track, gaining momentum and shape as popular independence movements which eventually undermined the basis of colonial rule and led to the establishment of new national governments. For seemingly obvious reasons, however, this model of national development has not been used to explain the emergence of nationalist movements in the handful of traditional Asian polities which remained independent during the period. Instead, these latter nationalisms, Thai nationalism among them, have been characterized as the self-initiated projects of modernizing elites. Thus, in study after study, that agglomeration of ideas and beliefs by which the members of a multi-ethnic Siamese empire came to define themselves in relation to each other and the outside world has been treated as though it were an intellectual product of the Jakkri court, an overarching discourse which a handful of kings and their loyal courtiers disseminated to a passive and for the most part receptive populace in such a way as to preempt the spread of rival ideas, symbols, and imagery.⁶ In recent years, considerable academic debate has arisen over the question of whether this effort was engendered by a heartfelt desire to protect the rights of a people or a more Machiavellian urge to preserve the interests of an absolute monarch.⁷ In either case, the kingdom's rulers are held to have succeeded in popularizing a particular vision of Thai nationhood – one which enhanced the legitimacy of the Siamese throne and created an ideological framework for the subsequent emergence of an authoritarian Thai state.

⁵ This paradigmatic view of the alternative paths to nationhood travelled by the peoples of non-European states has recently been affirmed again in A. D. Smith's *National Identity*, London: Penguin, 1991, 100-110.

⁶ See S. Greene, 'King Vajiravudh's Policy of Nationalism', Tej Bunnak and Michael Smithies (eds), *In Memoriam Phya Anuman Rajadhorn: Contributions in memory of the Late President of the Siam Society*, Bangkok: The Siam Society, 1970, 251-259; Vella: 1978; B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London: Verso, 1983, 100-101; Kullada Kesboonchoo, 'Official Nationalism Under King Chulalongkorn', paper presented at the International Conference on Thai Studies in Bangkok, 22-24 August 1984, and 'Official Nationalism Under King Vajiravudh', *Proceedings of the International Conference on Thai Studies in Canberra*, 3:1, 1987, 107-120; Likhit Dhiravegin, *Nationalism and the State in Thailand*, Bangkok: Thammasat, 1985; E. Murashima, *The Political Thought of the Thai Military in Historical Perspective*, Tokyo: Institute of Developing Economies, 1986; and "The Origins of Modern Official State Ideology", *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 19:1, March 1988, 80-96; Nithi Ieosriwong, 'chatniyom nai krabuankan prachathipatai' (The Role of Nationalism in the Democratic Movement), *Sinlapa wathanatham*, September 1992, 181-201; and S. Barmé, *Luang Wichit Wathakan and the Creation of Thai Identity*, Singapore: ISEAS, 1993.

⁷ The attempt to assign a Machiavellian motive to the 'nation-building' efforts of the Jakkri court is an integral part of the critique of 'official' nationalism developed by Anderson (1983), Kullada (1984; 1987), Murashima (1986; 1988), and Barmé (1993). See the discussion below.

Whatever its merits, this paradigmatic view of the nation's early history is not without a number of ironies and ambiguities. Despite the emphasis placed upon Siam's continued independence, for example, one notes from the historiography that the Siamese are generally acknowledged to have gained an understanding of nationhood in much the same manner as the peoples of neighboring colonial states. Not only is the threat of European encroachment thought to have served as a principal catalyst in the early formation of Thai nationalist sentiment but colonially-imposed borders and Western notions of race, history, government, and language are held to have afforded the Siamese with both a reference frame and the conceptual building blocks for the development of a territorially-based patriotism and the construction of a Thai national identity.⁸ And much as occurred in other parts of the region, the agents who orchestrated this process of nation-building are held to have come from the ranks of that very group most affected by 'the colonial experience' – Western-oriented intellectuals residing in the country's principal urban center, Bangkok. Here, the comparison ends, however, for in marked contrast to their anti-colonialist counterparts in French Indochina, British Burma, and Dutch Indonesia, Jakkri dynasts can hardly be characterized as a disenfranchised elite, and it can safely be said that they had little interest in championing the cause of popular sovereignty. Indeed, their efforts to promote a king-centered nationalist discourse were clearly meant to engender support for the continuation of Jakkri rule. Thus, in Siam alone, the forces which elsewhere were mastered and deployed in order to sweep aside the autocratic regimes of colonial rulers and lift a new class of individuals to power are believed to have been successfully channeled to preserve the political prerogatives of an authoritarian elite.

And a 'collaborative' elite at that, for while the court's decision to enter into treaty relations with the colonial powers of Europe is generally thought to have arisen from an awareness that compromise was the only alternative to a complete loss of sovereign authority, the allure of what the West had to offer was clearly a factor in the policy shift as well.⁹ By the mid-nineteenth century, the kingdom contained a growing

⁸ For a brilliant account of how the process of border delineation between Siam and the colonial territories of Europe gave rise to a new understanding of political space and historiography in the kingdom, see Thongchai Winichakul, *Siam Mapped: A History of the Geo-Body of Siam*, Sydney: University of Sydney PhD Thesis, 1988 (University of Hawaii Press, forthcoming). In addition, see Charnvit Kasetsiri, 'Thai Historiography from Ancient Times to Modern', in A. Reid and D. Marr (eds), *Perceptions of the Past in Southeast Asia*, Singapore: Heinemann, 1979, 157-170. With respect to the impact of European theories of race on Siamese thought, see D. Streckfuss, 'The Mixed Colonial Legacy of Siam: Thai Racialist Thought, 1890-1940', in Laurie Sears (ed), *Autonomous Histories, Particular Truths: Essays in Honor of John R. W. Smail*, Madison: University of Wisconsin, forthcoming, 1993. Regarding the court's growing interest in language, see A. Diller, 'Central Thai as a National Language', in C. Reynolds (ed), *Thai Identity*, Canberra: Australian National University, 1991.

⁹ As noted by Robinson, the collaborator was an individual who undertook to exploit the forces of Western expansion by mediating between an indigenous population and the colonial authorities – a definition no less applicable to the members of the Jakkri court than to the elites of neighboring states who facilitated the process of colonial rule. See R. Robinson,

number of 'modernists', educated members of the upper class whose fascination for 'things Western' – languages, technologies, and ideas – led them to forge close personal relations with the foreign community in Bangkok.¹⁰ In addition, accommodation brought with it a number of political and economic advantages as well, many of which initially accrued to the individuals who supported the 'progressive' King Mongkut's accession to the throne in 1851. The Bunnak clan, for example, was not only afforded a preeminent position in the Fourth Reign political administration, but its members gained monopoly control of the opium, gambling, and spirit tax farms – the primary sources of state revenue after Siam was opened to foreign trade in 1855.¹¹

Still, the principal beneficiaries of Siam's accommodation with the West were ultimately Monkut and his descendants. Prior to the signing of the Bowring Treaty, succession to the throne was a purely domestic matter determined through negotiations and, on occasion, force of arms.¹² By the time of Mongkut's death in 1868, however, "the narrow notions Westerners had about legitimacy and ... Western expectations that [Mongkut's son] would succeed to the throne" had emerged as a factor as well, with the result that Chulalongkorn was duly selected to replace his father as king.¹³ Moreover, the continuing risk that a succession crisis might lead to foreign intervention subsequently provided Chulalongkorn a pretext for appointing his eldest son to the position of crown prince in 1886. Thus, in a very real sense, 'the colonial threat' enhanced the domestic standing of Monkut's family line, allowing its members to assume the role of the kingdom's sole ruling house.

The assertion that Jakkri monarchs were the principal architects of the modern Thai nation is seemingly at odds with one of the central developments of the recent Thai past as well – the overthrow of the absolute monarchy. On 24 June 1932, a group of civilian and military officials known as the People's Party (*khana ratsadon*) staged an armed uprising against the government of King Prajadhipok, abruptly ending the absolute rule of the Jakkri royal line. Significantly, the conspirators initially sought to justify their actions by issuing a scathing indictment of Jakkri rule – a document which was read to an assemblage of army officers and cadets, distributed as a handbill in the

'Non-European Foundations of European Imperialism: Sketch for a Theory of Collaboration', in R. Owen and B. Sutcliffe (eds), *Studies in the Theory of Imperialism*, New York: Longman, 1972, 117-140.

¹⁰ B. Terwiel, *A History of Modern Thailand*, St Lucia: U. of Queensland, 1983, 141, 210-212.

¹¹ Brown: 1975, 21, 31-32, 40-44; and Seksan Prasertkul, *The Transformation of the Thai State and Economic Change (1855-1945)*, Cornell University PhD Thesis, 1989, 352-357.

¹² See N. Battye, *The Military, Government, and Society in Siam, 1868-1910: Politics and Military Reform During the Reign of King Chulalongkorn*, Cornell University PhD Thesis, 1974, 110-209.

¹³ Wyatt: 1984, 177, 190-191.

capital, and repeatedly broadcast over state radio.¹⁴ Among other things, the king and his relatives were accused of governing the country in a haphazard and self-serving manner with scant regard for the interests of the people – a collective mass whose name was invoked no less than fifty times within the space of several pages of text. On their behalf, the party also stated its intention to promulgate a constitution, form a representative assembly, secure the country's independence, develop the economy, expand the public school system, and guarantee the freedom and equality of all Siamese citizens. Had the uprising devolved into a civil war between supporters of the old regime and the new, this critique of the dynastic state might easily have provided a starting point for a very different account of the nation's pre-1932 past. As it was, however, the anti-royalist tone of the document quickly proved to be an embarrassment for the party when Prajadhipok agreed to remain on the throne as the kingdom's first constitutional monarch. In an early meeting with party leaders, the king expressed outrage over the "damaging language" of their communiqué and asserted that he would only assist the new government in maintaining the peace if its members respected the honor of the throne and made no attempt to strip the princes of their ranks and wealth.¹⁵ Ultimately, an agreement was reached and steps were taken to restore the prestige, if not the power, of the monarchy.¹⁶ Nonetheless, relations between the royal family and the party remained difficult at best, and Prajadhipok eventually took leave of the kingdom and the throne.

Precisely because of its awkward fit within the broader narrative of Thai national historiography, the 1932 coup has remained a matter of historical controversy.¹⁷ In a number of studies, party leaders have been portrayed as historical interlopers, as a 'small' group of 'Western-trained' intellectuals whose premature effort to establish a

¹⁴ At the conclusion of each broadcast, a new national anthem was also played in place of the king's anthem. See K. P. Landon, *Siam in Transition*, Chicago: University of Chicago, 1939, 13.

¹⁵ The meeting was held on 30 June 1932 after the principal military leader of the People's Party, *phraya* Phahon Phonphayuhasena, requested the king's help in controlling a number of senior princes who were already agitating against the new government. A minute can be found in Sinlapachai Chanchaloem (*nai* Honhuai), *Jaofa prachathipok rachana plunirat* (Prajadhipok: The Prince with No Wish to be King), Bangkok: Samphanphanit, 1987, 314-321.

¹⁶ Up to the time of Prajadhipok's abdication in early 1935, however, some members of the new administration continued to advocate that the government make a clean break with the monarchy. When the assembly met to draft an expression of regret at the king's decision to give up his office, for example, the representative from Chiang Mai expressed his inability to understand why such a response was necessary, while reminding his fellows that they were unlikely to be presented with such an opportunity again. See *phra* Phinit Thonakan, *Raingan prachum sapha phuthaen ratsadon* (Minutes of the Meetings of the National Assembly), 6 March 1935, cited in Phayom Rothanawiphat (A. K. Rungsaeng), *Pho. 27 sailap phrapokklao* (P 27: Prajadhipok's Undercover Agent), Bangkok: Thai kasem, 1978, 259.

¹⁷ On this point, see C. Reynolds' discussion in 'The Plot of Thai History: Theory and Practice', in G. Wijeyewardene and E. Chapman (eds), *Patterns and Illusions: Thai History and Thought*, Singapore: ISEAS, 1992, 318-325. The revised version of a paper given in 1984, the essay can also be found under the title 'The Plot of Thai History' in *Proceedings of the International Conference on Thai Studies*, Bangkok, Chulalongkorn University, August 22-24, 1984.

constitutional government disrupted the court's own plans for an ordered transition towards democratic rule.¹⁸ Moreover, as a consequence of the kingdom's subsequent political history, the coup has often been characterized as the first in a series of unwarranted power seizures by self-serving individuals who sought little more than the perquisites of office.¹⁹ As documented in a recent study by the Thai scholar Nakharin Mektrairat, however, the intellectual process which led to the overthrow of the absolute monarchy began long before 1932 and the event itself had far more popular support than has previously been acknowledged in the literature.²⁰

Consider, for example, the history of the 'People's Association' (*samakhom ratsadon*) – an organization which was formed in the immediate after of the 24 June coup for the stated purpose of "lending support to the People's Party, helping with the activities of the nation, and seeking to promote unity and patriotism among the Thai."²¹ Plans for the association were made in advance of 24 June and on the day of the coup, party leaders began accepting applications for membership. The response was overwhelming and by mid-afternoon, the supply of applications was exhausted.²² At least a part of this initial enthusiasm was apparently due to a rumor that those who joined the association would eventually obtain work with the new government. At a formal opening ceremony in early July, however, it was publicly announced that members would receive "nothing but the gratitude of the populace" for their services.²³ Within six weeks, the association had a countrywide membership of ten thousand individuals and by early the following the year, it had recruited at least ten times that number and established branch organizations in every province of the kingdom.²⁴

¹⁸ See Thawatt Mokarapong, *The History of the Thai Revolution: A Study in Political Behavior*, Bangkok: Thai wathana phanit, 1972; and Chai-Anan Samudavanija, *14 tula khana ratsadon kap kabot boworadet* (14 October: The People's Party and the Boworadet Rebellion), Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University Press, 1974; "Nai Suchinda" *Phrapokklao kasat nak prachathipatai* (Prajadhipok – the Democratic King) Bangkok: Sayam, 1976; and Kramol Tongdhamachart, *Toward a Political Party Theory in Thai Perspective*, Singapore: Maruzen Asia, 1982.

¹⁹ For example, see D. Wilson, *Politics in Thailand*, New York: Cornell University, 1962; F. Riggs, *Thailand- The Modernization of a Bureaucratic Polity*, Honolulu: East-West Center, 1966; and J. Stowe, *Siam Becomes Thailand: A Story of Intrigue*, London: Hurst, 1991.

²⁰ Nakharin Mektrairat, *Kanpathiwat sayam 2475*, (The Siamese Revolution of 1932), Bangkok: Munithi khrongkan tamra sangkhomsat lae manuthayasat, 1992. In addition, see his essay 'khwamnukkhith khong ratsadon to kanplianplaeng thang kanmuang lae sethakit nai thasawan ti 2470' (Siamese Perceptions of Political and Economic Change in the 1927-1937 Period), *Warasan thammasat*, 14:3, September 1985, 94-133.

²¹ NA, *lekthathikan khana rathamontri*, 0201.75/7, *khamprakat samakhom ratsadon* (4 July 1932 Announcement of the People's Association).

²² Applications were printed in advance of the coup and subsequently distributed at the Throne Hall. See Prayun Phamonmontri, 'The Political Change of 1932', in Thak Chalocemtiarana, (ed), *Thai Politics: Extracts and Documents 1932-1957*, Bangkok: Social Science Association, 1978, 66.

²³ NA, *lekthathikan khana rathamontri*, 0201.75/7, *khamprakat samakhom ratsadon* (4 July 1932 Announcement of the People's Association).

²⁴ *Bangkok Times Weekly Mail*, 22 August 1932, 35 and *10 Thanwa*, 1 June 1933, respectively. In this latter essay, the author estimated that the People's Association had 200,000 members

Apart from the indications of widespread support for the change of government, contemporary accounts of the post-coup period can be said to cast additional shadows on the prevailing historiographic paradigm of the modern Thai nation's beginnings as well. Despite an extensive debate over the significance of the 1932 coup, party-backed governments of the subsequent period are widely acknowledged to have been some of the most militantly nationalistic regimes in Thai history. Under the leadership of *phraya* Phahon Phonphayahasena and *jomphon* Plaek Phibunsongkhram, both key figures in the People's Party, the government pursued a complex array of 'nation building' (*kansang chat*) policies and programs – disseminating a particular view of Thai culture and the Thai past, promoting an irredentist movement to reclaim the territories ceded to the French, fostering a pan-Thai movement among the Tai-speaking peoples of neighboring countries, and even proclaiming the symbolic emergence of an ethnic Thai nation-state by changing the kingdom's name from 'Siam' to 'Thailand'.²⁵ Moreover, in at least one study of the period, it has been convincingly argued that these efforts were instrumental in engendering, for the very first time, a popular nationalist front which supported the political aims of the state.²⁶ Here, then, one finds a consensus of sorts that the People's Party was indeed a nationalist movement, raising the question of whether the overthrow of the Jakkri court was not a forthright rejection of the dynasty's claim to national legitimacy and a figurative 'liberation' of the Thai nation as well.

Add to this the contemporary recognition that much of the nation's pre-1932 past is a *post*-1932 construct – a history which was written and popularized in the aftermath of the absolute monarchy's overthrow.²⁷ In an essay now ten years old, C. J. Reynolds has rightly observed that it was a prominent member of the post-1932 political order, the writer and historian *luang* Wichit Wathakan, who assigned the meanings to 1932 which are with us today, braiding together the histories of the dynasty and the nation-state in such a way as to provide the nation's rulers with a new 'national liberator' status.²⁸ In doing so, *luang* Wichit sought to enhance the

in February of 1933. The organization was subsequently disbanded at the behest of Prajadhipok on the grounds that the Siamese were not ready for political parties.

25 Charnvit Kasetsiri, 'The First Phibun Government and Its Involvement in World War II', *Journal of the Siam Society*, July 1974, 25-63; Thamsook Numnonda, 'Phibulsongkhram's Thai Nation-Building Programme during the Japanese Military Presence 1941-1945', *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 9:2, September 1978, 234-47; Charoenrat Suwannaphusit, 'jomphon plaek phibun songkhram kap kansangchat wikhro jak phlaeng plukchai' (Field Marshal Plaek Phibun Songkhram and Nation-Building: An Analysis of Inspirational Songs), *Sinlapa wathanatham*, 9:6, April 1988, 77-94; and S. Barmé, *Luang Wichit Wathakan: Official Nationalism and Political Legitimacy prior World War II*, Canberra: Australian National University MA Thesis, 1989.

26 Barmé: 1989, 8, 155-156.

27 On this point, see Nakharin Mektrairat's discussion in 'kanplianplaeng kanpokkhong 2475 khong sayam phromdaen haeng khwamru' (The 1932 Change of Government: The Boundaries of Our Understanding), *Warasan thammawat*, 11:2, June 1982, 6-39.

28 Reynolds: 1984, 5; 16.

legitimacy of the new political order. In the process, however, he created a flattering 'tradition' for Siamese kingship as well – quite possibly a far more complimentary tradition than would otherwise have emerged had the institution of absolute monarchy been left in place.²⁹

1.2 A Counter-History of the Thai Nation. The possibility for an alternate biography of the modern Thai nation, one which acknowledges the court's early role in the nation's development while allowing for the possibility that the People's Party was a nationalist movement as well, emerges from a recent study by the Thai historian Thongchai Winichakul.³⁰ In an effort to trace the origins of Thai national consciousness, Thongchai examines the complex process which resulted in the creation of a bordered Siam, an expanse of sovereign political space which was henceforth to serve as the focal point of Thai patriotic sentiment, the unifying field for a new form of 'national' historiography, and the site of an 'internal' struggle over the meaning of nationhood and national identity. While much of his discussion is necessarily centered upon the court and its effort to project the authority of the dynastic state out to the newly-defined 'edges' of the empire, he also notes that this effort was *not* conducted in an ideological vacuum but rather was launched in order to displace and subsume a number of pre-existing loyalties and identities. Moreover, during the course of his study, he repeatedly emphasizes that the process of defining a national identity for the kingdom has remained a contested enterprise *up to the immediate present*.³¹

The idea that Thai national identity was shaped through a process of discursive struggle – and not just between 'Siam' and 'the West' but also between a succession of Siamese rulers and their recalcitrant subjects – is suggested by a growing corpus of literature on the topic of 'official' Thai nationalism as well. Benedict Anderson first employed the category in a Siamese context in order to argue that the nation-building effort of the Jakkri court was an anticipatory strategy for precluding the spread of popular nationalisms which might otherwise have undermined the integrity of the dynastic empire.³² Moreover, this interpretation has subsequently been affirmed in the studies of Kullada (1984; 1987), Murashima (1986; 1988), and Barmé (1989; 1993). Through the focus of their research and in the latter two instances, through the force of their own conclusions, all four individuals have suggested that the nationalist tenets espoused by two Jakkri monarchs and a handful of their ministers constituted

²⁹ See Barmé: 1989; 1993.

³⁰ Thongchai: 1988.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 14-20; 420

³² For a discussion of 'official' nationalism, see H. Seton-Watson, *Nations and States: An Enquiry into the Origins of Nations and the Politics of Nationalism*, Boulder: Westview Press, 1977, 148; and Anderson: 1983, 86-87; 95; 99-101.

the 'dominant' form of Thai nationalism during the period.³³ At the same time, however, all four have also taken note of the rival nationalist voices and 'unofficial' nationalisms which served as the targets of the court's official discourse. Anderson, for example, has implied that the kingdom's rulers were seeking to forestall the possibility that Siam's burgeoning population of ethnic Chinese would develop a discrete national identity.³⁴ Similarly, Kullada has argued that members of the ruling elite were engaged in a threefold effort to dispel a previous understanding of polity, counter the discontent resulting from the spread of education, and hinder the development of a middle-class 'bourgeois nationalism'.³⁵ Murashima, meanwhile, asserts that the court was primarily interested in halting the spread of Western liberalism, although he also takes note of the other, more radical forms of Thai nationalism which were emerging to intellectual currency during the period.³⁶ Finally, Barmé has written that official nationalism was formulated in response to the development of a politicized Chinese community, the growth of a critical bureaucratic elite, and the emergence of an increasingly restive educated commoner class.³⁷ In addition, however, he also notes that nationalism was a discourse which the ruling elite "could neither monopolize nor totally control" and makes brief mention of a popular nationalism which began to take shape in the 1920's – a nationalism which was seemingly formed in opposition to the dynastic state.³⁸

Apart from revealing the contested nature of early Thai nationalist discourse, this list of ideas and groups which served as the 'internal enemies' of the court's official nationalism is significant in several respects. First, it suggests that the kingdom's rulers were engaged in an ideological struggle with those very elements in society which formed the vanguard of nationalist movements in neighboring colonial states: Western-trained professionals employed in the civil and military bureaucracies, members of the urban intelligentsia, and representatives of ethnic groups residing under the authority of 'alien' rulers.³⁹ Secondly, it raises a number of interesting questions regarding the matter of how the discourse of nationalism was actually disseminated in Siam. As previous studies have tended to focus upon the court and its role in mediating between Siam and the outside world, the impression has arisen that Siamese rulers were the first to learn the idea of nationhood from the West. Indeed, long before their subjects appreciated the significance of the concept, Jakkri monarchs are held to have not only realized its political utility but taken steps to defuse its

33 Murashima: 1988; Barmé: 1993, 32.

34 Anderson: 1983, 100.

35 Kullada: 1984, 1-2; 1987, 109.

36 Murashima: 1986, 5.

37 Barmé: 1993, 21-22.

38 *Ibid.*, 32.

39 Smith: 1991, 106-110.

potential dangers by disseminating a state-centered nationalist discourse through the kingdom's school system. In allowing for the parallel development of a number of conflicting nationalist visions during the period, however, one is forced to conclude that the discourse of nationalism was also learned and disseminated through 'unofficial' channels as well, and without the mediation of the court. Moreover, if as has been suggested by Kullada, Murashima, and Barmé, education was at once a cause of political unrest and a factor in the emergence of an anti-royalist opposition, then it would appear that the court's principal means of promoting an official nationalist discourse – public schooling – was only partially effective. In fact, there are grounds for arguing that this latter effort may even have had the opposite of its intended effect – fostering a critical awareness of Siam and the outside world which ultimately contributed to the development of the 'middle-class nationalism' mentioned by Kullada and Barmé.

1.3 The Aims of This Study. From the foregoing discussion, the central arguments of this study should be readily apparent. Among other things, I have been attempting to suggest that the role of the Jakkri court in the early history of Thai nationalism has been grossly overstated. At the same time, I have drawn upon the recent studies of a number of individuals in order to emphasize the contested nature of early Thai nationalist discourse as well. Missing from this discussion, of course, is an account of the other nationalist voices of the period – a deficiency which will necessarily be addressed in the following pages.

The second part of my argument is far more problematic. As I have already mentioned, Jakkri monarchs are widely perceived to have exerted a dominant influence over the early formation of Thai national identity. As a result, other nationalist writers of the period have either been ignored or treated in a cursory fashion. While conducting research at the Thai National Library, however, I was literally overwhelmed by the volume of nationalist criticism which appeared in the Bangkok press, much of it in the decade just prior to the absolute monarchy's overthrow. Moreover, it became increasingly evident that many of the more popular publications of the period were highly critical of Jakkri rule, a correlation which would seem to indicate that the court's efforts to make the dynasty the focal point of Thai nationalist sentiment met with little success. Indeed, by virtue of the growing number of writers who undertook to portray the institution of absolute monarchy as an impediment to the progress of the Thai nation, and the fact of the absolute monarchy's overthrow, I have been led to conclude that the court's influence over the nation's development actually diminished over time as other, more popular nationalisms emerged to intellectual currency.

The third and final part of my thesis follows from the second. By arguing that Thai nationalism was initially the contested discourse of a ruling elite and a disenfranchised urban literati, by tracing the development of an intellectual movement for popular sovereignty in the 1920's, and by raising the possibility that it was this latter vision of nationhood which ultimately provided a reference frame for the overthrow of the dynastic state and the creation of a new national government, I hope to show that the modern Thai nation evolved in much the same manner as the nations which emerged in neighboring colonial states.

II

Print Journalism and the Matter of Siamese Unity

2.1 Introduction. Insomuch as the primary source materials for this study are a collection of essays and editorials which were published in the Thai-language press, it is appropriate that some consideration be given at the outset to the early history of Siamese journalism. Indeed, such consideration is doubly warranted, for print capitalism and one of its earliest products, the newspaper, had much to do with the development of national consciousness. Like the map, the printed vernacular facilitated the 'imagining' of a novel political space, a single linguistic field accessible to the finite number of individuals who shared the same language.¹ Paradoxically, however, even as the newspaper contributed to the formation of a vernacular community, it created a growing awareness of the divisions within its ranks. An inherently multi-voiced medium, it required the juxtaposition of rival viewpoints and conflicting accounts within the confines of a single discursive space, belying the idea that the linguistic collective was a homogenous community of opinion.

For similar reasons, the newspaper also posed a number of concrete challenges to the discursive authority of the Jakkri court. The very act of publishing a newspaper was predicated upon, and ultimately served to engender, a sense of collective interest and concern, a perception which lay at the heart of such notions as 'public affairs', 'public opinion', and 'public accountability'. At the same time, the newspaper encouraged the idea of social equality as well, both by compelling each individual contributor to address an anonymous audience of unknown rank and status as peers and by establishing a novel criteria for the validation of opinion – the reasoned argument.² Finally, through publication, 'the voice of authority' was given the appearance of being but one voice among many and exposed to interpretation, contestation, and debate.

¹ Anderson: 1983, 44-45; 62-63.

² On this latter point, see T. Eagleton, *The Function of Criticism: From the Spectator to Post-Structuralism*, London: Verso, 1984.

Of necessity, then, the newspaper's role in the early development of Thai nationalist discourse is a topic which warrants being examined in this and the next several chapters. Herein, I will present a brief account of the early history of newspaper publishing in Siam and thereafter, will trace the outlines of a late nineteenth century debate over the meaning of unity, a literary exchange which was set in train when Chulalongkorn and the members of his court sought to use the newspaper as a vehicle for promoting a sense of loyalty to the throne.

2.2 The Siamese Newspaper Trade. In a number of previous studies, the history of Siamese journalism has been recounted as yet another example of successful Jakkri 'modernization'.³ Although the art of newspaper publishing was introduced into Siam by the American missionary Dan Beach Bradley, members of the court are believed to have quickly assumed a preeminent role in the development of a vernacular press. King Monkut took a personal interest in printing and is thought to have emerged as an early champion of press freedom in consequence.⁴ In addition, his successors Chulalongkorn and Vajiravudh are held to have actively promoted the growth of an independent press in an effort to educate the subjects of the realm and pave the way for an eventual transition towards democratic rule.⁵

These flattering accounts of the monarchy's role in the early history of Siamese journalism aside, however, there are grounds for arguing that the press was an institution which established itself in Siam, despite the repeated attempts of the court to arrest and later dominate the course of its development. When Bradley undertook to produce the kingdom's first vernacular newspaper in 1844, his effort was openly opposed by the Third Reign court and failed within the space of a single year.⁶ Moreover, for the next thirty years newspaper publishing continued to be the private and largely unsuccessful endeavor of the foreign missionary community.⁷ Indeed, the sole exception in the period prior to 1874 was Monkut's *Royal Gazette*, a publication

³ Suphaphan Bunsat, *Prawat nangsu'phim nai prathet thai* (A History of the Press in Thailand), Bangkok: Bannakit, 1974; Sukanya Tirawanit, *Prawatkan nangsu'phim thai phai dai rabob somburanayasitthirat* (A History of the Thai Press Under the Absolute Monarchy), Bangkok: Thai wathana phanit, 1977; Chai'anant Nanthaphan, 'seriphap khong nangsu'phim nai samai phrabatsomdet phramonkutklao jaoyuhua' (Freedom of the Press During the Reign of King Vajiravudh), *Warasan thammasat*, 7:2, October 1977; Lawan Chotamara, *Ubatkan nangsu'phim* (The Origins of the Press), Bangkok: Phasiko, 1979; and Prayut Sitthiphan, *Thannandon si chiwit naknangsu'phim* (The Fourth Estate: A History of Thai Journalists), Bangkok: Buphit, 1984.

⁴ A.L. Moffat, *Monkut the King of Siam*, Ithaca: Cornell Press, 1961, 157-158; Prayut: 1984, 47.

⁵ Suphaphan: 1974, 74-76; Sukanya: 1977, 66; Chai'anant: 1977, 14-44; Lawan: 1979, 252; and Prayut: 1984, 259-263.

⁶ See Prayut: 1984, 13-15; and Anek Navikamun, 'chomna nangsu'phim chabap rack khong muang thai' (Siam's First Newspaper), *Sinlapa wathanatham*, 12:9, July 1991, 129.

⁷ Arnold Wright (ed), *20th Century Impressions of Siam*, London, 1908; and Khachon Sukkhaphanit, *Kao rack khong nangsu'phim nai prathet thai* (The Beginning of Journalism In Thailand), Bangkok: Suksaphanphanit, 1983.

which was meant to be used for purposes of 'official' discourse. Explaining his aims for the *Gazette* in 1858, the monarch announced that it would serve as a venue for the government to bring its myriad proclamations, prohibitions, and edicts to attention of the kingdom's subjects so that the king's wishes would be "known to all" and "false rumors damaging to the reputation of the government and the honor of the throne" could be brought to an end.⁸ Ironically, precisely because of the difficulties in representing the Siamese government with a single voice, the *Gazette* failed to last out the year. The small staff of the royal printery was overwhelmed by the project and when a foreign publisher offered his assistance, Monkut refused to hire him out of concern that he might further impede the enterprise by attempting to exercise an independent editorial authority.⁹

In the 1860's at a time when a small but growing newspaper trade had been established in the capital, Monkut took a number of steps to limit the scope of journalistic activity in the kingdom as well, placing prohibitions on the Siamese literati and attempting to exert an influence over the capital's foreign publishers. Concerned by the growing number of petitioners and litigants who used "the newspapers of the foreign doctors" as a forum in which to air their "private grievances", he proclaimed his intention to ignore any allegations which appeared in print and admonished his subjects to remember that such materials were "not to be taken as true."¹⁰ On a number of occasions, he also wrote to the kingdom's principal newspaper publishers to express his displeasure over the editorial commentary of their respective publications. In a letter of 1865, for example, he complained to Bradley that

even when a newspaper speaks of political affairs in Europe and America, there are few who are pleased to read of such things ... for one cannot help but notice the latent meanings (*khwaam to na tit lang*) of such commentary as well as the earlier understandings which have been excluded (*khwaamru kao ko mai mi ma*) ... Moreover, whenever mention is made of Siamese affairs, there are only criticisms and complaints, without a single good word being said about our officials from the king down to the members of the judiciary. [With respect to the Thai-language edition of the *Recorder*], there is hardly an issue which doesn't speak of us in this way and if not, we are still repeatedly urged to spend money on building this thing or doing that, told to invest in railroad construction, and to start using telegraphs ... And while only a few of us read the English *Recorder*, its articles ... are even more critical of Siam's

⁸ Monkut, 'prakat ruang ok nangsu ratchakitchanubeksa 2401', (An 1858 Announcement on the Issuing of the *Royal Gazette*), *Prachum prakat ratchakan thi si 2394-2404* (The Collected Royal Edicts of the Fourth Reign: 1851-1861), Bangkok, 1968.

⁹ See Prayut: 1984, 50-51.

¹⁰ See Mongkut, 'prakat mai hai chu khokhwam thi mi phu thing nangsu' pai long nai nangsu'phim' (Notification Prohibiting Belief in the Views being Published in the Newspaper), *Prachum prakat ratchakan thi si 2405-2411* (The Collected Royal Edicts of the Fourth Reign: 1862-1868), Bangkok, 1968; and Seni Pramroj, *A King of Thailand Speaks*, Bangkok: Siam Society, 1987, 81.

rulers and religion than the Thai version ... Were we to reflect upon the criticism being continually directed at us and our country, we might decide that we don't want any printing firms selling their wares here for we are not able to improve the country by changing its customs, its traditions, its religious practices, the behavior of its people and ourselves in the manner which those at the printing press are proposing ... such proposals are not pleasing to Thai ears, even if foreigners here and abroad enjoy reading them. Thus, when a printing enterprise has no value for our country, I would like to order it closed...¹¹

The problem, as he noted near the end of his letter, was that Siam had no law by which to do so, and its treaties with the "civilized" (*siwiliset*) countries of Europe had no provision for one either. In the process of treaty negotiation, Monkut and his ministers agreed to refrain from placing restrictions upon the commercial activities of foreign nationals in Siam, making no allowance for the possibility that there might eventually be a need to regulate the foreign-owned publishing concerns of the kingdom.¹² Moreover, in granting Siam's foreign residents extraterritorial status, the court inadvertently committed itself to bring libel proceedings against foreign-registered publications in the consular courts, where a Western standard of journalistic propriety prevailed.¹³

Faced with the difficulty of regulating the kingdom's newspaper trade, Monkut's successor Chulalongkorn early on devised an alternate strategy for controlling press discourse, one which continued to be utilized by the court until well into the twentieth century – patronage. At the opening of the Fifth Reign, the *Royal Gazette* was not only reissued as the official organ of the Siamese government but 'semi-official' news and opinion was also carried in a succession of royalist broadsheets – *Darunowat* and *Khot khao ratchakan*.¹⁴ And as the reign progressed, a host of additional publications were produced under royal auspices as well: *Wachirayan*, *Wachirayan wiset*, *Yutthakot*, *Thammajaksu*, *Thammasat samai*, *Thesaphiban*, and *Thawi panya* to name but a few. In the 1890's, an effort was even made to develop an 'official' foreign-language press, both by assisting foreign nationals to establish newspapers in the capital and by attempting to influence the editorial policies of existing publications through the provision of annual subsidies.¹⁵

¹¹ Prayut: 1984, 44. Bradley undertook to reissue the *Bangkok Recorder* in 1865.

¹² *Ibid.*, 43-45.

¹³ During the later decades of the century, the court was nonetheless able to successfully prosecute a number of foreign publishers, notably H. Gotte of the *Siam Mercantile Gazette* in 1889 and J. Lillie of the *Siam Free Press* in 1895.

¹⁴ See Phonphirom Iamtham, *Botbat thang kanmuang khong nangsu'phim thai* (The Political Role of the Thai Press), Bangkok: Khrongkan tamra, 1977, 7; and Khachon: 1983, 68-98.

¹⁵ In 1892, the government began subsidizing T. Lloyd-Williams's English-language daily, the *Bangkok Times*. Moreover, at the behest of the court, W. A. G. Tilleke and G. W. Ward began publishing the *Siam Observer* the following year and were henceforth provided with an annual subsidy. In addition, the owner of the *Siam Free Press* was expelled from Siam in 1895, J. Ward was asked to manage the paper on the government's behalf. For a discussion of

As will become apparent in the next section, however, this effort to shape press discourse through patronage was only partially successful, largely because of the nature of newspaper publishing. As noted by the editor of *Darunowat* in 1875, there was simply no way to produce a newspaper alone. Rather, it demanded instead that a community of literati contribute their intelligence, their support, and ultimately their comments, news, criticisms, and corrections.¹⁶ As a result, the medium quickly proved to be a poor vehicle for representing authority in monolithic terms.

2.3 Unity: A Late Nineteenth Century Problematic.

Create a sense of unity (*samakkhi*) ... and the country will stand forever.¹⁷

In the mid-nineteenth century, the Thai language appears to have allowed for a distinction to be made between two different categories of unity – a unity of action and a unity of belief. The former, that particular type of unity made manifest through collective endeavors, was conveyed by the word *phrom* (ready, all together, at the same time) and its related compounds *phromphriang* (joined, in unison, all at the ready) and *phromjai* (lit: hearts all together, unanimity).¹⁸ When referring to a unity of conviction or belief, however, one used a different word altogether – *samakkhi*. It was derived from the Pali *samagga*, a revealing compound of *sang* (a gathering together, a convergence around) and *agga* (the topmost, the best, or the highest) which was used in early Buddhist canon to denote the idea of harmony within the *sangha*, or Buddhist order.¹⁹ Moreover, the word appears to have initially retained a religious connotation in Siam.²⁰

During the early years of the Fifth Reign, however, the idea of *samakkhi* was afforded a growing significance in the secular life of the kingdom as well. At the time of Chulalongkorn's second coronation in 1873, the monarch selected a verse from one of Prince Patriarch Sa Putsathewa's sermons for his new seal of office (*am phaendin*) – a Pali couplet in which *samakkhi* was described as being essential for the prosperity

the subsidy policy and a list of additional publications which received government assistance in the Sixth Reign, see the discussion in the next chapter.

¹⁶ *Darunowat*, 2:15, 1875, 'nangsu' darunowat' (*Darunowat*).

¹⁷ King Bhumipol Adulyadej, 'krasae phraratchadamrat si thanwa' (Royal Speech of 4 December), *Khao phiset*, 12 December 1991, 10-12.

¹⁸ D. J. B. Pallegoix, *Dictionarium Linguae Thai*, Paris, 1854; D. B. Bradley, *Dictionary of the Siamese Language* (in the Vernacular), 1873; and J. L. Vey, Revised Edition of Pallegoix, *Dictionnaire Siamois Francais Anglais*, 1896.

¹⁹ T. W. Rhys Davids, and William Stede, *The Pali Text Society's Pali-English Dictionary*, London: Routledge, 1972. Until the middle of the century, the word was frequently rendered in Thai as *samakkha* – a transliteration of the Pali. Pallegoix: 1854.

²⁰ For example, see Prince Patriarch Wachirayan Warorot's 1898 address on the topic of *samakkhi* in *somdet phramahasomanjao Wachirayan Warorot, Thammakhadi* (Moral Matters), Bangkok: Mahamakut, 1971, 267-269.

(*khwamjaroen*) and success of all group endeavors.²¹ In addition, over the course of the next year, he not only personally instructed his courtiers on the meaning of *samakkhi* but the court-run publication *Darunowat* carried a series of parables on the subject in an effort to emphasize its importance to the broader capital literati as well.²²

As these latter tales provide an indication of the particular significance which Chulalongkorn attached to the concept of *samakkhi*, they warrant being examined in detail. Before doing so, however, some consideration should be given to the context in which they were published. In histories of the reign, the 1873-75 period is usually discussed in terms of Chulalongkorn's efforts to assert the primacy of his office in the face of the opposition of the kingdom's influential ex-regent *somdet jao phraya* Si Suriyawong (Chuang Bunnak) and his protégé second king Prince Wichaichan.²³ Upon entering his majority in 1873, the monarch sought to introduce a number of reforms into Siam's traditional system of government in a twofold effort to streamline the kingdom's political administration and consolidate the authority of the throne.²⁴ In the process, however, he antagonized a number of the kingdom's nobles and officials, many of whom had a vested interest in maintaining the existing political order, and by late 1874, his relations with Wichaichan had deteriorated to the point of armed conflict, giving rise to a crisis which was only resolved through the mediation of the British.²⁵ As a result, in 1875 the king chose to moderate his views and abandon a

21 Chai-Anan Samudvanija, *Ekkasan kanmuang kanpokkhong thai* (Documents on Thai Politics and Administration), Bangkok: samakhom sangkhomsat haeng prathet thai, 1975, 157-158.

22 Regarding Chulalongkorn's efforts to explain the importance of *samakkhi* to his courtiers, see *Wachirayan wiset*, 1:2, 1885, 'jotmai jak phraya phichai songkhram' (A Letter from *phraya* Phichai Songkhram). With respect to *Darunowat*, a history of the paper can be found in Khachon: 1983, 68-95.

23 Wyatt: 1969; Battye: 1974, 110-209; and Terwiel: 1983.

24 By early 1873, Chulalongkorn had already drawn up a formal program of reform for his ministerial council – a plan which included the complete abolition of corvée, slavery, and gambling, a reform of the law courts, the development of a salaried bureaucracy, and the creation of a police force and a standing army. Moreover, during the course of the next year and a half, steps were taken to implement a number of its components. Apparently, the principal source of conflict between the king and his ministers was the matter of state finance, however. Shortly after entering his majority, the monarch took the unprecedented step of attempting to centralizing the kingdom's finances under the authority of the throne. Tax farm revenues previously remitted to and retained by the kingdom's ministries were ordered to be sent directly to a new finance office in the Grand Palace. Moreover, an audit office was established in an effort to make the previously quasi-independent ministries fiscally accountable to the king. At the same time, the kingdom's various ministries and departments were ordered to begin budgeting their expenditures in consultation with finance office. See Brown: 1975, 32-35; Battye: 1974, 137-138; Engel: 1975, 63-66; Terwiel: 1983, 220; Wyatt: 1984, 192.

25 The British were called upon to assist in resolving the confrontation in early 1875 after Wichaichan took refuge in the British legation. The prince, who was close to the British Consul T. G. Knox, apparently anticipated that British mediation would result in a settlement favorable to the front palace. Ultimately, however, mediation fell to the Governor General of Singapore Sir Andrew Clarke, an individual who for a number of reasons elected to support to Chulalongkorn instead. In the 1870's, the prevailing view of Chulalongkorn in Singapore was a favorable one. Moreover, on several occasions in the period prior to 1875, Chulalongkorn had written to Clarke in order to ask his advice and assistance in developing Siam. Finally, at the time of the conflict, it was the policy of the British Foreign Office to

number of his early reforms in an effort to conciliate the various factional groupings in the capital.²⁶

It was in the months leading up to the crisis with Wichaichan that *Darunowat* began publishing a series of parables on the topic of *samakshi*. In August of 1874, for example, it featured a tale of Jupiter, "lord of all animals great and small", and his effort to end division within the animal kingdom.²⁷ Concerned that many of the animals were in the habit of unfairly eating others of their own kind (*chat dieo kan*) at a time when humans were causing increasing difficulties for their number, he called the beasts of the realm to a meeting and demanded that they swear an oath to refrain from doing anything which he indicated was unjust. In addition, they were to keep from harboring any evil thoughts against their sovereign and his laws as well. The plan was immediately agreed to by all but the lion, the tiger, and the bear – these latter three being secretly concerned that their diets were likely to suffer if they adhered to Jupiter's wishes. The monkey guessed their thoughts, however, and as the story ended, it sought to shame them by exclaiming "for ages, you have ruthlessly eaten both people and animals. Haven't you had your fill? How many more hundreds of years must elapse before you stop?"

The following week the topic was raised again in a tale ostensibly taken from a fourteenth-century cosmological treatise, the *Traiphumkhatha*.²⁸ It told of a tree of

cultivate relations with native Southeast Asian rulers who appeared capable of providing a stable administration for the interests of Western trade and commerce. Thus, when Clarke arrived, he strongly supported Chulalongkorn – not only upbraiding the ex-Regent Si Suriyawong on several occasions but also making British respect for the "royal family proper" exceedingly clear. See Xie Shunyu, *Siam and the British 1874-75: Sir Andrew Clarke and the Front Palace Crisis*, Bangkok: Thammasat University Press, 1988.

²⁶ Terwiel: 1983, 228; Wyatt: 1984, 194.

²⁷ *Darunowat*, 1:5, 4 August 1874. The tale was an allegory of a more specific nature as well. In August of 1874, Chulalongkorn invited a number of the more prominent members of the royal family and nobility to join a newly-formed Privy Council. As a result of the monarch's conflict with Si Suriyawong, however, a number of individuals were immediately unwilling to do so. A part of their reticence was due to an oath of loyalty which council members were required to swear to the king and the widespread rumors that Chulalongkorn had plans to change the law of succession in favor of his own family line. Both matters were directly alluded to in an essay published in *Darunowat* in which the writer expressed his confidence that the forty-nine councillors would unite together to assure that Chulalongkorn's son succeeded him to the throne. In addition, he satirically inquired as to whether those who had failed to join may have found "something in the oath which they couldn't stomach" [*Darunowat*, 1:9, 1 September 1874, 'tham dwei ruang priwi khaonsin' (Asking About the Privy Council)]. This was but one of a number of political allegories published by *Darunowat* during the period. In July, for example, the paper also featured a tale about a kindly "lion-king" (Chulalongkorn) which was compelled to drive an "arrogant elephant" (Wichaichan) and its "master" (Si Suriyawong) from his cave in order to make a refuge for the other beasts of the realm. Moreover, the same issue carried another parable in which Si Suriyawong was depicted as a greedy old man who sought to trick his own grandchild out of some fruit, only to be humiliated when the child admonished him to remember that "old evils are no longer wanted. It is wrong to be concerned about gathering up as much as you can to eat by yourself." See *Darunowat*, 1:4, 28 July 1874, 'nithan boran wa dwei ratchasi kap chang' (An Ancient Story Regarding A Lion-King and an Elephant); and the untitled tale on page 35.

²⁸ *Darunowat*, 1:6, 11 August 1874, 51; 'nithan ruang traiphum' (A Tale from the Traiphum). While the tale was said to have been taken in its entirety from the *Traiphumkhatha*, the work

mythic proportions which bore a fruit so delicious that the kings of ten kingdoms made an annual pilgrimage to gather it. A year came, however, when the rulers converged on the tree to find that it had failed to produce the abundant harvest of the past. In fact, it appeared to have stopped growing altogether, a development which led the assembled monarchs to debate the causes of its decline. In the process, their attention was increasingly drawn to the tree's numerous flaws, prompting several of those present to suggest that the time had come to cut it down. No sooner was this proposed, however, than the various parts of the tree began quibbling among themselves, each laying blame on the other for the shortcomings of the whole. While those on the ground were initially amused by the development, they were shortly drawn into the dispute as well – some siding with the branches and others with the leaves. The situation was only saved when a deity (*deva*) residing in the treetop admonished the various parts of the tree to remember that they not only belonged to the same plant species (*chat phoet dieokan*) but also were parts of the same plant. Noting that their sole hope of survival lay in united action (*phromphriangkan*), the deity promised to ask that the tree be spared, provided its various parts agree to follow his guidance. This they did and the tree was not only saved but quickly regained its flourishing state. Significantly, the tale concluded with a couplet in which *samakkhi* was described as being necessary for the prosperity and success of all group endeavors, the same verse selected by Chulalongkorn for his seal of office the previous year.

In addition, the issue also featured a story which served to illustrate the converse proposition – that a lack of *samakkhi* led to disaster.²⁹ It told of a greedy lion which left a cave replete with food in order to travel to a distant land in search of more. Entering a forest "somewhere in the vicinity of India", it encountered a herd of elephants and immediately determined to eat the entire lot. Inasmuch as to move against any one member of the herd was to risk being gored by the rest, however, it was compelled to trick the elephants into splitting up. This, it did by walking up to the herd and announcing that it had just encountered a ferocious beast which loved nothing better than to eat elephant meat. Alarmed by the news, the elephants inquired how they might best protect themselves, the lion replying in turn that they would in all likelihood escape notice if each went off on its own to hide. The elephants followed this advice, with the result that the lion was able to kill the entire herd.

While a number of similar fables were published in *Darunowat* over the course of the next few months, the tales recounted above suffice to indicate the particular set of

contains little more than a passing reference to a mythical jambolan tree of giant proportions. See F. Reynold's translation, *Three Worlds According to King Ruang: A Thai Buddhist Cosmology*, Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press, 1982, 290-291.

²⁹ *Darunowat*, 1:6, 11 August 1874, 'ruang lai'on lae chang khlong' (The Story of the Lion and the Herd of Elephants).

meanings which the court sought to link to the concept *samakkhi* in late 1874. With the story of Jupiter, for example, the author was clearly offering a metaphoric affirmation of the importance of uniting around the throne, for only thereby could the kingdom be protected from 'the humans' who were making increasing difficulties for 'the animals'. In addition, a similar message was conveyed by the story of the tree. Again, the kingdom was shown to be confronted by a twofold threat – the "foreign kings" who had it in their power to "cut the tree down" and "the various parts of the tree" which jeopardized the existence of the collective by thinking only of their own interests. Moreover, as the story unfolded, the "deva" alone was shown to possess a disinterested concern for the well-being of the "tree" as a whole, making its leadership essential for the tree's survival. Finally, the principal themes of both tales were reflected in the fable of the lion and the elephants. The foreign threat was symbolized by the lion, internal division by the elephants, each of which thought only of saving itself. Inasmuch as the herd was leaderless, however, it was incapable of devising a collective defense and perished in consequence. Thus, in this latter parable as well, the kingdom's survival was shown to require the unifying leadership of an absolute king.

Significantly, this particular interpretation of unity was only one of several to be presented in the pages of *Darunowat* during the period. In December of 1874, for example, one anonymous author actually contributed a lengthy critique of the idea that a ruler and his laws constituted the legitimate focus of *samakkhi*.³⁰ He began by explaining the meaning of the verse on the king's seal of office, stressing among other things that *samakkhi* had long been recognized as "a higher virtue" (*pen thamma yang loet yang prasoet*) which was manifest whenever the members of a given group were motivated by a sense of "mutual compassion and concern" (*khwaam phromnamjai tokan*) to "direct their behavior towards the same end" (*praphoet ruam thang dieo kan*). In addition, he asserted that "compassion" was also the key to group prosperity (*khwaamjaroen rungruang*) as well as the primary source of happiness and well-being within the collective.

More remarkably, he repeatedly emphasized that rulers who failed to recognize the importance of compassion were a potent source of division in their own right. This latter point was not only stated in the essay but conveyed through parable as well, the author narrating a tale which he claimed had first been told by the Buddha in order to impart the "true meaning" of *samakkhi* to his royal relatives. The story concerned a flock of birds which successfully eluded a trapper on a number of occasions by placing their heads in his net and flying away with it. A day came, however, when several of their number quarreled over which was responsible for saving the rest. As

³⁰ *Darunowat*, 1:25, 22 December 1874, 'wa dwei samakkhi', (On Unity).

a result, the next time the trapper came, the birds involved in the dispute withheld their strength and the entire flock was caught. By way of a conclusion, the author noted that even greater misfortunes were likely to result from conflicts arising between men of power and position, making it essential that the rulers of a kingdom be content with their wealth and display benevolence towards their subordinates.³¹

In addition to publishing criticism of the court's effort to foster a 'unity around the throne', *Darunawat* also carried a number of appeals for reform during the period, essays which served to emphasize that loyalty to the king was insufficient to assure the kingdom's future development. In one, for example, the author directly addressed the question of how Siam could be led to "prosperity" (*khwamjaroen*).³² Rather than stressing the importance of unity, however, he argued that the kingdom could only be developed through an extended process of substantive reform. Prosperity was said to be contingent upon three things – knowledge, freedom, and justice – and as the people of the kingdom had "only a little knowledge", as many remained "the slaves of others", and as members of the judiciary continued to act "like clock pendulums, swaying between plaintiff and accused until having determined which was the richer of the two", a prosperous Siam was something which could only be hoped for in the future.³³ As for the immediate present, he felt that the uneducated could hardly be expected to make "wise choices about what might lead to prosperity and what to decline" or to "think in grand terms about what would result in disaster", for they were "barely capable of distinguishing between truth and falsehood." Moreover, he noted that those who remained slaves were unlikely to consider such matters at all, for the benefits of their labors accrued to their *nai* (masters, overlords, superiors). Finally, he asserted that the *nai* themselves were equally uninterested in giving such matters their attention as they already possessed everything they desired. Thus, he was led to conclude that Siam would only prosper when schools had been opened in every village and an effort had been made to "drive stupidity, dishonesty and injustice" from the kingdom.

Similarly, another writer of the period expressed the view that the country could not be expected to prosper so long as the government grew wealthy "by

³¹ The essay appears to have generated controversy at the time of its publication. Although the author promised to continue his discussion in the next issue of *Darunawat*, a second instalment of his essay failed to appear.

³² *Darunawat*, 2:9, 71, 'khwamjaroen' (Prosperity).

³³ During the course of 1874, there was considerable debate over the question of whether Chulalongkorn's attempt to prohibit slavery in Siam would succeed. In October, for example, one individual wrote to the editor of *Darunawat* in order to assert that the slavery edict was unlikely to succeed due to the power of the slave owners (*nai ngoen*) and the weakness of the kingdom's judicial system. In response, a second writer argued that it was possible to enforce the edict, provided it was equally applied to all parties without regard to their social standing (*chat trakun*). See *Darunawat*, 1:17, 27 October 1874, 'jotmai jaeng khwam' (An Explanatory Letter), and 1:20, 17 November 1874.

impoverishing the people."³⁴ Here, he was specifically referring to the revenue derived from the government's gambling tax concession – an "evil" which he felt should be prohibited immediately. Chinese tax concessionaires were said to be hindering the development of the "homeland" (*banmuang*) by drinking the blood of "the real humans in the country of the Thai" (*manut nai prathet thai thae thae*). Moreover, in so much as the government derived benefits from their efforts, it was held to have inadvertently fostered the impression that it had little interest in the welfare of the people, for "how could parents who made no effort to protect their children from evil spirits be said to really love them?" Thus, in order to demonstrate his "benevolent concern" for the subjects of the realm, the king was called upon to find an alternate source of revenue.

As noted above, such arguments can be said to have raised an indirect challenge to the idea of a unity around the throne by emphasizing that reform was a critical step in its realization. Not only was 'division' asserted to have arisen from a variety of causes besides the specific relations of the monarch and his ministers – the inequities of social standing, the relative economic positions of the Chinese and the Thai, and the relationship between the government and the people – but its amelioration was seen to entail a number of complex changes in the existing socio-political order as well. In the view of the first author, for example, it required the complete abolition of slavery, an overhaul of the kingdom's judicial system, and the establishment of a kingdom-wide education system, whereas the second seemingly called upon the government to redefine its fiscal relationship with the people of the kingdom as a whole and take steps to protect the interests of its ethnic Thai majority.

The significance of this early linkage between reform and unity was made manifest in 1885, when members of the court who had previously supported Chulalongkorn's effort to build the authority of the throne directly petitioned the king to establish a constitutional monarchy.³⁵ While the petition has frequently been cited as an indication of elite concern over the possibility of foreign intervention in Siam, its principal arguments were meant to convince Chulalongkorn of the need to adopt a

³⁴ *Darunowat*, 1:20, 17 November 1874, 'jaeng khwam ma yang nai khuai dai sap' (For Mr. Khwai's Information).

³⁵ *Jaonai lae karatchakan krapbangkhomthun khwamhen jatkan plianplaeng ratchakan phaendin r. s. 103* (A Petition of 1885 from Princes and Officials on the Need for Changing the Administration of the Kingdom) in *Anuson mom sanit kritthakon* (Cremation Volume of mom Sanit Kritthakon), 1967, 5-46. That impatience with the slow pace of reform was a factor in the decision to petition the king is suggested by the remarks of its principal author, Prince Pritsdang Chumsai. A few years after the episode, he observed that "during the life of the late ex-Regent and while the late Wangna [Wichaichan] was living, the King devoted all of his time and energy to public interests in order to consolidate his authority and power of administration and reduce those of the late ex-Regent and Wangna. The late ex-Regent on the other hand tried to maintain his authority by frustrating in every possible way all of the movements the King set forward, and played off the late Wangna against the King ... in this struggle much time and energy have been wasted ..." Cited in Brailey: 1989, 49.

series of reforms in the kingdom's political administration.³⁶ Not only was Siam's future independence said to require that steps be taken to develop the kingdom along "civilized" European lines in the manner of Japan, but this process was represented as a desirable end in its own right. Indeed, the stated aims of the various colonial powers of Europe – to foster a global civilization, to see the various peoples of the world attain an equal level of happiness and prosperity, to assure that the less developed countries of the world did not impede the advance of the human race as a whole, and to protect the fellow members of their race from the lawlessness and corrupt political administrations of other lands – were described in the petition as "good and just" and the Europeans themselves were held to have "the best interests" of their colonial wards at heart.

Particularly interesting, however, are the discursive links which the petitioners drew between unity and rule of law. It was asserted in the document that Siam's political administration had a number of serious shortcomings which had "hindered the prosperity of the kingdom and its people", principal among them being the institution of absolute monarchy. European prosperity was said to have resulted from constitutional rule – a system of government which permitted the peoples of Europe to "share the same goals" and "work towards the same objectives." Similarly, the future prosperity of Siam was held to "require the cooperative efforts" (*asai khwamphromphriang*) of its people as well. That this had yet to occur, however, was said to be due to the fact that the people of the kingdom still believed that the development of Siam was "the responsibility of the king alone." Thus, in order to lead them "to think and act together" (*sati panya lae kamlang khong ratsadon pen kanphromphriangkan*), it was necessary to establish a constitutional government, for only thereby would they come to understand that their personal interests corresponded with the interests of the collective. In effect, then, the promotion of unity in Siam was said to entail that the absolute monarchy be replaced with a constitutional form of government.

As will be discussed below, the argument is one which continued to be voiced up to the time of the absolute monarchy's overthrow in 1932. Here, however, it is sufficient to note that it failed to persuade the king.³⁷ In his response to the

³⁶ For example, see Chai-Anan: 1975, 47-48.

³⁷ It is worth noting, however, that several months after the incident, Prince Phichit Prichakon, a brother of the king who served as a member of his Privy Council and later as Minister of Justice, produced a lengthy essay on the topic of justice in "a conscious attempt to formulate a system of natural law implying some form of compact between the modern king and his subjects ..." (Engel: 1975, 9). While the essay was an attempt to explain the legislative power of the king, it also reflected several of the ideas put forward in the petition. In commenting upon the function of law, for example, Prince Phichit noted that people who lived in closed proximity usually desired to be treated equally. Despite this fact, however, he observed that there were always those who sought to take advantage of others. Thus, for the sake of the majority, he asserted that it was essential to regulate human interaction with just

petitioners, Chulalongkorn remarked that he also wished to see Siam prosper and had no personal interest in maintaining his absolute authority. At the same time, however, he argued that he was immediately unable to relinquish his power because of "the beliefs of the Siamese people" and the pressing need to improve the kingdom's political administration.³⁸

In the aftermath of the petition incident, *samakkhi* continued to be a frequent topic of discussion in the period press. However, much of the debate on the subject turned upon the significance of two closely-related concepts: 'interdependence' and the notion that interdependence brought with it a shared responsibility for the collective well-being, such so that each individual member of the group had a 'duty' to the rest.³⁹ Although both ideas were invariably held to be important ingredients of *samakkhi*, there was little agreement over how either one should be applied within the context of Siam.

That the people of the kingdom were dependent upon the king and had a 'duty' to follow his wishes was a point which continued to be emphasized throughout the period. In 1898, for example, Prince-Patriarch Wachirayan Warorot produced an explanation of *samakkhi* in many ways similar to the one developed in the parables of *Darunowat* some twenty-five years before.⁴⁰ He began by asserting that all forms of life "from ants and termites to human beings" were governed by the interaction of basic elements. Not only was human strength said to be contingent upon the joint functions of the body but the collective capabilities of humankind were held to be a function of human interaction as well. While people were able to build houses, establish cities, rule over each other, defeat dangers, and bring each other happiness,

laws, for only thereby could the kingdom prosper. See *Wachirayan wiset*, 1:3, 1885, 'thamasan winitchai yutitham penyangrai' (A Consideration of Justice; What is Justice?).

38 Chulalongkorn, 'Phraratchadamrat top khwamhen khong phu ja hai plian kanpokkhong' (A Royal Proclamation of 1885 in Response to the Views of Those Who Wish the King to Change the Political Administration), in *Anuson mom sanit kritthakon* (Cremation Volume of mom Sanit Kritthakon), 1967, 53-60.

39 In the late nineteenth century, the idea of 'interdependence' was conveyed in Thai with a variety of expressions, *asai kan lae kan* (each depending upon the other) being one of the more commonly used. Regarding the concept of 'duty', the Thai word *nathi* was already in use in the 1890's, although the idea was frequently conveyed with the transliteration, *duthi*. A possible explanation for this borrowing lies with the fact that the concept was coming to be viewed in a new way during the period. As noted by Arraphajak Satayanurak, the notion that an individual had a duty to the state only emerged to common currency in Siam in the latter half of the century. See Arraphajak Satayanurak, 'kankoet naeokhit nathi phonlamuang nai rat thai samai mai' (The Origin of an Idea: Citizens' Duties Under the New Thai State), *Rathasatsan*, 14:3, September, 1988, 204-227.

40 *Thammajaksu*, 5:8, 1898, 'samakkhi khoe khwamphromphriang' (Unity is to be in Accord), reprinted in *somdetphramahasomanjao* Wachirayan Warorot, *Thammakhadi*, Bangkok: Mahamakut, 1971: 267-269. While the title suggests that Wachirayan held *samakkhi* to be equivalent to *khwamphromphriang*, his essay appears to have been a conscious attempt to reassert the distinction between 'unity of action' and 'unity of thought'. See the discussion above.

they could only do so if they were willing to cooperate. Having thus explained why *samakkhi* was "the sole means of collective prosperity and success", he undertook to differentiate between two categories of unity found within human groups. Significantly, both were defined in terms of the relationship between ruler and ruled. The first was an outward unity of the social body (*kai samakkhi*) – a unity made manifest whenever the members of a given group acted together at the command of their leader in order to accomplish a task or fight a battle. The second was an inner unity of thought (*jit samakkhi*) which arose whenever personal preferences or shared feelings led the members of a group to willingly follow their leader's wishes. Although *kai samakkhi* alone was held to be sufficient for the survival of the collective, he argued that it was best for everyone if they could maintain both forms of unity at the same time. Conversely, he also asserted that there was nothing worse for the collective well-being than division (*khwaam taek samakkhi*), making it essential that the people of the kingdom set aside their own desires for the sake of unity within the polity.⁴¹

During the same period, there were also those who stressed that the monarch was no less dependent upon his subjects and had duties to perform as well. Usually the point was subtly made, as in the 1894 essay of one individual who humorously noted that a sense of unity would only prevail in Siam when members of the kingdom's upper class made an effort to interact with those below their station in life.⁴² On occasion, however, the king and his ministers were not only ascribed a number of specific duties but they were also held to have been remiss in performing them. In an essay written in 1903, for example, the commoner-writer Thianwan argued that the people of the kingdom could not be expected to carry out their "duty of creating wealth for themselves and the government" unless their efforts were facilitated through legal reform, public education, and support in developing the economy.⁴³ In addition, he

⁴¹ In a subsequent essay entitled 'Kings are the Leaders of Human Groups', Wachirayan also argued that it was essential for people who lived together in a collective to invest supreme authority in one of their number so that conflicts could be resolved to the satisfaction of all. See 'phraratcha pen hua na khon mu manut' (Kings are the Leaders of Human Groups), 13 October 1914, reprinted in *Thammakhadi*, Bangkok: Mahamakut, 1971, 294-300.

⁴² *Wachirayan wiset*, 47:20, 20 September 1894, 'kanraksa samakkhi nai phuan fung' (Maintaining Unity Within A Circle of Friends).

⁴³ *Tunlawiphak phochanakit*, 8, 16, 23 October 1903; 'wa dwei kamlang yai sam prakan khong banmuang' (On the Homeland's Three Strengths). In biographical materials, Thianwan (T. S. W. Wannapho, 1842-1915) has generally been represented as an anomalous figure – a commoner with a temple education who became an early advocate of progressive reform at a time when the majority of his peers seemed uninterested in the affairs of the kingdom. While there is undoubtedly a degree of truth to this representation, it is questionable on a number of points as well. For example, the reforms which Thianwan undertook to champion in the early twentieth century – the replacement of the absolute monarchy with a constitutional form of government, reform of the kingdom's judicial system, universal education, and the prohibition on gambling to name but a few – were oftentimes measures which had been discussed and debated within the capital for decades. Moreover, although Thianwan was more outspoken than his peers, there are indications that his views were shared by a number of his

asserted that such measures were a requisite step in promoting a sense of unity (*khwamsamakkhi phromphriang pen namnung jaidieokan*) in the kingdom as well. Within the confines of his essay, then, the government was held entirely to blame for Siam's continued division and weakness. Indeed, at one stage, he emphasized the point by remarking that those who had the "duty to take care of their fellow countrymen" were far more interested in "gathering up acres of fields and orchards, building their palaces on the banks of the river, and drawing water from its cooler reaches."

The same year, Thianwan also produced a lengthy essay on the topic of unity – one which reflected and was possibly meant to serve as a critique of Wachirayan's essay of 1898.⁴⁴ Like the prince, he drew a distinction between two different types of unity, a lower form and a higher. However, Wachirayan's *kai samakkhi* and *jit samakkhi* were both subsumed within Thianwan's first category – a "common" or "mundane unity of belief" (*sammana samakkhi, samakkhi lokiya*). Ideally, it was said to arise "in any country, city, village, home, temple, or group where people loved their race, country, or religion." Believing themselves to have been born to a given race, country, etc., they developed the conviction that others were also a part of their group and came to feel that a given country was their own. And this, in turn, led them to feel united with others included in their group such so that the problems faced by one were seen as the problems of the rest as well. When such sentiments arose, not only were the members of a group willing to apply their intelligence, their wealth, and their productive energies in the service of their leaders, their country, and their religion, but the group's leaders were equally willingly to look after their fellows, displaying compassion and tolerance towards those below their station.

At the same time, however, Thianwan added that *samakkhi lokiya* was a form of unity which was manifest by lesser creatures such as bees, wasps, ants, and termites which "lived together in darkness with no understanding of truth, goodness, and evil." Moreover, he explained that it was frequently detrimental to the interests of those excluded from the immediate circle of a given group. Unity among a band of thieves, for example, was held to pose serious problems for any who were not themselves thieves. Similarly, unity among a group of unjust officials was said to be

contemporaries. During the 1901-06 period, for example, the print run for his newspaper *Tunlawiphak phochanakit* was a thousand copies an issue, and as the paper never had more than 250 subscribers, a sizable portion of each print run was apparently sold on the street. In addition, as he built a legal practice and operated a bookstore while publishing his newspaper, it can be presumed that his views were to some extent supported and shared by a circle of friends, colleagues, clients, and customers. Indeed, in the essay cited above, Thianwan remarked upon his need to "rely upon the help of law students and others" in pursuing his efforts to help the "flocks of people who come to my home to talk about the government" to "overcome their fear."

⁴⁴ *Tunlawiphak phochanakit*, 23 October, 1, 8 November 1903; 'wa dwei khwamphromphriang lokiya lae thamma' (On Mundane and Moral Unity).

harmful for those who lived under their authority. Deprived of an education and denied the right to accumulate wealth, the people would not only experience suffering but they were also likely to be treated as the inferiors of people in other lands. And when a country's people were viewed in this light, he concluded that there was little likelihood that their kings and ministers would be seen as "powerful and civilized" either. As a result, he asserted that it was essential for human groups to cultivate a second type of unity – a higher "unity of moral conviction" (*thammasamakkhi, samakkhitham*). Its realization was held to entail that the individual members of a group think and act in an impartial manner, even to the extent of setting aside the interests of their immediate families. Justice (*khwamyutitham*) alone was to serve as their guiding principle. Moreover, they were to keep in mind that karma dictated the terms of this incarnation and the next, and remember that those who viewed the common people of the realm as "ants and termites" were only creating future difficulties for themselves.

As has already been noted, there are reasons for suspecting that this interpretation of unity was meant to serve as a critique of Prince-Patriarch Wachirayan. In several instances, Thianwan appeared to be directly criticising Wachirayan's views on the subject, as when he spoke of individuals who created problems for themselves by considering people as "ants and termites." Similarly, his claim that justice and not the throne should be taken as the focal point of unity could be read as an unflattering commentary on the prince's earlier effort to explain the concept of *samakkhi* in terms of the harmonious relations of ruler and ruled. In addition, his remarks were given a greater potency during the period by the context in which they were published, for the previous year Wachirayan had begun to reorganize the administrative hierarchy of the Buddhist *sangha*, bringing the temples and monks of the kingdom under the direct control of Bangkok.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ See P.A. Jackson, *Buddhism, Legitimation, and Conflict: The Political Functions of Urban Thai Buddhism*, Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1989, 66-70. Thianwan's views could easily have been construed as being representative of a critical opposition within the confines of Chulalongkorn's own court during the period. A nephew and previous disciple of Prince-Patriarch Sa, he long enjoyed the support of several influential members of the royal family. Prince Sawat Wathanawisit, a brother of Chulalongkorn and one of the principal signatories of the reform petition of 1885, was a lifelong patron, the two men entering into contact after Thianwan submitted a lengthy reform proposal to the court in 1872. As a result of their friendship, Thianwan was briefly afforded a peripheral membership in the king's "Young Siam" faction – moving to Bangkok to start a law practice, occasionally writing for *Darunowat*, and periodically being invited to "speak in temples and in the homes of the powerful." His outspokenness appears to have eventually antagonized certain influential members of the court, however. In 1879 he was arrested and briefly held without charges. Then, in 1882, he was arrested again on a fabricated charge and, despite the full knowledge of the court and the support of influential friends (he was regularly visited and provided with books and writing materials) he was allowed to languish in prison for the next sixteen years. Although briefly freed in 1892 and 1897, he was reincarcerated after each incident, only being released in 1898 through the personal intervention of then-Minister of Justice Prince Ratburi. Thereafter, he briefly considered leaving Siam for England but was ultimately encouraged to remain in the country by Sawat, who provided him the necessary

Whether out of concern over Thianwan's essay or for some other reason, Chulalongkorn personally addressed the topic of *samakkhi* a few months later, doing so in a manner which made it clear that he was acquainted with Thianwan's views on the subject.⁴⁶ His remarks were specifically directed at the members of his own court, however, who he claimed held a number of contrary opinions on the causes of unity and division as well. At the outset, he asserted that much of the contention and debate on the subject was the result of a growing interest in European affairs among the kingdom's ministers and officials. Some were held to have developed the habit of drawing comparisons between Siam and the various countries of the West, arriving at the conclusion that European successes were due to their greater sense of unity (*pen samakkhi mai khatkhwang kan*) and shared purpose. At the same time, a number of others with a good knowledge of European languages and governmental forms were said to have developed the conviction that European unity was the result of parliamentary processes. Believing that the Europeans were able to thereby resolve their political conflicts to the satisfaction of all, the members of this latter group were held to be equally convinced that Siam's relative lack of prosperity was the result of the fact that its people were not allowed to similarly form themselves into ideological camps. In consequence, these latter individuals were said to be of the opinion that the government and people would only be united when the king established a parliament and permitted the formation of political parties.

Having outlined the debate prevailing among the kingdom's officials, he proceeded to criticise the viewpoints of both camps. With respect to the first group, he asserted that they either had "no understanding of what they are talking about" or were intentionally "praising the foreigners in order to scold their fellow Thai." While agreeing that Europeans frequently displayed a willingness to set aside their own immediate advantages for the sake of the long-term interests of their homelands, he felt it was wrong to conclude that this linkage between the individual European and his country of origin meant that they were united among themselves. Moreover, he saw little likelihood that the Siamese would be "scared into uniting" by an imaginary threat of foreign unity either. Although prepared to admit that political debate allowed people of differing opinions to reach agreement on matters of policy, he also claimed that the formation of a parliament would be of little immediate benefit at a time when most people still lacked a basic understanding of governmental matters. As there were only

capital to begin publishing his own newspaper. For a brief account of Thianwan's life and work, see Chai-Anan Samudavanija, *Thianwan lae K. S. R. Kulap*, Bangkok: Bannakit: 1981. Regarding the particulars of his arrest, see Sukanya: 1977, 55; and Suphot Chaengreow, 'Thianwan burut ratana khong samanchon' (Thianwan: the "Lord Chamberlain" of the Commons), *Sinlapa wathanatham*, 5:9, July 1984, 34-42.

⁴⁶ Chulalongkorn, 'Phraboromratchathipai wa dwei khwamsamakkhi lae khwam nai khatha thi mi nai am phaendin' (A Royal Explanation of Unity and the Significance of the Verse on the Seal of Office), 1903.

"twenty or thirty individuals in the government who wanted political parties", he noted that each party would have only a few members, making it immediately impossible to form a government. In addition, he expressed a personal belief that Siam "simply wasn't big enough for this type of activity", making it likely that excessive debate would create "additional divisions and conflicts." Thus, rather than agreeing to an abrupt reorganization of the government along European lines, he concluded that it was best to continue a policy of gradual reform.

He expressed concern, however, that his ability to pursue such a policy was being hindered by the divisions within the ranks of his own government. Instead of following his wishes, those entrusted to look after the kingdom's affairs were accused of persisting in their own views, with some believing that there was no need to make any change in the system of government and others asserting that the Siamese should "change their religion for the sake of the kingdom's prosperity." As the positions were irreconcilable, there was said to be considerable conflict among the ministers themselves. In consequence, he called upon everyone to recognize that "the only type of unity appropriate for Siam" was "a unity around the middle path of the king." The absolute monarchy was said to be grounded in "Siamese tradition", the people of the kingdom having long accepted the views of their monarch as being "the only correct ones." Moreover, apart from the "handful of people" who had developed the habit of opposing the king's wishes as a result of their "contact with foreigners", he felt that most of the kingdom's people continued to adhere to "the ancient custom of believing the views of the king to be true." Finally, he expressed irritation with individuals who felt that he should act on their every whim and stated his firm opposition to the idea "that people should be permitted to ignore his orders or judge him to be wrong", for such behavior merely served to indicate that an individual lacked "loyalty (*jong rakphakdi*) which is in truth unity (*samakkhi*)."

2.4 Conclusion. Despite Chulalongkorn's assertion that there was only one type of unity appropriate for Siam, a unity born of shared submission to the authority of the throne, the concept continued to be interpreted in a variety of contradictory ways over the next several decades. As will be discussed in the next chapter, Chulalongkorn's successor Vajiravudh was subsequently to address the topic in much the same manner as his father had before him.⁴⁷ At the same time, however, there were also an growing number of individuals who sought to characterize the court's definition of unity as a "false *samakkhi*" (*samakkhitham chanit jao, samakkhi plom*) which impeded

⁴⁷ Vajiravudh's interest in the concept was made manifest while he was still a student at Oxford, where he formed a 'Unity Association' (*samakkhi samakhom*) for his fellow Siamese students and undertook to publish a newsletter entitled 'The Unity News' (*samakkhisai*). See Greene: 1970, 253-254; and Thai Government and Administration in the Reign of Rama VI (1910-1925), University of London PhD Thesis, 1971. 20.

the development of a "truer", "higher" form (*samakkhi jing, samakkhi chanit thi sung*).⁴⁸

Before turning to consider developments in the Sixth Reign, however, it is necessary to clarify the main points of this chapter. First, by tracing the history of unity as a contested concept, I have been arguing that the Siamese polity was early on envisioned in a number of contradictory ways: as an aggregate of loyal subjects united under the authority of the Siamese throne; as a society fractured by its traditions and its inequitable distribution of wealth, power, and social privilege; as a community of citizens with rights and duties; and even as a 'false category' which interfered with the individual pursuit of higher moral principles. Secondly, I have been attempting to suggest that the discourse of journalism was inimical to the promotion of a single definition of polity. Rather, through its agency, 'polity' was constituted as the contested discursive process of a literati, with the result that 'Siam' emerged as a topic of discussion and debate.

⁴⁸ For example, see *Kro lek*, 18 August 1927, 'kotmai than hai itsaraphap kae rao pho laeo tae rao phu rap thammai joeng yang mai dai pho laeo (As We Already Receive Enough Freedom under Your Majesty's Laws, Why Don't We Have Enough Freedom?); *Thai num*, 23 August 1927, 'het haeng khwamjaroen' (The Causes of Prosperity); and *Itsara*, 16 September 1931.

III

Contested Nationalism in the Sixth Reign

It seems that people are presently defining the word 'nation' (*chat*) in number of different ways, with each believing his or her definition to be the only correct one. As a result, an endless series of arguments have arisen and a number of contradictory analyses have been put forward to explain the characteristics which a nation should have in order to be considered a good one.¹

3.1 Introduction. As a further example of how the early development of Thai nationalist discourse was influenced by the growth of the newspaper trade, I intend to use this chapter to discuss a collection of essays which were published in the vernacular press during the early years of the Sixth Reign. Many of these were written by King Vajiravudh, an individual who is widely considered to have been the 'founder' of the modern Thai nation.² Thai secondary school students in their third and oftentimes final year of study are still being taught that the monarch "built a nation" in line with Western ways of thinking after returning from a period of schooling in England.³ Moreover, as has already been noted, the state-centered nationalist philosophy which he espoused during the course of his fifteen-year reign is generally thought to have constituted the dominant form of Thai nationalism in the period leading up to the absolute monarchy's overthrow.⁴ As the above quotation suggests, however, the monarch was acutely aware of the fact the meaning of nationhood – "the characteristics which a nation should have in order to be considered a really good one" – remained a matter of contention and debate during the period.⁵

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- ¹ *Phim thai*, 29 May 1915, "Asvabahu" (Vajiravudh), '*khwampenchat doythaejing*' (True Nationhood).
 - ² Greene: 1970, 1971; Prayut: 1974; Vella: 1978, xiii; Kandi Mahakhan, *Ratanakosin yuk praprungrat 2394-2475* (Ratanakosin: The Period of Improving the Country 1851-1932), Bangkok: Thai wathana phanit, 1981; and Wyatt: 1984, 224.
 - ³ *Nangsu' rian sangkhomsuksa prawatsat thai song chan mathayom suksa pi thi sam* (Thai History for Third Year High School Students), Bangkok: Ministry of Education, 1980, 11.
 - ⁴ See Kullada: 1986; Murashima, 1986, 5; and 1988; Barmé: 1989, 31; and 1993, 7, 32.
 - ⁵ The word *chat*, which came to denote the idea of nation, initially carried a number of other meanings: origin, caste by birth, lineage, and race. Moreover, it remained sufficiently ambiguous in 1933 that the noted Thai statesman and linguist *mom jao* Wanwaitayakon Worowan was led to propose that the idea of nation be conveyed with a different word altogether – the neologism *pratchachat*. See Murashima: 1988, 81-82; Barmé: 1989, 14; and Somkiat Wanthana, 'muang thai yuk mai samphanaphap rawang rat kap prawatsat samnuk' (Thailand in the New Age: The State and Intellectual History), in Sombat Jantharawong and Chayawat Satha'anant (eds), *Yu muang thai* (Living in Thailand), Bangkok: Thammasat, 1987, 107.

Moreover, his essays on the subject appear to have engendered additional controversy as well, a point which will be discussed below.

3.2 *Vajiravudh's "Asvabahu" Essays.* Despite the prominence afforded to Vajiravudh in the early history of Thai nationalism, his reign is generally acknowledged to have "brought to the fore all the difficulties and shortcomings inherent in one-man rule."⁶ Among other things, he virtually bankrupted the treasury, throwing the government into a deepening financial crisis in the latter years of his reign.⁷ Moreover, his choice of council proved controversial as well. While still crown prince, he surrounded himself with youthful favorites, many of whom were subsequently elevated to positions of rank and power in the government without regard for their administrative capabilities.⁸ In fact, two young men in particular, *jao phraya* Ram Rakop and his brother *phraya* Anirutthewa (Fua and Fuan Phungbun), gained such influence that for much of the reign "it was difficult if not impossible to approach the king without their help."⁹ At the same time, a number of the kingdom's more experienced administrators were forced from government service, with the result that the government experienced "a considerable retrogression in overall efficiency."¹⁰ Not surprisingly, during the course of the reign, Vajiravudh and his courtiers were subjected to "an unprecedented degree of criticism" from within the ranks of "the armed forces, the civil servants, some retired members of both groups, and the small but slowly growing group of professionals" in the capital.¹¹

In addition, Vajiravudh's attempts to make the monarchy the focal point of Thai nationalist sentiment appear to have early on met with difficulties as well. One might consider, for example, his "Wild Tiger Corps" (*kong sua pa*), an organization which is generally held to have provided the monarch with a forum for disseminating his

⁶ V. Thompson, *Thailand: The New Siam*, New York: Macmillan, 1941, 54. As noted by Batson, Vajiravudh's reign left the "administration in disorder, the monarchy in disrepute, and the state finances deeply in the red." Batson: 1983, 3.

⁷ Phonphen Hantrakun, *Kanchaijai ngoen phaendin nai ratchasamai phrabatsomdet phramonkutklao jaoyuhua* (Government Spending During the Reign of King Rama VI), Chulalongkorn University MA Thesis, 1974; Batson: 1983, 16-17; Wyatt: 1984, 233.

⁸ Seldom mentioned but often implied in historical accounts of the period is the issue of Vajiravudh's homosexuality. As noted by Anderson, the monarch's sexual orientation influenced his style of government, his choice of council, and his relations with other members of the royal family. See Anderson: 1978, 208, note 24.

⁹ Chula Chakrabongse, *Lords of Life: A History of the Kings of Thailand*, London: Redman, 1967, 283.

¹⁰ W. Vella, *The Impact of the West on Government in Thailand*, Berkeley: University of California, 1955, 351. As noted by the British Minister to Siam in 1926, 'one by one the princes of the royal house [were] excluded from the government ... while the king ... becoming more and more inaccessible, left the affairs of state to favourites who staffed the Ministries with corrupt and low-born upstarts.' Great Britain, PRO, FO 2874/2874/40, Waterlow to Chamberlain, Annual Report for 1926.

¹¹ Chula: 1967, 274; Batson: 1983, 14.

ideas to the officials of the realm.¹² Created in May of 1911, the corps was apparently envisioned as an extended royal body guard which would provide the king with a means of asserting his authority over the country's political administration.¹³ In attempting to expand the organization over the course of the next year, however, Vajiravudh not only antagonized the principal families of the realm but also a sizeable portion of his own military establishment. Indeed, the extent of the military's antipathy was made manifest in early 1912 when a number of junior officers and enlisted men were discovered to be planning the monarch's overthrow.¹⁴ In subsequent investigations, the plot was revealed to have had the support of literally hundreds of individuals and in the aftermath of the incident, Vajiravudh continued to be widely criticised for "playing with his Tiger Soldiers" at the expense of the kingdom's development.¹⁵

The monarch's subsequent effort to make use of the government-subsidized press as a vehicle for presenting his ideas to the broader public was only slightly more successful. He began writing for the press under the pen name "Asvabahu" in late 1912 after being persuaded by his brother Prince Chakraphong that there was a need to enter into greater communication with the subjects of the realm.¹⁶ By the opening of the Sixth Reign, a number of Thai and English-language publications were already being provided with government subsidies and in 1911, court patronage was extended to several additional newspapers as well – *Chinosayam warasap* and *Phim thai*.¹⁷ In

¹² The lectures and speeches which Vajiravudh delivered to the Wild Tiger Corps are frequently said to have provided the ideological framework for his official nationalism. See A. Brown, Phrabat Somdet Phra Monkut Klao Chaoyuhua: "Awakening the Wild Tigers": An Annotated Translation, Australian National University Honours Thesis, 1983, 4; Kullada: 1987, 109; and Barmé: 1989, 26. The king's principal lectures of the period were subsequently published under the titles *Plukjai sua pa* (Inspiring the Wild Tigers, Speeches, 26 May 1911 – 4 July 1911, Bangkok 1965) and *Thetsana sua pa 17 kan* (17 Sermons for the Wild Tigers, Speeches 25 April 1914 – 22 May 1915, Bangkok: Mahamonkut, 1961).

¹³ Regarding Vajiravudh's aims in creating the Wild Tigers, see W. A. Graham, *Siam*, London: Alexander Moring, 1924, 225-226; Kullada: 1986, 106; and Greene: 1971, 35-36; 98-99; 104-108.

¹⁴ For an account of incident by two of its participants, see Rian Sichan and Net Phunwiwat, *Kabot r. s. 130 kanpaliwat khrang raek khong thai* (The Rebellion of 1912: The First Revolution of the Thai), Bangkok: Khamphi, 1976.

¹⁵ While only a hundred and six individuals were formally charged with rebellion, Thamsook Numnonda has noted the involvement of some 800 to 1,000 people and a 1912 report from the British Legation suggested a much higher number – 3,000 individuals "comprising many men in responsible positions." See Thamsook Numnonda, *Kabot r. s. 130* (The 1912 Rebellion) Bangkok: Ruangsins, 1979; and 'buanglang kankabot r. s. 130' (The Background to the 1912 Rebellion), *Aksansat*, 12:1, 1989, 18-45. In addition, see Great Britain, PRO, FO 371/1473, Peel to Sir Grey, 6 March 1912; and FO 371/1751, Peel to Sir Grey, *Annual Report for 1912*, 14 March 1913.

¹⁶ A full brother of the king, Chakraphong was Acting Minister of War in 1912 and heir-apparent to the throne until the time of his death in 1920. Regarding his efforts to persuade Vajiravudh of the need to create a favorable climate of opinion for the government, see Greene: 1971, 154.

¹⁷ Apart from the official publications of the court, subsidies were provided to the *Bangkok Times*, the *Siam Observer*, and the *Bangkok Daily Mail*, the latter two of which also featured a Thai-language edition. In 1910, all three were being given an annual subsidy of eight thousand baht and provided with news of the government's activities. With respect to the

the aftermath of the abortive military uprising, however, Chakraphong made use of the subsidized press in order to promote the view that the incident was largely a Chinese affair.¹⁸ At the same time, he encouraged Vajiravudh to establish a separate publication to act as the voice of the court, and when the monarch agreed and purchased *Phim thai* outright, he addressed the cabinet to win support for the idea.¹⁹

The prince began by noting that the kingdom contained a growing number of people who felt compelled to pass judgement on the government and its policies.²⁰ He added that there was nothing necessarily wrong with this in that it signified that people were coming to perceive the country as being their own. The problem was said to lie with the fact that most people still lacked a "true understanding" of the country's affairs, their opinions having been "shaped by the press and the views of foreigners." The Chinese, in particular, were held to have had "a surprisingly strong influence on the Thai", and insomuch as they were in the habit of criticising their government, the Thai wanted to do so as well. Instead of opposing the government's policies on the basis of principles like the Europeans, however, the Thai were said to be incapable of offering constructive criticism, largely because they lacked an understanding of the government's intentions. In consequence, he argued that it would be best if the government made an effort to explain new policies and laws to the public at large and as many Thais were "inclined to believe everything they read in the papers", he proposed that it do so by "seizing the press as a weapon" for promoting its various plans.

decision to subsidize *Chinosayam warasap*, the publication, which was printed in Chinese and Thai, was considered to be the more moderate of the capital's three Chinese-language newspapers. Ironically, its owner Sieow Hood Seng (Hsiao Fo-Cheng) was a personal friend of Sun Yat-Sen and a founding member of the *tung meng hui* organization in Bangkok. In addition to his publishing activity, Sieow was also an attorney for several of Siam's largest Chinese firms including the Tai Guan Company – the kingdom's principal importer and retailer of spirits. See Wright: 1908, 293-297; NA, R6, *betthalet* 13/3, *nangsu'phim* (Newspapers); R7, *ratchalekhathikan* 19/6, *nangsu'phim* 2468-2475, *ngoen utnun nangsu'phim* (Press Subsidies), December 1927; and Great Britain, PRO, FO, 371/2757, Telegram from Mr. Dering, 24 April 1916.

¹⁸ See *Bangkok Daily Mail*, 6 March 1912; *Siam Observer*, 7 March 1912; and *Straits Times*, which subsequently republished Chakraphong's interview under the heading 'Prince of Bisnuloke and the Conspiracy – Chinese Influence' (18 March 1912). Among other things, the prince asserted that the principal group of conspirators was composed of individuals "of Chinese descent" who had been "influenced" by developments in China.

¹⁹ Vajiravudh apparently began making plans to purchase *Phim thai* in March of 1912, after its editor wrote to the court to request that the newspaper's annual subsidy be increased by four thousand baht. At the time of the purchase, *Phim thai* had a circulation of five hundred copies [see NA, R6, *betthalet* 13/3, *nangsu'phim* (Newspapers)]. In an effort to assure that the paper continued to act as "the voice of the throne", Vajiravudh subsequently presented the entire staff with noble titles. See Salao Reckharuchi, *Nung sattawat nangsu'phim thai* (A Century of the Thai Press), Bangkok: Ruamsan, 1967, 276.

²⁰ The discussion which follows is based on NA, R6, *betthalet*, 13/3, *khwaam nai raingan prachum senabodi nangsu'phim thai lae chino* (Minutes of the Cabinet Meeting; *Phim thai* and *Chinosayam warasap*), Prince Chakraphong, 1 July 1912.

It was presumably with this end in mind that Vajiravudh began writing for the press in late 1912. However, many of his earliest essays reflected his immediate concerns in the wake of the plot against his government. One of his more frequent topics of discussion during the period was the inappropriateness of parliamentary rule for Siam, a point which he made by drawing examples from around the world in order to emphasize that democracy was disastrous for people who lacked the knowledge to make such a system of government work.²¹ As a part of this effort, he also appears to have singled out the republican experiment in China for particularly heavy criticism. In one essay of the period, for example, he asserted that the nationalist revolution of 1911 had resulted in the "Mexicanization" of China, producing a democracy "tempered with murder" in which political debates were resolved with "revolvers and bombs."²² And in another, he claimed that were it not for the word "republic" in the country's new name ("a name far too long for any but a Chinaman with lots of time on his hands to remember") and its new flag ("a crime far uglier than anything ever perpetrated by the Manchus") China's new political order would be beyond comprehension: a democracy in which "people were not permitted to have a voice", an assembly which was "forbidden from consulting with anyone", and a head of state who had assumed the position of the world's first "absolute president."²³

During the course of 1913, he produced a series of vitriolic critiques of Siam's ethnic Chinese community as well. Initially, his remarks were directed at the more politically-active members of the community – the "politicians" who "spread sedition and discontent" and the "self-styled patriots" who he claimed had grown "fat on the blood of their compatriots" by collecting donations for "so-called patriotic causes."²⁴ By the following year, however, he had broadened his criticism to include the Chinese community as a whole. One of his more controversial essays in this vein was *Jews of the Orient*, in which he openly characterized the Chinese as a threat to the well-being of the Thai nation.²⁵ Like the Jews of Europe, they were said to be unassimilable –

²¹ See Asvabahu, *A Siam Miscellany*, Bangkok: Siam Observer Press, nd.; *Phim thai*, 11 December 1913, 'than prathanathipadi joeng jaroen' (Long Live The President!); *Phim thai*, 13 December 1913, 'mua sathet len tenram' (When His Majesty Goes Dancing); and *Uttarakuru: An Asian Wonderland*, Bangkok: Mahamakut, 1965 (originally published in 1913).

²² *Siam Observer*, 2-4 June 1913, Asvabahu, 'Chinese Politics'. During the same period, Vajiravudh also translated and arranged for the publication of an essay by Dr. E. A. Dillon entitled 'The Chaos of China' (*Khwanakrajatkrajai haeng muang jin*).

²³ *Chinosayam warasap*, 1-2 July 1914, Asvabahu, 'kankhian rup yang samai mai nai prathet jin' (Modern Painting in China).

²⁴ For example, see *Siam Observer*, 2-4 June 1913, Asvabahu, 'Chinese Politics'; 'thurayot doy achiwa' (Ignominious by Profession), 1914, NA, R6, *betthalet*, 1/7.4; and *Phim thai*, 21 July 1915, 'athibai khwammungmai' (Explaining My Intentions). Throughout the period, he was particularly critical of Chinese who used newspapers as "instruments of sedition" and "mud-slinging machines" for settling private scores.

²⁵ Asvabahu, 'phuak yiw haeng buraphathit' (Jews of the Orient). As was the case with many of Vajiravudh's essays, 'Jews of the Orient' was first published in English by the *Siam Observer* in late June and early July 1914, and shortly thereafter reprinted in *Phim thai*. Copies in both

their false sense of superiority causing them to arrogantly stick to their own kind. Moreover, they were also accused of making money at the expense of any and all who were not of their own group – a type of behavior which Vajiravudh claimed would eventually result in their receiving the same sort of treatment in Siam that the Jews had received in Russia. In addition, they were held to lack a sense of obligation to Siam and its government, descending on the country like a "plague of locusts" for the sole purpose of gathering up as much wealth as they possibly could before returning home to China – prompting Vajiravudh to raise the question of whether they should be allowed to continue emigrating into the kingdom.

Over the next several years, he continued to elaborate his criticism of the Chinese, often emphasizing that they would desert the kingdom *en masse* in its "hour of need."²⁶ By 1915, however, the focus of his concern had largely shifted to a group which he referred to as "the modernists" (*khon samai mai*) – ethnic Thai whose desire to become "civilized" had led them to foolishly "turn their backs on everything that belongs to the old order of things" and "ape the ways of the Europeans."²⁷ In early April, for example, he accused such individuals of having forsaken the principals of Buddhism in order to adopt the vulgar mannerisms of lower-class foreigners.²⁸ Moreover, the following week, he criticised them for "sacrificing their Thainess" by "pretending to be knowledgable about politics" and called upon them to "try imitating their ancestors", instead.²⁹ One of his more elaborate critiques of the "modernists", however, was an essay which appeared at the end of the month under the title 'Mud on Our Wheels' (*khlon tit lo*). It began with a political analogy – the 'ship of state' being represented as an automobile on the muddy road to prosperity and civilization.³⁰ The Siamese road was said to be extremely dangerous, compelling the driver to proceed with greater care than was necessary for steering a country like Japan. As a result of Siam's cautious advance, however, its "forward progress" was held to be far less likely to run into future difficulties. In fact, the only real threat to the kingdom's future development was said to come from the "cakes of mud" on its tires – a trope for the ill-considered habits of the kingdom's educated classes. There were the "half-Thais", whose mimicry of the West led them to look up to foreigners and down on

English and Thai can be found in NA, R6, *nakhonban*, 20.11/4 – *nangsu'phim phraratchaniphon* (Newspapers – Royal Writings).

26 For example, see his 1915 essay 'muang thai joeng toen thoed kham tuan sathi khon thai' (Wake Up Siam: A Reminder to the Thai.) in *Pakinakkhadi phraratchaniphon nai phrabatsomdet phramonkutklao jaoyuhua* (Essays of Rama VI), Bangkok: Sinlapa bannakhan, 1963, 1-54.

27 Asvabahu, 'ruang khwamphraphoet khong khon thi riak wa samai mai' (The Behavior of So-Called Modernists) 1914, in NA, R6, *betthalet* 1.7/4.

28 *Samuthasan*, April 1915, Asvabahu, 'prayot haeng kanyu nai thamma' (The Benefits of Being Moral).

29 *Phim thai*, 7 April 1915, Asvabahu, 'lathi ao yang' (The Cult of Imitation).

30 *Phim thai*, 28 April – 22 May 1915, Asvabahu, 'khlon tit lo' (Mud on Our Wheels). *Phim thai*, 28 April 1915, Asvabahu, 'khlon tit lo khamnan' (Mud on Our Wheels – Introduction).

their fellow nationals.³¹ Moreover, there were others who had developed "the Chinese habit" of believing the tracts of "politicians who preached rebellion" and ignoring the public pronouncements of their own government.³² In addition, he presented a series of lengthy harrangues against the kingdom's educated youth: for their assumption that the government was the kingdom's sole employer,³³ for having an over-inflated sense of self-worth which caused them to believe that they were "equal to others above their station in life",³⁴ for erroneously asserting that they and their fellows were economically deprived,³⁵ and for their lapse of appropriate sexual morality.³⁶

In this instance again, Vajiravudh continued to embellish his critique of "the modernists" over the course of the next year. In late 1916, however, he abruptly quit writing for the popular press altogether. Although a number of additional royal essays were subsequently published under the pen name "Asvabahu", these invariably appeared in a palace journal of limited circulation, *Dusit samit*.³⁷ Moreover, his essays of this latter period were frequently little more than acerbic satires of the Bangkok press. In *Dusit samit*'s premier issue, for example, he stated his intention to "studiously ignore" the views of any writer who disagreed with his opinion and

31 *Phim thai*, 28 April 1915, Asvabahu, 'khlon tit lo kanaoyang doy mai tritrong (Mud on Our Wheels – Thoughtless Imitation), and 29 April 1915, 'khlon tit lo kantham ton hai tomtai (Mud on Our Wheels – Self-Inflicted Undevelopment).

32 *Phim thai*, 30 April 1915, Asvabahu, 'khlon tit lo kanbucha nangsu jonkohenet' (Mud on Our Wheels – Excessive Belief in Written Materials).

33 *Phim thai*, 1 May 1915, Asvabahu, 'khlon tit lo khwamniyom pen samian' (Mud on Our Wheels – The Fascination with Being a Clerk). The principal points of the essay were subsequently reiterated in an essay of December entitled 'maphrao thoen tok' (Forgetting Ones Station in Life).

34 *Phim thai*, May 4 1915, Asvabahu, 'khlon tit lo thoe kiathiyok mai mi mun' (Mud on Our Wheels – An Over-Inflated Sense of Self). Vajiravudh attributed this type of behavior to education and a growing belief in the idea of equality (*lathi khwamsamoephak*), a belief which he noted was shared by members of the press, certain government officials, and many of the kingdom's educated.

35 *Phim thai*, May 5 1915, Asvabahu, 'khlon tit lo khwamjon mai jing' (Mud on Our Wheels – False Poverty). The "erroneous idea" that the Thai were poor was one which Vajiravudh attributed to several factors: "civilized" ways of thinking, self-pity, and the self-interested agitation of both the modernists and the press. He noted that those who spoke of Siamese poverty invariably drew comparisons between Siam and abroad, while calling upon the government to take various courses of action. The absurdity of this, he felt, lay with the fact that the Thai were not poor. People in the provinces were said to have plenty of food, and more than enough money to use for purposes of gambling. Moreover, he claimed that there was not a single "real" beggar to be found in the capital. Thus, he concluded that those who complained of being poor were simply individuals who spent too much money on clothes, extra wives, and gambling.

36 *Phim thai*, May 6 1915, Asvabahu, 'khlon tit lo taengkan chuakhrao' (Mud on Our Wheels – Temporary Marriages). In subsequent instalments, Vajiravudh also addressed the matter of irresponsible parenting, prostitution, and several other issues. See *Phim thai*, 7-11 May 1915.

37 Vajiravudh began publishing *Dusit samit* in 1918 for the "residents" of the court's doll-house city of Dusit Thani. Although a limited number of subscriptions were accepted, the paper could only be purchased within the confines of Dusit Palace and its maximum circulation was in the order of three hundred copies per issue. See *Phraratchaniphon khlong suphasit jak nangsu'phim dusit samit 2461-2463* (A Collection of Vajiravudh's Poems Published in *Dusit samit* between 1918-1920), Bangkok: Khana anukammakan, 1977, 3.

"throw away" all outside contributions.³⁸ Similarly, the following week, he sarcastically noted that his publication would differ from the capital's other newspapers in that it would make no pretense of "serving as the voice of the people" when it criticised the kingdom's rulers and accused the king's loyal servants of being "sycophants of the court."³⁹ Finally, in a subsequent issue, he also "apologized" for *Dusit samit*'s numerous 'deficiencies': its failure to lecture the government on its responsibilities, its unwillingness to scold government officials, and its utter lack of experience in libel proceedings.⁴⁰

As these comments suggest, Vajiravudh's decision to stop writing for the public was in part the result of his frustration over the criticism engendered by his essays of the period, a point which will be discussed in the next section. Before doing so, however, it is worth considering what the monarch had hoped to accomplish with his "Asvabahu" essays. In this regard, his sundry criticisms of both the kingdom's Chinese community and its European-oriented "modernists" were seemingly directed towards a single end – proscribing the boundaries of "appropriate" national behavior. In his earliest essays, he invariably stressed that certain actions and beliefs – promoting republicanism or criticizing one's leaders for "patriotic" purposes – were quintessentially foreign to the Thai. Similarly, his critique of the kingdom's Chinese community allowed him to further emphasize what the Thai were *not* – a people who lacked a sense of obligation and loyalty to the throne. Finally, in his numerous essays on the "modernists", he not only sought to locate the monarchy at the center of a "Thai tradition" but also utilized this position in order to imply that his critics were "foreign-inspired."

This latter point can be better understood by considering Vajiravudh's effort to defend his administration's economic policies. From the turn of the century, the kingdom's rulers were increasingly called upon to play a more active role in developing the economy.⁴¹ Moreover, economic concerns appear to have been a significant factor in the abortive military uprising of 1912.⁴² When addressing the subject of economics, however, Vajiravudh initially chose to emphasize the failings of 'socialist' experiments overseas. At one point, for example, he observed that the

³⁸ *Dusit samit*, 7 December 1918, 'khamnam' (Introduction).

³⁹ *Dusit samit*, 14 December 1918 'lak khong nangsu'phim' (The Principals of Newspapers).

⁴⁰ *Dusit samit*, 5 July 1919, 'khamnam' (Introduction). In addition, see *Dusit samit*, 14 June 1919, 'thammai khapjao joeng chop bon? (Why Do I Like to Complain?). The essay was a caustic satire of Sicow Hood Seng, the editor of *Chinosayam warasap* who emerged as one of the monarch's principal critics during the period.

⁴¹ In the final decade of the Fifth Reign, Chulalongkorn had increasingly emphasized the importance of using the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Public Instruction in order to assist in developing the kingdom, with the result that both ministries made extensive plans for large-scale projects and programs. With the change of reigns, however, the budgets of both ministries were cut. See D. B. Johnston, *Rural Society and the Rice Economy in Thailand 1880-1930*, Yale University PhD Thesis, 1975, 339-362.

⁴² Thamsook: 1989, 20-23.

Chinese had previously tried to create a socialist state only to realize its "impossibility in the domain of practical politics."⁴³ And at another, he sought to characterize socialism as an ancient ideology which was bankrupt but for the "wealth of verbiage" put forward by "social reformers" and "professional patriots" in foreign lands.⁴⁴

He was ultimately compelled to acknowledge the existence of his domestic critics when the Ministry of Public Instruction sanctioned the use of a popular treatise on political economy in government schools, however.⁴⁵ Significantly, the work in question had been written by an influential member of the Siamese nobility and was highly critical of the government's *laissez faire* economic policies. In its introduction, for example, Siam was described as an impoverished country which lagged far behind the West in terms of its economic development.⁴⁶ Moreover, the kingdom's farmers were said to be locked into a cycle of poverty from which there was little hope of escape. Finally, in an effort to address the matter, the author presented a number of concrete proposals for government action, including: the establishment of a national credit institution to provide low-interest loans to farmers, the creation of self-help organizations such as agricultural cooperatives and labour associations, and the development of vocational training programs for the kingdom's youth.

In response, Vajiravudh produced a scathing critique of the study, its author, and everyone who took an interest in the subject of political economy.⁴⁷ The work was held to be of little immediate benefit to anyone but the individuals who made money from its publication; its popularity was attributed to a general misapprehension that the study of political economy would allow people to "get rich without lifting a finger"; the author's "negative" perception of Siam was said to be the result of his "foreign education"; and his use of "European" class categories was held to be entirely

⁴³ *Siam Observer*, 2,4 June 1913, Asvabahu, 'Chinese Politics'.

⁴⁴ Vajiravudh, *Uttarakuru: An Asian Wonderland*, Bangkok: Mahamakut, 1965. The essay originally appeared in the *Bangkok Observer* in 1913.

⁴⁵ Namely *Sapsat* (The Science of Wealth). Its author, *phraya* Suriyanuwat (Koet Bunnak), served in the administration of Chulalongkorn for some thirty years, eighteen of which were spent in a number of diplomatic capacities in Europe. His two-volume *Sapsat* was the first treatise on political economy to be published in Thai, some five hundred copies being printed in 1911 and a second printing being issued in 1915. Initially, the literary journal *Si krung* undertook to republish the work in serialized form. However, the serialization was sufficiently well-received that the paper's editor undertook to solicit subscriptions for a reprint of the work in bound form (see *Si krung*, 2:8, April 1915, 805-827; 2:9, May 1915, 901-919). For a biography of *phraya* Suriyanuwat and an overview of his work, see Sirilak Sakkriengkrai (ed), *Phraya suriyanuwat (koet bunnak) nak settasat khon raek khong muang thai* [Phraya Suriyanuwat: Thailand's First Economist], Bangkok: Thai wathana phanit, 1980.

⁴⁶ *Si krung*, 2:8, April 1915, 'sapsat' (The Science of Wealth), 805-827

⁴⁷ *Samuthasan*, July 1915, Asvabahu, 'sapsat tam khwamhen ekkachon phu dai an nangsuan' (The Private Opinion of a Person Who has Read *Sapsat*). A copy of the article can also be found in NA, R6, *betthalet*, 1.7/4. Despite Vajiravudh's opposition to the work, the Ministry of Agriculture subsequently adopted *phraya* Suriyanuwat's recommendations with respect to the establishment of agricultural cooperatives in 1916. Moreover, the program emerged as the cornerstone of the government's agricultural policy in the period prior to the overthrow of the absolute monarchy. See *Siam Yearbook 1930-31*, Bangkok: Bangkok Times, 1930, 156-167.

inappropriate for a land where "all but the king were equal."⁴⁸ In addition, Vajiravudh further asserted that "Siamese poverty" was a fiction born of "false comparisons" between Siam and the West, a view which he continued to expound over the next few months.⁴⁹

Perhaps a more telling example of Vajiravudh's effort to marginalize the views of his critics during the period was contained in another of his essays of 1915 – 'True Nationhood'.⁵⁰ Indeed, the essay is particularly relevant here in that it provides a clear indication of the monarch's awareness that his was not the only view of the Thai nation being articulated during the period. He introduced the topic in much the same fashion as Chulalongkorn had done when discussing the significance of unity, explaining that the "nation" had emerged as a matter of debate as the result of individuals who "thought like foreigners." By way of an example, he remarked that there were a growing number of people in the capital who believed that the nation's progress was somehow contingent upon everyone being given "complete freedom" – a ridiculous idea which was likely to create divisions within the "real nation" by leaving each person "free" to define the idea of nationhood in any way he desired. Likening the individuals who spread such ideas to Thewathat, a disciple of the Buddha who questioned his teachings in an effort to destroy the Buddhist faith, he admonished his readers to keep a watchful eye for the "false patriots" in their midst. These were described as people who spoke in such a way as to foster "division". Moreover, insomuch as language was "a tool for binding people together", they were likely to be non-Thai speakers as well. And finally, if anyone claimed to be "totally free of obligations" or disagreed with the monarch and refused to make sacrifices on his behalf, he was most certainly not a real Thai, for the nation was a ship, the king its helmsman, and all true Thais had a duty to help paddle the boat.

3.3 Asvabahu's Critics.

I've noticed the private opinions (*khwamkhithen ekachon*) which other people have been writing for the newspapers and it's made me want to write a few of my own ...⁵¹

As has already been noted, Vajiravudh's "Asvabahu" essays elicited a critical response from a number of his contemporaries. Indeed, his earlier essays were frequently met with satire. In reply to his assertion that the Siamese were immediately incapable of self-government, for example, one author presented a lengthy critique of parliamentary

⁴⁸ The point was also made in *Phim thai*, 7 May 1915, Asvabahu, 'khwamkhaojaphit' (A Misunderstanding).

⁴⁹ For example, see 'khlon tit lo khwamjon mai jing' (Mud on Our Wheels – False Poverty) and 'muang thai jong toen thoed' (Wake Up, Siam!).

⁵⁰ *Phim thai*, 29 May 1915, Asvabahu, 'khwampenchat doythaejing' (True Nationhood).

⁵¹ *Siam Observer*, 26 May 1914, 'khwamhen ekkachon' (A Private View).

experiments in Japan, China, Russia, Turkey, Portugal, and Mexico – a commentary which at first glance appeared to reflect the views of Asvabahu himself.⁵² At the end of his essay, however, he sarcastically noted that one of the problems with parliaments was that their meetings invariably irritated kings and presidents, who were *also* interested in claiming absolute authority "so that they could swindle the people." Similarly, another writer expressed confusion over why "nine-tenths of the world's people" were willing to suffer the inefficiencies of parliamentary rule.⁵³ At the same time, he claimed to be equally baffled by Vajiravudh's assertion that the Siamese were "too stupid" to have a voice in the country's political affairs. While admitting that those who lived in the world's democracies were "a whole lot smarter", he had always believed that the Siamese were more intelligent than their neighbors in Cambodia, where the French were planning to open a parliament. Did this mean, he asked the editor, "that all this time we've been mistakenly thinking that we were smarter than our neighbors?" By way of a response, the editor reminded him that most Siamese really were "incredibly stupid", the "few intelligent ones" having already entered government employ "because of the greater gains to be made there."

Vajiravudh's sanguine view of the economy was also openly ridiculed during the period as well. In May of 1914, for example, one individual heaped praise on the court for having maintained Siam's independence, while sarcastically adding that there no reason to be concerned that the French were reorganizing the country's legal system, the British its treasury, and the Germans its army.⁵⁴ Remarking that "most of the country's citizens wished that Siam were more like Japan", he asserted they should nonetheless feel "pleased that the vast expanse of territory once ruled over by our kings has been greatly reduced through the sacrifice of Cambodia and Laos", the land lost being "of little use" to the Thai. In consequence, he was led to conclude that the only real problem remaining to be solved in Siam was the matter of government revenue – for there was "far too little" of it and a quarter of what there was came from domestic opium sales. Noting that the government was responsible for the well-being of the people, and the king responsible for the government, he asked that the court "stop selling poison to the kingdom's citizenry" and make an effort to keep them productively engaged in agriculture, trade, and industry instead. Similarly, another author of the period, who chose the pen name "Helping to Paddle" in an obvious play upon Vajiravudh's ship-of-state metaphor, was openly critical of the court for failing to assist the kingdom's poor in finding work.⁵⁵ Arguing that many "good citizens"

⁵² *Bangkok Daily Mail*, 29 March 1914, 'palimen nai tawanok' (Parliaments in the East).

⁵³ *Chinosayam warasap*, 1 July 1913, 'praisani lekha' (Postal Clerk).

⁵⁴ *Sayam Observer*, 26-29 May 1914, Mangkhon Daeng, 'khwamhen ekkachon' (A Private View).

⁵⁵ *Phim thai*, 1 and 10 July 1915, 'Chwei Phai', 'khwamkapkhaep haeng phonlamuang' (The Difficult Straits of the Citizenry).

were being left to fend for themselves at a time of limited employment opportunities, he accused the government of giving them little choice but to take up criminal activity or starve.⁵⁶

Compared to the response engendered by Vajiravudh's opinions on parliamentary rule and the economy, however, his critique of the kingdom's Chinese community proved to be far more controversial. Thai commentators of the period were deeply divided on the issue, with some urging the king to moderate his views and others taking his views to the extreme.⁵⁷ Moreover, among those who agreed with the king, a number were highly critical of the government for having allowed the Chinese to assume a dominant position in the kingdom's economy in the first place. As noted by one pamphleteer of the period, the powerful men of the realm had no one to blame but themselves for the fact that Siam was being "overrun by outsiders" and unless the wealthier Thai made a concerted effort to assist their poorer compatriots in developing the nation's trade and industry, there was little likelihood that the Thai would ever be able to compete with the foreigners in their own homeland.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ In response, Vajiravudh expressed his surprise that *Phim thai* had permitted the writer to 'bark on endlessly' about a topic which had already been 'heard many times before' and was of 'little benefit to anyone.' Anyone who had travelled at home and abroad could 'testify to the fact that Siam had fewer poor people than anywhere else in the world.' And besides, 'parents' could hardly be expected to support their full-grown 'children', let alone take responsibility for their actions. Such matters were contingent upon 'individual karma (*kam*) ... people receiving only as much good or evil as they deserved in life'. Thus, the claim that the government was somehow responsible for ending poverty was absurd. Unless people were willing to do 'a little honest labour', there was absolutely no way for them to become rich, and any who remained confused on this point were advised to re-read his *Uttarakuru* and *Khlon tit lo*. *Phim thai*, 17 July 1915, Asvabahu, 'khwamhen ekkachon mua an bot khwamkhaekhaep haeng phonlamuang' (The Opinion of One who has Read "The Difficult Straits of the Citizenry").

⁵⁷ In an editorial which appeared in the *Bangkok Times*, one writer discussed the wisdom of Chulalongkorn's policy of treating the Chinese as though they were Siamese subjects who contributed to the kingdom's general prosperity. Moreover, he added as well that as the Chinese continued to play an important role in the Thai economy, it was essential for the government try to teach them to be good citizens (*Bangkok Times*, 15 July 1914, 'National Development'). Conversely, throughout the period *Phim thai* continued to publish a number of acerbic letters in support of Vajiravudh [for example, see *Phim thai*, 19 July 1914, 'jotmai' (A Letter); and *Phim thai*, 14 December 1914, "Thai Thai", 'khon chat thai' (People of the Thai Nation)] until the king was finally compelled to intervene "for the sake of the Chinese who were born in Siam and have lived here for generations." See his remarks in *Phim thai*, 15 November 1914, 'banha ruang yiw haeng buraphathit' (A Problem Regarding Jews of the Orient).

⁵⁸ Sanguan, *Khamwingwon* (Entreaties), March 1915. A copy of the document along with accompanying documentation can be found in NA, R6, *nakhonban*, 11/1. The pamphlet was brought to the attention of the Thai government by the British legation, which took umbrage with its final paragraph in which the ship of state was said to be wedged between two great rocks, and the Siamese citizenry were held to be on the brink of becoming "bait for the white sharks." In a formal complaint of 12 April 1915, it was noted that the author of the pamphlet, *nai* Sanguan of the "Flourishing Agriculture Hair Salon" was being aided by a German subject named Frey in producing "certain Siamese prints of distinctly pro-German tendencies." One of these was reportedly a pro-German (or at least anti-British and French) periodical entitled *Kanrop yai nai yurop* (The Great War in Europe), a publication which reportedly ended after a few issues when Sanguan was unable to find a printer daring enough to print it on his behalf.

Within the kingdom's Sino-Thai community, however, Vajiravudh's anti-Chinese polemics met with uniform outrage.⁵⁹ Shortly after the publication of 'Jews of the Orient', for example, the editor of *Chinosayam warasap* asserted that Siamese citizens everywhere should oppose Asvabahu for seeking to make the Thai to hate their "fellow citizens" of Chinese descent

... for who would dare to suggest that there is anything worthwhile in our announcing to the world that we may have to start treating a foreign-language group residing in our country in the same way that the Russians have seen fit to treat their Jews, or that this could possibly be a wise policy aim of our government? Moreover, who in the world would think that there is anything either appropriate or fair in choosing to criticise a diverse race of people at a time when we are receiving their help and they remain loyal to us?⁶⁰

At the same time, he also offered a brief explanation of how he conceived of his "duties" as a Sino-Thai, asking readers to judge for themselves whether he posed a threat to the nation. Among other things, he noted that he had a responsibility to promote justice in Siam, to not only love justice as an abstract principle but also to make sure that it was afforded to "people of all races" so that none could claim that the kingdom had no justice to give them. Moreover, he believed that he also had a duty to look after his family. Beyond this, however, he claimed to be under no obligation to follow the dictates of political leaders, foreign or domestic. While at liberty to agree with their ideas, he did so only from a sense of right and wrong and in this instance, he felt there was nothing right about unjustly maligning "fellow citizens of Chinese descent."⁶¹

⁵⁹ A small, yet telling indication of the response which Vajiravudh's essays engendered among the members of the kingdom's Chinese community is provided by a Ministry of Interior report that Chinese merchants were selling handkerchiefs bearing the king's likeness in all of the Chinese districts of the capital. See NA, R6, *betthalet*, 13/1 *nangsu'phim jin* (Chinese Press), Yomarat to Vajiravudh, 31 May 1912.

⁶⁰ *Chinosayam warasap*, 22 July 1914, "Batkunchon" (Sieow Hood Seng), 'dwei khwamjingjai' (With Sincerity). While Sieow's remarks were also published in the Chinese edition of his paper, he undertook to urge restraint upon his fellow Chinese in the capital. In one editorial of the period, for example, he remarked that it should always be remembered that:

we are citizens of a weak country and we have come to live in a weak country in an age when might is right. Thus, we have to recognize that there is presently no other way for us to protect ourselves from danger and injustice besides remaining peaceful and enduring our suffering ... if we allow ourselves to be tricked into adopting our enemy's methods and display our anger, those governing the country will have further grounds for irritation with us and our present position here will be destroyed.

See *Hua Siam Si Pao*, 27 August 1915.

⁶¹ In response to the article, Vajiravudh noted that while he had anticipated criticism from the kingdom's self-styled Chinese patriots (*phuak rakchat*) and nationalists (*nachoenalit*), he took umbrage with fact that some writers had undertaken to attack him personally. Reminding his audience that one of the reasons why Christians hated Jews was because of "what they had done to Jesus Christ", he asserted that such commentary might not be tolerated in the future. *Phim thai*, 21 July 1915, Asvabahu, 'athibai khwammungmai' (Explaining My Intentions).

Apart from the commentary of its editor, *Chinosayam warsap* published an ongoing series of letters critical of Asvabahu and his supporters as well. In one, for example, the author made a pretense of being concerned over a question of semantics, expressing his doubts over the meaning of two words in the Thai compound *prachop-soplo* (a word which presently denotes obsequious behavior and sycophancy).⁶² He had heard it said that *soplo* had the negative connotation of intentionally deceiving a superior, whereas *prachop* simply meant to speak in a manner pleasing to those above one's station in life, a type of behavior which wasn't necessarily bad. A dictionary published by the Ministry of Public Instruction gave no indication that the meaning of either word was negative, however. Instead, it indicated that both referred to deferential speech or behaviour and implied that their meanings differed only with respect to degree. After noting that *prachop* behaviour was so widespread as to lead people to believe that it was acceptable, he expressed the opinion that the meanings of both words were nonetheless decidedly negative and to prove his point, he narrated a tale in which

... a group of *nakprachop* (flatterers) were sitting around a man of great wealth and position, each of them considering what they should say to please him. While they were still thinking, the rich man noisily farted. Without blinking an eye, one of the more skilled of the *nakprachop* immediately chimed up: "Has someone just opened a bottle of perfume? What a truly enchanting fragrance!", and proceeded to look back and forth as if he really expected to see someone holding a bottle of perfume. At this, the rich man raised his eyebrows and replied: "Ah ... that must be my fart ... but farts are usually supposed to stink, aren't they? If mine are fragrant, I may have come down with some type of disease." No sooner had he finished speaking than the *nakprachop* began fanning the air in front of his nose, inhaled deeply, and said: "Oh, m'lord? Well, yes ... in fact, it is starting to stink now after all."

It was only at the end of the tale that the writer clarified his intentions by remarking that the story reminded him of the press commentary brought forward in support of 'Jews of the Orient', an essay which had been "noisily released" to the public a few days before.

From 1915 onward, Vajiravudh's "Asvabahu" essays also elicited a number of broader nationalist critiques of the Sixth Reign court as well. One of the earliest essays in this vein, a response to 'khlon tit lo' (Mud on Our Wheels), was entitled 'lo tit khlon' – a play on the king's original title which carried the twofold meaning 'Wheels in the Mud' and 'Ridiculing One Who is Stuck in the Mud'.⁶³ Its author,

⁶² *Chinosayam warsap*, 21 July 1914, "Talum Phuk", 'khwamhen ekkachon' (An Individual Viewpoint).

⁶³ *Bangkok Daily Mail*, 12 May –13 June 1915, "Khonanthawisin" (*phraya* Winai Sunthon), 'lo tit khlon' (Wheels in the Mud/Making Fun of One Who is Stuck in the Mud).

"Khonanthawisin" (*phraya* Winai Sunthon), claimed to be writing in order to point out a number of "bad habits" which Asvabahu had failed to mention, habits "far more harmful than loose morals" in that they created "divisions" within the nation. However, his list of examples:

taking advantage of each other without regard for the unity of the group as when men of wealth and position exploit those less powerful than themselves; [the habit which] some of our society's more fortunate members have of listening to those in their immediate circles while ignoring the advice of any beyond its fringe until they can no longer comprehend the real nature of things or the condition of those below their own station; and the habit which some influential men have of generously looking after their personal followings while treating all others with disdain

were clearly meant to be read as unflattering commentary on the behavior of the king.⁶⁴ Indeed, at one stage, he openly revealed his intentions by writing of "rulers who made fools of themselves" when they sought to teach people how to love the nation.⁶⁵

In a separate essay of the period entitled "Patriotism; Fresh, Hot Patriotism!", another writer also implied that Vajiravudh's nationalist proselytizing had rendered the concept of "patriotism" virtually meaningless.⁶⁶ Asserting that the very air of the capital had grown "steamy with the breath of self-styled patriots", men who sought to justify the most trivial of their actions in patriotic terms, he went on to list a number of ludicrous examples of "the new patriotic thinking", a list which included everything from hats and moustaches to gossip and flattery. Moreover, in each instance, he noted how patriotism had been used to support a number of contrary propositions. Praising the government, for example, was said to be patriotic in that it made the authorities happy. At the same time, criticising the government was held to be patriotic as well in that it allowed for the possibility of improvement. Similarly, maintaining the traditional practices of the country was patriotic because it reduced the worries of the court, while reform was patriotic "because the way things stand at present runs contrary to everywhere else in the world." At the conclusion of the essay, the author

⁶⁴ *Bangkok Daily Mail*, 12 May 1915, "Khonanthawisin", 'lo tit khlon' (Wheels in the Mud/Making Fun of One Who is Stuck in the Mud).

⁶⁵ *Bangkok Daily Mail*, 13, 22 May 1915, "Khonanthawisin", 'lo tit khlon' (Wheels in the Mud). *Phraya* Winai's criticism of the throne gave rise to an acerbic literary debate which continued over the course of the following month. *Phim thai* carried a number of letters in support of Vajiravudh while the *Daily Mail* and *Chinosayam warasap* published a number of additional pieces of criticism. By mid-June, for example, the editor of the *Daily Mail* claimed to have received some eighteen essays in support of *phraya* Winai. See *Bangkok Daily Mail*, 13 June 1915. In addition, see *Phim thai*, 24 May 1915, Asvabahu, 'kho khwammetta' (Asking for Compassion).

⁶⁶ *Bangkok Daily Mail*, 3 May 1917, 'rakchat mae oi ron ron cha! (Patriotism; Fresh, Hot Patriotism!) The author explained that he had chosen this particular title because he wanted to invoke "the cry of a street-peddler selling sweets or steamed fish and rice."

called upon his readers to remember who was to blame for having made patriotism into such a "noisy business", while suggesting that they judge patriotic intent in terms of actions alone.

One of the more scathing indictments of the court to be published during the period, however, was a letter which was written in response to the above essay.⁶⁷ After stating that he and his friends found the satire highly amusing, the writer criticised its author for implying that patriotism was no longer meaningful. While agreeing that members of the Siamese upper class had frequently used the word "to cloak their illicit activities from the people at large ... in the same way as one might dig a well, not for water it brings but for the fish which come with it", he claimed that a "true love of the nation" (*kanrakchat thaejing*) could still be found among the common people of the kingdom. As a result, he was led to conclude that the meaning of patriotism could easily be discerned by simply reconsidering who the nation's "real patriots" were – an assertion which carried the implication that the "false patriots" of the realm were none other than Vajiravudh and his courtiers.

3.4 Conclusion.

Through its relationship with the reading public, critical reflection loses its private character.

Criticism opens itself up to debate, it attempts to convince, it invites contradiction.⁶⁸

It has frequently been suggested that Vajiravudh, through his writing, was intentionally seeking to foster the development of a critical debate.⁶⁹ The monarch made no attempt to keep the real identity of "Asvabahu" a secret and continued to use the pen name after it had become one of the better-known pseudonyms of the capital. Moreover, in a number of essays, he stressed that he was simply expressing a "private opinion" and stated his willingness to enter into a dialogue with any who disagreed with his views.⁷⁰ In addition, he is even said to have taken a certain pleasure in the criticism which arose in response to his essays of the period. Following the publication of 'Wheels in the Mud' in 1915, for example, he is reputed to have thanked *phraya* Winai for his outspokenness, while adding that "journalism is a game like billiards or tennis – only amusing when one plays against a skilled opponent."⁷¹

While thoroughly in keeping with the broader tradition of royalist historiography, this interpretation of events is difficult to reconcile with the archival records of the

⁶⁷ *Bangkok Daily Mail*, 10 May 1917, 'to toem kanrakchat' (More on Patriotism).

⁶⁸ P.U. Hohendahl, *The Institution of Criticism*, Ithaca: Cornell, 1982, 52.

⁶⁹ See Suphaphan: 1974, 74-76; Sukanya: 1977, 66; Chai'anant: 1977, 14-44; Lawan: 1979, 252; and Prayut: 1984, 259-263.

⁷⁰ In introducing 'Jews of the Orient', for example, he acknowledged the possibility that his opinion of the Chinese could be "entirely wrong." Similarly, at the opening of his essay 'Chinese Politics', he invited debate from any who disagreed with his views.

⁷¹ See Suphaphan: 1974, 74-75; and Sukanya: 1977, 70-73.

period. When 'Wheels in the Mud' first appeared in the *Daily Mail*, for example, officers of the court were dispatched to discover the identity of its author and *phraya* Winai went into hiding out of fear for his life.⁷² Shortly thereafter, Vajiravudh also demanded that his cabinet find a way to keep Siamese nationals from publishing their "tasteless remarks" in the foreign-owned publications of the capital.⁷³ Finally, when the *Daily Mail* continued to feature a critical commentary on the king and his court, the monarch responded by purchasing the paper outright and presenting it as a gift to his favorite courtier *jao phraya* Ram.⁷⁴

By 1917, Vajiravudh's concern that a growing number of "undesirables with a little money in their pockets" were becoming involved in the newspaper trade also led him to order the drafting of the kingdom's first comprehensive press act.⁷⁵ Although the measure was ultimately shelved out of concern over the likely response of the foreign diplomatic community, it nonetheless reveals the press policy which was being contemplated by the government during the period.⁷⁶ To assure that prospective newspaper publishers were men "of good repute", it stipulated that they demonstrate an initial capital holding of at least a hundred and fifty thousand baht, fifty thousand of which was to be lodged with the government as a surety bond. Moreover, the proprietor, whether of Siamese or foreign nationality, was to be held "completely accountable to the laws of Siam." Finally, the Ministry of Interior was to be given the authority to bring legal action against any newspaper publishing news of: any matter likely to pervert the public morals; any pretrial proceeding of any criminal investigation; the proceedings of any meeting not open to the public; any material which might create a breach of the peace, and any material considered to be insulting to the royal family or threatening to the form of government and its institutions.⁷⁷

⁷² See *Bangkok Daily Mail*, 13 June 1915, "Khonanthawisan", 'lo tit klon' (Wheels in the Mud).

⁷³ Vajiravudh, *raingain prachum senabodi* 31 May 1915, *Anuson nai ngan praratchathan phloeng sop nang chaksi sutritakun* (Cremation Volume of Chaksi Sutritakun), Bangkok: 1971, 6.

⁷⁴ For details of the transaction, see NA, R7, *ratchalekathikan*, 19.2/8, *wa rongphim sayam fri pret* (Regarding the Siam Free Press), *phraya* Boribun Ratchasombat to Prajadhipok, 6 May 1927. In addition, see Phonphirom: 1977, 19.

⁷⁵ A copy of the 1917 draft can be found in NA, R6, *mahathai* 13/8, *phraratchabanyat nangsu'phim lae samut ekkasan bantuk ruang kotmai nangsu'phim* (A Record of the Press Law). In an accompanying document, it was noted that the king had requested the Ministry of the Interior to draft a press law "not once but many times."

⁷⁶ NA, R6, *mahathai* 13/8, *phraratchabanyat nangsu'phim lae samut ekkasan bantuk ruang kotmai nangsu'phim* (A Record of the Press Law). The law reportedly would have been adopted in 1917 but for the difficulties posed by "the representatives of foreign countries." In light of subsequent press histories, it is also worth noting that the individual drafting the report recommended that the government announce that it had decided not to adopt a comprehensive press law because the king "was unwilling to bring undue pressure to bear on" the kingdom's journalists. At the end of the year, however, the government approved a lesser measure prohibiting the publication of defense-related matters without the prior approval of the government and immediately used it to bring charges against *Chinosayam warasap* (see Sukanya: 1977, 84; and Chai-anan: 1977, 41).

⁷⁷ It was already possible to bring libel and *lese mageste* charges against newspaper owners and editors under the terms of an 1899 law. See Engel: 1975, 110-113.

Given the severity of the proposed press act, one can safely assume that Vajiravudh took little satisfaction in the critical press commentary of the period. Although his choice of venue, his use of a pseudonym, and his literary style can all be said to have encouraged debate, he appears to have erroneously anticipated that few would dare to openly challenge his views. As a result of this miscalculation, his effort to "seize the press as a weapon" further undermined the very ideas which he sought to champion – the primacy of royal viewpoint and the notion that "the king alone was above the rest" – by providing his numerous critics with a discourse to react against.

IV

Political Journalism

Thais throughout the country ... have turned to politics (*kanmuang*) and begun printing their views in the press. Their aim is to point out the shortcomings of our government and the errors which certain of its members have committed so that such matters will be known to all and steps can be taken to remove these evils from our nation.¹

4.1 Introduction. Thus far, I have been primarily concerned with challenging the idea that Thai nationalism was the monopoly product of a ruling elite. Towards this end, I have undertaken to place the court's 'official' nationalism within a broader intellectual context in an effort to show that the process of formulating and disseminating a Thai nationalist discourse was from the outset the contested enterprise of a literati. At the same time, I have also been arguing that the growth of a newspaper trade helped to foster an understanding of political community at odds with the nationalist visions of Chulalongkorn and Vajiravudh alike. In the present chapter, I intend to further this line of argument by discussing a particular form of nationalism which emerged to popularity in Bangkok in the period after 1917.

The principal source materials for this discussion are a collection of essays and editorials which were published in the vernacular press during the latter years of the Sixth Reign. In most cases, pennames have allowed the individual authors to remain anonymous. Moreover, in several instances the histories of individual publications have remained obscure as well, for prior to the promulgation of Siam's first comprehensive press act in early 1923, newspaper owners and editors were under no obligation to reveal their identities and had little to gain by doing so. Despite these difficulties, however, the materials provide ample evidence of what can rightly be described as a nascent Thai 'independence movement' – the effort of a metropolitan intelligentsia to assert the authority of a 'people' over a government which was increasingly represented in 'enemy-oppressor' terms.

¹ *Sayam ratsadon*, 13 October 1923, 'chat, satsana, phramahakasat khu arai' (What Do We Mean by Nation, Religion, and King?).

As the essays can also be said to reveal not one but rather a multiplicity of perspectives on the Thai nation, a diverse collection of rival viewpoints as to what the nation was and ought to be, I should offer some explanation as to why I have chosen to treat the materials as a corpus, as a 'nationalism' and not a number of discrete 'nationalisms'. Simply put, it is my contention that each individual author contributed to the development of a single nationalist project by openly participating in a process of national self-determination. Thereby, the monarchy's claim to preeminence in the domain of national affairs was effectively undermined and Siam increasingly came to be viewed as a 'multi-voiced' polity which could only be forged into an indivisible whole, a nation, through political means.

4.2 Political Journalism. In an effort to characterize this project, I have elected to make use of an ideological banner which was employed by the writers, themselves – political journalism (*nangsu'phim kanmuang*). In order to appreciate the significance of the appellation, it is necessary to recall that until well into the twentieth century, the court was vehemently opposed to the idea of politics, in the sense of an activity through which diverging interests within a given unit of rule are recognized and conciliated by being afforded a share in power proportionate to their relative importance within the community as a whole.² In his 1903 discourse on unity, for example, Chulalongkorn was highly critical of the proposition that there was a need to create an institutional framework for the expression of rival viewpoint in Siam. Indeed, near the end of his essay, 'political dissent' was depicted as an intolerable aberration, an affront to the unity of a polity in which the king's views were held to be "the only correct ones." Moreover, in the subsequent period, his successor Vajiravudh not only stressed that it was an act of 'national betrayal' to disagree with the king but sought to define the concept of 'politics' in anti-national terms as well, both by offering blanket criticisms of any and all who professed a knowledge of the subject and by claiming that 'politicians' (*nakkanmuang*) were little more than self-serving individuals who 'preached rebellion and anarchy.'

Within this context, the underlying significance of political journalism becomes clear. In early 1917, when the editor of *Sayam samai* described his publication as the kingdom's first 'political newspaper' (*nangsu'phim ponlithik*), the assertion alone presumably sufficed to indicate that the paper was to serve as the platform of a critical opposition.³ The point was also made manifest by the collection of essays which appeared in *Sayam samai*'s first issue as well, however. In a satirical commentary on Jakkri 'modernization', one writer 'praised' the court for having "substantially

² The definition is B. Crick's. See *In Defense of Politics*, Middlesex: Penguin, 1982, 21.

³ The premier issue of *Sayam samai* dated 1 January 1917 and related documentation can be found in NA, R6, *betthalet*, 13/20, *nangsu'phim sayam samai* (*Sayam samai*).

increased the volume of European imports into the country" and marvelled at its 'success' in creating a bloated army officer corps of some two thousand men within the space of a single decade.⁴ In addition, a second employed Vajiravudh's dictum on the importance of having a national "helmsman to keep the oarsmen paddling in unison" in order to argue that Siam was in dire need of a prime minister.⁵ Finally, in a number of additional essays, the kingdom's rulers were openly criticised for continuing to rely upon gambling as a source of state revenue, for doing little to assist the kingdom's farmers in developing the economy, and for doing nothing at all to improve the country's provincial administration.⁶

In conjunction with this piecemeal criticism of the government, the essayists of *Sayam samai* also made a concerted effort to promote the idea of political rule. In his introductory remarks, for example, the editor observed that the newspapers of the capital were already representing the interests of a number of rival camps, with "some serving as the voice of the government, others as the voice of foreigners, and still others as the voice of the people."⁷ At the same time, he noted that the subjects of the realm were divided into a number of discrete classes and added that the members of each group were inclined to interpret the 'truth' of events in different ways. As a result, he was led to conclude that the nation could only be protected from "the dangers and evils of false commentary and ... erroneous beliefs" by carefully considering the opinions of each and every member of society. In much the same fashion, the paper's contributors repeatedly emphasized that it was "normal for people to be of different minds", "unlikely that everyone would ever see things in the same light", and "impossible to speak in a manner pleasing to everybody." Indeed, diversity of opinion was held to be a logical correlary of "the individual right to offer a well-intentioned commentary on issues of national importance", a "benefit for the nation" provided everyone agreed to "take the majority view as the decisive one."⁸

Whether as a result of its critical commentary or as a consequence of the challenge which it posed to the court's vision of an 'apolitical polity', *Sayam samai*'s first issue

4 *Ibid*; 'kanpokkrong prathet sayam thiap khwamjaroen nai rawang khrung ratanakosin tangtac ton rachakan thi nung jonhung kanlapatyuban' (The Development of Siam's Political Administration from the First Reign to the Present).

5 *Ibid*; 'prathet sayam wela ni somkhuan ja thung wela tang anakha mahasenabodi ru mai' (On the Question of Whether a Prime Minister Should Be Appointed in Siam).

6 *Ibid*; 'ruang khwamhen nai kanlock bonbia laco ja ha raidai chwei thotthaen' (On Finding Alternate Sources of Income to Replace the Revenue Lost Through the Prohibition of Gambling) and 'ruang khwamhen withi truat rachakan faiturakan' (On Administrative Inspections).

7 *Ibid*, 'khwamprasong thi ok nangsu'phim ni' (Our Aims in Publishing This Paper).

8 *Ibid*, 'prathet sayam wela ni somkhuan ja thung wela tang anakha mahasenabodi ru mai' (On the Question of Whether a Prime Minister Should Be Appointed in Siam); and 'ruang khwamhen nai kanlock bonbia laco ja ha raidai chwei thotthaen' (On Finding Alternate Sources of Income to Replace the Revenues Lost Through the Prohibition of Gambling).

drew an immediate closure order from the government.⁹ In the subsequent period, however, an increasing number of self-styled political journals were published in the capital: *Wayamo* (1920); *Torpedo* (1921); *Yamato* (1922); 'Bangkok Politics' (*Bangkok kanmuang* – 1922); 'The Politician' (*Nakkanmuang* – 1922); 'The Laborer' (*Kammakon* – 1923); 'The Free Word' (*Seri sap* – 1923); 'Red Dragon' (*Mangkong daeng* – 1923); 'Avanti' (*Awandi* – 1923); the 'Destroying Torpedo' (*Phikhat torpedo* – 1923); the 'Devastating Torpedo' (*Sanghan torpedo* – 1923); 'The Weekly Destroyer' (*Phikhat* – 1923); 'The Sunday Destroyer' (*Phikhat wanathit*); 'Punishing the Immoral' (*Prap atham* – 1924); 'Destroying the Immoral' (*Phikhat atham* – 1924); and 'Armor' (*Kro lek* – 1924) being some of the better-known. As their mastheads suggest, all were highly critical of the Sixth Reign court. Indeed, the more critical were generally the most commercially successful. The Japanese-registered *Yamato*, for example, had a profitable twenty-month print run, its circulation early on exceeding that of the government's principal dailies, the *Bangkok Daily Mail* and *Phim thai*.¹⁰ Similarly, *Bangkok kanmuang* quickly went from a weekly to a daily format, its owner *nai* Hom Nilarat na Ayuthaya building a successful publishing business over the course of the next ten years.¹¹ And one of the more stridently anti-royalist

⁹ See NA, R6, *betthalet*, 13/20, *nangsut'phim sayam samai* (*Sayam samai*).

¹⁰ The first 'political' daily to appear during the period, *Yamato* commenced publishing in July of 1922 and was eventually closed by the Bangkok Police Department in March of 1924. As it was registered in the name of I. Miyakawa, a Japanese merchant who owned a Bangkok dry goods store, and printed at a concern which ostensibly belonged to another Japanese national named Wayakato, it has frequently been suggested that *Yamato* was a "truly Japanese newspaper" which was begun as "a part of the Japanese forward movement in Siam." It was apparently common knowledge in the capital that the paper was run by *nai* Sombat Lekchuwong, however. Moreover, following the closure of *Yamato*, two additional Thai-language publications were subsequently produced on Wayakato's press: *Yai Bunnak's* critical *Morning Post*, a daily which enjoyed a brief five-month run before being closed on charges of *lese majeste*, and *nai* Phong Thaithae's weekly *Laem thong*, a publication which was equally shortlived, apparently for similar reasons. Regarding *Yamato's* circulation, no figures are available, although its sales were reportedly better than those of the *Bangkok Daily Mail*, a paper which in turn was more popular than *Phim thai*. On this latter point and on the matter of whether *Yamato* was a part of a Japanese forward movement, see Phonphirom: 1977, 21-22 and Salao: 1967, 444-445. Regarding *nai* Sombat's involvement with the newspaper, see *Bangkok kanmuang*, 3 March 1924, 'nai yu maisuk' (Mr. Not So Happy).

¹¹ *Bangkok kanmuang* was published from 16 October 1922 through to the time of the absolute monarchy's overthrow in 1932. Hom purchased his own printing press in early 1923 and by June, the paper was being issued as a daily. In November, it was also enlarged from twelve to twenty pages. Subsequently, Hom issued a number of additional publications as well: *Khao soi* (1923), *Thai num* (1926), *Kammanto* (1926); and *Sayam num* (1932). At least a part of *Bangkok kanmuang's* success was due to Hom's personal experience in journalism. He began his career as a translator at *Bangkok Daily Mail*, subsequently leaving the paper in order to publish the weekly *Kampan* (1920) and a successor paper, *Torpedo* (1921). The venture was also aided by Hom's business partner *nai* Prom, the adopted son of an influential Bangkok merchant who had previously served as a cavalry officer in the military. In addition, Hom subsequently utilized his knowledge of Bangkok business and politics to cultivate patrons, 'selling public praise' and securing the support of a number of prominent individuals through 'smelting' (*thalung*) or blackmail. See NA, R7, *rachalekhathikan*, 19.2/9, *bangkok kanmuang*, and *mahathai*, 26/14, *sayam num nai hom*.

publications to appear during the period, *Nai Kao* Sonsakun's *Nakkanmuang*, boasted record sales by its second issue.¹²

The commercial success of political journalism was the result of several factors, one being the rising level of public antipathy for the Sixth Reign court. As has already been noted, from the early years of his reign, Vajiravudh was widely criticised for his choice of counsel, his policies, his spending, and a host of other shortcomings. In addition, the monarch's troubled relationship with the Siamese military establishment was further exacerbated in 1917 when he sought to lead the kingdom into the Great War on the side of Great Britain and France – the countries which posed the principal threat to Siamese independence. The plan gave rise to yet another abortive coup attempt against the throne, a plot which was rumored to have had the backing of several senior members of the royal family, and when troops were finally dispatched to Europe in mid-1918, it was necessary to rally their morale by explaining that their sacrifice would provide the kingdom with a "breathing space" in which to protect itself from the "molestations" of its "powerful neighbors."¹³

More significant than the waning popularity of Vajiravudh, however, was the growth of a literate commoner class and its concentration in Bangkok. While it is virtually impossible to estimate the percentage of the population that was literate in 1917, it is clear that their numbers were greater than ever before. From the end of the nineteenth century, education was increasingly viewed as a means of social mobility in Siam, largely because of a shortage of trained personnel to staff the kingdom's expanding bureaucracy. In an effort to address the problem, the court opened dozens of schools in the capital and arranged for hundreds of upper-class children to be sent abroad for a period of study. Out of concern that a "surplus of educated youth" would eventually lead to social unrest in the kingdom, however, comparatively little effort was made to develop a provincial education system.¹⁴ Ironically, the policy appears

¹² *Nakkanmuang* commenced publication on 18 December 1922 as an occasional newspaper with a print run of three thousand copies, all of which were reportedly sold within the space of a few days. As a result, five thousand copies of the paper's second issue of 15 January 1923 were printed and shortly thereafter, *nai Kao* began producing the publication on a weekly basis. In November of 1923, the paper was changed to a bi-weekly format and was on the brink of becoming a daily when closed by the Bangkok Police Department in June of 1924. Regarding the paper's circulation, see *Nakkanmuang*, 15 January 1923, 38.

¹³ See Batson: 1983, 22, footnote 25; and Suwadi Charoenphong, *Patikirya khong rathaban phrabatsomdet phrapokkiaojaoyuhua to kankhluanwai tam naco kwamkit pratchathipatai lac sangkhom niyom kon kanplienplaeng kanpokkhong 2475* (The Seventh Reign's Response to Democratic and Socialist Movements in the Period Prior to 1932), Chulalongkorn University MA Thesis, 1976, 62. A translation of Prince Chakraphong's speech to the troops on the occasion of their departure for Europe is enclosed in Great Britain, PRO, FO 371/4093, Lyle to Earl Curzon, 11 September 1919. The significance of the speech was not lost on Lyle, who noted that it amounted to "an exhortation to the soldiers addressed to conceal their present feelings of dislike towards their French and British neighbors."

¹⁴ Concerned that public education would have a deleterious impact upon the kingdom's political stability in 1906, Prince Wachirayan proposed that the government provide little more than a basic education to most Siamese children. See Wyatt: 1969, 326-327.

to have had the opposite of its intended effect, for a steady stream of provincial children simply moved to Bangkok in order to avail themselves of its superior educational facilities and in short order, there was a 'surplus' of educated youth in the capital proper.

Although the thousand or so individuals who completed their schooling each year were encouraged to "stop blocking the doors of the ministries" and "return to their farms in the countryside", most chose to remain in the capital, their increasingly concentrated numbers providing the impetus for change in the kingdom's newspaper trade.¹⁵ As circulation figures once counted in the hundreds rose into the lower thousands, scores of new publishing ventures were launched in Bangkok.¹⁶ By 1924, some ninety-nine privately-owned printing presses were already operating in the capital, a number which rose to one hundred and twenty-seven over the next three years.¹⁷ A part of this increase was due to the growth of a book trade, Bangkok's fourteen publishing houses producing some 40,000 copies of thirty-nine titles in a one month period of 1924 alone.¹⁸ Still, the vast majority of those engaged in commercial publishing during the period sold periodicals, as evidenced by the one hundred and ninety-one new newspapers – commercial gazettes, movie magazines, literary journals, educational supplements, women's weeklies, and religious publications for both Buddhists and Muslims – which were produced in the decade after 1916.¹⁹

This flourishing of the commercial press was significant in several respects. It undermined the court's ability to influence press opinion with subsidies, and more

¹⁵ See *Phim thai*, 17 April 1925, 'sonthana kap chainum' (Chatting with Young Men); 20 April 1925, 'hua ok chainum' (The Heart of a Young Man); and *Sayam ratsadon*, 8 January 1925, 'khwamhen khong chao rai' (The Opinion of a Farmer).

¹⁶ Available circulation statistics suggest a gradual increase in newspaper sales throughout the period. In 1874, *Darunawat* had a circulation of less than a hundred copies per issue. By the turn of the century, however, Thianwan's *Tunlawiphak photchanakit* had a print run of one thousand copies and some two hundred and fifty subscribers. By 1912, the circulation of the court-subsidized *Daily Mail* was in the order of 1,500 copies an issue, and by the 1920's, the measure of a newspaper's profitability lay somewhere in the range of two thousand copies per issue. The editor of a *Nakkanmuang* was elated when his newspaper's sales passed this figure in December of 1922, and *Suphap burut*, a newspaper considered successful in its day, made a profit on its initial print run of 2,000 copies – 1,900 of which were sold. See Khachon: 1983, 68; Sukanya: 1977, 57; NA, R6, *betthalei*, 13/3, *nangsu'phim* (The Press); and *Suphap burut*, 1 June 1929 and 1 July 1929 respectively.

¹⁷ See NA, R6, *nakhonban, kromtamruat phranakhonban laephuthon, rachakantuapai* (Ministry of the Capital; Department of the Police; General Affairs), 4.1/213, *nangsu'phim mangkhon daeng* (Mangkhon Daeng) *phraya* Athikon Prakat to *phraya Phetda*, 20 September 1924; and NA, R7, *mahathai*, 26/9, *phrarachabanyat nangsu'phim* (Ministry of Interior; the Press Law), 1927.

¹⁸ NA, R6, *nakhonban, kromtamruat phranakhonban laephuthon, rachakantuapai* (Ministry of the Capital; Department of the Police; General Affairs), 4.1/213, *nangsu'phim mangkhon daeng* (Mangkhon Daeng Press) *phraya* Athikon Prakat to *phraya Phetda*, 20 September 1924. Most were reportedly 'ruang anlen', novels or pieces of "pleasure reading" printed in batches of 1,500 copies.

¹⁹ See Kromsinlapakon, *Bannanukrom warasan lae nangsu'phim nai prathet thai sung tiphim rawang 2387-2477* (A Bibliography of Periodicals and Newspapers Printed in Thailand between 1844 and 1934), Bangkok: *ho samut haeng chat*, 1970.

importantly, it provided a previously powerless segment of society with a forum in which to articulate their diverging viewpoints and concerns. "Scores of young men and women" were said to have taken up writing during the period, developing "a variety of new literary styles" in the process.²⁰ Journalism, translation, and the production of novellas were listed alongside taxi driving and crime as growth occupations for "the tens of thousands of young people who came to the capital in search of education and work."²¹ Bookstalls were said to be "filled with so many strange new publications" that it was "no longer possible to make a selection."²² Still, most commentators readily agreed that it was first and foremost "the age of the newspaper" (*samai nangsu'phim*) – a time when the press was "truly beginning to serve as the voice of the people" or, from the perspective of the court, a time when "an increasing number of meddlesome individuals" published their opinions on national affairs in an effort to "make the country's citizens lose faith and respect for the government."²³ The popularity of the medium was reflected in the growing number of classroom broadsheets issued by capital school children.²⁴ The concern which the development engendered within the government was made manifest in renewed discussions on the need for a comprehensive press law.

It is within this context that the word 'politician' (*nakkanmuang*) was increasingly used to refer to writers who challenged the kingdom's established political order on behalf of the Siamese 'public'. Often depicted as heroic figures, they were said to have "taken up writing in order to teach the Thai that they had a duty to vigorously protect their national interests."²⁵ At the same time, they were held to be "defending the nation, religion, and the interests of the majority" from the kingdom's "unscrupulous officials."²⁶ In this latter respect, they were heralded as 'the tough guys' (*pen nakleng to*) of journalism, individuals who "refused to be anything less than provocative" (*mai yom lot khaen loei*) in their "fearless struggle with the evil councillors" (*mai watwan to ummat tutrit khon dai*) of the realm.²⁷

20 *Sayam ratsadon*, 9 January 1925, 'sonthana kap nakpraphan samai ni' (Talking to Writers of the Age).

21 *Si krung*, 22 August 1928, 'saphap khong khon thai' (The Condition of the Thai).

22 *Ibid.* In addition, see *Sayam riwiw*, 5 June 1927, 'ruang naru samrap chaorao' (Matters of Interest to Us All). The writer estimated that five to fifteen new romances were printed each day during the course of 1924.

23 *Vayamo*, 1 February 1923, 'singla an phanla noi' (A Little of Everthing); *Dusit samit*, 3 February 1923, "Nua Mai" (Vajiravudh), 'jotmai khong phuan samai nangsu'phim' (A Letter From a Friend: The Age of Newspapers); and 24 February 1923, "Nua Mai" (Vajiravudh), 'rak chat' (Patriotism).

24 On the matter of the high school press, see Sanit Charoenrat, *O wa anapratcharatsadon* (For the People of the Kingdom), Bangkok: Phrac phittaya, 1964, 29.

25 *Sayam ratsadon*, 28 February 1925, 'sonthana kap phuak rao' (Talking Among Ourselves).

26 *Nakkanmuang*, 11 October 1923, 'khwamrueang an thaejing khong rao' (Our Real Intentions).

27 The description is taken from an advertisement for *Sayam s-ikkhi* which appeared in *Bangkok kammuang* on 16 June 1923.

4.3 'The Government' and 'The People'. By the early years of the Sixth Reign, a schism between 'the government' and 'the people' was firmly embedded in the conventions and language of newspaper publishing. In common parlance, a newspaper was a "voice" (*paksiang*) which "spoke on behalf of" (*pen paksiang khong*) a specific *khana* – the "party" or "faction" of writers affiliated with the owner of a given printing press. In common practice, however, the "voices" of the capital were generally divided into two broad camps: publications of the government-subsidized press (*nangsu'phim rathaban*) which were insulated from the market and relatively free from the threat of prosecution, and the independent or "popular newspapers" (*nangsu'phim ratsadon*) which ran the risk of having their "mouths shut" (*pitpak*) by the court. Not surprisingly, the former were generally supportive of the government, carrying an authoritative commentary in defense of its various policies and plans, while the latter frequently served as a forum for the government's critics, many of whom claimed to be writing on behalf of the people of the kingdom as a whole.

In the period after 1917, this rift between the literary vantage points of the court and the public was gradually transformed into a discursive battleline as a result of a renewed debate over the countervailing duties of the 'ruling party' (*khana pokkhrong*) and 'the people' (*khana ratsadon*).²⁸ Much as Thianwan had previously undertaken to point out the duties of the king and his ministers, so an increasing number of writers sought to delineate the appropriate functions of 'national government'. The tasks of the political administration were generally not at issue, the writers of both camps being inclined to agree that the authorities had the duty to defend the nation and see to the well-being of its members. There was, however, a considerable amount of contention over the extent to which these functions were actually being carried out by the Sixth Reign court. Moreover, as the reign progressed, the kingdom's rulers were increasingly held to account for an expanding list of perceived 'national shortcomings': economic, political, and social.

As was noted in the last chapter, the government's role in developing the economy had long been a matter of debate, with some writers claiming that the production of national wealth was the responsibility of the citizenry alone and others demanding that the government take a more active role in the kingdom's economic development. Most commentators of the period were particularly concerned by Siam's low level of agricultural productivity, both because a majority of the country's citizens were farmers and because the government derived a significant portion of its revenue from farm-related income. In addressing the issue, however, the writers at *Phim thai*

²⁸ Both terms were commonly used during the latter years of the Sixth Reign. See *Yamato*, 4-6 March 1924, 'siang khong nangsu'phim farang' (Foreign Press Opinion); and *Sara nakhon*, 24 April 1925, 'yuk haeng kankabot ru?' (An Age of Rebellion?).

generally sought to promote the view that the principal impediment to the development of agriculture was the farmer who, in "receiving all that he needed from nature", had "little concern for his future" and "no incentive to stop resting and start planting."²⁹ In contrast, essayists of the popular press usually depicted the nation's farmers as an exploited underclass: impoverished, undereducated, and unaided in their struggle to develop a principal component of the economy.³⁰ In an extended editorial which was published in late 1922, for example, the farmers of the kingdom were said to be "wasting away in poverty", "falling into a type of debt slavery far worse than any previous form", "losing their fields to creditors", "wandering the countryside like restless ghosts", and ultimately "turning to criminal activity in order to provide for their families."³¹ In this particular instance, the government was criticised for adopting a system of land tenure "akin to that employed in colonial Burma and India", thereby opening the door for usurious money lenders to strip the farmer of his land.³² In a number of subsequent essays, however, the 'plight of the farmer' was often explained in terms of governmental neglect. The kingdom's provincial administration was held to be 'inefficient' at best and 'oppressive' at worst, providing little in return for the taxes which it extracted from countryside.³³ Moreover, the court at Bangkok was frequently compared to "a giant leech" which "drained the blood" of the provinces, "leaving the principal producers of the nation's wealth to live in the forests."³⁴

Equally divisive was the matter of whether the government should take a more active role in the kingdom's commercial development. While commentators of the period were generally agreed that there was a need to develop the kingdom's industrial base and virtually all paid lip service to the idea that the Thai should produce and use their own products, the government-subsidized press was inclined to find fault with

²⁹ *Phim thai*, 12-15 July 1922, "Na Rat" (Of the State), 'khwamsukjaroen khong bukkhon lac prathetchat' (On the Happiness of Persons and Nation-States). In addition, see *Phim thai*, 5 May 1923, 'rao jonlong phra arai?' (Why Are We Getting Poorer?).

³⁰ For example, see *Wayamo*, 30 July 1920, 'phokasap khong prathet sayam', (The Resources of Siam); *Samphan thai*, 2 January 1924, "Rakchat" (Patriot), 'wa dwei phasi raidai ru inkhamthaek' (On Income Tax); *Bangkok kanmuang*, 9-10 December 1924, "Jaothanya", 'prathet sayam yu dai dwei arai?' (On What Does Siam Stand?); and *Sara nakhon*, 14 July 1925, 'kamlang samkhan khong rao' (One of Our Important Strengths).

³¹ *Yamato*, 26 July - 26 December 1922, "Chao Kasikam" (A Farmer), 'thina pen chaloei khong jaoni' (The Fields: Prisoners of War in the Battle with Creditors).

³² *Yamato*, 26 December 1922.

³³ *Wayamo*, 30 July 1920, 'phokasap khong prathet sayam', (The Resources of Siam); *Nakkamuang*, second issue, 15 January 1923; *Yamato*, 4 June 1923, 'withikan pokkhrong' (Administrative Methods); *Bangkok kanmuang*, 10 December 1924, "Jao Thanya", 'prathet sayam yu dai dwei arai?' (On What Does Siam Stand?); and *Sara nakhon*, 14 July 1925, 'kamlang samkhan khong rao' (One of Our Important Strengths).

³⁴ *Sayam ratsadon*, 24 December 1923, 'hetdai khwamjaroen joeng ruam yu tae krungthep' (Why Bangkok Alone is Developing). In addition, see *Bangkok kanmuang*, 22 October 1924, 'khwamhen ekkachon sukhaphiban kap kansuksa' (A Private View of Sanitation Boards and Education); and 9-10 December 1924, "Jaothanya", 'prathet sayam yu dai dwei arai?' (On What Does Siam Stand?).

Siam's manufacturers and consumers, the former for producing expensive goods of inferior quality and the latter for being overly enamored of Western products.³⁵ In contrast, the independent press was far more pessimistic in its appraisal of the nation's economic straits and highly critical of the authorities for 'failing' to protect the economic interests of the Thai. Domestic industry was held to be "nonexistent", the "only Thai goods in the market having been produced by convict labor", and trade was repeatedly said to have "fallen completely into foreign hands."³⁶ In part, the "backward condition" of the economy was blamed on Siam's 'colonial legacy', the Thai having been forced to enter into inequitable treaty relations with the West and "tricked into believing that the things which Europeans have to sell are popular in the outside world and should be popular with us as well."³⁷ Insomuch as the court had "allowed" these developments to occur, however, it was ultimately held to account for the 'fact' that Thai were "becoming the slaves of foreigners in their own home."³⁸

In the period after 1922, this nationalist critique of the government's economic policies was gradually transformed into a broader literary assault on the kingdom's ruling class as a whole. Misappropriation of funds emerged as the principal issue of the period, the muckraking journalists of the political press producing an ongoing series of exposés on powerful individuals who used "the wealth of the nation", money which "rightly ought to have been invested in public projects", for their own private ends.³⁹ At the same time, abuse of authority – a sweeping category which included arrogance, debauchery, incompetence, influence peddling, favoritism, factionalism, malfeasance, and nepotism – was regularly discussed in the pages of the

³⁵ For example, see *Phim thai*, 9 April 1925, 'sinkha khong rao' (Our Products); and *Bangkok Daily Mail*, 10 April 1925, 'khon thai kap khong thai' (The Thai and Thai Products).

³⁶ See *Sara ratsadon*, 14 March 1923, 'khwamhen ekkachon khwamjaroen khong yiphun' (A Private View on the Causes of Japanese Prosperity); *Kammakon*, 5 May 1923, 'lak khwamjaroen khong prathet' (The Basis of the Country's Prosperity); *Nakkanmuang*, 6 October 1923, 'jampen ru mai?' (Aren't These Things Essential?); and *Sayam ratsadon*, 16 February 1925, 'kanha liangchip khong khon thai' (Thai Occupations).

³⁷ *Sara ratsadon*, 14 March 1923, 'khwamhen ekkachon khwamjaroen khong yiphun' (A Private View on the Causes of Japanese Prosperity); *Nakkanmuang*, 6 October 1923, 'jampen ru mai?' (Aren't These Things Essential?); *Sayam ratsadon*, 28 February 1925, 'sonthana kap phuak rao' (Talking Amongst Ourselves).

³⁸ *Wayamo*, 30 July 1920, 'phokasap khong prathet sayam' (The Resources of Siam); *Kammakon*, 10 March 1923, 'phai nai amnat' (The Danger of Power); and 8 December 1923, 'lak haeng khwamjaroen' (The Principals of Prosperity); *Nakkanmuang*, 1 November 1923, 'khwamyak khong chao thai' (The Difficulties of the Thai); *Sayam ratsadon*, 16 February 1925, 'kanha liangchip khong khon thai' (Thai Occupations); *Sara nakhon*, 9 March 1925, 'thammai joeng la lang' (Why Are We Behind?); *Kro lek*, 19 April 1925, 'phuak rao jong loem ta thoed mua loem ta ko khwan lang na sia thi diao' (We Must Open Our Eyes and After They are Open, We Must Wash Our Faces Immediately!).

³⁹ By early 1923, such exposés were being regularly published by scores of newspapers in the capital. For example see *Nakkanmuang*, 18 December 1922 and 15 January 1923; *Sayam ratsadon*, 13 and 18 January 1923; *Kammakon*, 5 and 12 May 1923; *Wayamo*, 2 and 12 June 1923; *Yamato*, 4 and 7 June 1923; *Bangkok kanmuang*, 26 June and 2 July 1923; *Samphan thai*, 14 July and 7 November 1923; and *Kro lek*, 23 April 1925, 'khunnang kong samai ni du muan mi thaep mai wen da la pi' (It Seems Like There Are an Endless Series of Corrupt Officials).

popular press as well.⁴⁰ While the primary aim of this effort was seemingly to compel 'authority' to adhere to a 'public' standard of propriety – by drawing attention to individual acts of wrongdoing and by pressuring the government to take corrective measures – the sheer volume of material served to convey the impression that the powerful men of the kingdom were far more interested in the acquisition of private pelf and the pursuit of personal pleasures than they were in the nation's development.⁴¹ Indeed, the point was oftentimes made directly in derisive poems and essays on "the bum-wipe better classes" (*phudi khi dut*) who "bought their way into government employ in order to turn a profit for themselves and their business factions" – individuals whose preoccupation with "relieving other people of their wallets" left them "little time left to consider the needs of their compatriots."⁴²

In scores of essays, elite self-interest was also shown to have placed the nation's independence in jeopardy. Public education, for example, was widely heralded as the key to national prosperity, the means by which the Thai could acquire the skills to successfully compete with the foreigners in trade and industry.⁴³ Rather than working to keep the "more knowledgeable and more united" foreigners from taking advantage of the Thai, however, the court was held to have intentionally underfunded education out of concern that an educated populace would be more difficult to govern.⁴⁴ In

⁴⁰ Here, again, the commentary is far too extensive to offer more than a partial citation. See *Sayam ratsadon*, 13 January 1923, 'khon thi tamngan tamnaeng sung khwan mi khredit di' (Those Appointed to High Positions Should Have Good Public Standing); *Kammakon*, 27 January 1923, 'amnat jao' (The Power of Princes); *Wayamo*, 1 February 1923, 'singla an phanla noi' (A Little of Everything); *Yamato*, 3 March 1924, 'khwanhen ekkachon wa dwei rakkaew rakkhwan khong prathet' (A Private View of the Country's Foundations); *Samphan thai*, 31 May 1924, 'sotsot ronron' (Fresh and Hot); *Morning Post*, 19 August 1924, 'polisi khong banmuang' (The Policies of the Homeland); *Kro lek*, 12 October 1924, 'thamma kap prathet' (Moral Rectitude and the Country); *Bangkok kanmuang*, 18 April 1925, 'laeo tae jai tuayang chuarai' (As They Please: Evil Examples); and *Sara nakhon*, 9 July 1925, 'saphap khong lok plianplaeng dai dwei khwanhit' (The World is Transformed by Thought).

⁴¹ Corruption cases were used to promote a number of broader agendas as well. As noted by the editor of *Kammakon*, cases were often selected on the basis of their educational value. An exposé on a provincial education official who misappropriated tax revenues, for example, not only brought pressure to bear on the individual involved in the case but also affirmed that importance of public education. See *Kammakon*, 11 August 1923, 'ahan nangsuhim' (Food for the Press).

⁴² *Kro lek*, 12 July 1925, 'bua mua fanhen' (It's Depressing to Envision), and *Bangkok kanmuang*, 30 January 1924, 'khwanhen ekkachon ruang muang thai ja pen muang thai dai yang rai' (A Private View of How the Land of the Thai/Free Can Become the Land of the Thai/Free).

⁴³ *Wayamo*, 10 September 1920; *Kammakon*, 5 May 1923, 'lak khwanjaroen khong prathet' (The Basis of the Country's Prosperity); *Bangkok kanmuang*, 22 October 1924, 'khwanhen ekkachon sukhaphibun kap kansuksa' (A Private View on Sanitation Boards and Public Education).

⁴⁴ *Khao sot*, 25 October 1923, 'ya wiset' (Extraordinary Medicine); *Samphan thai*, 7 November 1923, 'tamnaeng rachakan kap chaotangprathet' (Government Offices and Foreign Nationals); *Kammakon*, 8 December 1923, 'lak haeng khwanjaroen' (The Principals of Prosperity); *Bangkok kanmuang*, 30 January 1924, 'khwanhen ekkachon ruang muang thai cha pen muang thai dai yang rai' (A Private View of How Siam Can Become Thai/Free); *Sayam ratsadon*, 28 February 1925, 'sonthana kap phuak rao' (Talking Amongst Ourselves); *Kro lek*, 1 March

much the same fashion, the king's excessive spending was said to have imperiled the nation's future as well. Under the title "A Disaster for the Country", for example, one author remarked upon the "frightening" twenty-two million baht shortfall in state revenue over the 1915-1922 period and openly accused the court of further "dissipating the national inheritance" by selling off eighty-six million baht worth of Privy Purse holdings and borrowing another forty-five million baht from abroad – developments which led him to conclude that Siam was being "stripped to the bone."⁴⁵ Similarly, others attributed the kingdom's debts to Vajiravudh's "penchant for squandering millions of baht each year on the pleasures of his courtiers" – "parasites" who were said to be "bleeding the nation dry."⁴⁶

4.4 Anti-Royalism and National Self-Determination.

[Foreigners] consider our country's political system to be a museum piece, the last of its kind in the world. Our king, however, has been trying to make us proud of the fact by pointing to neighboring states which were previously free and are now their slaves ... and by inviting anyone who isn't proud to leave the realm of human existence (*choen plian jak khon pen maichai khon*) ... It may well be true that every nation needs a heart ... but from what I've heard, our faltering heart has no real interest in the nation. Rather, it appears to be primarily concerned with its position and private purse, and this is certainly true of those two-faced characters who cling to [his] chair legs ...⁴⁷

Insomuch as the political authority of the monarchy was 'absolute', there is nothing surprising about the fact that the king was frequently held to account for the nation's underdeveloped condition. Given contemporary perceptions of the Jakkris' place in the early history of Thai nationalism, however, it is difficult not to be taken aback by the number of writers who chose to represent the dynasty as an impediment to the national advance during the period. Although notably direct, the above description of Vajiravudh's nationalist proselytizing – as a transparent attempt to buttress the authority of a "museum-piece" government in order to preserve the interests of the

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- 1925, 'phu mi bandasak ja' (Dearest Nobility); and *Sara nakhon*, 9 July 1925, 'saphap khong lok plianplaeng dai dwei khwamkhit' (The World is Transformed by Thought).
- ⁴⁵ *Kammakon*, 1 March 1923, 'khwam haya khong prathet' (A Disaster for the Country).
- ⁴⁶ *Bangkok kanmuang*, 19 April 1924, *raijai nai phrarachasamnak* (Expenses in the Palace); *Kro lek*, 3 May 1925, 'khwamhayana' (Calamity); *Kammakon*, 5 January 1924, 'sup luat chat' (Drinking the Blood of the Nation); and *Kammakon*, 10 April 1924, 'kanngoen phaendin khong prathet' (The Country's Finances). In addition, see *Wayamo*, 9 January 1923, 'singla an phanla noi' (A Little of Everything); *Bangkok kanmuang*, 22 March 1924, 'kan soem khong thanakan kap kanplianplaeng saphap khong rathaban' (Fiscal Decline and the Changing Conditions of Government); and *Kro lek*, 28 December 1924, 'ngoen raijai khong prathet kap ngoen duan khong kharachakan' (Government Revenues and Salaries); and 22 November 1925, 'maikwat mai kwat ruan di' (A New Broom Makes for a Clean Sweep).
- ⁴⁷ *Kro lek*, 12 and 19 October 1924, 'thamma kap prathet' (Moral Rectitude and the Country).

ruling elite – is in no way extraordinary.⁴⁸ Indeed, the author appears to have been expressing the common sentiments of his day. His essay was published over a five week period in one of the more popular journals of the capital without interference from dynastic authorities.⁴⁹ Moreover, the basic premise of his argument – that the nation's progress could only be gauged in terms of equal rights, freedoms, and political privileges – was reflected in the essays of a number of his contemporaries.⁵⁰

Throughout the period, the idea of equality (*khwamsamoephak*) – a concept which was variously interpreted in terms of social standing, legal rights, and economic opportunity – was frequently used to critique the nobility as an institution. Rather than serving as a mark of respect, rank and title were increasingly decried as the principal sources of national division.⁵¹ By splitting the Thai into "artificial classes", those at the top of the social hierarchy were said to have been "left at liberty to oppress their compatriots at the bottom" – individuals who were in turn "expected to enter into subservient relations" with their 'betters'.⁵² As a result, the Thai continued to "pay obeisance to their masters and bully their servants", behavior which belied their "feeble belief that they were not the slaves of anyone."⁵³ Status gradations were said to have also made a mockery of the idea of equality under the law, as powerful individuals and their clients "remained free to do as they pleased", with scant regard for the rights of others or the consequences of their actions.⁵⁴ In addition, many writers of the period were of the opinion that patronage played a far greater part in the attainment of noble status than did competence, that those who were given the authority to "belittle their peers" were frequently little more than the undeserving

⁴⁸ For similar commentary, see *Mangkong daeng*, 1 March 1923, 'jin kap thai' (The Chinese and the Thai); *Samphan thai*, 14 July 1923, 'pen thai jing?' (Are We Really Thai/Free?); *Bangkok kanmuang*, 27 May 1924, 'lak haeng khwamsuk lae khwamsammakhi khwamkhaorop bucha' (The Basis of Happiness, Unity, and Mutual Respect); and 3 October 1925, 'kao kap mai' (The Old and the New).

⁴⁹ See *Kro lek*, 12, 19, 26 October, 2 and 9 November 1924.

⁵⁰ See *Kammakon*, 10 March 1923, 'phai nai amnat' (Danger of Power); *Bangkok kanmuang*, 26 June 1923, 'jotmai' (Letter to the Editor); *Wayamo* 3 July 1923, 'khwan ru yang?' (Isn't It Time that We Should?); *Kammakon*, 13 October 1923, 'nanakharom' (Diverse Views); *Kro lek*, 8 February 1925, 'setthi muang thai' (The Thai Wealthy); and 6 September 1925, 'kan thu amnat' (Venerating Power).

⁵¹ *Kammakon*, 18 May 1923, 'yot lae bandasak' (Ranks and Titles); *Wayamo*, 1 February and 7 July 1923, 'singla an phanla noi' (A Little of Everything).

⁵² *Samphan thai*, 14 July 1923, 'pen thai jing?' (Are We Really Thai/Free?). In addition, see *Bangkok kanmuang*, 24 November 1924, 'kuap thao phraya' (Almost a *Phraya*) in which the noble author complained that there were a growing number of people in the kingdom who refused to use appropriate forms address and pay deference to their social superiors.

⁵³ *Sayam ratsadon*, 28 February 1923, 'sonthana kap phuak rao' (Talking Amongst Ourselves).

⁵⁴ *Nakkamuang*, 15 January 1923; *Kammakon*, 10 February 1923, 'sit khong kammakon' (The Rights of Laborers); 13 October 1923, 'nana kharom' (Diverse Views); *Bangkok kanmuang*, 26 June 1923, 'jotmai' (Letter).

favorites and flunkies of the politically influential – individuals who were more "likely to impede the nation's development" than promote it.⁵⁵

That this assault on political hierarchy was intended as an indirect criticism of the absolute monarchy is suggested by the growing number of writers who made use of 'feudalism' ((*lathi fīwdalit*, *fudan sitthem*) as a trope for the Sixth Reign social order. In mid-1923, for example, one individual undertook to explain the origins of political corruption in Siam by presenting a contorted history of feudal Europe.⁵⁶ Among other things, he explained that feudalism was essentially the same as "farming on the backs of others" (*tham na bon lang khon*) and described the early history of kingship in terms of criminal bands who laid claim to the fields, livestock, and peoples of a given area, splitting up the booty among their relatives and followers. The common people, who were said to have been left with "little more than their lives", were expected to present the fruit of their labor in its entirety to a local lord, who "like a pair of golden chopsticks, would pinch out a percentage for himself" before presenting the rest to the king. As a consequence of this "enormously corrupting" (*maha ubat*) system, rulers were said to have been able to "satisfy all of their wants through beating and intimidation", while the rest of society "trilled endlessly", "bathing themselves in sweat", "seldom looking skyward", "seldom even speaking."⁵⁷ After noting how education, the spread of nationalist sentiment, and civil war ultimately led to the establishment of a more equitable social order in Europe, he returned to a discussion of misappropriation and regressive taxation in Siam, drawing parallels between Charles I, "a profligate spender who kept to the company of sycophants and squeezed the people with new taxes", and Vajiravudh.⁵⁸ Similarly, another writer of the period asserted that the political systems of feudal Europe and modern Siam were essentially the same in that "both were designed to place people under the authority of kings."⁵⁹ The principal difference between the two was said to lie with the fact that the feudal lords of Europe divided up the land while the rulers of Siam divided up people. At the

⁵⁵ *Wayamo*, 1 February 1923, 'singla an phanla noi' (A Little of Everything); *Samphan thai*, 14 July 1923; *Bangkok kanmuang*, 4 March 1924, 'ratsadon sayam kho khwamyutitham' (The Siamese People are Calling for Justice); *Morning Post*, 19 August 1924, 'polisi khong banmuang' (The Homeland's Policies). In addition, see *Bangkok kanmuang*, 25 November 1924, 'ya khot kho ratsadon' (Don't Squeeze the People's Throats) in which the writer undertook to describe the kingdom's six levels of noble rank in descending order as: nobles who draw their salaries from public revenue and work on the public's behalf; individuals who take the money but work for themselves; those who take handouts from the king and spend all of their time dancing; a large number of individuals who live off of the people; an equally large number who are wards of the state in the kingdom's prisons; elephants and horses which hold noble title.

⁵⁶ *Bangkok kanmuang*, 14, 16, 18, 21, 25 June, 5, 7 and 9 July 1923, 'jotmai nai ket' (Nai Ket's Letter).

⁵⁷ *Bangkok kanmuang*, 16 June 1923.

⁵⁸ *Bangkok kanmuang*, 25 June, 5 July 1923.

⁵⁹ *Bangkok kanmuang*, 16 July 1923, 'khwamhen ekkachon ruang kanpeneng' (A Private View on Independence).

same time, however, he also noted that the Europeans had eventually succeeded in 'reclaiming' their political rights.

Apart from interpreting the Thai present in terms of a feudal European past, essayists of the period also made increasing use of popular uprisings from around the world in order to foreshadow possible Thai futures. The French Revolution was a frequent topic of discussion, especially in editorials on the consequences of elite self-interest and excessive royal spending. In an essay on national finance, for example, one writer offered a lengthy description of Louis XVI as a "profligate spender ... who thought only of his own pleasure", a ruler of "such excessive habits that even his slaves were permitted to waste money", an individual who "bled the kingdom's middle and lower classes" until the burden became "too heavy for them to endure", a monarch whose decapitation was ultimately justified on the grounds that he had "rebelled against the nation."⁶⁰ Similarly, another presented an unflattering account of the reigns of Louis XV and XVI in order to emphasize that "even the most loyal of subjects can be driven to rebel against their monarchs" while a third explained that the French has simply grown weary of being "the slaves of others" and decided to be "servants of the nation", instead.⁶¹

In similar fashion, the Russian Revolution was frequently discussed in the essays of individuals writing on the Siamese ruling class. In one, for example, the author noted at the outset that the Thai nation would never be united so long as the powerful men of the kingdom (*phuyai*) continued to "oppress their compatriots" and ignore the "interests of the majority", and thereafter, offered a brief account of the factors which allowed the Bolsheviks to seize power in Russia.⁶² Among other things, he asserted that Nicholas II had "lost sight of the nation's real interests after having surrounded himself with selfish individuals whose desire for personal gain led them to oppress the people at large", that the "deplorably low level of education" in Russia had left the Russian people susceptible to Bolshevik propaganda, and that Lenin had garnered considerable popular support by permitting the people to have a voice in the affairs of their government "for the very first time." Moreover, he also supported Lenin's decision to confiscate the wealth of the rich on the grounds that many members of the Old Regime had "previously sustained themselves by drinking the blood of their compatriots and sleeping contentedly while others toiled." Similarly, in other essays

⁶⁰ *Bangkok kanmuang*, 27-28 October 1923, 'suruy surai' (Frivolity).

⁶¹ *Kro lek*, 14 and 21 December 1924, 'prawat kanla ton nung khong prathet farangset het thi farangset plian kanpokkhong', (An Episode in French History: The Reason France Changed its System of Government); and *Bangkok kanmuang*, 3 October 1925, 'kao kap mai' (The Old and the New). In addition, see *Bangkok kanmuang*, 22 March 1924, 'kan soem khong thanakan kap kanplianplaeng saphap khong rathaban' (Fiscal Decline and the Changing Conditions of Government) in which the writer undertook to argue that spendthrift kings were the principal cause of political upheaval around the world.

⁶² *Wayamo*, 12 August 1922, 'singla phan anla noi' (A Little of Everything).

of the period, the Bolshevik Revolution was characterized as an effort to free the Russian people from "the unendurable oppression of corrupt and traitorous officials", a movement to establish "a more equitable social order", an event caused by Czar Nicholas's "habit of treating the Russian people as though their sole reason for existing was to produce wealth for the royal family", and an uprising which led to the establishment of "a truly representative form of government."⁶³ Moreover, even critics of the revolution were frequently no less pointed in their remarks, like the writer who sarcastically noted that Bolshevism had little chance of spreading in Siam, "a Buddhist country where people believe that oppressing their fellows is wrong, that farming on the backs of others is inappropriate, that power is not synonymous with morality, and that stealing other people's money and drinking their blood is a sin."⁶⁴

As often as not, the kingdom's rulers fared little better in the essays of writers who drew comparisons between Siam and neighboring Asian states. In discussing Woodrow Wilson's Versailles speech, for example, one essayist observed that the Thai were as inspired by the idea of national self-determination as the "other oppressed peoples of the region."⁶⁵ Similarly, others cited the political instability of China as proof of the danger in waiting "too long" to give people a voice in their own political affairs.⁶⁶ And throughout the period, Japan was increasingly touted as an ideal case study in regional development, a model of Asian nation-building which served to highlight the inadequacies of Siam's European-oriented development. In marked contrast to the gradual pace of reform under the auspices of a king "who ruled as he pleased", the authorities in Japan were said to have quickly ended the country's "feudal tradition" by promoting public education and forming a national assembly.⁶⁷ Moreover, unlike the "Westernized" members of the Jakkri court who were accused of being "far more concerned with their own pleasures" than they were with "helping the nation", the rulers of Japan were described as "heart-felt patriots" who "ate Japanese

⁶³ *Bangkok kanmuang*, 5 March 1924, 'sowiat ratsia' (Soviet Russia); *Kro lek*, November 2 1924, 'thamma kap prathet' (Moral Rectitude and the Country); and *Bangkok kanmuang*, 22 March 1924, 'kan soem khong thanakan kap kanplianplaeng saphap khong rathaban' (Fiscal Decline and the Changing Conditions of Government). In addition, see *Wayamo*, 6 February 1923, 'awut pakka' (The Pen as a Weapon); *Bangkok kanmuang*, 30 January 1924, 'khwamhen ekkachon ruang muang thai ja pen muang thai dai yang rai' (A Private View of How Siam Can Become Thai/Free); *Yamato*, 3 March 1924, 'khwamhen ekkachon wa dwei rakkaew rakkhwan khong prathet' (A Private View of the Country's Foundations); *Sara nakhon*, 24 April 1925, 'yuk haeng kankabot ru' (An Age of Rebellion?); *Kro lek*, 6 September 1925, 'kanthoe amnat' (Venerating Power); *Bangkok kanmuang*, 3 October 1925, 'kao kap mai' (The Old and New).

⁶⁴ *Sara nakhon*, 17 March 1925, 'kanthu lathi' (Believing in Ideologies).

⁶⁵ *Morning Post*, 15 April 1924, 'yang mai thung samai thi khwan plian withi kanpokkhong' (The Age for Changing the Method of Government has not yet Arrived).

⁶⁶ *Yamato*, 3 March 1924, 'khwamhen ekkachon wa dwei rakkaew rakkhwan khong prathet' (A Private View of the Country's Spirit); *Lua sayam*, 1 August 1925; *Bangkok kanmuang*, 3 October 1925, 'kao kap mai' (The Old and the New).

⁶⁷ *Sayam ratsadon*, 17 and 18 September 1925, 'phonsawadan sangkhep prathet yiphun' (A Brief History of Japan).

foods in the Japanese style, even in front of foreign visitors."⁶⁸ Perhaps the most damning comparison of all, however, pertained to the court's continued reliance upon foreign advisers, for in contrast to Japan, which was praised for having used and then excluded its European officials, the Jakkris were held to be wasting huge sums of money on the salaries of foreign nationals whose work could easily have been done by educated Thai.⁶⁹ Indeed, the fact that foreigners had been allowed to occupy "a number of the most important positions in virtually all of the key ministries" struck many writers of the period as proof of the court's failure to protect the country's independence.⁷⁰ As noted by one, apart from the handful of individuals who worked in the consular courts, Siam was under no obligation to "support *farang*", making it likely that the kingdom's rulers had either been "tricked" into doing so by the foreigners or betrayed by the "numerous Manchukwo types" in their own employ.⁷¹

Not surprisingly, such commentary was frequently juxtaposed with demands that the institution of absolute monarchy be brought to an end. Among other things, it was proposed that the Thai be allowed to choose their own king, that a prime minister be appointed to manage the political administration, that a constitution be promulgated, that a parliament be formed, and that a new government be created through national elections.⁷² At the same time, the establishment of majority rule, both in neighboring states where people were no longer willing to endure the rule of "others outside of their immediate groups" and in Siam, was said to be "just a matter of time."⁷³

4.5 The Tramwaymen's Strike and the Press Law. In this final section, I wish to briefly consider the press commentary engendered by two developments in the latter years of the Sixth Reign: the government's decision to break a popular strike in early 1923 and its subsequent effort to enforce a new press act. In both instances, the threat of violence was used to buttress the authority of the dynastic state. As will be

⁶⁸ *Sara nakhon*, 9 March 1925, 'thammai joeng la lang' (Why Are We Behind?); and *Yamato*, 17 March 1923, 'sara ratsadon fan pai ru' (Is *Sara ratsadon* Dreaming?).

⁶⁹ According to the estimate of one individual, the government was 'wasting' over two million baht a year on the salaries of a hundred and seventy foreigners, most of whom could "easily have been replaced by Thai" nationals. Similarly, another criticised the court for failing to replace foreign advisors with returning overseas students, many of whom had completed their educations at great expense to the kingdom. See *Nakkanmuang*, 9 December 1923, 'khrai ja wa khao khoe khrai' (Who Will Tell Them What They Are?); and *Bangkok kammuang*, 5 January 1924, "Kaenphet", 'nai farang ja!' (Dearest Foreigners!).

⁷⁰ *Bangkok kammuang*, 5 January 1924, "Kaenphet", 'nai farang ja!' (Dear Foreigners!).

⁷¹ *Samphan thai*, 7 November 1923, 'tamnaeng rachakan kap chao tangprathet' (Government Offices and Foreign Nationals).

⁷² *Kammakon*, 1 March 1923, 'nai hui' (*Nai Hui*); *Bangkok kammuang*, 25 June 1923, 'jotmai nai ket na sathon' (*Nai Ket na Sathon's Letter*); 23 March 1924, 'kotmai thammanun prapheni' (Constitutional Law); 27 October 1924, kanwot (Voting); 1 June 1925, 'lao tae jai' (As They Please); *Sakhon thurakan*, 4 June 1925, 'khwam thoeng' (Delight!).

⁷³ *Bangkok kammuang*, 17 July 1923, 'khwamhen ekkachon ruang pen eng' (A Private View of Independence). In addition, see *Kro lek*, 6 September 1925, 'kan thoe amnat' (Venerating Power); *Nakkanmuang*, 6 October 1923, 'jampen ru mai' (Are These Things Essential or Not?); and *Bangkok kammuang*, 16 and 17 March 1924, 'angkrit kap intia' (England and India).

discussed below, however, both efforts proved to be exceedingly controversial, further exacerbating the conflict between 'the government' and 'the people', the dynasty and the nation.

On 31 December 1922, tram drivers of the Bangkok Tramways Company, a foreign-run enterprise which operated the capital's streetcar concession, walked off the job in protest over company regulations.⁷⁴ It was the second such incident in three years, the first having been resolved when the Ministry of Interior interceded on behalf of sixty four workers who downed tools in a dispute over their working conditions.⁷⁵ The 1922 strike was far larger, however, some three hundred and five individuals ultimately stopping work in support of the strikers' demands. Moreover, in contrast to the earlier dispute, it was eventually broken with the assistance of the government. Initially, Minister of Interior *jao phraya* Yomarat (Pan Sukhum) promised to negotiate with the company on behalf of the workers. When they refused to end the strike at his request, however, he provided the company with police protection and allowed it to fire a majority of the individuals involved in the episode.⁷⁶

From the outset, the strike was depicted in the press as a conflict of 'national' proportions – a symbolic struggle between 'Thai labor' and a 'foreign oppressor'. Several weeks in advance of the incident, *Bangkok kanmuang* published a lengthy critique of the company's foreign managers, who were accused of treating their employees like "commodities ... for the rich to exploit ... until nothing is left but rotten bones."⁷⁷ Moreover, once the strike was in progress, capital journalists produced a series of editorials on the "thoroughly justified action by laborers who are attempting to make a cruel employer realize that the Thais are not slaves and that the Thai nation must be free."⁷⁸ As a result of this sympathetic commentary, the strikers

⁷⁴ For a detailed account of the strike, see A. Brown, *The Industrial Working Class and the State in Thailand: An Introductory Analysis*, Australian National University MA Thesis, 1990, 3J-73.

⁷⁵ NA, R6, *nakhonban*, 13/4, *khon ngan borisat rotrang thai thun yutngan prathuang* (Workers of the Tramways Company Stop Work in Protest).

⁷⁶ *Sayam ratsadon*, 15 January 1923, 'kansatraik khong kammakon rotrang' (The Tramwaymen's Strike); 16 January 1923, 'kammakon thai khon doen rotrang satraik khrang thi sam' (Thai Laborers of the Tramways Company Strike for the Third Time); and NA, R6, *nakhonban*, 13/7, *khonngan borisat rotrang thai thun yutngan prathuang* (Workers of the Tramways Company Stop Work in Protest). In a report to the king, Yomarat explained that he "tried to lead the discussions with the company and instruct the laborers as to what was appropriate but they refused to do as they were told."

⁷⁷ *Bangkok kanmuang*, 18 December 1922, 'kammakon rotrang' (The Tramway Workers). In the same essay, the author also explained the utility of strikes, leading the Thai scholar Kanchada Poonpanich to conclude that staff members of *Bangkok kanmuang* were instrumental in organizing the tramway workers. See Kanchad: Poonphanich, 'The Beginning of the Labour Movement in Thailand (1900-1930)', *Asian Review*, Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University, 1988, 38.

⁷⁸ *Yamato*, 27 January 1923, 'sonthana kap nangsul'phim thai' (Talking with *Phim thai*). In addition, see *Sayam ratsadon*, 17 January 1923; *Yamato*, 17 January 1923, 'kret kansatraik khong phuak rotrang' (The Great Tramwaymen's Strike); and *Kammakon*, 27 January 1923, 'itsaraphap khong kammakon' (The Freedom of Labor).

early on enjoyed considerable public support and when the government chose to side with the company, it was widely criticised for 'betraying' a just national cause.⁷⁹ The Minister of Interior came under particularly heavy criticism during the period, both for "breaking his promise" to the workers and for "placing the interests of wealthy foreigners before the needs of his impoverished compatriots."⁸⁰ Insomuch as his and the company's actions were ultimately subject to the approval of the throne, however, the court was widely criticised as well.⁸¹ As noted by one commentator of the period, the company was "clearly in the wrong"

yet our government has brought pressure to bear against Thai laborers, men eking out their livings under the company's oppressive system. By using their power for such inappropriate ends, our officials have brought danger to Siam and to our nation.⁸²

Similarly, another drew parallels between the court's 'betrayal' of Thai labor and *phraya Jakkri's* collusion with an invading Burmese army to effect the fall of Ayuthaya, concluding his essay with the assertion that "the real enemies of the Thai" were not the foreigners but rather fellow nationals who lacked compassion for their compatriots.⁸³

Public antipathy for the government was also manifest in an unusual legal proceeding which was initiated in late January against one of the Tramway Company's chief inspectors – a Siamese citizen of Chinese descent by the name of Hui. *Nai Hui* was already known in the capital as an individual who had allegedly abused his authority and cheated his subordinates out of their pay, the strikers having demanded

⁷⁹ Individuals hired to replace striking drivers were accosted by irate citizens and accused of "betraying their fellow Thais." Moreover, by mid-January, there were growing calls for a boycott of the company's streetcars. See *Sayam ratsadon*, 16 January 1923 and *Yamato*, 22 January 1923, 'kret kansatraik khong phuak rotang' (The Great Tramwaymen's Strike).

⁸⁰ *Sayam ratsadon*, 16 January 1923; *Kammakon*, 1 March 1923, 'jao khun yomarat kap phuak kammakon' (Lord Yomarat and the Laborers).

⁸¹ Under the terms of a 1902 agreement, all company regulations were subject to the approval of the Siamese government. In addition, under a revised contract of 1912, the government also had the authority to seize the company in the event it used unlicensed drivers, as was done during the course of the strike. On both points, see *Yamato*, 25 January 1923, 'borisat kap khonngan rotang' (The Tramway Company and Its Employees).

⁸² *Yamato*, 25 January 1923, 'borisat kap khonngan rotang' (The Tramway Company and Its Employees).

⁸³ *Yamato*, 6 and 7 February 1923, 'khwamhen ruang borisat kap khongnan rotang' (An Opinion on the Tramways Company and Its Staff). The writer added that if the "strike had happened in Japan, the company would have been out of luck." In addition, see *Yamato*, 22 January 1923, 'khobankhap mai khong kharachakan' (New Regulations for Government Officials); 25 January 1923, 'borisat kap khonngan rotang' (The Tramway Company and Its Employees); *Kammakon*, 27 January 1923, 'itsaraphap khong kammakon' (The Freedom of Labor); 27 January 1923, 'khamnam' (Introduction); and 17 February 1923, 'kammakon kap kanmuang' (*Kammakon* and Politics); *Sayam ratsadon*, 16 January 1923; *Khao soi*, 25 October 1923, 'ya wiset' (Extraordinary Medicine) and *Nakkamnuang*, 1 November 1923, 'khwamyak khong chao thai' (The Difficulties of the Thai).

his immediate dismissal in consequence.⁸⁴ On 13 January, however, he further inflamed public sentiment by derisively observing to a group of replacement drivers that the Thai were "a race which came running whenever scraps were placed in a pan at the side of the road." When the remark found its way into print a few days later, eleven Bangkok attorneys filed a motion with the prosecutor's office to bring libel charges against Hui for "insulting the Thai nation." Moreover, the prosecutor was subsequently swamped with petitions from scores of men and women – lawyers, merchants, lesser members of the nobility, and common citizens – who asked to be considered as parties to the case on the grounds that "they, too, were Thai."⁸⁵

When the case came to trial in mid-February, it engendered an additional wave of anti-government criticism from the kingdom's Sino-Thai community, largely as a result of the plaintiffs' attempt to prove that Hui – an individual who had previously "dressed like Chinaman", "worn a queue", and "eaten Chinese food" – was an enemy of the Thai nation.⁸⁶ In early March, the first *and* last issue of *Mangkong daeng* appeared on the streets of the capital, its lead editorial proclaiming that Hui was *not* a pure Chinese but rather a descendant of the Ho peoples of Southern Yunnan.⁸⁷ At the same time, the publication also featured a series of editorials on Vajiravudh's earlier criticisms of the kingdom's Chinese community. In one, for example, the Chinese were characterized as being "a part of the kingdom's backbone", "long-standing Siamese citizens", "outstanding members of the Siamese nobility", "close relatives of the Thai", and "fellow Thais" – a group which had "done its part" to preserve the kingdom's independence, "no race in the world having done more." Moreover, in obvious reference to the mixed racial ancestry of the Jakkri dynastic line, the writer also complained of

Thais who although at least half-Chinese already ... mistakenly think that they don't have any Chinese blood in their veins ... consider themselves to be true Thai, and set out to insult the

⁸⁴ For a discussion of *nai* Hui's role in the strike see *Yamato*, 17 January 1923, 'kret kansatraik khong phuak rotrang' (The Great Tramwaymen's Strike).

⁸⁵ *Sayam ratsadon*, 29 January 1923, 'nai hui kap chat thai' (Hui and the Thai Nation). The article featured a memorandum from the prosecutor which explained the complexities of the case: the need to demonstrate that actual damages had resulted from the remark and the more pressing question of whether eleven people could be said to represent a nation. At the same time, however, he added that public sentiment was so strongly against *nai* Hui as to make it seem "as if Thai nation really were the plaintiff."

⁸⁶ See *Sayam ratsadon*, 21 February 1923, 'ruang nai hui minpramat chat thai' (Hui's Libelous Remarks on the Thai Nation). When the prosecutor's office subsequently failed to pursue the case, rumors began circulating in the capital that the chief prosecutor had been bribed on *nai* Hui's behalf. See *Kammakon*, 1 March 1923.

⁸⁷ *Mangkong daeng*, 1 March 1923, 'nai hui mai chai jin' (Hui is Not Chinese). The publication was closed on charges of sedition after its first issue. See NA, R6, *nakhonban*, 20.18/111 *nangsu'phim Mangkong daeng*.

Chinese as though they were an inferior race without realizing that their actions constitute an attack on their own ancestry.⁸⁸

Elsewhere in the publication, a second writer also remarked upon the "vulgar habit" which certain Thais had of treating Siamese citizens of Chinese-descent "as though they were the foulest of creatures", while noting that intelligent people everywhere had

nothing but disdain for the arrogant fool, the pompous stuffed-shirt who holds the highest of regards for himself alone while belittling all others, the individual who puffs himself up like a strange beetle in order to play the part of a national sage.⁸⁹

Similarly, a third pointedly inquired why Vajiravudh had made no attempt to characterize the Europeans as the 'real Jews' of Siam and a fourth presented a scathing critique of the court's economic policies, noting among other things that ⁹⁰

anyone who looks back over the past three years or so has difficulty in saying how the kingdom has developed. Has the army developed? Has the trade of the kingdom expanded? Has its administration improved? In truth, there has been no development at all and only sycophants of the court would dare to say otherwise ... if the country's leader were energetically attending to the kingdom's affairs, we would see far more development than this.⁹¹

The court's concern over the voluminous press criticism of the period was reflected in the editorial commentary of the government-subsidized press. During the early months of 1923, *Phim thai* carried a series of essays on the subject of "dangerous newspapers" and "evil journalists" who sought to profit "by making a flagrant display of their contempt for the government and the king."⁹² "Slaves of sin", they were said to be "conniving with foreigners" to "spread malicious gossip" and "encourage sedition" – "weakening the hearts of the country's citizens", "using words to lure readers into the flames", "digging graves with their pens and pushing people in." A number of similar editorials were also published in the palace journal *Dusit samit*, including several which were written by Vajiravudh. In an essay of February, for example, the monarch berated the popular press for attempting to make an otherwise contented populace "lose faith and respect" for their leaders and scoffed at the idea that

88 *Ibid.*, 'jin kap sayam' (China and Siam).

89 *Ibid.*, 'jin kap thai' (Chinese and Thai).

90 *Ibid.*, 'jin kap khontangprathet nai sayam' (Chinese and Foreign Nationals in Siam).

91 *Ibid.*, 'sathiti khong prathet sayam' (Siamese Statistics).

92 See *Phim thai*, 12 January 1923, 'nangsu'phimphai' (Dangerous Journalism); 9 February 1923, 'khvamhen ekkachon' (A Private View); 6 March 1923, 'khvamhen ekkachon' (A Private View); 20 March 1923, 'puak malaeng mao' (Moths into the Flame); and 25 March 1923, 'nangsu'phimphai' (Dangerous Journalism).

press criticism of the government was in any way beneficial for the nation.⁹³ Moreover, in two subsequent essays, he also ridiculed the idea that his critics spoke on behalf the masses (*mahachon*) and expressed irritation at "the growing number of meddlesome individuals" who believed that it was patriotic to voice their opinions on national affairs.⁹⁴ As the Thai people were "not of equal intelligence", he admonished them to remember that such matters were best left to the kingdom's leaders – "level-headed individuals" who could decide what "was appropriate for the group", and if need be, take steps to "silence the voices of their incoherent compatriots."

In March of 1923, the Ministry of Interior was also granted the authority to regulate the newspaper trade and shortly thereafter, an effort was made to close many of the capital's more critical publications.⁹⁵ At the behest of a number influential individuals, the ministry brought legal proceedings against scores of Bangkok publishers – for libel, for sedition, and for lese majeste. In first half of 1923, for example, the Bangkok Police Department was the plaintiff in no less than seven different press-related court cases, closing two newspapers and sending five individuals to prison.⁹⁶ Moreover, an additional twenty-seven publishers were prosecuted by the Police Department over the next several years, with the result that eight printing presses were impounded, seventeen newspapers shut down, and another eight persons jailed.⁹⁷

In all probability, a far greater number of newspapers would have been closed during the period were it not for the shortcomings of the new press law. By virtue of the continued extraterritorial status of foreign nationals, critical publishers were able to

⁹³ *Dusit samit*, 3 February 1923, "Nua Mai" (Vajiravudh), 'jotmai khong phuan samai nangsu'phim' (A Letter From a Friend in the Age of the Newspaper).

⁹⁴ *Dusit samit*, 24 February 1923, "Nua Mai" (Vajiravudh), 'rakchat' (Patriotism); and 1 March 1923, "Nua Mai", 'jotmai khong phuan nangsu'phim nai ban' (Letter from a Friend: the Home Press).

⁹⁵ See NA, R6, *mahathai*, 13/8, *phrarachabanyat nangsu'phim lae samutekkasan yo ruang phrarachabanyat nangsu'phim* (Ministry of Interior, the Publications Act, A Summary of the Newspaper Act). Although the new law was announced on 23 January 1923, publishers were given a two-month grace period in which to register their concerns.

⁹⁶ These included a January libel suit against *Sayam ratsadon* on behalf of Lord Prefect *phraya Phetphani*; a March libel suit against *Bangkok kanmuang* on behalf of the Director of the Police Department, *phraya Athikon Prakat*, which resulted in the jailing of the paper's editor, *nai Sem Sumanan*; a March sedition charge against *Mangkong daeng* which resulted in the paper's closure and the jailing of its editor, *nai Tun*; a March libel charge against *Nakkanmuang* on behalf of unnamed parties which resulted in the jailing of its owner, *nai Kao Sonsakun*; an April libel charge against *Wayamo* on behalf of unnamed parties which resulted in its behind-the-scenes owner *luang Upathan Nitihet (nai Prom)* being stripped of his noble title and barred from practicing law; an April libel charge against *Kammakon* which resulted in the paper's brief closure; a May libel charge against *Sayam sakkhi* on behalf of *phraya Minburi*; and finally, a July *lese majeste* charge against *Wayamo* which resulted in the paper's closure and jailing of its legal owner, A.E. Sufali, and its editor, Sathit Semanin.

⁹⁷ Newspaper closures include *Samphan thai*, the Thai-language edition of *Chinosayam warasap*, *Khao kap tam*, *Nakkanmuang*, *Yamato*, *Kammakon*, *Prap atham*, *Phikat torpedo*, *Sayam sakkhi*, *Nakhon thai*, *Awanti*, *Morning Post*, *Laem thong*, the Chinese-language edition of *Chinosayam warasap*, *Si Sapda*, and the Chinese papers *Lian Siang Pao*, and *Tong Wa Pao*.

insulate themselves from prosecution by registering their newspapers to foreign frontmen (*lo*).⁹⁸ In this regard, one need only consider the case of Chaiphon Press (*khana chaiphon*).⁹⁹ From the latter months of 1922, it produced an ongoing series of political weeklies: *Bangkok kanmuang*, *Nakkanmuang*, *Kammakon*, *Samphan thai*, *Phikat torpedo*, *Islam sarasat*, and *Prap atham* to name but a few.¹⁰⁰ As the press was ostensibly owned by a Portuguese national named Ferdinando Xavier and many of its publications were registered to Japanese, Italians, Dutch Indonesians, French Cambodians, and British Indians, officials at the Ministry of Interior were obliged to obtain the permission of two different foreign legations and bring charges in the consular courts in order to close a Chaiphon newspaper.

As a final draft of the new press law was being prepared, the Ministry of Interior sought to challenge the legality of such arrangements by bringing charges against another critical publication of the period, *Wayamo*.¹⁰¹ In 1922, the paper was purchased by *luang* Upathan Nitihet (Prom Wiriyasarit), a retired judge and a practicing lawyer who had been a regular contributor to the Bangkok press for a number of years.¹⁰² In an effort to protect the concern from litigation, however, *luang* Upathan immediately hired a foreign 'owner' – an Indian of British nationality named A.E. Sufali. Moreover, he subsequently registered his printing press, Bangkok Independent, to Sufali as well.¹⁰³ Thus, the only Thai national legally

⁹⁸ The ruse was widely used by the owners of gambling dens and brothels during the period as well. By 1919, police reports already contained frequent references to Chinese of Japanese nationality who acted as 'frontmen' (*lo*) for the capital's gaming houses. Similarly, a 1924 police report noted that 'police have closed any number of brothels only to see them reopened under the protection of Portugese, Dutch, and Japanese front men'. See NA, R6, *nakhonban*, *kromtamruatphranakhon lae phuthon rachakan tuapai*, 4.1/52, klong 2. With respect to prostitution, see NA, R6, *nakhonban*, *kromtamruatphranakhon lae phuthon*, ying *sopheni*, 4.8/3.

⁹⁹ As the editor of the government-run *Bangkok Daily Mail* remarked in 1924, it was "common knowledge" that Chaiphon was an anti-government press run by "enemies of the Thai" who sought to "undermine public respect for the kingdom's leaders." See *Bangkok Daily Mail*, 8 June 1924, 'kansup ha tua nai ali' (Seeking Mr. Ali).

¹⁰⁰ The discussion is based upon information found in NA, R6, *nakhonban*, 20.1/1-41, *nangsu'phim kho anuyat ok nangsu'phim* 2455-2470 (Requests for Permission to Publish 1912-1927).

¹⁰¹ One of the earliest of the self-styled political newspapers, it commenced publication on 16 July 1920 under the ownership of three Thai commoners – *nai* Fak, *nai* Sara, and *nai* Chu. In early 1921, however, the owners became embroiled in a libel proceeding and abruptly 'sold' the paper to an American businessman named E.E. Butler, an individual who fled the country shortly thereafter. As a result, *Wayamo*'s ownership remained in doubt until 1922, when it was purchased by *luang* Upathan Nitihet (Prom Wiriyasarit). See *Yamato*, 25 July 1923, 'wayamo kap phrarachabanyat samut ekkasan lac nangsu'phim' (*Wayamo* and the Royal Edict on Publishing).

¹⁰² "Thai Noi" (Salao Rekharutchi), *Nung sattawat nangsu'phim thai* (A Century of the Thai Press), Bangkok: Ruamsan, 1967, 448.

¹⁰³ Bangkok Independent Press was initially registered to *nai* Yong Wirasamrit. However, in early August, it was announced in *Wayamo* that Yong was no longer responsible for the activities of the press, which had reportedly been rented to an unnamed party. In early 1923, it was registered as belonging to Sufali. See *Wayamo*, 12 August 1922; and NA, R6, *nakhonban*, 20.1/1-41, *nangsu'phim kho anuyat ok nangsu'phim* 2455-2470 (Requests for Permission to Publish 1912-1927).

associated with *Wayamo* was its 'editor', a twenty year old rice farmer from Ayuthaya named Sathit Semanin.¹⁰⁴ In late 1922, the Ministry of Interior nonetheless brought charges on behalf of a number of unnamed parties in an effort to prove that *luang* Upathan should be held legally responsible for *Wayamo*'s contents – an unusual case which ultimately left Sufali in possession of the paper after some eight months of litigation.¹⁰⁵

Faced with the difficulty of prosecuting behind-the-scenes owners of foreign-registered publications, Yomarat subsequently turned to the foreign legations in the hopes that they would compel their nationals to dissociate from the more critical publications of the period – a time-consuming effort which initially met with little success. As often as not, no sooner had the cooperation of the relevant legation been obtained than the newspaper in question changed its registry. In a bid to avoid litigation, for example, the proprietor of *Kammakon* – Thawat Ritthidet – shifted the nationality of his paper five times within the space of a single year.¹⁰⁶ Shortly after it began publication, the paper passed into the hands of a Japanese national named S. Maki, who subsequently 'sold' it to a Dutch Indian named Ahmad Benhati Mohammed. Thereafter, Ahamed turned the enterprise over a French Cambodian – a 'Monsieur Museau' (whose real name was the somewhat less French-sounding 'Saw') – and in early 1924, the paper went Dutch again when a *nai* Ali emerged as its sole legal owner and editor.¹⁰⁷

The court's frustration over this shell game was reflected in the commentary of the government press. From March, the editor of *Phim thai* produced a number of indignant exposés on 'modern editors': grass cutters at the Bangkok golf course who had been lured away from their positions with offers of an extra ten baht a month and

¹⁰⁴ As a result of Sathit's subsequent involvement in journalism, it has been suggested that he was indeed the principle editor of *Wayamo* [see Sathian Phanatharangi, 'sathit semanin bannathikan nangsu'phim khon raek thi titkhuk' (Sathit Semanin – the First Newspaper Editor to be Imprisoned), *Sinlapa wathanatham*, 2:19, May 1981, 34-40]. Given his age and lack of experience, however, it seems far more likely that he was simply acting as *luang* Upathan's assistant during the period.

¹⁰⁵ Regarding the individuals who brought suit against the paper, no names were mentioned, although *luang* Upathan subsequently acknowledged that *Wayamo* had published "materials upsetting to certain individuals, in fact to certain groups of individuals, particularly a number of powerful men in the upper levels of society." In January, *luang* Upathan was briefly awarded possession of the paper. However, he promptly appealed and the case continued on until May, at which time he was found guilty of perjury, stripped of his noble title, and barred from practicing law. Legal ownership of the paper nonetheless remained with Sufali and throughout the period, *luang* Upathan succeeded in making a laughingstock of the government by publishing a farcical commentary on the court proceedings. See *Wayamo*, 30 November 1922, 'prakat' (Announcement); 9 January 1923, 'betthalet' (Miscellaneous); 12 April 1923, 'khamhaikan khong luang upathan nitihet' (The Testimony of *luang* Upathan Nitihet); 8 May 1923, 'thot luang upathan pen nai phrom wiriyasari' (*Luang* Upathan Stripped of Title).

¹⁰⁶ NA, R6, *nakhonban*, 20.1/1-41, *nangsu'phim kho anuyat ok nangsu'phim* 2455-2470, *kammakon* (Requests for Permission to Publish 1912-1927 – *Kammakon*).

¹⁰⁷ A brief history of *Kammakon* can be found in *Nakkanmuang*, 25 September 1923.

Dutch Muslims who were "incapable of speaking Thai, let alone writing it."¹⁰⁸ Moreover, the subject was also taken up by Vajiravudh's courtiers in a series of acerbic satires which appeared in *Dusit samit*. One such essay, for example, was ostensibly a letter of employment from an individual named "Alibin Satan Binnarok" (Alibin Satan-Flying to Hell), in which the author inquired:

Do you want to start a newspaper which criticises others for fun? If so, you probably need someone to be its owner, editor, manager, etc. I am willing to hold any position which might get someone thrown in jail ... At present I have no nationality or religion and am willing to represent myself as being under the authority of the Bolsheviks, the forest people, the pigs, the dogs, the crows, the chickens, or any other group you desire. For a mere sixty baht a month ... I will shamelessly go to prison while you shamelessly criticise others.¹⁰⁹

Similarly, a few weeks later, the paper carried a second letter from "Alibin" in which the writer complained that he had been unfairly singled out for ridicule while remarking that it was

far worse for people who call themselves Thai nationalists to hide behind a foreigner in order to scold their compatriots and encourage other Thais to hate them. How could they be better than I am? While I'm not Thai, I should still be recognized as having more courage than the dogs who hide behind me, shouldn't I?¹¹⁰

In roughly the same time period, Vajiravudh also expressed his anger with Yomarat for failing to take swift action against the government's critics.¹¹¹ Although the king's letter is missing from the archival record, the severity of its tone is indicated by the minister's reply. After emphasizing that he was "equally concerned for the honor of the throne", Yomarat offered a lengthy explanation of the difficulties in closing foreign-registered newspapers. Repeating what Vajiravudh must have already known for himself, he asserted that there was little to be gained from prosecuting foreign frontmen and stressed that it was necessary to find a way of "punishing those who have hidden themselves behind the scenes." He claimed to have already investigated the matter and added that he was in the process of gathering sufficient evidence to convict such individuals in the courts. At the same time, however, he cautioned that the matter of prosecution warranted careful consideration, as critical writers of the period were

¹⁰⁸ *Phim thai*, 23 March 1923, 'kotmai sayam' (Siamese Law); 12 April 1923; 18 April 1923 'lo' (Frontmen).

¹⁰⁹ *Dusit samit*, 23 June 1923, "Sulasamit", 'rap asa' (A Volunteer).

¹¹⁰ *Dusit samit*, 7 July 1923, 'mai yom rap phit' (Refusing to Admit a Wrong).

¹¹¹ The following discussion is based upon NA, R6, *mahathai*, 13/58, *ruang nangsu'phim long khao siatsi* (On the Insulting Remarks of the Press), Yomarat to Vajiravudh, 6 July 1923.

choosing their words in such a way as to allow for several different interpretations, and while the deeper meaning is clear enough to members of the upper classes, middle-class commoners are sufficiently uninformed as to have little understanding of what is being referred to. Thus, explaining these intended meanings in court ... might not be the best way to protect your majesty's honor.

For this reason as well, he felt it was equally unwise to bring legal proceedings in the consular courts and risk "tarnishing" the king's reputation overseas.

Despite his reservations, Yomarat was ultimately compelled to prosecute a foreign-registered publication a few weeks later – *luang* Upathan's *Wayamo*. In early June, the paper featured a particularly scathing critique of the court in which the "king's officials" were openly decried as being a drag upon the progress of the Thai nation.¹¹² Moreover, in mid-July it drew the critical attention of the authorities again by publishing a satirical commentary on the romantic entanglements of the king.¹¹³ Immediately thereafter, rumors began circulating in the capital that "a senior member of the royal family" had given an unnamed minister a week in which to "take care of" the paper and within the space of three days, *Wayamo*'s owner and editor had been jailed on charges of lese majeste.¹¹⁴

The closure of *Wayamo* was but one of a series of actions taken against the critical press over the next several weeks. Indeed, Thawat's *Kammakon* was involved in a far more ominous incident a few days later. Although the Ministry of Interior was immediately unable to bring legal proceedings against the paper as a result of its shifting ownership, aggravated parties apparently found a number of other ways to express their displeasure over the publication's editorial content.¹¹⁵ In June and July,

¹¹² See *Wayamo*, 2 June 1923, 'singla an phanla noi' (A Bit of Everything). The writer began by asserting 'with each passing day, the king's officials allow our country to fall further behind the countries of others. To use the language of monks, they are completely mired in a world of illusions (*anitchang*) and while there may well be considerable variation in their calibre, there is clearly no shortage of slimy, low-life bastards (*hia*) in their ranks.' Thereafter, he continued on to discuss the case of a high ranking member of the nobility who had been allowed to retain his post in the Royal Opium Department after raping a twelve year old girl.

¹¹³ A copy of *Wayamo*'s issue of 19 July 1923 with the offending passages underlined in red ink can be found in NA, R6, *nakhonban, kromtamruat phranakhon lae phuthon, rachakan tuapai*, 4.1/221, *bit rongphim bangkok independent* (The Closure of Bangkok Independent Press). The essay contained a conversation between two characters, *nai* Kiang and *nai* Kao Jaidi, in which the latter remarked that he was "thinking of dumping another wife." *Nai* Kao was held to represent Vajiravudh.

¹¹⁴ See *Wayamo*, 21 July 1923, 'ja rap asa prap nangsuhim (Volunteering to Deal with the Press)'. The government's action against the paper was in response to its editorials of 2 June and 19 July. A. Sufali was sentenced to five years in prison, while Sathit Semamin was sentenced to four. See *Yamato*, 25 July 1923, 'wayamo kap phrarachabanyat samut ekkasan lae nangsuhim' (Wayamo and the Press Law); 23 August 1923, 'wayamo ben kabot? (Is Wayamo in Rebellion?); *Sayam ratsadon*, 26 July 1923; and *Yamato*, 1 September 1923, 'wayamo pen kabot? len kon ik!' (Is Wayamo a Rebel? You've Got to be Kidding!).

¹¹⁵ In a report of 6 July 1923, Yomarat remarked that he had only just obtained permission from the Japanese to bring charges against the paper when it was sold to a Dutch national. Similarly, in a subsequent report of the seventeenth, he stated that the Dutch were unwilling to

Thawat reported that someone was conducting false subscription drives in the paper's name, circulating fake copies of *Kammakon*, and even stealing the editor's mail.¹¹⁶ Events took a particularly ugly turn on 25 July, however, when a member of the paper's editorial staff, *nai* Thanom Phongson, was attacked by a man wielding a machete.¹¹⁷

There are indications that assault was a part of an orchestrated effort to intimidate the behind-the-scenes owners of foreign-registered newspapers. A day before attack, the editor of *Sayam ratsadon* was approached by an unnamed party with a request that he publish a statement regarding "the anti-government politicians at *Kammakon* who would soon be leaving Siam permanently, with no hope of being able to return to be 'anti' again."¹¹⁸ Moreover, the following afternoon one of the capital's busier streets was littered with handbills proclaiming:

this evening at 9:30 PM, the golden-tongued behind-the-scenes editor of *Kammakon* will be cut to pieces. Isn't it odd that His Majesty the King (*phra phu pen jao*) has failed to look kindly on this self-styled patriot who claims to speak for the benefit of the people? Could it be that he has truly sacrificed himself for the nation as he once claimed he was willing to do?¹¹⁹

Over the next several days, two additional handbills were distributed around the capital as well. In one, the perpetrator 'apologized' for having erred: he had intended to "slit Thanom's throat but it was dark ...and the wound looked sufficiently deep to finish him off ... the job would be done more thoroughly the next time." And in another, it was promised that the Japanese 'owner' of *Yamato*, I. Miyakawa, would be the next victim: acid would be thrown in his face "to give him a mark of distinction which will remain with him to the end of his days."¹²⁰ Finally, although Thanom survived the

request that the new owner, Ahamed Benhati Mohammed, dissociate from the paper out of concern that he was a legitimate investor. See NA, R6, *mahathai*, 13/58, *ruang nangsu'phim long khao siatsi* (On the Insulting Remarks of the Press). Thawat appears to have been aware of the government's plans to close his paper during the period for in May, he noted that Yomarat was holding regular meetings in order to devise a strategy for shutting *Kammakon* down. See *Kammakon*, 12 May 1923, 'topbanha' (Solving Problems).

¹¹⁶ *Kammakon*'s reporters were also said to have received a series of false tips from fictitious individuals as well. See *Kammakon*, 21 June; 7 July; 1 September 1923.

¹¹⁷ At the time of the attack, *nai* Thanom Phongson was the editor of another critical weekly – *Awanti*, a paper apparently modelled after Mussolini's *Avanti*. Although he served on the staff of *Kammakon* as well, the paper denied that he was anything more than a news agent. See *Kammakon*, 4 August 1923, 'talaeng kit bannathikan' (An Explanation from the Editor); *Chinosayam warasap* 30 and 31 July 1923; and *Yamato*, 31 July 1923. In addition, see *Sayam sakkhi* of 5 August 1923 which reported rumours that the attack had been planned by "three high-ranking officials who were incapable of taking legal action against the paper because of its association with a foreign national." The editor of *Sayam ratsadon* also noted that it was impossible for the attacker to have acted alone. *Sayam ratsadon*, 27 July 1923.

¹¹⁸ *Sayam ratsadon*, 27 July 1923. When the individual was unwilling to identify himself or explain the meaning of his message, the editor refused, however.

¹¹⁹ See *Samphan thai*, 29 July 1923; and *Sayam ratsadon*, 27 and 30 July 1923.

¹²⁰ *Sayam ratsadon*, 2 August 1923.

attack and recognized his assailant, a local thug by the name of Krai, the police were unable to press charges when scores of individuals came forward to testify that Krai had been elsewhere on the evening in question.¹²¹

Ironically, these efforts to silence the critical press resulted in little more than a further round of press criticism. By mid-1923, the 'litigating noble' had been transformed into a figure of public satire and the court was being openly ridiculed for seeking to "legislate criticism out of existence."¹²² In scores of essays, the age when commoners had "no more rights than day-old chickens" and the powerful were free to "stitch up their mouths, tie their hands, and beat them in unfair fights" was asserted to have passed.¹²³ At the same time, the emergence of a free press was held to be an irrevocable step in the nation's political evolution – one which would eventually lead to either a representative form of government or political turmoil.¹²⁴ In the interim, newspapers were said to be "opening the eyes and ears of the citizenry", "bridging the gap" between the government and the people, and diminishing the risk of "an explosion" by providing "the oppressed" with a forum in which to "vent their frustrations."¹²⁵ In consequence, the government was urged to take press opinion into careful consideration

for the views contained in newspapers are put forward by many different types of people and constitute a wide variety of diverging thoughts, opinions, and feelings, many of which are quite good ... As civilized governments around the world are already doing this, our government's concern that such a change in procedure would compromise its political

¹²¹ *Sayam ratsadon*, 2 August 1923.

¹²² In one essay of the period, for example, the writer asserted that it was impossible *not* to criticise the administration as there were only a handful of people left who were willing to pay to hear it praised – "the very same ones who know how bad things really are" and "live in terror that their evil deeds will be exposed." Similarly, another expressed surprise that the government was suddenly concerned by the editorial content of newspapers which it had previously treated as "waste paper", and a third sarcastically noted that the new press law would at least "compel the authorities to acquaint themselves with the views of their fellow countrymen." Vajiravudh's views on the press were openly ridiculed during the period as well. See *Wayamo*, 27 January 1923, 'betthalet' (Miscellaneous), 1 February 1923, and 5 April 1923, 'singla an phanla noi' (A Little of Everything); *Awanti*, 20 April 1923, 'nangsu'phim thai samhao' (The Insolent *Phim thai*); *Nakkanmuang*, 29 September 1923, 'thoilang khao khlong ru?' (Aren't We Regressing?); *Bangkok kammuang*, 1 June 1925, 'lao tae jai' (As They Please); and *Sayam ratsadon*, 22 September 1925, 'nangsu'phim kap kotmai minpramat' (The Press and the Libel Law).

¹²³ *Bangkok kammuang*, 2 July 1923, 'seriphap khong nangsu'phim' (Freedom of the Press). In addition, see *Bangkok kammuang*, 5 June 1924, 'saphap khong nangsu'phim wela ni' (The Present Condition of the Press); 14 June 1924, 'saphap khong nangsu'phim nangsu'phim kap karachakan' (The State of the Press – Newspapers and Officials; *Wayamo*, 6 February 1923, 'singla an phanla noi' (A Little of Everything); 15 February 1923, 'jotmai' (Letter to the Editor).

¹²⁴ *Sara nakhon*, 5 September 1925, 'opporthunit' (Opportunists).

¹²⁵ *Kammakon*, 8 March 1924, 'tho ploi ai' (Letting Off Steam); *Sayam ratsadon*, 15 June 1925, 'thana khong nangsu'phim' (The Status of the Press).

authority seems rather arrogant ... In most parts of the world, openly following the wishes of the people is no longer something to be embarrassed about.¹²⁶

In a number of essays, the government's censorship efforts were also interpreted as further proof that the dynastic state was a national adversary of sorts. Among other things, the authorities were accused of packing "true patriots" off to prison in ever-increasing numbers while rewarding "criminals and money-grubbers" with rank and position in the government.¹²⁷ At the same time, the greater license which they afforded to the English-language press was seen as an indication of betrayal as well, a sign that the powerful men of the realm were overly-enamored with the opinions of "the whites ones whose countries they use as models of civilization."¹²⁸ One individual sarcastically proposed that he and his contemporaries make an effort to present their views in English "like Asvabahu", not only because they were more likely to catch the eye of the kingdom's important officials but also because it was fitting in a country "where the rulers follow European policies, adopt European habits, and oftentimes speak European languages better than they do their own native tongue."¹²⁹ In the essay of another, however, the kingdom's rulers were described as "fools ... who left the nation at the mercy of the foreigners" by ignoring the "well-intentioned voices of their own group" and attempting to silence the newspapers of 'the people's party' (*khana ratsadon*).¹³⁰

4.6 Conclusion. As was noted at the outset, my primary aim in this chapter has been to trace the emergence of a Thai independence movement – a nationalism which was formed in opposition to the Jakkri dynastic state. Towards that end, I have presented

¹²⁶ *Bangkok kanmuang* 14 June 1924, 'saphap khong nangsu'phim nangsu'phim kap karachakan' (The State of the Press – Newspapers and Officials). In addition, see *Kammakon*, 28 July 1923, 'wong khong nangsu'phim' (The Scope of the Press); *Sayam sakkhi*, 8 August 1923, 'kanfong nangsu'phim' (Suing Newspapers); *Nakkanmuang*, 6 October 1923, 'nangsu'phim kap karachakan' (The Press and Government Officials), 11 October 1923, 'khwammung an thaejing khong rao' (Our Real Intentions); *Sayam ratsadon*, 13 October 1923, 'chat, satsana, phramahakasat khoc arai?' (What is the Meaning of Nation, Religion and King?), and 27 December 1924, 'nangsu'phim kap ammal' (Newspapers and Officials); *Bangkok kanmuang*, 9 December 1924, 'prathet sayam yu dai dwei arai?' (On What Does Siam Stand?); *Kro lek*, 1 February 1925, 'nangsu'phim kap rathaban' (The Press and the Government) and 14 June 1925, 'kho hai jaokhun yomarat top banha ngan suan lumpini' (Asking Lord Yomarat a Few Questions on Lumpini Park).

¹²⁷ *Nakkanmuang*, 24 November 1923, 'rak chat ru rak krapao' (Loving the Nation or Loving Their Wallets).

¹²⁸ *Nakkanmuang*, 29 September 1923, 'rathaban kap nangsu'phim' (The Government and the Press); *Bangkok kanmuang*, 11 June 1924, 'saphap khong nangsu'phim' (The Status of the Press); *Yamato*, 4 - 6 March 1924, 'siang khong nangsu'phim farang' (The Foreign Press). In this latter essay, the writer humorously asserted that if Siam were a person, foreign editors would be the hats and overcoats while Thai editors served as the underwear.

¹²⁹ *Bangkok kanmuang*, 4 September 1925, 'khwamhen nai mon thaithae' (The Views of Mr. Mon True-Thai).

¹³⁰ *Yamato*, 4 - 6 March 1924, 'siang khong nangsu'phim farang' (The Voice of the White/Foreign Press).

a brief discussion of 'political' journalism in the latter years of the Sixth Reign. From the foregoing discussion another point emerges as well, however – namely, that the 'overthrow' of the absolute monarchy was already well underway in the 1920's, a point which will become increasingly clear in the next several chapters.

Visual Irreverence: Cartooning and Caricature

What purpose does caricature (*phap lo*) serve? ... How should a cartoonist explain his work and his intentions? Let me tell you. Inasmuch as our world is daily moving closer to an age of equality, it is essential that caricature capture the attention of those on high (*than*) and make them less inclined to put on airs. While it's true that the rich, the titled, and the powerful should be free to do as they please within the confines of their own homes, they must also understand that their behavior is capable of hindering the prosperity of the homeland and the development of its newly-awakened citizens, who are only just learning to be Thai as opposed to volunteer slaves ... In consequence, when a powerful individual (*jao khun*) views a caricature of himself, he ought feel the same way that anyone else would feel. He ought to say to himself, 'Eh! Now I am certain that other people think my behavior has been strange and destructive.' Thereafter, he may be a little less arrogant – precisely the result which caricature is meant to produce ...¹

5.1 The Advent of Political Cartooning in Siam. The above passage serves to introduce yet another facet of political criticism in the latter years of the Sixth Reign – graphic satire. In the period after 1922, the press made increasing use of cartooning and caricature, both as a supplement for written opinion and as a form of independent editorial commentary in its own right. The development was closely related to the use of graphic art in commercial advertising. During the early decades of the twentieth century, the trademarks and diagrams which had previously served to identify manufacturers and their products were gradually replaced with an eye-catching array of symbols, visual metaphors, and puns – a 'language of images' in which the common political metaphors of the day were often comically distorted and abused.² In the advertising of patent medicines, for example, the nation-as-body simile was turned on its head – the body being represented as a nation in need of strengthening and defense from external enemies (see Figure 5.1 below).³ Similarly, in marketing

¹ *Bangkok kanmuang*, 4 October 1924, "nai du phap" (Mr. Picture Watcher), 'khvamhen ekkachon ruang phaplo' (A Private Opinion of Caricature).

² The expression is Robert Phillippe's. See *Political Graphics: Art as a Weapon*, New York: Abbeville Press, 1980, 14.

³ The same effect was frequently achieved with words alone. The manufacturer of one blood tonic enjoined the reader to build a medicinal "fence" in order to protect himself from "the enemies which lurk beyond the door of our home". Similarly, another described his product as both "a textbook on weaponry" and "a weapon with which to combat enemies of your children." See *Bangkok kanmuang*, 19 November 1924.

foreign luxury items, contemporary notions of civilization, prosperity, and class were frequently rendered ludicrous through exaggerated illustration (Figure 5.2). In addition, the use of graphic appeals to promote the consumption of local merchandise not only trivialized the concept of patriotism by making it a matter of hats, teas, etc., but also allowed the advertisement to be read as a form of political commentary in its own right (Figure 5.3).

Despite the growing popularity of graphic advertising, however, a shift in perceptions was required before graphic art came to be regularly used for editorial purposes in Siam. Caricature was initially viewed as a 'foreign' art, far too irreverent for the prevailing social milieu, while political cartooning struck many newspaper publishers of the period as being a "dangerously direct" way of expressing an opinion.⁴ As a result, apart from a few early experiments, most newspapers were immediately unwilling to print such materials.⁵ Indeed, the principal exception in the period prior to 1923 was Vajiravudh's *Dusit samit*, a publication which not only featured the cartoon art of the king but periodically employed a number of skillfully-crafted lithographs in support of the monarch's various subscription drives.⁶ As its sole retail outlet was *phraya* Aniruthewa's miniature Hotel Metropole in the court's doll-house 'city' of Dusit Thani, however, the paper was unlikely to have been seen by more than a handful of the monarch's closest associates.

5.2 The Graphic Editorials of Bangkok kanmuang. It was only with the emergence of a critical press that political cartooning came into its own. In January of 1923, at a time when Minister of Interior Yomarat and his newly-appointed Lord Prefect *phraya* Phetpani were being widely criticised for their handling of the Tramwaymen's Strike, *Sayam ratsadon* used caricature to satirize both men. In one drawing, for example, *phraya* Phet was shown seated at a dining table heaped with platters of "fried chicken regulations", "beefsteak criminals", and "roast pig triads" – an allusion to allegations that the Lord Prefect had conspired with Yomarat, construction contractors, and

⁴ See *Kro lek*, 12 October 1924, 'photjana phangphe prakop phapkatun aidia khong kaen phet phu mi chusiang nai choeng khwamfan' (Verbal Expression Illustrated with Cartooning – The Ideas of "Kaen Phet", a Person Known for His Dreams).

⁵ The first political cartoon to be published in Siam was in reference to Vajiravudh's literary exchange with *phraya* Winai Sunthon in mid-1915. Entitled "The War of the Pens", the cartoon was drawn by *khun* Pothiphak Phimlikhit (Pleng Filania) and appeared in the *Bangkok Daily Mail*. See Lawan: 1979, 17; and J. Traipin, 'khun pothiphak phimlikhit nakkhian phaplo katun khon rack khong muang thai' (*khun* Pothiphak Phimlikhit: Siam's First Political Cartoonist); *Sinlapa wathanatham*, October 1992, 51-55.

⁶ It is presumably for this reason that Vajiravudh is erroneously credited with introducing the art of cartooning into Siam. See Pairote and Kullasap Gesmankit 'Cartooning Techniques Widely Applied in Thailand', *Bulletin of Asian Culture*, 25, January 1980, 21; and J. A. Lent, 'Comic Art in Asia: History and Present Status', *Asian Thought and Society*, 8:22, March, 1983, 103.

Chinese labor organizers to defraud the government (Figure 5.4).⁷ And in another, the foreign manager of the Siam Electric Company was shown looking on with delight as *phraya* Phet and Yomarat ran a laborer through the company's regulation wringer, their eyes shut to his suffering (Figure 5.5).⁸

Hom Nilarat's *Bangkok kanmuang* also began using graphic satire during the period as well. The paper was already one of the more visually-oriented publications in the capital, its pages filled with graphic advertising and stylized illustrations of an oftentimes provocative nature, and from mid-1923 it regularly featured political cartooning and caricature.⁹ Many of the drawings were done by the paper's editor, a talented young graphic artist by the name of Sem Sumanan.¹⁰ At the same time, however, it published the artwork of several other individuals and even solicited outside contributions with periodic "cartoon contests." In a competition of early June, for example, the paper received scores of entries, including a high school student's prize-winning commentary on sycophancy – a drawing of a boy scout looking on with disdain while an official licked the shoes of his supervisor's wife (Figure 5.6).

As often as not, the paper's cartoons were published alongside related pieces of editorial commentary, the graphic image being used in support of the written text. As a result of the cartoonist's ability to render complex meanings through simple visual metaphors, however, such drawings were frequently far more immediate, more

⁷ *Sayam ratsadon*, 13 January 1923, 'khon thi thamngan tamnaeng sung khwan mi khredit di' (Individuals Occupying High Offices Ought to be Reputable). Prior to assuming his position, *phraya* Phet was responsible for the construction of some fifty district offices around the kingdom, all reportedly built at great expense with coolie labor. Yomarat was also said to have profited from the enterprise, appointing *phraya* Phet to office in reward for his service. After the paper published additional allegations on 18 and 20 January, *phraya* Phet brought charges. Details of the lawsuit can be found in NA, R6, *nakhonban* 20.3/63 *nangsu'phim karachakan sayam ratsadon, khokhwaminpramat*.

⁸ The cartoon appeared with an editorial criticising Yomarat for his "betrayal" of the kingdom's laboring poor. See *Sayam ratsadon*, 16 January 1923, 'khon toen rotrang straik khrang thi sam' (A Third Tramwaymen's Strike).

⁹ With respect to *Bangkok kanmuang*'s "provocative" illustrations, *nai* Hom can be said to have pioneered the technique of using graphic representations of scantily-clad women in order to boost newspaper sales in Siam. As a result, *Bangkok kanmuang* had the dubious honor of being the first newspaper to run afoul of the Siamese government for publishing "obscenity". When it featured an illustration of a couple poised on the brink making love on 12 July 1923 (see Appendix A, Figure 1), the Ministry of Interior ordered the police to seize and burn all unsold copies. The incident appears to have had little impact on the newspaper's subsequent editorial policy, however. In fact, a few days later, Hom drafted a humorous essay entitled 'Watching the Heavens Tremble' in which he remarked that he had been "swamped with offers to purchase the issue in question at any price." Moreover, he confidently asserted that the police would find it impossible to bring the case to court, as the drawing was "only obscene if one considered what might be about to happen and there was no prohibition on leading people to consider a future possibility." *Bangkok kanmuang*, 17 July 1923, 'hen sawan wai' (Watching the Heavens Tremble).

¹⁰ Sem Sumanan's early career remains something of a mystery. Originally from northeastern Siam, he appears to have come to Bangkok as a youth in order to receive an education. Thereafter, he worked for several papers before joining Hom Nilarat at *Bangkok kanmuang*. He apparently taught himself cartooning, for on one occasion he advised would-be cartoonists to improve their skills by studying the drawings of *Punch* and reading Wright's *History of Caricature* (London: 1865). See *Bangkok kanmuang*, 4 October 1924.

accessible and more readily intelligible, than the essays which they served to illustrate. A serialized cartoon which Sem produced for an editorial on the importance of modelling Siam's political and economic development after Japan, for example, constituted a visual "proof" that the matter was one of national survival. Initially, he produced a drawing of an eagle carrying the flag of Imperial Japan towards an emaciated elephant, the latter functioning as an ambiguous symbol for both the Siamese monarchy and the Thai nation. Then, a few weeks later, he published the image again with a few notable changes: the eagle had come to rest on the elephant's back, the elephant had grown visibly leaner, and under both was the caption "We Must Awaken!" (Figures 5.7 and 5.8).

In addition, the paper's cartoonists were frequently able to elicit sympathy and support for a given editorial opinion by representing abstract ideas in anthropomorphic terms. In one of Sem's drawings of early September, for example, "patriotism" was depicted as a modest young woman, a Thai *liberté* who carried the flag while leading a farmer, a factory owner, and a small child – symbols for Siamese agriculture, industry, and trade – into the foreground (Figure 5.9). Similarly, the three sectors of the kingdom's economy were subsequently represented as peasants sitting despondently in the middle of a barren field under the caption "Pay a little attention to these fellows!" (Figure 5.10). And in another cartoon of the period, "the causes of crime" were drawn as criminals in flight; the first complaining of his inability to find work, the second asserting that he lacked the financial wherewithal to compete with foreigners in trade and industry, and the third explaining that he was uneducated and starving (Figure 5.11).

Insomuch as cartooning allowed for well-worn arguments to be restated in a novel and amusing manner, it also proved to be a useful method of keeping issues before the public eye. In pursuing its criticism of the government's low level of spending on education, for example, *Bangkok kanmuang* made frequent use of graphic satire, often publishing cartoons in place of written commentary. In June, it featured a caricature of the Minister of Public Instruction as an intrepid hunter taking aim at a large 'budget bird' in a tree immediately in front of him – an image at odds with the accompanying caption which made it clear that he had missed in the past and was likely to miss again (Figure 5.12). Moreover, in a subsequent drawing, the minister was shown flying a kite on a short length of string in front of a group of bemused children (Figure 5.13). And in a third, a subtle commentary on the government's effort to finance rural education with new local taxes, a farmer was drawn singing a ballad of "the shameful education cess" to his immobilized buffaloes (Figure 5.14).

Political graphics increasingly figured in *Bangkok kanmuang*'s evolving critique of the Siamese nobility as well. During the latter months of 1923, for example, the paper published a number of composite drawings of the self-serving official, cartoons which

illustrated the myriad shortcomings of upper-class morality and behavior.¹¹ In one, a visual pun on the Thai word *phu yai* (lit: big person; superior), a giant was shown clutching a bag of his ancestors' money in one hand while embracing a tiny prostitute with the other. The accompanying captions made it clear that he was also an arrogant individual who loved drinking and gambling more than he did his fellow nationals. Moreover, the 'anti-national' nature of his behavior was further emphasized through a label on his chest, *hua nok* (foreign-headed) – a term denoting an individual enamored with the West as a result of his foreign education (Figure 5.15). And in yet another cartoon of the period, a drawing apparently meant to serve as a critical commentary on the nationalist proselytizing of the Sixth Reign court, the *phu yai* was represented as a "false patriot", a hypocrite who spoke of his love for the nation while his organs misappropriated funds, took bribes, neglected their duties, insulted the nation, and oppressed its people (Figure 5.16). One of the more intriguing studies in this vein, however, was a drawing which was published in December; a sketch in which an obese member of the nobility was shown contemplating his canine-like reflection in a mirror. An unflattering portrait of the ruling class, it was also an ironic commentary on the press – the mirror which represented nobility in "sub-human" terms (Figure 5.17).

More remarkable than this visual assault on the nobility, however, was the paper's graphic criticism of the throne. For the most part, such drawings were subtly executed, like the cartoon of October in which Vajiravudh was depicted as a scale which gave greater weight to the young men of the court than it did to monies of the treasury (Figure 5.18). On occasion, however, the artist's criticism of the monarch

¹¹ Throughout the period, individual nobles were also subjected to graphic criticism of a more specific nature. During the course of 1924-25, for example, the head of the Bangkok Sanitation Board *phraya* Pratchakankitwichan was a frequent target of capital satirists as a result of his decision to award the On Weng Company with a monopoly concession on the capital's night soil trade. Previously, the trade had been handled by four private firms at an average cost of 1.50 baht per bucket per month. After On Weng received the concession, however, the company distributed bigger buckets to all of the capital's residents and announced a 25% rate increase. Meanwhile, those who sought to retain their smaller buckets were harassed by the police and left to use the same bucket for days on end. In response, the Bangkok press featured an ongoing commentary on the Sanitation Board, the company, its noble stockholders, and the police, who were widely rumored to be receiving kickbacks from company officials. Scores of letters from outraged citizens were also published during the period as well. In one, for example, the company's price hike was held to have effectively reduced the overall volume of night soil by leaving the people with no money to buy food. Similarly, under the heading "A Shitty Matter", another writer complained of the "new tax on crap" and invited *phraya* Pratchakankitwichan to personally inspect his overflowing bucket. Not surprisingly, graphic satirists of the period also joined in the criticism, producing drawings of dung-toting millionaires, nobles fighting over manure-filled buckets, and thoroughbred dogs lapping at piles of waste. For press commentary of the period, see *Bangkok kanmuang*, 20 September 1924, 'borisat onweng ja lenkan kap chaoban' (The On Weng Company's Plan to Trick Farmers); 24 September 1924, 'jotmai' (Letters); 14 October 1924 'ruang khi' (A Shitty Matter); 16 December 1924, 'borisat onweng kap phraya boribunkosakon' (The On Weng Company and *phraya* Boribun Kosakon); and *Sayam riwiv*, 'borisat onweng tham ngan ao lae dai fai diao' (The On Weng Company Only Thinks of Profits). With respect to the graphics of the period, see Appendix A, Figures 2-5.

was blatant as well. In a cartoon entitled "Morality Will Lead Us to a Better Place", for example, Sem presented a biting commentary on the quality of Vajiravudh's leadership by drawing 'morality' as an exhausted rickshaw driver struggling to pull a paunchy king up a steep incline (Figure 5.19).¹²

Given the number of newspapers which were closed on charges of *lese majeste* during the period, it is curious that the government failed to bring legal action against *Bangkok kanmuang* for publishing such overt criticism of the monarchy. The paper's use of such materials may ultimately have contributed to the jailing of its editor on a separate charge, however. The previous March, Sem had written a satirical essay on corruption in the Bangkok police force in which he humorously observed that police officers stationed in the capital's Chinese districts were "unusually fat", a curious development in that

the police stationed in these districts ought to be getting plenty of exercise catching gamblers. Moreover, one would expect them to be irritated by the extra work but instead, they are surprisingly happy – as happy as if they'd won the 100,000 baht jackpot in the lottery. Not only are they delighted by the opportunity to get exercise catching gamblers, but it would appear that it is precisely this type of exercise which is helping them to look so hearty. Without the Chinese ... our policemen might waste away.¹³

The obvious implication was that the police were receiving regular kickbacks from Chinese gaming houses, an allegation which was widely believed to be true.¹⁴

¹² On occasion, page layout and juxtaposition were also used to satirize the throne. In honor of the king's birthday in 1924, for example, the paper published a portrait of Vajiravudh alongside an editorial entitled "The Suffering of the Rich", an essay on income tax which began with the passage: "Who would have thought that the rich could suffer? Since they are usually able to obtain everything that they desire, what could possibly upset them?" *Bangkok kanmuang*, 31 December 1924, 'khwaam thuk khong setthi' (The Suffering of the Rich). See Appendix A: Figure 6.

¹³ *Bangkok kanmuang*, 12 March 1923. Sem noted that there were no less than five districts in the capital where "a police officer can become fat within the space of a year."

¹⁴ Commenting on the case in early May, for example, the editor of *Wayamo* asserted that "everyone knows that the Police Commissioner is aware of the flourishing state of gambling in Siam, and most find his inactivity curious." (*Wayamo*, 3 May 1923). The archival record suggests that police inactivity was due in part to the commissioner's personal involvement in the scandal. As early as 1919, the Foreign Adviser to the Police Force described *phraya* Athikon's Special Force as a factional grouping of minimal education and questionable integrity (NA, R6, *nakhonban, kromtamruat phranakhon lae phuthon rachakan tuabai*, 4.1/2, Lawson to Yomarat, 13 February 1919). Moreover, the following year, when explaining why a new law had failed to reduce the amount of gambling in the capital, he observed that the law was "not being enforced" and added that "while the government will neither pay the gendarmerie a living wage nor give out rewards, the proprietors of the illicit gaming houses can and do. The abolition of gambling houses has not reduced gambling and has greatly increased bribery" (NA, R6, *nakhonban, kromtamruat phranakhon lae phuthon rachakan tuabai*, 4.1/164, Report for the year 1919-1920). During the course of the trial, *phraya* Athikon made no effort to investigate the truth of Sem's allegations, despite the requests of several high-ranking police officers (NA, R6, *nakhonban, kromtamruat phranakhon lae phuthon, rachakan tuabai*, 4.1/214, *song nangsui'phim bangkok kanmuang, phraya Phonphakphiban to phraya Athikon Prakat*, 14 March 1923). Finally, in a report filed a number of years later by a military reserve officer who had previously served in the police force, it was noted that "high-

Instead of investigating Sem's charges, however, Police Commissioner *phraya* Athikon Prakat chose to respond to the article by bringing a libel suit against *Bangkok kanmuang* – an extended piece of litigation known as "the Case of the Fat Policemen" which eventually resulted in Sem's imprisonment in early August.¹⁵

During the course of the trial, the government was openly criticised for failing to investigate the truth of Sem's allegations, a criticism which was also reflected in *Bangkok kanmuang's* cartoons of the period. In one drawing, for example, it was implied that the kingdom's rulers preferred the views of the English-language press to the opinions put forward their own compatriots, believing the former to be true and the latter false (Figure 5.20). And in another, the artist likened the act of publishing a newspaper in Siam to balancing a spinning top on a wooden post (Figure 5.20). And in a third, a drawing which appeared a week prior to Sem's sentencing, 'the quest for justice' was represented as a tiny boat floating far out at sea with no land in sight (Figure 5.22). In addition, the case also served as the subject of the kingdom's first comic strip – a series of drawings in which a well-intentioned Sem was shown being mauled by a "gambling" tiger (Figure 5.23).

A far more bitter commentary on the incident was contributed by Sem from his cell, however. In a cartoon of September, he not only underscored that gambling was an evil which ought to be brought to an end but used the drawing's title – "Is m'lord just going to sit there while demon gambling pulls fellow human beings down to hell?" – in order to directly address the Police Commissioner (Figure 5.24). Moreover, in November, he produced a second drawing entitled "A Technique for Controlling the Lawless" in which a policeman was shown to have worked himself into a sweat by beating an individual unconscious in front of a group of terrified children (Figure 5.25). And in another drawing which appeared in *Bangkok kanmuang* a few months after his release, Sem portrayed himself as an animal trainer engaged in a struggle with a raging buffalo (Figure 5.26). The buffalo, a well-known symbol of stupidity in Siam, was labelled "the press law" while its horns were captioned "the Police Department" and "*phraya* Phetphani", the Lord Prefect of Bangkok.

ranking police officers of the Special Force are receiving monthly payments from Chinese casino operators; a given establishment is required to pay each officer 150 baht per month. If the money isn't paid by the first of the month, the casino owner is arrested the following day and required to double the payment in order to escape prosecution. Moreover, at Chinese New year, the officers' men expect presents of gold and other things of value. Many casinos are operating by these arrangements, which I can personally attest have been in effect since at least 1923." See NA, *samnakngan lekhatikan khanarathamontri* (Office of the Cabinet), 0201.16/28 *plianplaeng kanpokkhroing* 2475 (Change of Government, 1932).

¹⁵ See *Yamato*, 6 August 1923, 'khadi tamruat won' (The Case of the Fat Policemen).



Figure 5.1: *Bangkok kanmuang*, 1923, "We must defend ourselves from dangerous diseases with a fence of Century Quinine Wine."



Figure 5.2 *Bangkok kanmuang*: a 1924 advertisement for scotch.

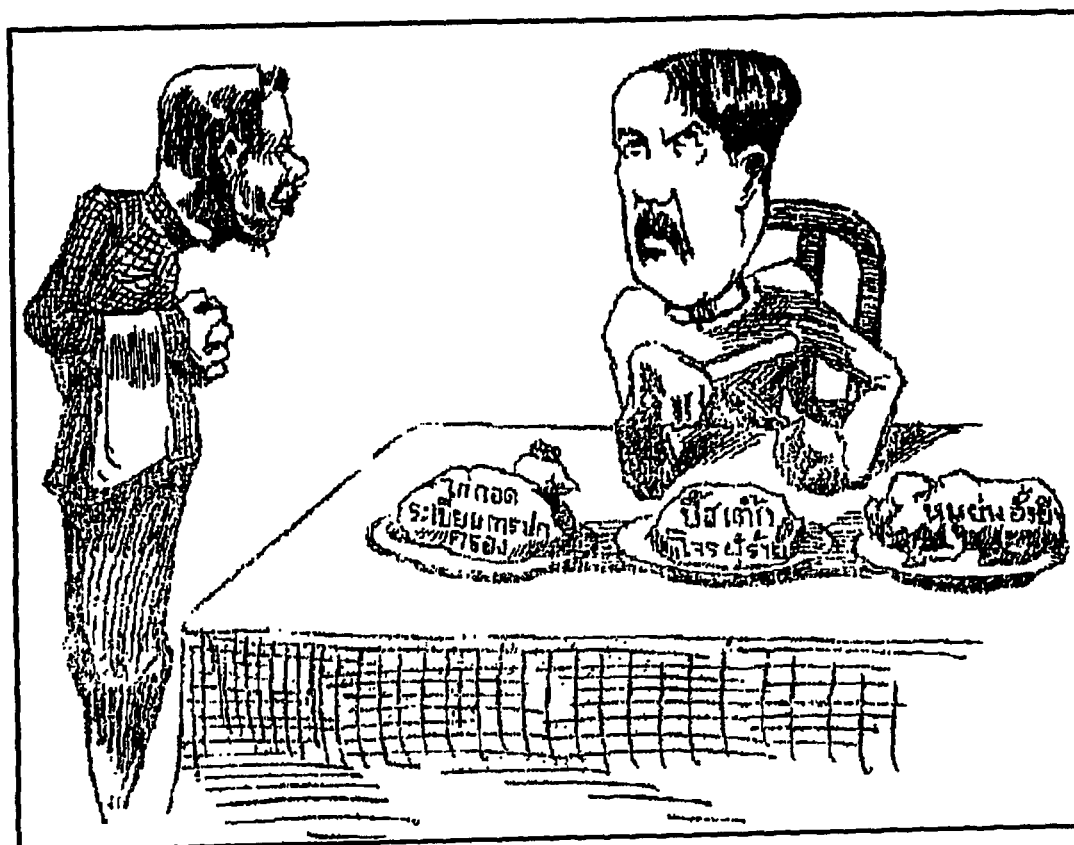


Figure 5.4: *Sayam ratsadon*, 13 January 1923.

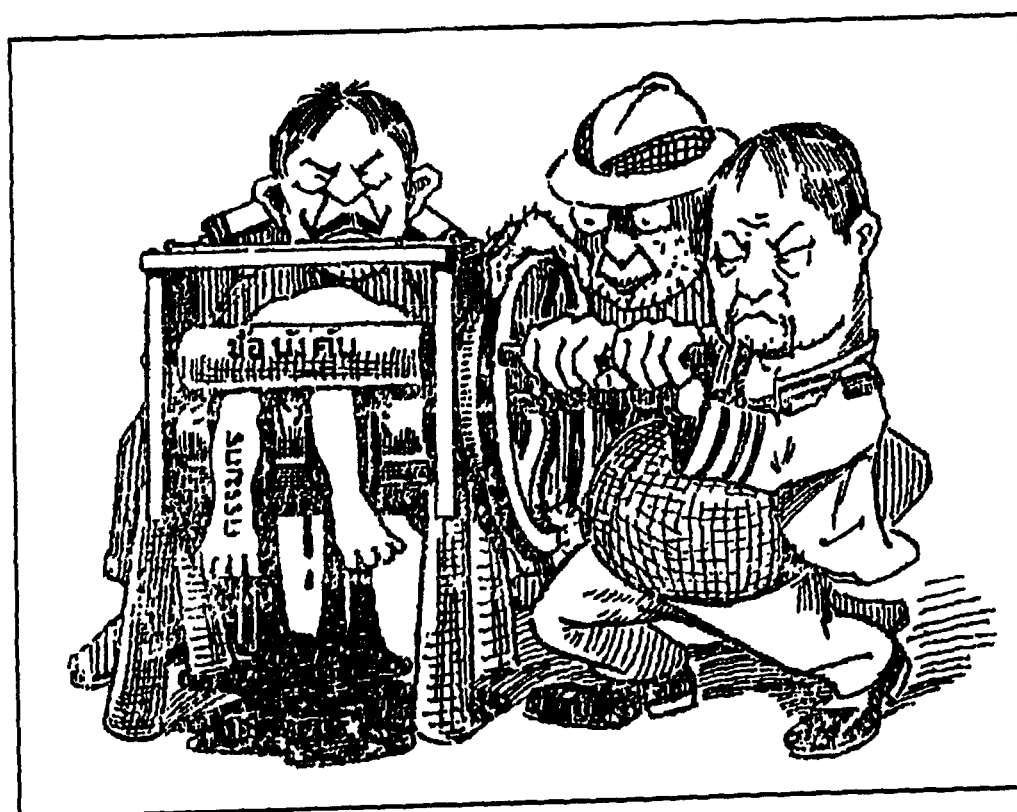


Figure 5.5: *Sayam ratsadon*, 16 January 1923.

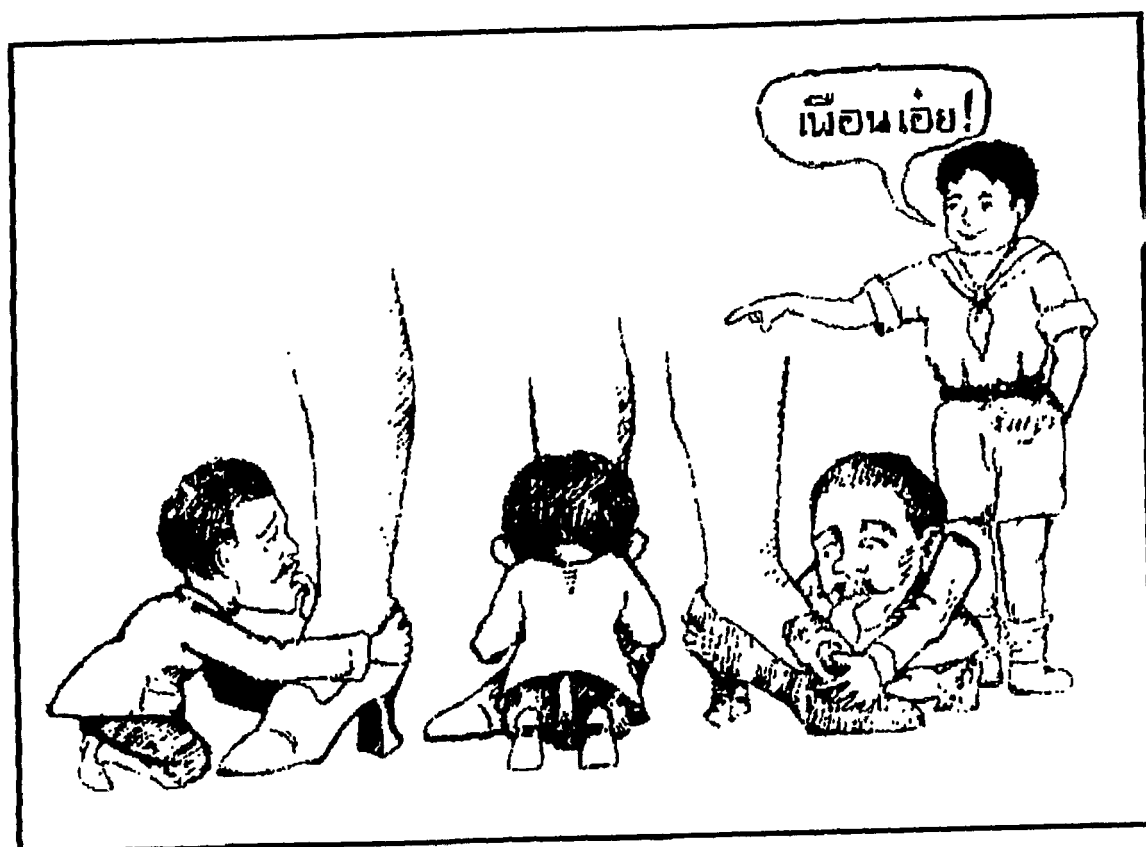


Figure 5.6: *Bangkok kanmuang*, 13 June 1923.



Figure 5.7: *Bangkok kanmuang*, 19 July 1924, 'Khaen Phet's Dream'.

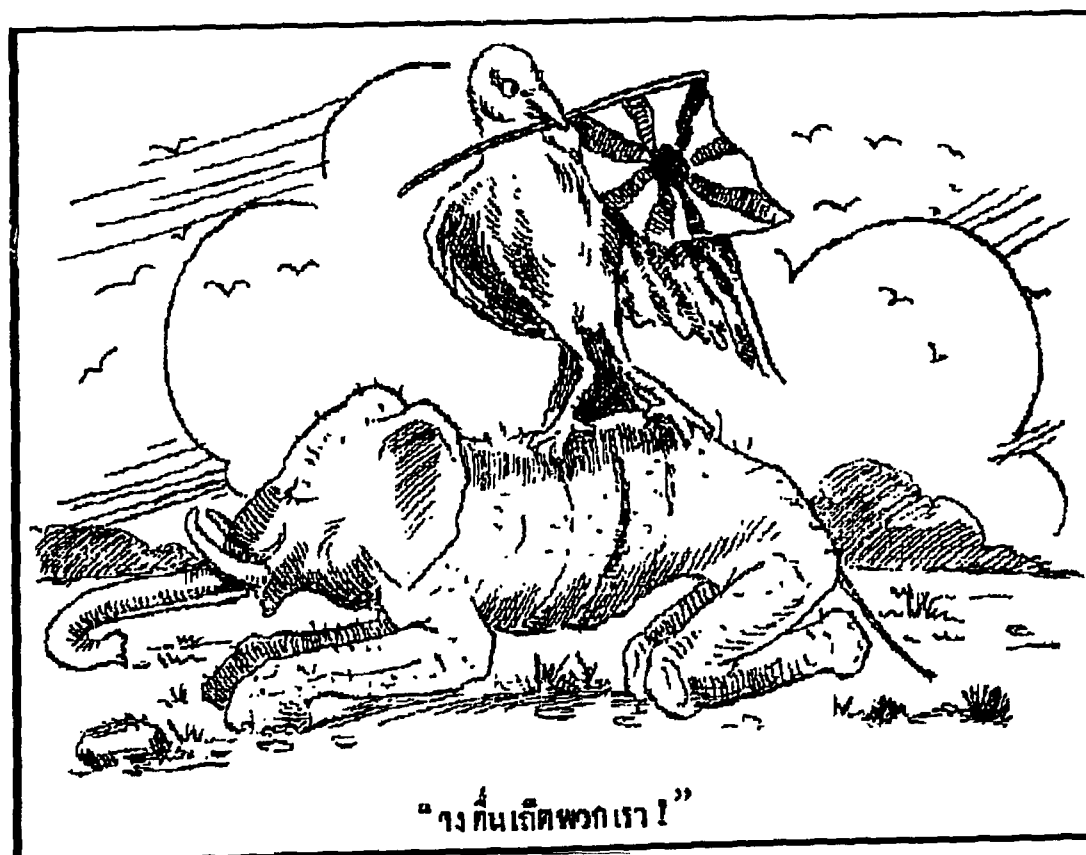


Figure 5.8: *Bangkok kanmuang*, 30 September 1924, 'We Must Awaken!'



Figure 5.9: *Bangkok kanmuang*, 4 September 1923, 'The security of the homeland depends upon four factors – patriotism and support for agriculture, industry, and trade.

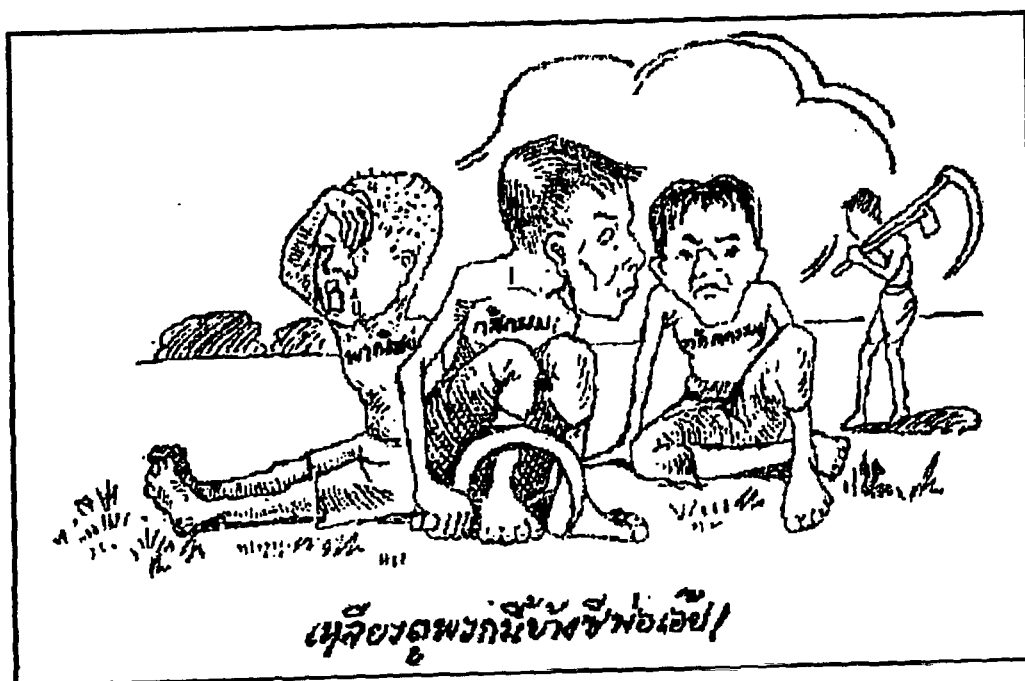


Figure 5.10: *Bangkok kanmuang*, 30 October 1923, 'Pay a little attention to these fellows!'



Figure 5.11: *Bangkok kanmuang*, 6 October 1923, 'The Causes of Crime'. The figure on the left is saying that he would like to be a member of the nobility but no positions are open. The figure in the middle is noting that he lacks the capital to compete with foreigners in trade and industry. The figure on the right is explaining that he turned to crime because of hunger and stupidity. The policeman in the background is declaring that all three are criminals. In the foreground, the cartoonist has posed the question: 'How might things be improved?'

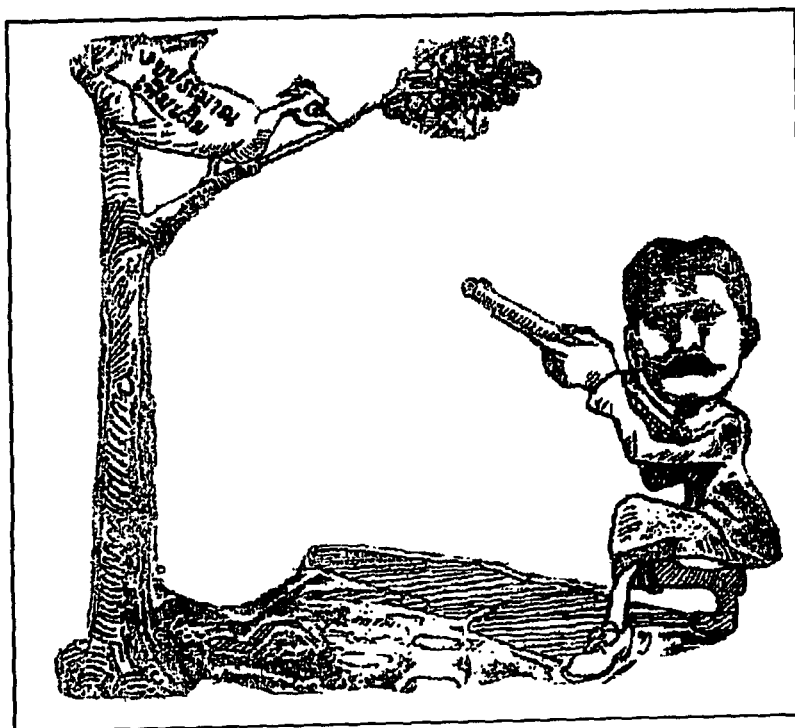


Figure 5.12: *Bangkok kanmuang*, 1 June 1923. The drawing appeared under the caption: 'Driven by necessity – if you miss again today, m'lord, you'll have to try again tomorrow.'



Figure 5.13: *Bangkok kanmuang*, 8 June 1923. The caption reads: 'When we only have a short length of string, how can we fly as high as they do?'



Figure 5.14: *Bangkok kanmuang*, 12 July 1924, a farming singing to his immobilized buffaloes and dog about the "shameful" education cess.

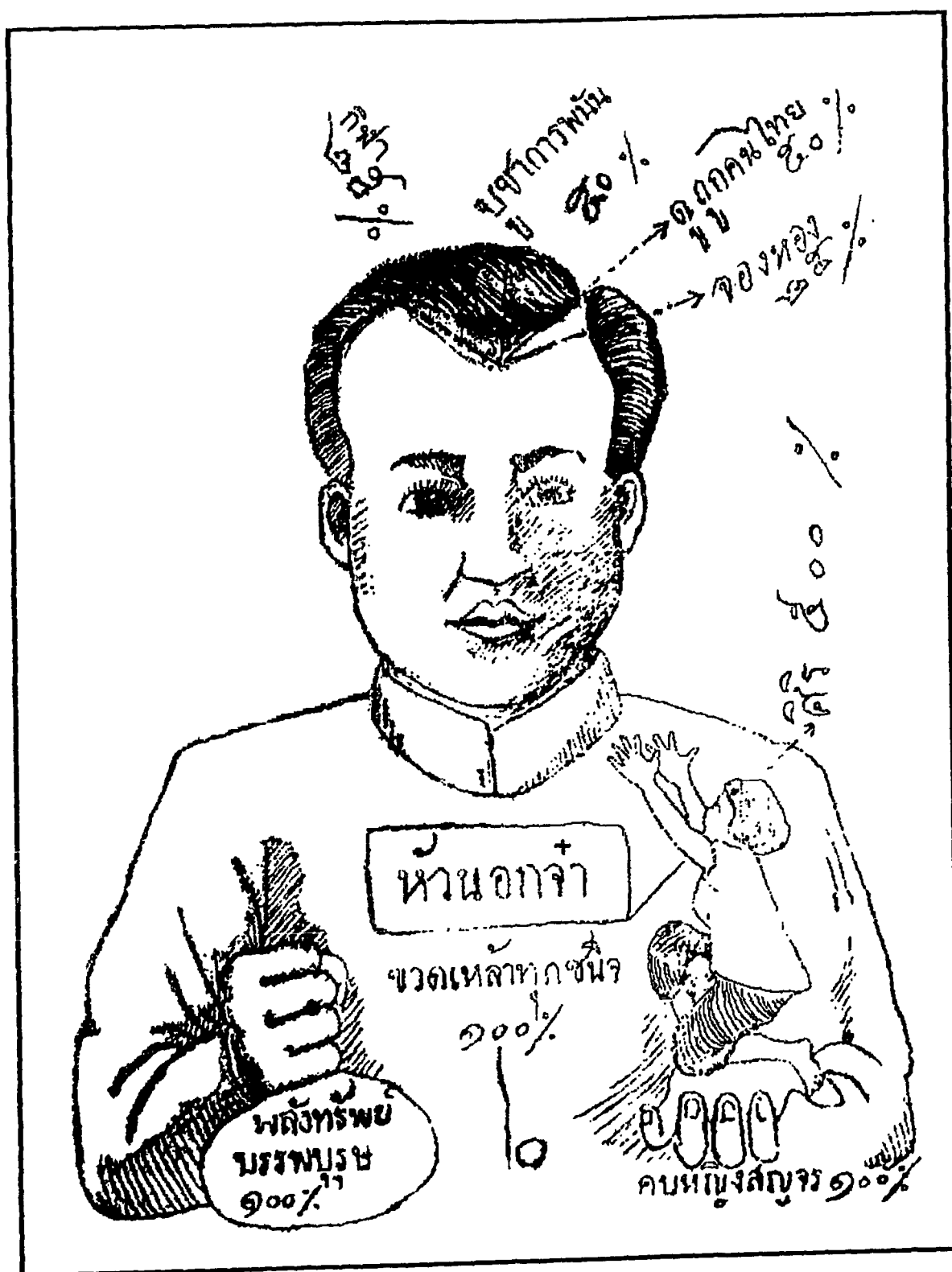


Figure 5.15: Bangkok kanmuang, 14 June 1923.



Figure 5.16: *Bangkok kanmuang*, 18 December 1923.



Figure 5.17: *Bangkok kanmuang*, 4 December 1923.

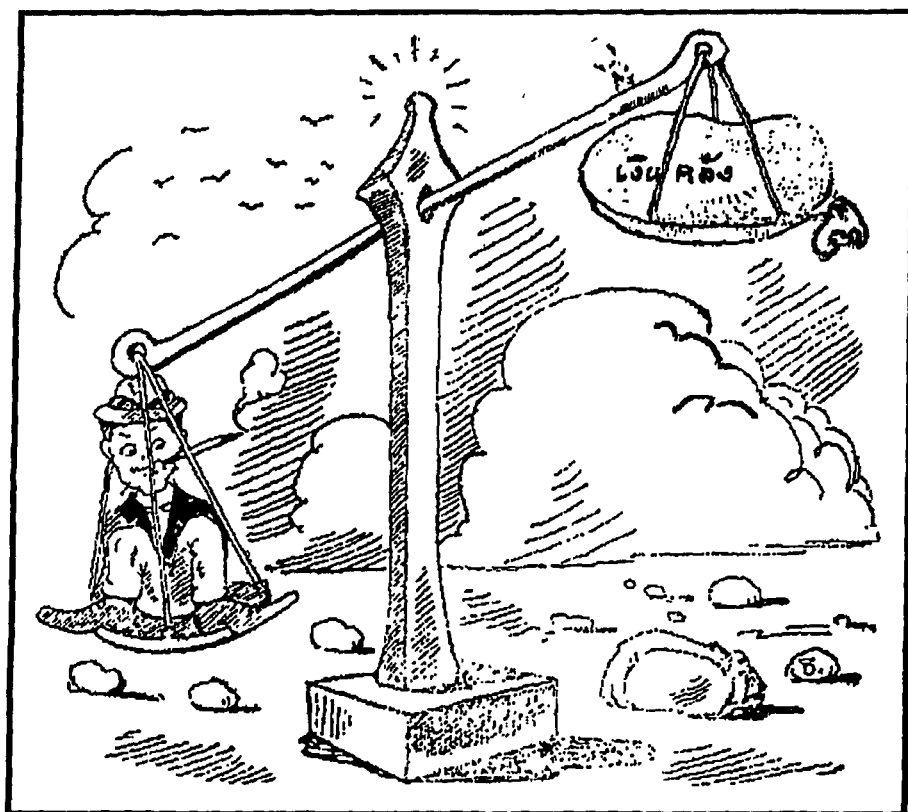


Figure 5.18: *Bangkok kanmuang*, 16 October 1923.



Figure 5.19: *Bangkok kanmuang*, 21 August 1923.



หนังสือพิมพ์คนไทย

หนังสือพิมพ์คนต่างประเทศ

Figure 5.20: Bangkok kanmuang, 14 July 1923.



Figure 5.21: *Bangkok kanmuang*, 18 August 1923, 'The Stability of the Thai Press – Like spinning tops on wooden posts.



Figure 5.22: *Bangkok kanmuang*, 31 July 1923, "Justice".



Figure 5.23: *Bangkok kanmuang*, 17 January 1924.



Figure 5.24: Bangkok kanmuang, 15 September 1923.



Figure 5.25: Bangkok kanmuang, 11 November 1923.

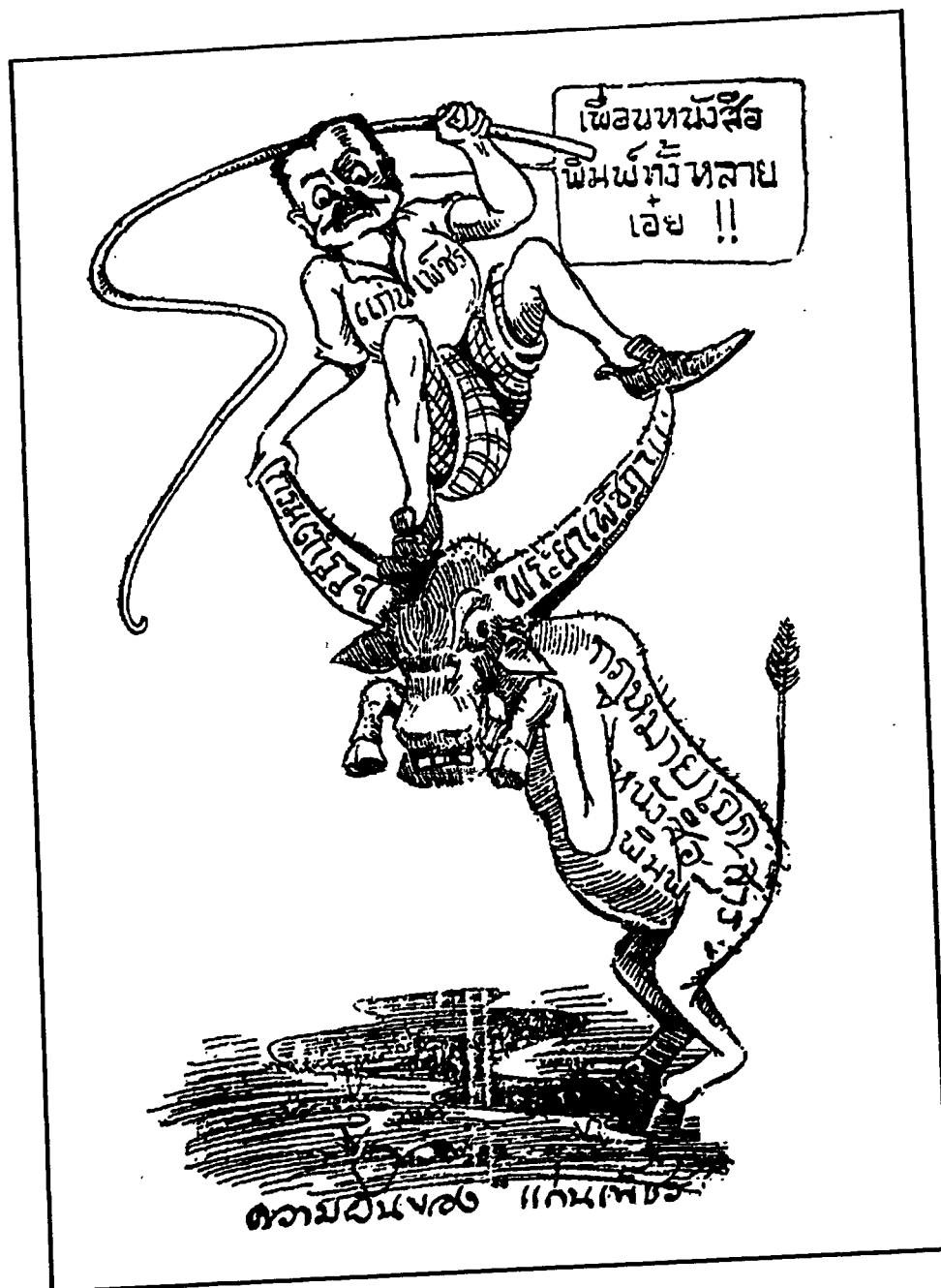


Figure 5.26: Bangkok kanmuang, 26 July 1924.

5.3 "Kaen Pher" (Sem Sumanan) at Kro lek.



Figure 5.27: *Kro lek*, 25 January 1925; Sem Sumanan's self-portrait.

In 1924, Sem left the editorship of *Bangkok kanmuang* and joined the staff of *Kro lek* (Armor) – a new weekly which quickly proved to be one of the more provocative publications of the late Sixth Reign.¹⁶ In its first issue, the editor asserted that his aim in publishing the paper was to counter the "obscene" belief that Siam was peopled by "gods", "sub-humans", and "human waste" – a belief which he claimed had resulted in the vast majority of the country's citizens being "oppressed, abused, and pressured; their heads used as stepping stones, their necks as saddles, and their backs as the fields of others." After noting that it was the duty of the press to teach people of their freedom and equality, he further criticised the "patriotic" newspapers of the Privy Purse – the *Daily Mail* ("a puppet with a bad part in a poor play") and "lord *Phim thai*"

¹⁶ At the time when *Kro lek* began publishing on 12 October 1924, Chan Thiranan was listed as its owner, editor, and general manager. Like several other publications of the late Sixth Reign, however, *Kro lek* was rumored to have a behind-the-scenes patron – in one version *nai* Hom, who was said to have arranged for Sem to secretly manage the enterprise on his behalf, and in another, an influential member of the royal family (see *Kro lek*, 19 October 1924, 'kro sanyan'). While the editor was quick to deny such rumors, Sem's position with the paper was clearly a significant one. Officially an advisor to the editor, he managed the newspaper's financial business, produced the artwork for its cover, and also proved to be one its more frequent contributors. Moreover, in August of 1925, he assumed the paper's editorship and in early 1926, when the paper converted to a daily format, he registered as its owner as well. See NA, R6, *nakhonban*, 20.1 – *nangsū'phim kho anuyat ok nangsū'phim* (Newspapers – Requests to Publish).

("the oddest of the batch, ever proud of the fact that it is riding on the ship of the gods, it keeps tying a monkey to the helm") – for having failed to either come to the people's aid or act as their voice. On both points, *Kro lek* promised to be different, the editor sarcastically remarking that it would make "an honest attempt to pay back" the king for all of the things he had done.¹⁷

From the outset, it was obvious that graphic satire was to be used as an integral part of *Kro lek*'s editorial policy. The paper's first issue contained a brief essay on political cartooning in which it was asserted that "intellectuals around the world" had come to recognize that cartoons were superior to the printed word, "a brief glance at one being sufficient to provide the reader with as much insight and amusement as could be obtained from reading an essay written by the best of journalists."¹⁸ Moreover, its cover also featured a biting caricature of *phraya* Athikon Prakat, Sem depicting the Police Commissioner as an errant school boy who played games with a ball labelled "counterfeiting rings" while carrying a basket filled with "fake virgins"(Figure 5.28). Given the "Fat Policemen" episode, this allusion to Athikon's involvement in both the counterfeiting activities of the Bangkok triads and the capital's growing brothel trade was remarkable enough in its own right.¹⁹ A few weeks later,

¹⁷ *Kro lek*, 12 October 1924, 'Kro lek pen kro diao thi ja pongkan krasun ayutitham hai than tang phuang khwamjamnong lae saphap khong rao', (*Kro lek* is the Only Armor Capable of Defending You All from the Bullets of the Unjust: Our Aims and Our Condition).

¹⁸ *Kro lek*, 12 October 1924, 'photjana phangphe prakop phapkatun aidia khong kaen phet phu mi chu siang nai choeng khwamfan' ("Verbal Expression Illustrated with Cartooning – The Ideas of 'Kaen Phet', a Person Famous for His Dreams").

¹⁹ Here, again, Sem's allegations appear to have been warranted. During the course of his thirty-one years of service in the Siamese Police Department, *phraya* Athikon Prakat (Lui Chatikwanit) earned a reputation as an individual who was capable of controlling the various triad and political associations of the Bangkok Chinese community. A Sino-Thai who began working as a translator in the Ministry of the Capital (*krasuang nakhonban*) in 1898, he rose through the ranks of the Chinese Criminal Investigations Division to assume command of its undercover Special Force (*kong phiset*) in 1909. Under his leadership the force developed a certain notoriety for its heavy-handed policing in the capital's Chinese districts, and Athikon himself came to be widely feared by the kingdom's ethnic Chinese. As noted by a contemporary, he was:

a self-made man, ... exceedingly ambitious, ... astute, courageous, purposeful ... He was one of those who have the make-up of a despot, and he prided himself in being one. And so ... he liked to be feared or to be pleased, and he took good care that the Chinese either feared or pleased him ... The privileged few did please him, but the rest of the Chinese feared and hated him, and in fearing and hating him, they feared and hated the Siamese Government.

(Y.H. Tsan, 'Chinese in Siam', *Chinese Press Weekly*, 1:4, 25 August 1935, cited in Skinner: 1950, 245.) It was during this period as well that allegations arose of Special Force complicity in a wide range of criminal activities: counterfeiting, illegal gambling operations, illegal opium sales, the trade in Chinese prostitutes, and the operation of unregistered brothels to name but a few. With regard to police involvement in the brothel trade and gambling, see NA, R6, *nakhonban*, 4.8/2-3 – *kromtamruat phranakhonban lae phuthon ying sopheni kokhwamdami ruang phraya athikon anuyat hai ran khai namcha pen rongyingnakhonsopheni* (Prostitutes: On *phraya* Athikon's Decision to Allow a Tea House to Operate as a Brothel); and NA, R6, *nakhonban*, *kromsanphakon*, 11.5J/16 – *kanphanan samnao ruang krasuang phrakhleng on kanraksa pho. ro. bo. kanphanan hai krasuang nakhonban pen jaonathi fai pokkhrong raksa 2464* (Gambling: Authorization for the Ministry of the Capital to Enforce the

however, Sem used cartooning to reiterate his earlier allegation of police complicity in Bangkok's illegal gaming activities as well. In this latter drawing, *phraya* Athikon was depicted as a dog which had been "harnessed" in the service of the state's effort to hunt down Bangkok's casino operators. On his side was the word "gambling", however – an ambiguous reference which was seemingly meant to convey the impression that the hunt need go no further than the Police Commissioner himself (Figure 5.29).

Over the course of the next year, Sem was equally caustic in his treatment of a number of other issues as well. In his continued criticism of the government's *laissez faire* economic policies, for example, he frequently implied that Siam had fallen under the domination of foreign economic influences, as in a cartoon of April which served to illustrate the Thai proverb "so long as the chickens have rice to eat, there's no need to worry." Although the expression was commonly used to indicate the bountiful existence of the Thai farmer, Sem twisted its meaning by drawing a picture of a Chinese coolie seated beside his foreign-hatted chickens (Figure 5.30). Similarly, in commenting upon the government's education policies, his previously sympathetic caricatures of the Minister of Public Instruction were supplanted by images of an incompetent individual who lacked the necessary sense of direction to manage the country's school system (Figure 5.31).

More remarkable, however, was Sem's increasingly irreverent commentary on the Sixth Reign court – an ongoing series of cartoons in which Vajiravudh and his favorites were invariably represented as figures of public scorn and ridicule. One of his earliest drawings in this vein was a sketch of a memorial which Vajiravudh had recently commissioned in honor of his dog, *phra* Yale. Employing the statue as a ready-made piece of satire, he produced a picture of a dog on a pedestal surrounded by respectful members of the nobility. Just above the statue, however, he drew a burst of light rays – a well-known symbol of Jakkri kingship which conferred royal status on the dog and canine status on the king (Figure 5.32). Similarly, the following week, he produced a second sketch in which Vajiravudh's favorite courtiers, *jao phraya* Ram and his younger brother *phraya* Aniruthewa, were shown carting off a hog-tied elephant which bore the label "our lives" – a drawing which carried the implication that the kingdom and its people had fallen completely under their authority (Figure 5.33).

Royal Prohibition on Gambling). The former set of documents makes it clear that Athikon acted on his own initiative to "profit from an activity which we are in no position to end" and the latter indicates that the Special Force had full responsibility for Chinese gaming activities at the time of the "Fat Policemen" incident noted above. In addition, see the comments in *Chinosayam warasap*, 27 September 1920; *Pakka thai*, 22 April 1926; and *Thong thai*, 28 September 1926. Finally, for brief biographies of *phraya* Athikon, see *Anuson nai ngan phraratchathan phloeng sop naiphontamruat tho phraya athikon pratat (lui chatikwanit)* (Cremation Volume of *phraya* Athikon Pratat (Lui Chatikwanit), Bangkok: 1955; and Prayut Sitthiphan, *Phramahakasat kap prawatsat tamruat sayam* (The Monarchy and the History of the Siamese Police), Bangkok: Wacharin, 1976.

These early critiques of the throne were comparatively subtle, however, when compared to Sem's later caricatures of Vajiravudh – unflattering studies in which the monarch was almost invariably represented as an enemy of the Thai nation. In a drawing of January 1925 entitled "A Competition Between National Development and the Wild Tigers", for example, a portly Vajiravudh was shown happily quaffing a beer with a group of onlookers while two skeletons played a game of billiards (Figure 5.34). And in subsequent sketch which appeared with the caption "Dreaming of My Fellow Nationals", Vajiravudh and *jao phraya* Ram were represented as a balding sun and an evil moon rising over a sea of impoverished supplicants. Oblivious to the true condition of those on the ground, they were shown half-inquiring and half-asserting that the people below them had no real cause for complaint (Figure 5.35). In reply, however, one of the individuals in the crowd was noting that:

tens of thousands of us have no work and no money with which to buy food. [In such circumstances] what likelihood is there that the fear of prison will keep us from turning to crime?

Much as Sem had previously done with the Siamese nobility, he also undertook to represent the king and his courtiers as beasts: dogs, foxes, and monkeys which were shown to have adopted human mannerisms in order to mislead the nation in pursuit of their own trivial ends.²⁰ In the months just prior to Vajiravudh's death, for example, he depicted the principal members of the Sixth Reign court as *hia* – a species of giant, carrion-eating lizard which was widely believed to be a creature of singular spiritual impurity, a form of life so low as to be considered a harbinger of death. As these latter drawings not only resulted in *Kro lek's* closure but also proved to be immensely popular with the capital literati, they warrant being examined in detail in the next section.

²⁰ See Appendix A, Figures 7-9.



Figure 5.28, *Kro lek*, 12 October 1924, *phraya* Athikon as a school boy.

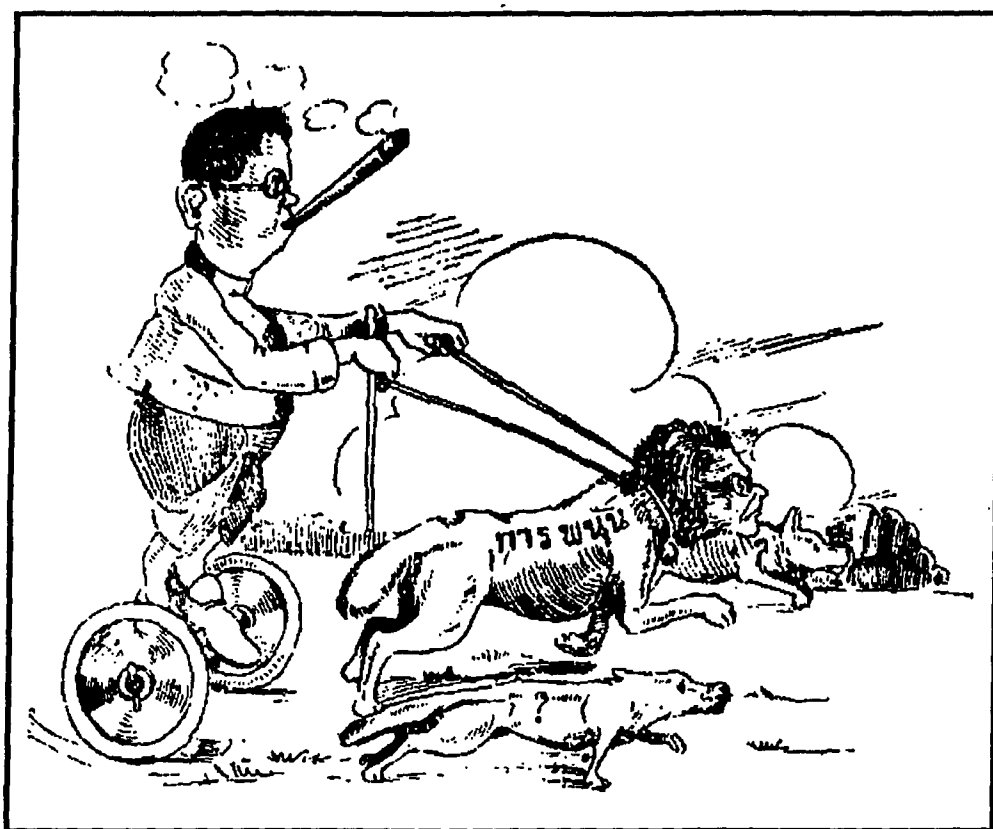


Figure 5.29: *Kro lek*, 30 November 1924.

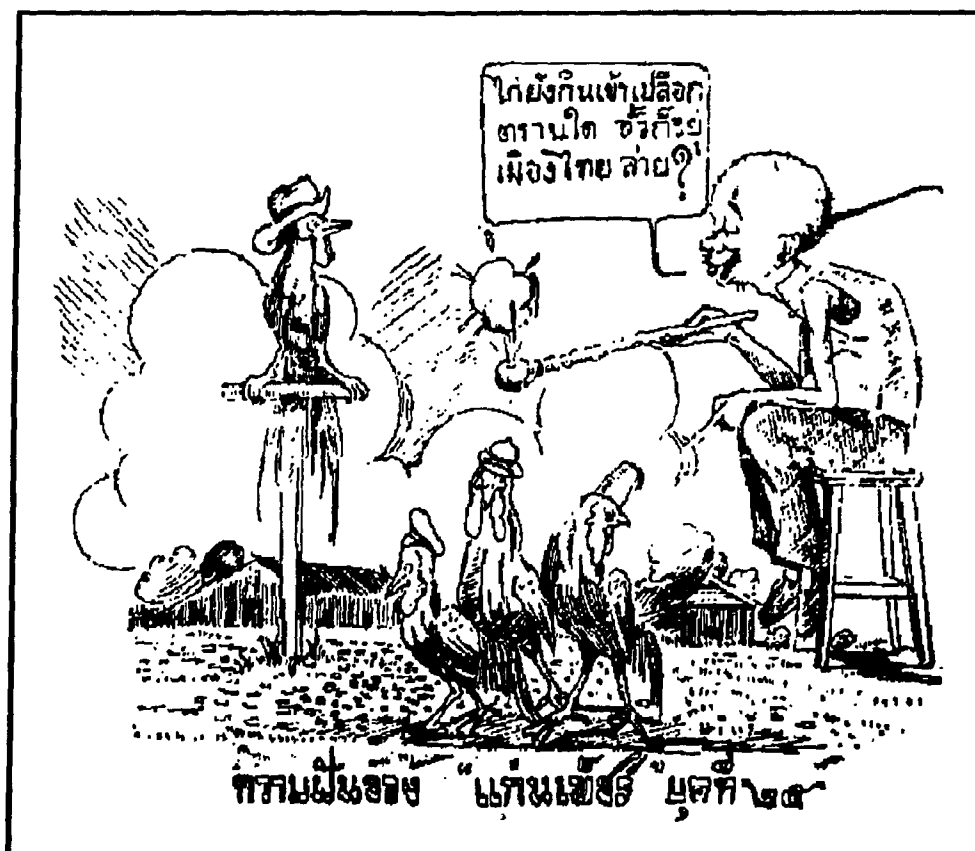


Figure 5.30: *Kro lek*, 5 April 1925.



Figure 5.31: *Kro lek*, 14 June 1925, 'The longer we sleep, the more dream we churn out.'

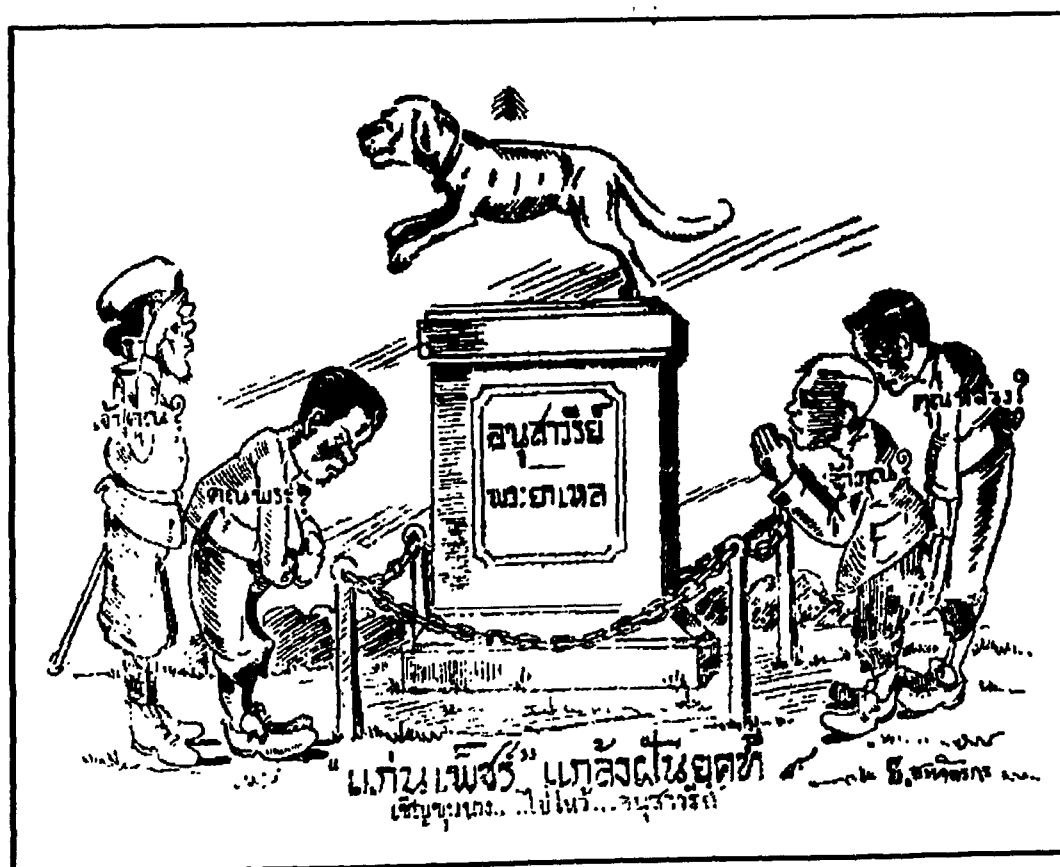


Figure 5.32: *Kro lek*, 7 December 1924, 'Kaen Phet pretends to dream.'



Figure 5.33: *Kro lek*, 14 December 1924.



Figure 5.34: *Krolek*, 11 January 1925.



Figure 5.35: *Kro lek*, 8 February 1925, "Dreaming of my Fellow Nationals."

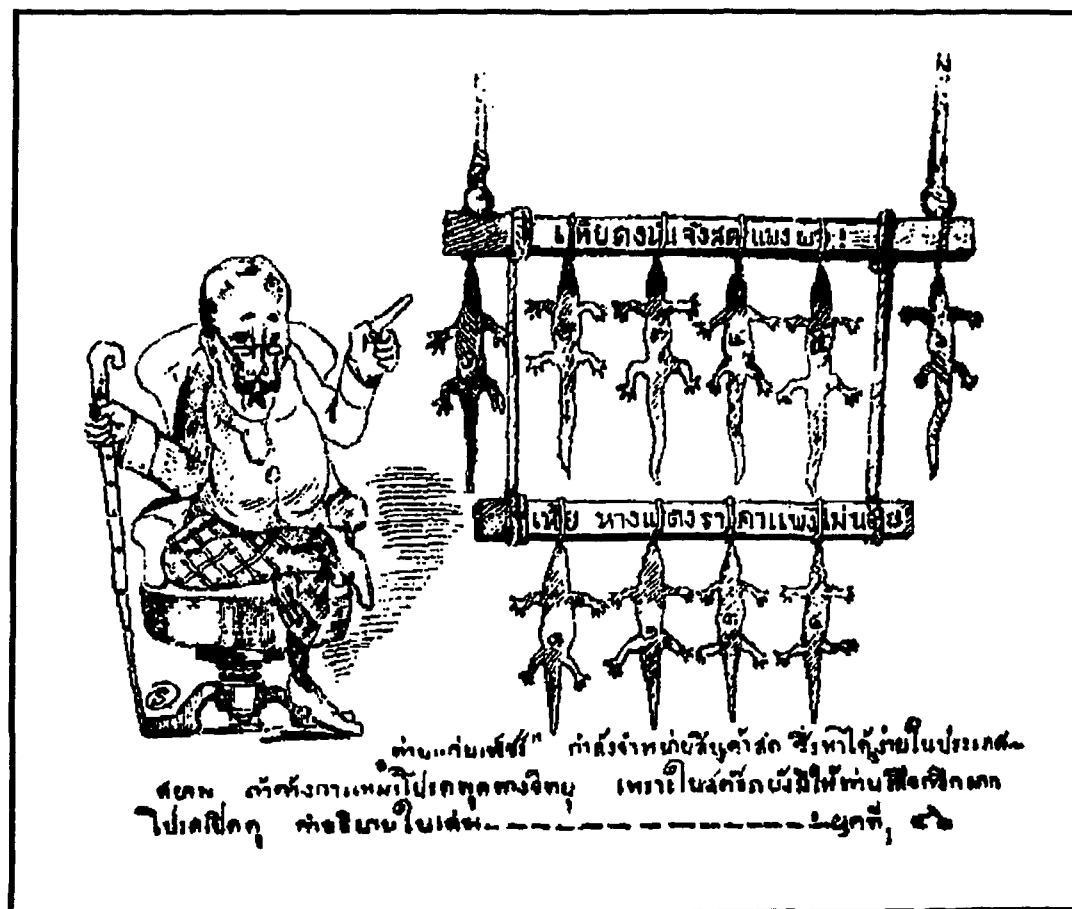


Figure 5.36: *Kro lek*, 4 October 1925; Kaen Phet's Trade in *hia*. The lizards on the top bar are described as "Forest Lizards: Very Fresh and Very Expensive"; those on the bottom as "Red-Tailed Lizards: Not Cheap." In the caption at the bottom of the page, it is noted that "Kaen Phet is now wholesaling a type of merchandise which can be easily found in Siam. If interested in becoming a distributor, please contact him by radio. His stock includes a wide variety of types ..."

In October and November of 1925, Sem produced one of his more elaborate pieces of political satire for *Kro lek* – a series of caricatures, essays, and allegorical poems on the topic of "the *hia* trade."²¹ The above drawing served to introduce the trade, Sem depicting himself as a modern entrepreneur who had foolishly determined to make his fortune by selling a virtually unmarketable famine food at inflated prices.²² Moreover, he continued his self-deprecating humor in an accompanying essay in which he explained how he had arrived at his decision to enter into the trade. After noting that he had previously made his living by selling "dreams" to *Kro lek*, he asserted that his

...winds of inspiration had suddenly ceased to blow. I closed up the house and feigned sleep, but no dreams came. Sitting didn't help, nor did standing or walking – asleep or awake, with

²¹ See *Kro lek*, 4 October 1925 – 22 November 1925.

22 The impression of modernity was created with Sem's reference to radio, a technology which had yet to be imported into Siam. Similarly, when labelling the various types of *hia* and their prices, Sem emphasized the "inedibility" of his product by transcribing Lao words into Thai -

eyes open or shut, even hunched over in a gloom, there wasn't a single dream to be found. Fearfully considering the prospect of going hungry for a week for lack of having anything to give to the people at *Kro lek*, I flopped about like a butcherblock chicken which had already been knocked on the head. I briefly considered trying to sell a little dog meat to someone, but *Spikenpa's* place had already stopped buying it. Nor was selling bird and rat meat likely to work either, as the marketplace was already full of people trying. Unable to devise a plan, it suddenly seemed as if life wasn't worth the living. I didn't have the strength to get a rickshaw started and besides, I held a firm conviction that there was nothing desirable about imitating the work of others. In consequence, I decided that it was better to look for happiness in the next life, snatched up a piece of rope, and hurried off to the temple grounds at Wat Saket to hang myself. Fixing the rope around my neck with one hand, I held a piece of charcoal in the other in order to write on the temple wall: "I, Kaen Phet, take leave of my fellow Thais of firmer hearts for it is beyond my strength to make a living in *muang thai*." But upon having written these parting words, and just as I was preparing to tighten the noose and let myself drop – merciful heaven! – the gods had not forgotten "Kaen Phet" after all. By chance, I looked to my side and noticed the words which a child had written on the temple wall: "Those slimy red-tailed *hia* are only good for blood-sucking and stepping on the heads of their fellow nationals." Reading the words, joy welled up in my heart as I thought – I'm saved! I'm not dead yet! And there's still no need to die ... I still had a chance to support myself by trading in *hia*. There was nobody selling them and it was a trade well-suited to the geography of our homeland, where *hia* could be found in abundance. There were thousands of different types around the country, at least several score of which could be found right here in Bangkok ...²³

Amusing enough in its own right, the passage could also be read as a farcical commentary on the condition of the Siamese economy. For months, the Bangkok press had been filled with editorials on the importance of developing products for export, with wicker, shellfish, pineapples, tobacco, peppers, burlap, and railroad ties being just a few of the items touted as potential cures for the kingdom's poverty.²⁴ Within this context, Sem's observation that the Bangkok dog meat market had collapsed, his speculation that the markets for bird and rat meat were already over-supplied, and his ultimate decision to sell an unmarketable product constituted a sarcastic rejoinder to the capital's economic optimists and their single-product solutions for Siam's economic difficulties.

a device which presumably would have made both Sem and his product appear decidedly lower class in 1925 Siam.

²³ *Kro lek*, 4 October 1925, 'sinkha sotsot khoe nua hiadong kap hia hangdaeng khong kaenphet', (Fresh Merchandise: Kaen Phet's Forest and Red-Tailed Lizard Meat).

²⁴ For example, see *Sayam ratsadon*, 18 April 1925, 'kanjaksan khong rao' (Our Wicker Industry); *Phim thai*, 28 April 1925, 'joeng ya loem sia loei (Let's Not Forget This One); and 12 September 1925, 'phoct okat tham kankhakhai' (Plants which Present an Opportunity for Trade); *Sara nakhon*, 8 June 1925, 'kanha ngan tham' (Looking for Work); and *Sakhon thurakan*, 25 June and 23 July 1925, 'khao kasikani' (Agricultural News).

By virtue of a double pun which lay at the heart of Sem's trade, his scheme could also be read as a metaphor for the caricaturist's art, however. There was the word *hia*, which not only denoted a type of lizard but also served as a potent Thai perjorative akin to the English expression "low-life bastard." In addition, the Thai verb "to sell" (*khai*) could be used to convey the meaning of "humiliate" (*khai na*; lit.: sell + face) and "betray" (*khai chat*, lit.: sell race/nation). As a result, it was possible to interpret Sem's observation that there were "thousands of different types of *hia* around the country" as an assertion that the kingdom was "full of bastards" and his proposal to "sell" them could be taken as a plan to publicly expose such individuals for what they were. That this was indeed Sem's intention was made apparent the following week, when the cover of *Kro lek* featured a drawing of "Forest *hia* Number One" – a figure which looked every bit like a government bureaucrat seated at his desk (Figure 5.37). In an accompanying poem, Sem explained that he had drawn the *hia* in an earlier incarnation, the species being comprised of previous high-ranking members of the nobility who had been (or rather, soon would soon be) reborn as a *hia* for stealing their underlings' pay, making people's money disappear, etc. Moreover, he added that this particular type of *hia* could be found in abundance in Bangkok, for they "loved nothing better than to ride around in motorcars."²⁵

Having begun his 'trade' by satirizing the nobility as a class, Sem subsequently employed a combination of caricature and prose-poems in order to ridicule some of the kingdom's most powerful men. His "Forest *hia* Number Two", a variety which had previously "gone crazy over wealth, rank, title, and himself", was an obvious caricature of Minister of Interior Yomarat (Figure 5.38).²⁶ Similarly, his "Forest *hia* Number Three":

a two-faced male with a tail ... a stupid individual who learned the art of flattery while still quite young ... a *hia* which lulls its victims into mistaken trust and then does what it pleases with their money ... a species hated by all the gods but one, this latter continuing to see it as special ...²⁷

was clearly Vajiravudh's favorite, *jao phraya* Ram (Figure 5.39). In addition, although the drawing of "*hia* Number Four" is missing from the archival record, the creature was characterized as "...the sibling of a pretty deity ... curiously favored by the lord, who gave him everything he desired even as he used his power and position to cheat others ... a wasteful little brother with the comprehension of a buffalo ... who

²⁵ *Kro lek*, 4 October 1925, 'sinkha praphet thi nung khoe ai hia dong mi kamaphoet dang ni' (First-Class Merchandise: This is the Origin of the Forest *hia*). Sem's poems and accompanying drawings were often published in separate issues of the paper. In this instance, the poem appeared in advance of the drawing.

²⁶ *Kro lek*, 11 October 1925, 'hia namboe song' (*Hia* Number Two).

²⁷ *Kro lek*, 18 October 1925, 'hia namboe sam' (*Hia* Number Three).

has completely forgotten his race..." – a description suggesting a caricature of Ram's brother *phraya* Aniruthewa.²⁸ Undoubtedly the most provocative of Sem's *hia* drawings was his last, however – a likeness of King Vajiravudh, the sixth king of the Jakkri line, entitled "Red-Tailed *hia* Number Six", a species which the reader had already been informed was "only good for blood-sucking and stepping on the heads of their fellow nationals" (Figure 5.40). Although slated to appear on the cover of *Kro lek*'s issue of 22 November, printing difficulties resulted in the paper being issued a week late.²⁹ In the interim the king died, with the result that the drawing appeared at a time when virtually every other newspaper in the capital was in the process of publishing official eulogies.

As has already been mentioned, "the *hia* trade" appears to have been an exceedingly popular piece of satire in its day. It not only engendered a "huge response" from around the country including "all of the outlying provinces" but many of those who contacted the paper undertook to embellish Sem's theme – reporting sightings of dangerous new varieties, offering to "give away the entire pack" living near their homes, requesting information on trapping techniques, claiming to have caught individual *hia* in the act of laying eggs, and even placing orders for *hia* which they could "take home to stab."³⁰ One district official living in the rural northeast, for example, not only praised "Kaen Phet" for being "the first person with the necessary skill to market this type of product" but also promised to give him all the business he desired, since Ubon, Udon, and Roi Et were over-supplied with "the lord's *hia*, a type which claimed to have been given the authority to do as they pleased."³¹ More significantly, several other newspapers of the period subsequently took up the trade as well – the graphic artists at *Kasem rat*, *Kai phet*, and *Thong thai* not only adopting Sem's metaphor but also imitating his style.³²

Predictably, the response of the court was of an entirely different order. Even before the start of the trade, *Phim thai* had begun editorializing on the "outrageously

²⁸ *Kro lek*, 25 October 1925, 'hia namboe si' (*Hia* Number Four). *Phraya* Aniruthewa's caricature was apparently featured on the cover of *Kro lek*'s issue of 8 November 1925 – an issue missing from the collection of the National Library of Thailand. Also missing is the issue featuring the caricature of "hia Number 5", an "old *phraya*" who was said to have monopoly control over both the city's gambling activities and its criminal gangs (*nak leng*). *Kro lek*, 1 November 1925, 'hia namboe ha' (*Hia* Number Five). In light of Sem's ongoing criticism of *phraya* Athikon Prakat, this latter drawing may well have been a caricature of the Police Commissioner.

²⁹ *Kro lek*, 22 November 1925, 'kro lek thalaeng kitchakan' (An Announcement from *Kro lek*). The editor promised that *Kro lek* would "adhere to the customs of those loyal to the throne" by paying respects to Vajiravudh in the next issue.

³⁰ See *Kro lek*, 18 October 1925, and 22 November 1925.

³¹ *Kro lek*, 18 October 1925, 'kho khopjai khun lung kaen phet thi karuna ratsadon jong dai tang talat khai hia khoen', (An Expression of Gratitude for Uncle Kaen Phet's Effort to Establish a Public Market for Hia).

³² For example, see the cover of *Kasem rat*'s issue of 5 March 1925 which featured a caricature of Yomarat as a giant lizard seated in a chair. In addition, see the graphics in the next chapter.



Figure 5.37: *Kro lek*, 11 October 1925, Kaen Phet pointing to Forest *hia* Number One in a previous incarnation. The *hia* is seen to respond: "Damn if he doesn't know my origins!"



Figure 5.38: *Kro lek*, 25 October 1925, 'Forest *hia* Number Two', a caricature of *jao phraya* Yomarat. Kaen Phet is explaining that this particular *hia* is a very important variety.



Figure 5.39: *Kro lek*, 1 November 1925, 'Forest hia Number Three', a caricature of *jao phraya* Ram Rakop. Both figures are exclaiming that Kaen Phet "isn't playing around."



Figure 5.40: *Kro lek*, 22 November 1925, 'Red-Tailed *hia* Number Six', a figure which looks suspiciously like King Vajiravudh, is shown warning Kaen Phet to "look out for his head." The magazine was issued a few days late, appearing on the street shortly after Vajiravudh's death.

vulgar" (*ujat sia ying kwa ujat*) cartoons of the popular press.³³ Moreover, after Sem's caricatures of *jao phraya* Yomarat and *jao phraya* Ram appeared on the cover of *Kro lek* in October, both men reportedly demanded the publication's closure as well.³⁴ Remarkably, the paper continued to appear without incident until the printing of Sem's "Red-Tailed *hia* Number Six", at which time it was immediately shut down. Given the particulars of the incident, it is difficult not to suspect that Sem had an influential patron, however, for there is no indication that charges were filed against any member of *Kro lek*'s editorial staff and after a brief six week interval the paper resumed publication under Sem's name.

5.5 Conclusion. In attempting to assess the significance of political cartooning in the latter years of the Sixth Reign, it is worth reconsidering the explanation of caricature which was cited at the beginning of this chapter. Among other things, the author asserted that caricature was an instrument for stripping the arrogant of their airs and a means of compelling the politically powerful to recognize that their actions were ultimately subject to the critical scrutiny of their compatriots at a lower level in society. At the same time, he noted that the caricaturist's flagrant display of irreverence for authority was contributing to a broader 'national' project as well, by liberating the Thai from their 'self-imposed slavery' to a ruling elite.

That cartooning and caricature were successfully used in support a broader nationalist critique of the dynastic state is amply attested to by the graphics included in this chapter. Through the medium of the cartoon, the court and its policies were rendered ludicrous and exposed to a further dose of public ridicule. Moreover, by tampering with the iconography of the dynasty and depicting the king and his ministers as sub-human beings, the more talented graphic artists of the period were able to invert authority's representation of itself – to demonstrate, in effect, that the dynasty was *not* the ideological center of an emergent Thai nation but rather an impediment to the nation's advance. Yet while the cartoonist was clearly an agent in the process of disseminating a critical nationalist discourse, the medium of cartooning was largely a product of the times. As was noted at the opening of this chapter, the advent of cartooning in Siam and its emergence as popular form of political communication was predicated upon a growing disaffection for dynastic authority in society at large.

Before concluding this chapter, it is worth briefly mentioning an additional point as well. In the preceding pages, I have examined a selection of graphic editorials which

³³ See *Phim thai*, 3 September 1925, 'nangsuphim kap mahachon' (The Press and the Public)

³⁴ *Kro lek*, 22 November 1925. The editor remarked that "*hia* Number Two" and "*hia* Number Three" were "very hot over the matter ... sending people to demand that the trade be immediately brought to an end."

appeared in two of the more commercially-successful newspapers of the late Sixth Reign – *Bangkok kanmuang* and *Kro lek*. As cartooning and caricature were regularly featured in several other publications of the period, this discussion could easily have been expanded. Remarkably, however, none of the cartoons presented in this section have been discussed before. Indeed, despite the rich collection of available source materials, almost nothing at all has been written on the early history of Siamese cartooning and the work of only one 'cartoonist' of the period – Vajiravudh – has been republished in full.³⁵

³⁵ A number of his crude drawings and caricatures can be found in Vella's 1978 history of the reign. Moreover, *Dusit samit* has recently been republished in its entirety.

VI

A Movement for Popular Sovereignty: 1925-1927

The movements of opinion in this country give a sure sign that the days of Autocratic Rulership are numbered. The position of the King must be made more secure if this dynasty is going to last. Some sort of GUARANTEE must be found against an unwise King.¹

6.1 Introduction. With the change of reigns, the new king Prajadhipok and his ministers took a number of steps to restore 'public' confidence in the dynasty. Shortly after coming to the throne, Prajadhipok reduced the authority of his office by creating a Supreme Council (*aphirathamontri sapha*) of princes, an 'advisory' body which was given the task of assisting the monarch in governing the kingdom.² Moreover, a policy of strict economy in government expenditures was adopted as well, with cuts being made in the budgets of virtually every ministry and some ten thousand officials being released from government service.³ Finally, the king and his ministers considered the possibility of modifying the kingdom's political administration through tax reform, the creation of an independent civil service commission, and the formation of representative institutions at the local and national levels of government.⁴

The primary impetus for this reform process was provided by the period press. With the death of Vajiravudh, the independent journalist's claim to be representing the interests of 'the people' was seemingly no longer at issue. In contrast to his predecessor, Prajadhipok early on spoke of the critical press as though it were simply a

¹ Prajadhipok, 23 July 1926, cited in Sinlapachai: 1987, 105.

² The move effectively transformed the absolute monarchy into an oligarchy. Although the Supreme Council was ostensibly an advisory body, Prajadhipok consistently deferred to the wishes of his more experienced half-brothers and uncles, all of whom were senior to the monarch in age. Decisions within the council were reached through discussions in which the views of all the members were taken into consideration and when a general consensus as to a given course of action could not be reached, the matter was allowed to lapse from immediate consideration. Thus, in early 1926, when the council proved incapable of deciding upon a draft law clarifying the terms of its own operation, the matter was shelved for the duration of the reign, despite the fact that the king considered such a law to be important. See Suwadi: 1976, 83-87; Batson: 1983, 151.

³ Batson: 1983, 34; Wyatt: 1984, 235-236.

⁴ Discussions ultimately resulted in the appointment of a forty-member Privy Council in 1927 and the creation of a Civil Service Commission in 1929. A number of other plans including the introduction of an income tax, the creation of elected municipal councils, the promulgation of a constitution, and the formation of a partially-elected national assembly were also discussed but never enacted.

manifestation of 'public opinion' – not its cause but rather its consequence.⁵ Moreover, within the confines of his court, a number of individuals were seemingly prepared to accept that critical journalists were nothing more than what they had all along claimed to be: individuals who "wrote on politics because people were interested in it" and took up criticism "because people liked it."⁶ Thus, during the course of the reign, the king and his ministers not only paid close attention to press opinion – summarizing viewpoints, cataloguing clippings, and all the while exchanging commentary among themselves as to which essays warranted governmental action and which governmental sanction – but court speculation as to the desires and likely responses of 'the public' was almost invariably phrased in terms of "writings that had appeared or could be expected to appear in the Bangkok press."⁷

This is not to say that journalists of the period were at liberty to write as they pleased, however. Barely a month into the reign, a press division (*kong nangsu'phim*) was established in the Police Department to keep the capital's Lord Prefect abreast of "all news of a false or unpleasant nature."⁸ Such items as were brought to his attention were then passed on to the Minister of Interior, who had the responsibility for determining, on his own initiative or in consultation with the king, how such matters were to be addressed – through a clarification in the subsidized press, a verbal or written warning to the offending editor, or in certain instances through investigations, legal proceedings, and closures.⁹ Nine newspapermen were jailed on libel charges in early January of 1926, the entire Bangkok press corps was admonished by the king to

⁵ In mid-1926, Prajadhipok noted that 'in olden days, the actions of the king were hardly ever questioned. It would not have been safe to do so ... but things began to change with the new order of things ... towards the end of [Chulalongkorn's] reign, there was a young party which began to criticize the king in many ways, but not openly. In the reign which has just ended, things got much worse ... every official is more or less suspected of embezzlement or nepotism ... the court was heartily detested and on the verge of being ridiculed. The birth of a free press aggravated matters still more.' See Sinlapachai: 1987, 105.

⁶ *Kasem rat*, 25 December 1925, 'nuai nangsu'phim' (The Newspaper).

⁷ See Batson: 1983, 16. Although most ministries kept separate clipping archives, the largest was maintained by the Ministry of Interior – some forty-six boxes of material in all. In addition, Prajadhipok and his ministers apparently made a point of reading all of the principal newspapers in the capital. In 1931, for example, the king's subscription list included *Phim thai*, *Si krung*, *Bangkok kanmuang*, *Lak muang*, *Thai thae*, *Ratchakitchanubeksa*, the *Sunday Daily Mail*, the *Monday Daily Mail*, the *Bangkok Daily Mail*, the *Siam Observer* and the *Bangkok Times*. Published essays of the period were frequently discussed in cabinet meetings and often used as grounds for initiating official investigations as well. See NA, R7, *mahathai* 26, *nangsu'phim*. In particular, see *mahathai* 26.2/1-12, *nangsu'phim sopsuan khao* (Newspaper: Investigations of News); and 26.1/1-14, *banthuk nangsu'phim raiwan sanu jaokhun samhuha* (A Record of Daily Newspapers Submitted to the Lord Prefect). Regarding the king's subscription list, see R7 *ratchalekhathikan*, 19/8, *ruang nangsu'phim thi ok nai muang thai lae ngoen kha nangsu'phim* (Thai Newspapers and Subsidies).

⁸ See NA, R7, *mahathai*, 26/4, *nangsu'phim* (The Press).

⁹ Government scrutiny of the press extended to advertisements as well. In 1929, for example, then Minister of Interior Boriphat ordered that the editor of *Thai num* be 'verbally warned' for the wording employed in an advertisement for a gonorrhea cure, a passage in which an old man accused his young wife of "playing around" behind his back. See NA, R7, *mahathai*, 26.1/1, *nangsu'phim banthoek* (Press Record).

refrain from publishing "any criticism of a personal nature" a few weeks thereafter, and plans for a more stringent press law were already being discussed by the end of the year – a development which eventually came to pass in September of 1927.¹⁰

Throughout the period, however, the kingdom's ruling class remained at the center of an evolving nationalist critique. Indeed, as will be discussed below, not only was the institution of absolute monarchy increasingly represented as an impediment to the national advance but there were widespread calls for the promulgation of a constitution and the establishment a Siamese parliament.

6.2 Nationalist Criticism in the Early Years of the Reign.

A cleansing rain merely spreads the pig shit around.¹¹

For a brief interval in late 1925, press criticism of the court yielded to praise. Early on, Prajadhipok's apparent willingness to reduce the authority of the monarchy for the sake of good government generated speculation that a host of additional reforms were in the offing. Rumors spread through the capital that the Supreme Council was but a preliminary step in the formation of a bicameral legislature – a 'House of Lords' which would shortly be followed by the creation of an elected commoner assembly.¹² Moreover, as the new king and his ministers undertook to address the government's budgetary problems, they were widely praised for their fiscal responsibility as well.¹³

Within the space of a few months, however, this early enthusiasm for the new administration had already begun to wane and there were signs of growing scepticism in the capital that the Seventh Reign was likely to be any different from the Sixth. In February, there was the writer who asserted that "it just wasn't true" that each successive monarch led the kingdom further down the path of prosperity "for with some reigns, the economy has deteriorated and with others, it has been left to stagnate."¹⁴ Similarly, in March, another individual sarcastically observed that the

¹⁰ See NA, R7, *mahathai* 26/1 *nangsu'phim sopsuan khana* (Investigations of Printing Presses); 26/2 *nangsu'phim prachum bannathikan* (Meeting With Editors); 26/4 *nangsu'phim* (The Press); and 26/8 *nangsu'phim* (The Press). In addition, the court appears to have made behind-the-scenes financial arrangements with several newspapers as well. In January of 1926, Prajadhipok's father-in-law Prince Sawat drew 80,000 baht from the Privy Purse in order to 'arrange things' with several unnamed publications. The money was unrelated to press subsidies, then running at roughly forty thousand baht a year. Nor did it have anything to do with Sawat's subsequent purchase of the *Bangkok Daily Mail* from *jao phraya* Ram Rakhop in 1927. See NA, R7, *ratchalekhathikan*, 19/2, *nangsu'phim* (The Press).

¹¹ *Kro phet*, 30 June 1926, 'khwaiprasong khong ratchakan kap bukkhon' (The Aims of Governments and Private Individuals).

¹² See Suwadi: 1976, 104; and Sinlapachai: 1987, 110. In addition, see *Pakka thai*, 25 and 29 December 1925, 'nana kharom' (Diverse Views); and 18 and 19 January 1926, 'rathasapha kap ratsadon' (An Assembly and the People).

¹³ *Kro lek*, 4 January 1926, 'phon an koet jak kantang ong aphirathamontri sapha' (The Benefits Accruing from the Formation of the Supreme Council).

¹⁴ *Kro phet*, 7 February 1926.

politically powerful seemed far more interested in finding lesser wives than in "keeping promises" and "pursuing reform."¹⁵ And in April, a third described the early initiatives of the reign as a predictable bit of "administrative house-cleaning" undertaken by individuals who could be expected to

spend more time maintaining their power and position than they do in preserving the rights of the citizenry ... [for] people who enjoy power and are used to holding it are seldom receptive to any reduction in their authority, even if they intend to work for the public good at the outset.¹⁶

Finally, in May, disenchantment with the new reign was further reflected in another of Sem Sumanan's graphic satires for *Krolek* – a portrait of the dynastic state as a 'monkey king' perched precariously on a chariot hitched to a team of writhing *hia* (Figure 6.1).

In part, this renewed criticism of the government was due to the misapprehensions of capital journalists, at least some of whom appear to have felt betrayed when they realized that the Supreme Council was but "an institution for the king to consult and not a place for the people to address their concerns, as was previously understood."¹⁷ Still, press commentary of the period suggests that a number of other factors were at work as well, principal among them being the composition of the new cabinet (Figure 6.2). Drawing upon the authority of the Supreme Council, Prajadhipok retired most of his brother's ministers within the space of a few months, a move which in itself would presumably have been a welcome change.¹⁸ His decision to replace some seven individuals with members of the royal family was *not*, however, and from the outset there were cries that this convergence of princely authority and ministerial power was likely to generate "serious conflicts of interest at the heart of the government."¹⁹ Indeed, it appeared to many as if the senior princes of the realm were simply dividing the ministries up amongst themselves as "preserves for their families and protégés" and in short order, the court was being openly criticised for placing the interests of the royal family before those of the nation.²⁰

¹⁵ *Pakka thai*, 12 March 1926, 'kanphut kap kankratham' (Speaking and Acting). Another of Thawat Ritthidet's newspapers, *Pakka thai* (The Thai Pen) began publishing in December 1925.

¹⁶ *Pakka thai*, 9 April 1926, 'withikan pokkhrong ru kanplianplaeng khong rathaban' (Methods of Government or the Government and Change).

¹⁷ *Pakka thai*, 19 January 1926.

¹⁸ Suwadi: 1976, 91-92; Wyatt: 1984, 236.

¹⁹ For example, see *Kro phet*, 28 February 1926, 'saphap nai ratchakan prathet rao' (The Condition of Government Service in Our Country). The writer expressed particular concern over the appointment of Prince Boriphat to head the Ministry of War on the grounds that the prince would be unable to carry out his duties on the Supreme Council while holding a position in the cabinet.

²⁰ See Great Britain, PRO, FO 2874/2874/40, Waterlow to Chamberlain, Annual Report for 1926. The observation was also reiterated by Andrew Freeman, an American journalist whose



Figure 6.1: *Kro lek*, 9 May 1926, 'A dream of Kaen Phet'.

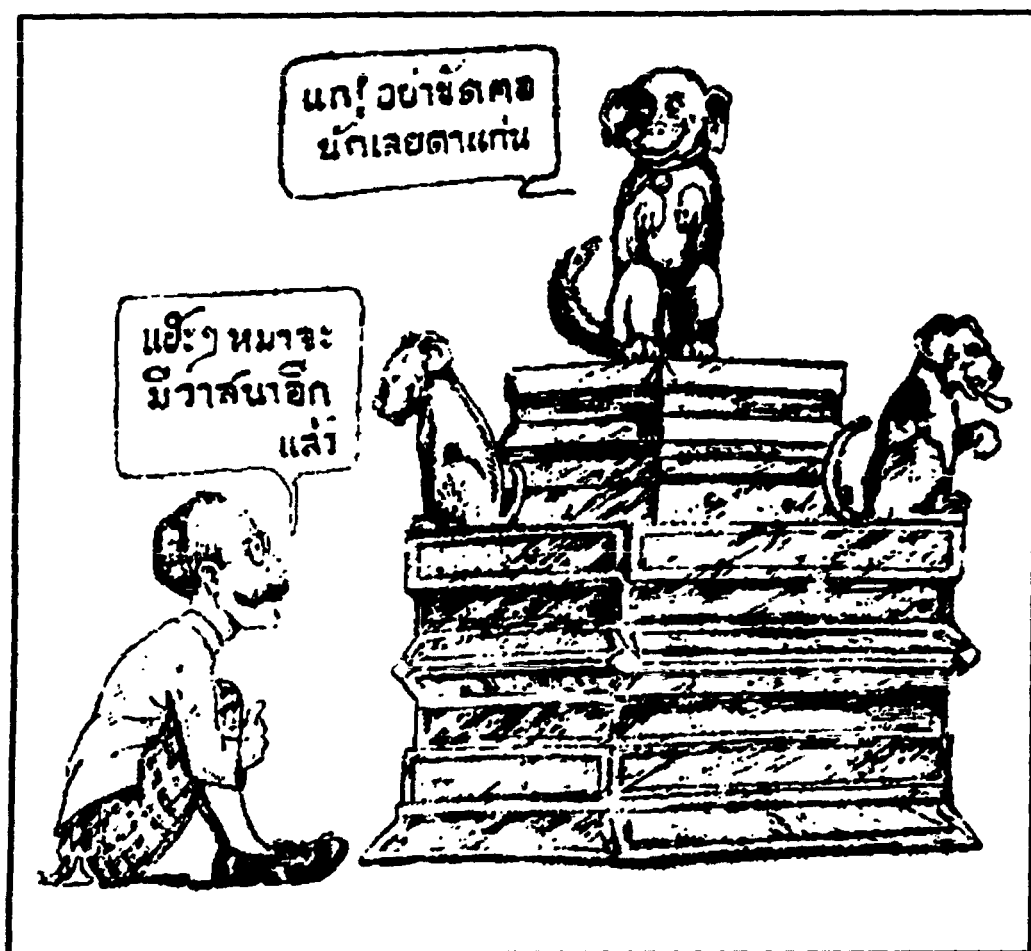


Figure 6.2: *Kro lek*, 25 April 1926, Kaen Phet's commentary on the new cabinet. Seated on the left, he is remarking that dogs seem to have had all the luck again. The 'top dog', meanwhile, is admonishing him not to complain too much.

In addition, the court's decision to retain Vajiravudh's Minister of Agriculture *jao phraya* Phonlathep (Chaloem Komarakhun na Nakhon) proved exceedingly controversial as well. Throughout the period, there were widespread allegations that Phonlathep had repeatedly abused the powers of his office to pursue a number of questionable land and timber transactions, while doing very little to promote the kingdom's agriculture.²¹ Indeed, one wit of the period even went so far as to suggest that the minister had "been able to effect an overall regress in its development."²² Thus, when he was permitted to retain control of what many people were coming to perceive as "the country's single most important ministry", there was an indignant outcry from the press.²³ As noted by one writer in August of 1926, Phonlathep ought to have been driven from office by 'embarrassment alone' but in so much as he wasn't, the Supreme Council should have undertaken the task:

for it isn't as if the minister's work record is without blemishes; rather, its numerous blotches and stains exude an odor far more pungent than fish in the marketplace ever could.²⁴

years of work in Siam as the editor of the *Bangkok Daily Mail* led him to write of the Seventh Reign court in generally sympathetic terms. Nonetheless, he also noted that 'princes, who frequently had several wives ... found it necessary to care for scores of dependents, and, as a convenient form of patronage, they provided employment in various government departments where they had influence. Their favorites were quickly promoted and given one or another of the five titles of nobility ...' (A. Freeman, 'His Majesty King Prajadhipok of Siam', *Asia*, May 1931, 278). For similar remarks in the period press, see *Pakka thai*, 10 July 1926; *Sayam riwiv*, 29 August 1926; *Bangkok kanmuang*, 1 March 1927, 'tamnaeng ratchakan' (Governmental Positions), in which the writer suggested that the royal family was 'flourishing' at the expense of the kingdom, which 'gained little from the elevation of one group over another'; and *Thai num*, 20 February 1929, in which a writer spoke of the 'grossly mistaken assumption that by attending to the interests of the king and his royal relatives alone the kingdom could somehow be led to prosperity'.

- 21 See *Wayamo*, 13 August 1920; *Bangkok kanmuang*, 4 March 1924, 'ratsadon sayam kho khwam yutthitham jaokha!' (The Siamese People Demand Justice!), and 21 November 1924, 'riarai bipkhamap bankhap kep ngoen!' (Soliciting Collections, Pressuring People, and Gathering Money!), *Kro lek*, 12 and 19 July 1925, 'kansonthana ruang Sir Cook' (Speaking of Sir Cook); *Pakka thai*, 3 March 1926; *Thong thai*, 10 August 1926, 'jao phraya phonlathep kap phraya chonlamak khwan tun ru yang' (Hasn't the Time Come for the Retrenchment of *jao phraya* Phonlathep and *phraya* Chonlamak?); and 17 August 1926, 'ratsami jao phraya phonlathep' (The Radiance of *jao phraya* Phonlathep); *Sayam riwiv*, 5 September 1926, 'ru noi ploi ramkhan' (When you learn a bit about it, you'll be irritated as well). Among other things, the minister was accused of engaging in irregular logging enterprises in the north, of involvement in questionable land transactions in the south, of misappropriating government property, of using ministerial personnel in his home as servants, of colluding with officials in the Department of Irrigation to defraud the government, of forcing land sales in rural areas, and of accepting bribes through his wife. In addition, during the early months of the Seventh Reign, the editor of *Pakka thai* asserted that Phonlathep's 'sole contribution' to the development of the kingdom's agriculture during the course of a three-year tenure in office was the hiring of an expensive foreign 'expert' to engage in fish propagation, an unnecessary project which was said to have been openly ridiculed by the foreigner in question, Hugh M. Smith, as well. See *Pakka thai*, 9, 12, and 26 January 1926.
- 22 *Thong thai*, 10 August 1926, 'jao phraya phonlathep kap phraya chonlamak khwan tun ru yang' (Isn't it Time to Retrench *jao phraya* Phonlathep and *phraya* Chonlamak?).
- 23 See *Pakka thai*, 30 December 1925; and *Thong thai*, 17 August 1926, 'rasami jao phraya phonlathep' (The Radiance of *jao phraya* Phonlathep).
- 24 *Thong thai*, 10 August 1926, 'jao phraya phonlathep kap phraya chonlamak khwan tun ru yang' (Isn't it Time to Retrench *jao phraya* Phonlathep and *phraya* Chonlamak?).

Despite such criticism, Phonlathep was allowed to retain control of the Ministry of Agriculture until 1931, when his involvement in a major land scandal finally resulted in his 'retirement'.²⁵

Equally controversial was the court's initial retention of Minister of Interior Yomarat, the only other non-royal member of Vajiravudh's cabinet to remain in the government after January. From late December onward, the press was filled with allegations that he and his son had conspired to defraud the government of vast sums of money over a period of years.²⁶ Moreover, when the minister responded by bringing libel proceedings against five Bangkok newspapers, an additional wave of

²⁵ At the start of the Seventh Reign, foreign mining operations in the vicinity of Phuket were purchasing land from local farmers at a price ranging from two hundred to one thousand baht per *rai*. Subsequently, however, the Ministry of Agriculture ordered that all such purchases be arranged through a private firm – a monopoly enterprise which began pressuring area farmers to sell their land at the rate of six to seven baht a *rai*. When most were unwilling to sell, *jao phraya* Phonlathep personally negotiated a slightly better sale price for area farmers while informing them that the ministry had the legal wherewithal to force land sales. From this time forward, farmers who refused to sell were simply evicted from their property, the purchase price of their land being pocketed by ministry officials. The matter came to light in late 1930, when several individuals initiated legal proceedings against the minister in an effort to recover some 14,554 baht from the Ministry of Agriculture and petitioned the king for assistance. Although the Ministry of Agriculture made no response to the suit, *jao phraya* Phonlathep was replaced in office by *jao phraya* Pichaiyat (Dan Bunnak) several months thereafter. For details of the scandal, see *Num sayam*, 9 October 1931, 'thai ophayop pai yu dindaen angkrit makmai' (Many Thai Now Emigrating to British Territory) in which the writer remarked upon the number of farmers who were fleeing the kingdom for British Malaya as a result of the incident; and 25 November 1931 'ratsadon fong senabodi thi san ha wa rap ngoen laeo mai jai' (Individuals Bring Charges Against Minister for Having Failed to Make Payments) and 26 November 1931, 'ratsadon hai senabodi jamloe yun khamhaikan' (Individuals Call for Minister-Defendant to Submit Deposition).

²⁶ See *Pakka thai*, 28 December 1925, 18 and 28 January 1926, 6 February 1926; *Lak muang*, 4 January 1926; *Khai phet* 7 January 1926; *Kro lek*, 21 and 28 March 1926, *Kro phet*, 18 April 1926, 'phraya sukhum naiphinit la ok laeo khwan truat banchi kanfaifa samsen sia sak khrao ru yang' (Now that *phraya* Sukhum Naiphinit has finally retired, isn't it about time that the books at Samsen Electric are checked?); and *Si krung*, 25 June 1927. Among other things, Yomarat was accused of having misappropriated crown monies set aside for the construction of Lumpini Park; of repeatedly defrauding the government through a series of major construction projects including the Rama VI Railroad Bridge and the Anan Palace; and of conspiring with his son *phraya* Sukhum Naiphinit to embezzle money from the government-owned Samsen Electric Company. His personal business interests included: the country's only cement plant – Siam Cement Company of which he was the founder and principal shareholder; the capital's principal brickyard – the Golden Lotus Brickworks which was managed by his son; and one of the country's principal coal mines – the Sinla Coal Mining Company which was also under his son's management. At the same time, in his role as Minister of the Interior, he oversaw the bidding on government construction projects throughout the kingdom, not only approving the purchase of construction materials but approving the bids of Chinese contract labor organizers (and here again there were allegations that the Ministry of Interior continued to use Chinese over Thai labor on government construction projects because it was personally profitable to the Minister). Finally, it should be noted that it was during Yomarat's tenure in office that the Ministry of the Capital was placed under the Ministry of Interior, making Yomarat the immediate superior of police Special Force Commander *phraya* Athikon Prakat during the early 1920's – the period in which the Special Force was developing a certain notoriety for being involved in the Bangkok prostitution and gambling trades. For a brief account of Yomarat's business activities during the period, see Laksami Rattasamphan, Jomphon *jao phraya* surasakmontri choem saeng-xuto kap kandamnoen thurakit khong than rawang 2428-2474 [Field Marshal *jao phraya* Surasakmontri (Choem Saeng-Xuto) and His Business Enterprise: 1885-1931], Chulalongkorn University MA Thesis, 1980, 100-101.

criticism arose as a result of the treatment received by the defendants in the case, all of whom were refused bail and held incommunicado until the day of their preliminary hearing.²⁷ The courtroom was "packed" with people, the proceedings "the principal gossip on the streets" and for much of January, the trial was depicted in the press as a symbolic conflict between 'oppressive' authority and patriotic journalists who had the best interests of the Thai nation at heart.²⁸ The police were accused of acting in a "vengeful" and "exceedingly ugly" manner, the treatment of the defendants was decried as "barbaric" and "unprecedentedly harsh", and the government was repeatedly called upon to devise "some other basis for the kingdom's development besides private power and personal gain."²⁹ Some of the most strident criticism came from one of the newspapers involved in the case, however. In an essay on the "human craving for justice", for example, the editor of *Pakka thai* asserted that he and his staff were

not rebels for we have neither incited a riot nor attempted to damage the interests of our country. Rather, we are true Thai who are proud of the nation, religion, and king. Yet while we have certainly not been scheming to create division amongst the rulers of our country, we *do* hate those members of the nobility who use their power unjustly, cheating the people and the king with their devilish policies ... Consider for a moment whether the behavior of our country's police force has been appropriate and respectable! ... and as for *jao phraya* Yomarat's decision to prohibit newspapers from publishing the same types of material as they did in the past, it is being said that his motive is simply to protect himself ... If he is allowed to succeed, Siam will slowly fill up with so many vile germs that no doctor will be able to effect a cure. Admittedly, our newspaper is basically different from *Phim thai* for we don't engage in sycophancy and they don't go to jail. But to forbid the untamed press from operating in Siam will only be to the advantage of such men as Yomarat. Still, if the only way we can demonstrate our loyalty to the nation is by going to jail, then we'll go, and as this one is arrested, that one will remain to carry on the work until such a time as all of the corrupt nobles, or all of our staff members, have been completely eliminated.³⁰

27 Initially, charges were filed against the owners and editors of *Pakka thai*, *Lak muang* and *Khui phet*. A few days thereafter, additional charges were brought against *Saman samakkhi* and *Saman maitri*. In all, some nine individuals were arrested. For a discussion of the various cases, see *Sayam ratsadon* of 15, 18, and 19 January 1926, *Sara nakhon* of 16, 21 and 25 January 1926, *Bangkok kanmuang*, 20 January 1926, and *Pakka thai* 18-21 January 1926. Subsequently, *phraya* Athikon Prakat apologized to one of the defendants while admitting that he was acting on the explicit instructions of the Minister of Interior. *Pakka thai*, 18 and 26 January 1926.

28 See *Sara nakhon*, 16 January 1926, 'sanluang hai khwamyutitham nai ruang jao phraya yomarat kac nangs'u'phim' (The Court Grants Justice in the Yomarat's Case Against the Press) and *Bangkok kanmuang*, 20 January 1926.

29 *Sara nakhon*, 16 January 1926; *Bangkok kanmuang*, 20 January 1926. In addition, see *Sayam ratsadon*, 18 January 1926.

30 *Pakka thai*, 20 and 23 January 1923, 'nana kharom' (Diverse Views). In this latter essay, the editor humorously observed that 'if someone insults *jao phraya* Yomarat, it's seen as being

As a result of such commentary, the owners and editors of the capital's principal newspapers were called to a meeting in late January at the behest of the king, admonished to remember that slanderous remarks and satirical poems were a source of "national disunity", and ordered to make every effort to "be polite" in the future.³¹ At the same time, Yomarat was apparently pressured into dropping charges against the nine defendants and the incident may well have been a factor in his decision to 'retire' from office in early March.³²

Apart from the composition of the new cabinet, the manner in which Prajadhipok and his ministers undertook to deal with the budget deficit gave rise to considerable criticism during the period as well. While the need for fiscal economy was generally recognized, the austerity measures adopted by the court were frequently cited as proof of the previous reign's financial excesses. The Ministry of Finance was openly taken to task for having allowed Vajiravudh and his courtiers to "waste money for fifteen years" and "the pretty state of the economy" was attributed to the court's "habit of borrowing money from the foreigners in order to purchase their jewelry."³³ Moreover, in short order criticism was also being voiced over the government's policy of retrenchment. Staff cuts *per se* were not at issue, for the idea held sufficient public appeal to foster a new weekly publication – the *Retrenchment (Dunlayaphap)*. The

somehow worse than cheating people out of their money. It's very irritating when you think about it. Perhaps Yomarat will put everyone like us in jail, leaving those on the other side free to walk the streets and swindle each other. Life would be so easy for them then. Each day when they wake up, they could say to themselves – Ah! Now who shall I swindle today?"

³¹ See *Kro lek*, 25 January 1926, 'prachum bannathikan' (Editors' Meeting); and *Sara nakhon*, 25 January 1926. While the king was praised for his concern, several writers of the period took umbrage at his remarks. In an essay of 27 January, for example, the editor of *Pakka thai* asserted that "in truth, newspapers really ought to assist the king in noticing things. Those of us who publish newspapers have done so to help the nation, not to get thrown in jail. ... As a group, however, most of us newspapermen believe that Siam belongs to the Thai people. Moreover, we want our country to be strong and secure, and feel that this can only come to pass when we Thai stop oppressing our fellows. Our rulers must not take advantage of others for the sake of their personal advantage or for the sake of their relatives or personal followings. Instead, they must provide justice to all of the country's citizens. And when corrupt activities of certain officials government go unnoticed and unstopped by the government, and they continue to be elevated in rank and position, news of their wrongdoing ought to be printed."

³² Apparently, the court was equally interested in seeing Yomarat retire during the period. The minister's rise to prominence in the Sixth Reign was in some measure predicated upon the fall of his previous patron, Prince Damrong – an individual who was forced to leave the ministry in 1915 as a result of his deteriorating relationship with King Vajiravudh. Thus, with Damrong's return to the government at the start of the Seventh Reign, Yomarat was under considerable pressure to step down – pressure which he initially resisted. In February, the press was filled with rumors of his effort to negotiate a marriage between one of his daughters and Prajadhipok's brother-in-law. Moreover, in early March he also arranged for some 500 rickshaw drivers to surround Damrong's palace in protest at his retirement. See *Pakka thai*, 5 and 6 February 1926; 12 March 1926.

³³ See *Pakka thai*, 16, 17 and 26 April 1926, 'thok banha kanngoen' (Arguing On Financial Problems); *Kro lek*, 4 January 1926; *Thong thai*, 25 May 1926, 'dunlayaphap pen khun ru thot: than aphirathamontri mai fang siang khrai' (Is Retrenchment a Benefit or a Blight: The Supreme Councillors Aren't Listening to Anyone) and *Pakka thai*, 16 October 1926. In this latter article, the author noted that the government had been "wasting tax revenues for fifteen years" no less than four times, concluding with the remark "do you get what I'm driving at?"

administration was widely believed to have been "packed with the incompetent clients and relations" of outgoing ministers and Vajiravudh was said to have "spent years demonstrating his sense of equality by making everyone a noble" – a novel approach which resulted in "a rather unfortunate lowering of standards."³⁴ Thus, the purge of some ten thousand officials was considered to be "a necessary step in restoring the heart of ten million to good health", and even early critics of the plan professed their willingness to withhold final judgement until "later, when they have proven themselves incapable of doing anything else of benefit for the nation."³⁵ Support for the policy was lost, however, when the Supreme Council failed to set up an impartial body to oversee its implementation. Indeed, the court apparently did not even bother to draw up guidelines, simply leaving the matter of who should be dropped from government payrolls to the discretion of department heads and section chiefs further down the bureaucratic chain – individuals who, in lieu of a comprehensive civil service law or board of appeals, were at liberty to reduce their staffs in any way they saw fit.³⁶

Within the factionalized administrative hierarchy of the absolute monarchy, the results were not entirely unpredictable, and by early 1926 the press was filled with allegations that the powerful men of the realm were using retrenchment as an excuse to root out the clients of their opponents and further 'entrench' their personal followings.³⁷ One writer even went so far as to suggest that it was not the government's intention to *dunlayaphap* at all, but rather to *dunlayaphuak* – a bit of word-play loosely translated as "balance personal factions, not budget transactions."³⁸ As the politically influential were believed to be "far too scared of each other" to engage in mutual recriminations and blood-letting and many of their subordinates were reportedly being reinstated in other branches of the government, it appeared to many as if the only ones being released from government service were "the truly powerless ... the men who used to do all the work" (See Figures 6.3 & 6.4). Conversely, the individuals who remained in the governmental hierarchy were decried as "the very ones who ought to have been given the sack ... traitors of the nation" (*phuak khai chat*) who did little more than "dip their hands into the public till" and "enter into

³⁴ *Kro lek*, 11 April 1926, 'tat mai ya wai no' (When You Cut Down Trees, Don't Leave the Stumps); and *Thong thai*, 27 July 1927.

³⁵ *Thong thai*, 15 June 1926, 'phon haeng kandunlayaphap' (The Outcome of Retrenchment); and 25 May 1926, 'dulayaphap pen khun ru thot: than aphirathamontri mai fang siang khrai' (Is Retrenchment a Benefit or a Blight: The Supreme Councillors Aren't Listening to Anyone).

³⁶ See *Sayam riwiv*, 22 August 1926, 'khana aphirathamontri thoe lak arai nai ruang luakkat' (What Principles Does the Supreme Council Adhere to in Removing People from Office?).

³⁷ See *Pakka thai*, 19 April 1926; and *Kro lek*, 9 May 1926.

³⁸ *Krophet*, 30 June 1926, 'dunlayaphap ru dunlayaphuakkan nae pho oi' (Precisely What Are They Up To; Balancing the Budget or Balancing Factions?).

private business arrangements with foreigners."³⁹ As a result, the original aim of retrenchment was quickly forgotten and by March, writers were openly speaking of the period as

a tragic age, and *not* because of the passing of the late king but rather because of the large number of competent individuals being released from government service ... concerned for their futures, concerned that they will be unable to support their families ... individuals without any understanding of agriculture and commerce ... and without the financial wherewithal to engage in private enterprise.⁴⁰

Increasingly, journalists took the matter of retrenchment into their own hands as well, putting forward a series of ever-more specific recommendations on the matter of who should be removed from government employ. One suggested that the police force and the army officer corps were both in dire need of retrenching.⁴¹ Similarly, another turned to the Ministry of Education, pointing out that the head of the Textbook Division "which had failed to produce any texts", an administrative official at Wat Thepsirin "who makes four-hundred baht a month for doing nothing at all", the foreign advisor to the ministry "who makes two thousand baht a month for drafting an annual report of doubtful accuracy" and the head of the Special Division "who spends his day handling personal matters and is hated by the entire staff" could all be removed to good effect.⁴² And a third boldly asserted that the standing Minister of Finance, the Minister of Agriculture, the Assistant-Minister of Education, the Chief of Police, and the *monthon* governors of Ayuthaya, Nakhon Sawan, Nakhon Rachasima, Pitsanulok, and Chantaburi were all individuals of "proven incompetence" who warranted removal as well.⁴³

Confidence in the new administration was further eroded by the court's half-hearted effort to investigate the financial scandals of the previous administration. When it was

³⁹ *Sayam ratsadon*, 25 March 1926; *Pakka thai*, 15 March, 6 and 19 April 1926; *Kro phet*, 11 April and 30 June 1926. In addition, see *Sayam riwiv*, 26 December 1926, which featured the following poem:

Those with good eyes
have been retired by the thousands.
The only ones left
are the blind and the deaf
who scold with loud voices.

⁴⁰ *Kro phet*, 28 March 1926, 'sahai ruam chat chan khang kap chan tam', (Fellow Nationals of the Middle and Lower Classes); *Pakka thai*, 28 May 1926, 'nana kharom' (Diverse Views); and *Thong thai*, 7 September 1926, 'khwanakok khong kharatchakan thuk wan ni' (The Heavy Hearts of Government Officials at Present).

⁴¹ *Pakka thai*, 7 May 1926.

⁴² *Pakka thai*, 19 April 1926. The author was referring to *phraya* Phakdi Narabet, *phraya* Charan Chuwanathep, Mr. W. E. Johnson, and *phraya* Worawit Phisan respectively.

⁴³ *Sayam riwiv*, 22 August 1926, 'khana ong aphirathamonti thoe lak arai nai ruang luakkat' (What Principles Does the Supreme Council Adhere to in Deselection?). In addition, see *Pakka thai*, 7 May 1926, 'achip khong kharatchakan' (The Occupation of Government Officials) and *Khro phet*, 5 July 1926, 'mom jao Prasopprasong'.



Figure 6.3 *Kro lek*, 18 April 1926, Entitled "Let's not have it be like this, beloved comrades!", the above drawing is a caricature of King Prajadhipok cradling his relatives and sycophants while giving the boot to the kingdom's honest, hard-working, straight-talking officials.



ขาหมูก็เคยกิน แต่ยังสูลีบตีนไม่ได้

Figure 6.4: *Sayam riwiw*, 25 September 1927, a commentary on sycophancy and patronage in the Seventh Reign political administration. The drawing is captioned: "We've had ham hocks before but licking these feet is best of all!"

announced in January of 1926 that a royal commission had been formed to investigate state finances, the press was filled with praise.⁴⁴ Here again, however, the investigations came to be viewed in much the same light as the government's retrenchment policy – yet another episode in which the lesser officials of the realm were "compelled to suffer for the shortcomings of their superiors."⁴⁵ Although the commission uncovered significant discrepancies in the accounts of the Ministry of the Palace, the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Marine, the Department of Irrigation, the government-owned Samsen Electric Company, the Bangkok Water Works, the Department of Railroads, the Post and Telegraph, and even the Temple of the Emerald Buddha, the court seemed unwilling to press charges against any but a string of accountants and lesser officials – individuals who would in all likelihood have found it difficult if not impossible to defraud the government on their own initiatives.⁴⁶ The committee's audit of the Ministry of Interior was a case in point. By mid-1926, it had been determined that some 179,036.25 baht was missing from ministry accounts and charges were filed against a previous accountant in the Department of the Capital, *phra* Borirak Thani. During the trial, however, it came to light that *phra* Borirak had been pressured to 'lend' money to a number of his superiors, including the Minister of Interior, his deputy, the Lord Prefect of the Capital, and his registrar – all of whom had 'forgotten' to make repayments. Nonetheless, *phra* Borirak was ultimately held solely responsible for the missing funds (see Figure 6.5).⁴⁷

As a result, the new administration was increasingly perceived to be no more interested in curbing the activities of the kingdom's self-serving officials than the previous administration had been.⁴⁸ Indeed, by mid-1926, 'elite self-interest' and, by

⁴⁴ For example, see *Pakka thai* 11 January 1926 in which the writer praised the king's decision to appoint his father-in-law Prince Sawat to head the investigations. Noting that Sawat was 'not scared of anyone', he predicted that 'lots of *jao phraya*, *phraya*, *phra* and *luang* would shortly be finding their way into court'.

⁴⁵ For example, see *Pakka thai*, 22 February 1926, 'lak kankong' (The Principles of Thievery); *Thong thai*, 3 and 11 August 1926, 'o wa anitcha muang thai' (Oh Miserable Muang Thai); and *Si krung*, 4 October 1926, 'khwamrapphitchop' (Responsibility).

⁴⁶ *Sayam riwiv*, 5 September 1926, 'ru noi ploi ramkhan' (When You Understand a Bit about it, You'll be Irritated as Well); and *Pakka thai*, 'ngoen luang' (Royal Finances) 25 October 1926. By September, some nine individuals had either been convicted or were in the process of being tried on corruption charges: one *phraya* – an accountant from the Ministry of Justice who was able to flee the country for China and a number of officials of the *phra* and *khun* ranks.

⁴⁷ Those with outstanding 'loans' included *jao phraya* Yomarat, *phraya* Si Thammathirat, *phraya* Phetchaphani, and *phraya* Wichit Sarakhrai. When no charges were brought against the four, the editor of *Pakka thai* accused the government of "revealing the tail of the elephant" while keeping the rest of the animal hidden from view. *Pakka thai*, 19 and 25 October 1926, 'nana kharom' (Diverse Views).

⁴⁸ *Kro lek*, 11 April 1926, 'tat mai ya wai no' (When Cutting Trees Don't Leave the Stumps); *Thong thai*, 3 and 11 August 1926, 'o wa anitja muang thai' (To the Shame of Our Thai Homeland); *Pakka thai*, 9 October 1926, 'ratchakan mai ngai muan ratchakin' (Carrying Out Government Duties is More Difficult than Carrying Off Government Monies), and 25 October 1926, 'ngoen luang' (State Finance); *Si krung*, 28 October 1926, 'kharatchakan kap kankhakhai' (Officials and Trading Activity).

extension, the institution of absolute monarchy were again being openly decried as the principal impediments to the establishment of a just, equitable, and unified social order (Figures 6.6, 6.7, and 6.8).⁴⁹ Moreover, a growing number of writers chose to make the point by threatening the possibility of revolution from below. During the latter part of 1926, for example, the editorial staff of *Pakka thai* produced an ongoing series of essays on the Russian Revolution in an apparent effort to intimidate the court into considering the idea of political reform. In response to a *Phim thai* editorial on the evils of Bolshevism, one writer remarked that an ideology which was spreading through much of the civilized world "could not be all bad" while adding that people would only believe in such an ideology if they felt that it held the promise of greater justice and happiness than they were receiving under the prevailing political order.⁵⁰ Similarly, another expressed his inability to understand how an ideology premised upon the concept of 'equality' (*samoephak*), a concept which he and his friends believed to be inherently good, could be seen as "inherently evil" by any but self-serving members of the upper class, who mistakenly construed that they had "a right to step on the heads of their fellow nationals."⁵¹

Several of the more provocative essays in this vein were published under the penname "O" by a writer who subsequently identified himself as a lesser member of the royal family.⁵² In an effort to explain the origins of Bolshevism, he produced a lengthy history of Czarist Russia, usually ending each separate instalment with a humorous aside which served to emphasize that communism could easily spread in

⁴⁹ *Krophet*, 28 February 1926, 'saphap khong manut' (The Human Condition), 14 March 1926, 'thiap khwamramruai khong senabodi lae kharatchakan' (The Wealth of Ministers and Officials Compared), and 'kanmuang kap khwamhen' (Politics and Viewpoints); *Thong thai*, 6 July 1926, 'yutitham' (Justice), and 3, 11 August 1926, 'o wa anitja muang thai' (To the Shame of Our Thai Homeland); *Si krung*, 4 October 1926, 'khwamrapphitchop' (Responsibility) and 2 May 1927, 'phonlamuang kap saphap lae anakhot khong rao' (The Condition and Future of Our Citizenry); *Lak muang*, 27 November 1926, 'phuak rao thai dai rap khwamyutitham jak rathaban phiang rai?' (How Much Justice do We Thai Receive From the Government); *Thai num*, 24 February 1927, 'wicha kanmuang' (The Study of Politics); *Sayam riwiv*, 10 April 1927, 'phuachat ru phuakrapao' (For the Nation or For Their Wallets?); *Pakka thai*, 11 May 1926, 'lak kotmai wa dwei yutitham' (Justice as Embodied in the Law), 1 November 1926, 'nana kharom' (Diverse Views), 9 February 1927, 'nathi khong phupokkhong' (The Duties of Rulers); 11 February 1927, 'kharatchakan kap ratsadon' (Officials and the People); and 28 March 1927, 'saphap khong manut thammai joeng tangkannak' (Why Are the Circumstances of People So Different?).

⁵⁰ *Pakka thai*, 1 October 1926, 'sonthana kap warak' (Speaking with Warak). The essay was written in response to an editorial which appeared in *Phim thai* on 27 September 1926. In addition, see *Pakka thai*, 5 October 1926, 'yom hua tapu warak' (Setting the Head on Warak's Nail).

⁵¹ *Pakka thai*, 2 November 1926, 'sonthana kap nai nat' (Speaking with *nai* Nat). The essay was drafted in response to an article which appeared in *Kro lek* on 10 October 1926.

⁵² See *Pakka thai*, 19 October 1926, "O", 'saphap khong bonchewik' (The Condition of the Bolsheviks). The writer revealed himself to be *mom luang* Thanom after claiming that his 'Thainess' (*khwampenthai*) had been called into question by the authorities. In response he asserted that he was a not only a prince of the blood but "a real Thai from tip to toe who believes in Buddhism, etc."



Figure 6.5: *Sayam riwiw*, 8 August 1926, the methods employed by the committee charged with investigating royal finances.



Figure 6.6: *Sayam riwiw*, 15 August 1926, a commentary on corruption and national division. The elephant, a symbol of the throne and the nation, is stripped of its legs by four individuals, each of whom is heading in a separate direction.



Figure 6.7: *Sayam riw*, 9 January 1927, "Your mouths may love the nation but what do your hands love?", a commentary on 'false patriots' in the government's employ. While professing their love of the nation, the four individuals are shown snatching up bags of government revenue.



Figure 6.8: *Sayam riw*, 26 September 1926, a commentary on social hierarchy and national division entitled "Our Custom of Crawling". The foreigner on the left is inquiring whether the individuals crawling about on the floor with the dogs aren't also fellow members of the Thai nation. His host on the right is acknowledging that they are while attempting to justify their lowly status by adding that they have less money than he does.

Siam as well. On one occasion, for example, he claimed that he was compelled to stop writing because it was

time to pay the rent for our building, a piece of Privy Purse property on which the bloodthirsty landlord makes a 100% profit. It always makes me a little weak in the knees but then as soon as I think of our compassionate king, I recover.⁵³

In much the same vein, a second essay concluded with note that he was being threatened by a group of thugs who had been dispatched to his home by an enraged member of the nobility.⁵⁴ And in a third, he wrote that the kingdom's "patriarchs" had informed him of their disinterest in hearing about the history of Bolshevism, and added that they were nonetheless likely to be "confronted by the marching columns of O's" in the not-too-distant future.⁵⁵

6.3 *The Demand for a National Assembly*

There may come a time when the Siamese people will clamour for a parliament ... it would be of no avail to explain, even with the best of reasons, that a parliamentary government is not suited to the racial qualities of the Siamese! They will surely yell louder that they are being oppressed by a tyrannical ruling class, and there may be some trouble.⁵⁶

As press criticism of the government continued in the early months of the reign, Prajadhipok and his ministers began considering the possibility of modifying the kingdom's political administration in order to facilitate an eventual transition towards democratic rule. During the course of 1926, the court discussed the idea of creating some type of legislative assembly to assist with the drafting of new laws.⁵⁷ In early 1927, however, it was agreed that the task could be performed by the existing Privy Council, provided it was reorganized and reduced in size. Towards that end, a planning committee was formed in February and by June it had largely completed its work, putting forward a proposal for a forty-member council which would be appointed by the king to consider new legislation at his and the Supreme Council's behest.⁵⁸ At the same time, consideration was also given to the idea of forming elected councils at the local level of government.⁵⁹ In this latter case, however, the

⁵³ *Pakka thai*, 7 October 1926, "O", 'ruang bonchewik' (On the Bolsheviks).

⁵⁴ *Pakka thai*, 15 October 1926, "O", 'saphap khong bonchewik' (The Condition of the Bolsheviks).

⁵⁵ *Pakka thai*, 6 November 1926, "O", 'saphap khong bonchewik' (The Condition of the Bolsheviks). In addition see *Pakka thai*, 11, 15 and 26 October 1926 and *Sayam riwiv*, 7 November 1926, 'rao yakjon phro arai' (Why are We Getting Poorer?).

⁵⁶ Prajadhipok, June 1927, cited in Batson: 1974, 48.

⁵⁷ Batson: 1983, 133-134.

⁵⁸ Suwadi: 1976, 115-116.

⁵⁹ See Batson: 1974, 41; Suwadi: 1976, 136-137; and Sonthi: 1976, 1-3.

proposal met with considerable opposition and continued to be debated over the next six years.⁶⁰

In April of 1927 news of both plans was carried in the government-subsidized press, setting off a storm of speculation that the court was on the brink of forming a people's assembly.⁶¹ Despite an immediate clarification from the government, press commentators of the period continued to express enthusiastic support for the idea over the course of the next year, often emphasizing the multiple benefits which were likely to accrue to the nation as a result of democratic rule.⁶² Among other things, the formation of a Siamese parliament was heralded as the key to national unity, the means for ending the divisions which had arisen as a result of "some being elevated at the expense of others."⁶³ Denied the right to participate in the country's political affairs, the people of the kingdom were said to have developed the conviction that princes and nobles were "not a part of their group."⁶⁴ Moreover, this perception was held to have been further reinforced by the behavior of "rank-crazed" (*ba yot*) members of the upper class, who treated the commoners of the realm as "slaves" and "beasts of burden", while "ignoring their calls for justice and compassionate treatment."⁶⁵ With

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- ⁶⁰ The new Minister of Interior, the Prince of Lopburi, was immediately opposed to the idea and suggested that the matter be set aside for a time, after which a foreign advisor in the Land Registration Department, Mr. R. D. Craig, might help conduct a comparative study of systems of local government in neighbouring countries. The Craig Committee was subsequently formed in late 1927 at the behest of the king, its investigations continuing over the course of the next several years. Its final report was not altogether optimistic, however, and the plan continued to be opposed by key members of the Seventh Reign administration until the time of the monarchy's overthrow in 1932. See Great Britain, PRO, FO, F 1496/1496/40, Waterlow to Chamberlain, Annual Report for 1927; and Sonthi: 1976, 7.
- ⁶¹ News of the government's plan to create a legislative council was first carried in *Siam Observer* on 16 April 1927. Several days thereafter, *Thai num* and *Si krung* both carried reports that the council was to be comprised of elected commoners as did *Bangkok kanmuang*, which featured an editorial on the coming 'Siamese Assembly' (*rathasapha sayam*). See *Thai num*, 18 April 1927, 'rathamonttrisapha sung thi ja dai khit tangkhoen nai raorao ni' (The New High Council Which They Are Thinking of Forming in the Near Future); *Si krung*, 19 April 1927, 'kamlang thahan muang thai kap dunlayaphap' (Military Strength and Retrenchment); and *Bangkok kanmuang*, 'rathasapha sayam' (A Siamese Assembly).
- ⁶² *Phim thai* featured two separate articles on the coming reforms on 20 and 21 April, one in which it was asserted that the new council would be appointed "like the councils of old" and another touting the king's plan for municipal councils. In addition, see *Sayam riwiv*, 1 May 1927, 'khwamtongkan khong phonlamuang' (The Desires of the Citizenry) and *Kro lek*, 21 April 1927, 'sapha ratsadon' (A People's Assembly) in which the writer noted that he had been informed by the Royal Secretariat that the government had no immediate plan for creating a representative assembly.
- ⁶³ *Kro phet*, 28 February 1926; *Sayam riwiv*, 8 May 1927, 'riwiv bangkok kanmuang' (A Review of *Bangkok kanmuang*), *Thai num*, 8 July 1927, 'khunnang kap ratsadon' (Nobility and the People), 3 August 1927, 'kanpokkhong' (Administering); and *Sayam riwiv*, 11 September 1927, 'banmuang khong rao' (Our Homeland).
- ⁶⁴ *Thai num*, 18 April 1927, 'rathamonttrisapha sung thi ja dai khit tangkhoen nai raorao ni' (The New High Council Which They Are Thinking of Forming in the Near Future).
- ⁶⁵ *Sayam riwiv*, 1 May 1927, 'khwam tongkan khong ponlamuang' (The Needs of the Citizenry); *Pakka thai*, 13, 14 and 15 May 1927, 'thamniam kanpokkhong prathet' (Traditions of Government); *Thai num*, 15 July 1927, 'ba yot' (Crazed with Rank); *Kammanto*, 19 August 1927, 'khrui wing khrui rang' (Those Who Beseech and Those Who Hesitate); and *Thai num*, 27 August, 'chiwit khong ratsadon' (The Lives of the People).

the establishment of a parliament, however, it was anticipated that the kingdom's various classes would be able to work together for the benefit of the nation as a whole.⁶⁶ Members of the upper class would have an opportunity to better understand the minds of the people, who would in turn be "led to realize that the country and the nation belong to everyone and not just to one group alone."⁶⁷ In addition, when differences of opinion arose as to a given course of policy, matters could be equitably resolved through public debate and the casting of ballots, with the result that the kingdom's laws would come to reflect the will of the majority.⁶⁸

For similar reasons, the establishment of parliamentary rule was said to be a critical step in the kingdom's political evolution as well. Absolute monarchies were frequently characterized as the "earliest" and, hence, "the least developed" of political systems – "the form most likely to disappear."⁶⁹ Moreover, world history was held to have repeatedly demonstrated that countries with autocratic political systems had difficulty in developing.⁷⁰ For one thing, absolute monarchies offered little assurance that the laws of the realm would protect the interests of the majority, as autocrats "often ruled for the benefit of themselves and their relatives alone."⁷¹ And for another, even when a ruler was compassionate, there was no guarantee that his laws would be just, as only the Buddha had escaped from the cycle of karma and even the wisest of kings had impurities and sins (*kilet*) which shaped their individual dispositions and influenced the character of their laws.⁷² Finally, officials who held their positions at the pleasure of the court were said to be far more concerned with the wants of the kingdom's rulers than they were with the needs of the people.⁷³

⁶⁶ *Bangkok kammuang*, 20 April 1927, 'khwamitsaraphap khong rao' (Our Freedom); *Si krung*, 19 April 1927, 'kamlang thahan muang thai kap dunlayaphap' (Military Strength and Retrenchment); 22 April 1927, 'kho khwan wijan ruang parlimen' (Aspects of the New Parliament which Warrant Consideration);

⁶⁷ *Thai num*, 26 May 1927, 'jao phaendin kap ratsadon' (Lords and the People). In addition, see *Sayam riwiv*, 8 May 1927, 'riwiv bangkok kammuang' (A Review of *Bangkok kammuang*).

⁶⁸ *Pakka thai*, 12 May 1927, 'thamniam kanpokkhong prathet' (Traditions of Government).

⁶⁹ See *Sayam riwiv*, 11 September 1927, 'kamnoet rathaban latthi kanpokkhong mi ki chanit' (The Origins of Government: How Many Types of Political Ideology Are There?). In addition, see *Thai num*, 3 August 1927; and *Kammanto*, 3 August 1927, 'khonsatitiwchan' (Constitution).

⁷⁰ *Pakka thai*, 9 February 1927, 'nathi khong phupokkhong' (The Duties of Rulers); and 13 May 1927, 'thamniam kanpokkhong prathet' (Traditions of Government).

⁷¹ *Pakka thai*, 9 February 1927, 'nathi khong phupokkhong' (The Duties of Rulers); *Thai num*, 12 May 1927, 'ruang phrajaophaendin kap kanpokkhong' (On Kings and Political Administrations); *Sayam riwiv*, 22 May 1927, 'riwiv thai num' (A Review of *Thai num*); and *Kro lek*, 18 August 1927, 'kotmai than hai itsaraphap rao pho laco phurap thammai joeng yang mai dai pho laco' (When We Already Have Sufficient Freedom Under the Law Why Do We Still Lack Freedom?).

⁷² *Pakka thai*, 13 May 1927, 'thamniam kanpokkhong prathet' (Traditions of Government); and *Kammanto*, 19 August 1927, 'khray wing khray rang' (Those Who Beseech and Those Who Hesitate).

⁷³ *Thai num*, 4 June 1927, 'kharatchakan thi pokkhong dwei ratthathammanun niyom kap kharatchakan nai prathet thi pen somburanayarasitthirat' (Officials Under Constitutional Governments and Absolute Monarchies); and *Sayam riwiv*, 19 June 1927, 'riwiv thai num' (A Review of *Thai num*).

Conversely, once an assembly had been formed and the absolute monarchy brought to end, the institution of princely rule would be ended as well, greatly diminishing the significance of class and rank.⁷⁴ All would be equal before the law and the assembly would provide a forum in which the diverging interests of the government and the people, the nobles and the commoners, could be resolved so that fellow Thai could "stop killing and selling each other" and start cooperating to solve the nation's problems.⁷⁵ Corruption would be controlled, the educational system would be improved, and the economy would be developed, thereby "ending the risk of Siam becoming a colony."⁷⁶

In a number of essays, the demise of autocratic rule was also asserted to be an integral part of national development.⁷⁷ Nature was said to have dictated not only that nations "be born, grow old, suffer, and die" but also that they "become independent of their parents" – an eventuality which would only come to pass when each and every member of the political community had been afforded equal rights and freedoms.⁷⁸ And as nations "either progressed or regressed", it was held to be of critical importance that "the people" (*khana ratsadon*) of the kingdom be given their freedom and allowed to help their leaders stave off national disaster.⁷⁹ In one essay of the period, for example, democratic reform was held to be the only way of saving Siam

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- ⁷⁴ *Kro phet*, 28 February 1926, 'saphap khong manut' (The Human Condition); *Si krung*, 19 April 1927, 'kamlang thahan muang thai' (Military Strength in Siam). Conversely, it was held that social divisions would become more pronounced if an assembly were *not* formed. See *Thai num*, 18 April 1927, 'rathamonttrisapha sung thi ja dai khit tangkhoen nai raorao ni' (The New High Council Which They Are Thinking of Forming in the Near Future).
- ⁷⁵ *Kro lek*, 3 September 1927, 'sapha ratsadon kap rathaban' (The People's Assembly and the Government); *Pakka thai*, 12 May 1927; *Thai num*, 25 July 1927, 'kiatayok haeng pratchachon' (The Honor of the People); and *Kammanto*, 11 August 1927, 'rathasapha mi prayot to chat yang rai' (What Benefit Would an Assembly have for the Nation?).
- ⁷⁶ *Bangkok kanmuang*, 18 April 1927, 'itsaraphap khong rao' (Our Freedom); *Si krung*, 23 April 1927, 'rathasapha haeng chat kamnot amnat wai yang rai' (How a National Assembly will Effect the Distribution of Power), and 29 September 1927, 'sapha ratsadon ja thoen wela jattang dai ru yang' (Has the Time Come for Establishing a People's Assembly or Not?); *Thai num*, 25 August 1927, 'khwamthukyak khong chaona' (The Suffering of the Farmers); *Sayam riwiv*, 18 September 1927, 'banha sapha ratsadon' (The Problem of a People's Assembly); and 13 November 1927, 'sapha ratsadon' (A People's Assembly).
- ⁷⁷ *Kro lek*, 21 April 1927, 'sapha ratsadon' (A People's Assembly); *Si krung*, 23 April 1927, 'rathasapha haeng chat' (The National Assembly); *Thai num*, 3 August 1927, 'kanpokkhong' (Administration).
- ⁷⁸ *Si krung*, 10 August 1927, 'wikhro sapha ratsadon' (An Analysis of the People's Assembly); *Thai num*, 27 and 28 May 1927, 'itsaraphap sam prakan khong chat' (Three Facets of National Freedom).
- ⁷⁹ *Sayam riwiv*, 8 and 15 May 1927, 'riwiv bangkok kanmuang jotmai jak nai ket na sathon' (A Review of *Bangkok kanmuang*: The Letters of *nai Ket na Sathon*); and 11 September 1927, 'banmuang khong rao' (Our Homeland); *Kammanto*, 11 August 1927, 'rathasapha mi prayot to chat yang rai' (The Utility of an Assembly for the Nation); and 15, 19, 20, 22 August 1927, 'khrui wing khrui rang' (Those Who Beg and Those Who Hesitate); *Si krung*, 8 July 1927, 'rathaban kap kotmai' (The Government and the Law).

from the fate of India, Burma, and Vietnam – 'nations' which had been "paralyzed by internal divisions" and ultimately "enslaved by foreigners" in consequence.⁸⁰

In an effort to emphasize the importance of establishing a Siamese parliament, scores of writers turned to historical analogy as well. Some pointed to China, a country which had been "thrown into turmoil because the emperor waited too long to adopt needed reforms, the imperial household having invariably been behind the times."⁸¹ Meanwhile, others argued that the time for parliamentary government was at hand whenever the common people of a given country entered into conflict with corrupt members of the nobility, as had previously occurred in France and was presently happening in Siam (Figure 6.9).⁸² Finally, a number of others continued to taunt the court by alluding to developments in Russia, like the individual who observed that

while students are taught that the world is round like an orange, I personally suspect that it looks like a bomb. To the north, one finds Russia, the part of the bomb which contains the fuse. The fuse has already ignited with a roar heard round the world and China has disappeared under clouds of smoke. As it is still burning, countries everywhere are growing increasingly concerned that they will be unable to escape the explosion ... I only hope that our own country will remain unaffected, although there are reasons for doubting this, as the fuse is said to run under *muang thai* as well. Certainly, we are not without good people who are willing to commit themselves to extinguishing its flames, but it's a big country and a spreading fire isn't easy to stop ... still, I think the government may have already come up with a way to save us. Let's hope they hurry before a disaster strikes and they are unable to speak ... if a people's assembly were established it would definitely make most people happy and people want to be happy ... an assembly would eliminate all of the dangers we fear.⁸³

As plans for the new Privy Council were being finalized in 1927, Prajadhipok expressed concern over the views being aired by "semi-educated" members of the intelligentsia while noting that Siam might eventually be compelled to "play the game" of parliamentary politics at some point in the future.⁸⁴ The court's immediate response to the press commentary of the period was to adopt a series of legal measures in a bid to control the spread of 'radicalism', however. At the behest of the king, a

⁸⁰ *Sayam riwiw*, 11 September 1927, 'banmuang khong rao' (Our Homeland); and 25 September 1927, 'khvamrungruang khong prathet lae chat' (The Prosperity of the Country and the Nation); *Thai num*, 8 July 1927, 'khunnang kap ratsadon' (The Nobility and the People); *Kammanto*, 11 August 1927, 'rathasapha mi prayot to chat yang rai' (The Benefit of an Assembly for the Nation).

⁸¹ *Thai num*, 13 May 1927, 'ruang tahan rua khong phrajaophaendin, (The King's Navy); and *Sayam riwiw*, 22 May 1927, 'riwiw thai num' (A Review of *Thai num*).

⁸² *Thai num*, 26 May 1927, 'jaophaendin kap ratsadon' (The King and the People).

⁸³ *Pakka thai*, 12 May 1927, 'sapha ratsadon' (A People's Assembly).

⁸⁴ See Batson: 1974, 42-50.

draft anti-Bolshevik act was drawn up and presented to the cabinet in May, although its passage was subsequently delayed when several ministers objected to its terms.⁸⁵ Minister of Justice *jao phraya* Phichaiyat, for one, argued that in specifically legislating against Bolshevism, other radical groups such as republicans and anarchists would remain beyond the scope of the law. Thus, he proposed instead that new legislation be directed against any who were "enemies of the methods and economic policies of the government." Similarly, the Minister of Foreign Affairs recommended that the proposed law be phrased in such a way as to make illegal the incitement of class-hatred and violence for political purposes, and others called for the various punishments stipulated in the draft to be strengthened in order to deter all forms of political agitation. As a result, a committee was formed to reconsider the proposal, and by August, it had reached the conclusion Bolshevism was only one of the 'dangers' confronting the dynastic state, another being any

unwise and premature agitation for changes in the form of government. In the process of time, there may be a general desire for some form of popular participation or some restraint upon the power of the sovereign. The great bulk of the people in Siam are as yet not trained in political or economic thought. There is not now nor will [there] be for a considerable time to come any possibility of fundamental change in the Government of Siam. There is a danger accordingly that agitation of a political nature would lead to unrest and possibly premature attempts to secure some changes in the constitution of the country.⁸⁶

In an effort to address the problem, the committee briefly considered forbidding all public discussion of political reform. Ultimately, however, it was agreed that excessively strict laws might in themselves provoke a reaction. Thus, it was proposed instead that the existing penal code be rewritten in such a way as to make the promotion of any political or economic doctrine intended to bring into disrepute the sovereign, the government, or the administration of the state a punishable offense. Moreover, all forms of agitation likely give rise to class hatred or result in the forceful change of the government and its laws were to be prohibited as well. Strikes were to be made illegal, school curriculums subject to the strict supervision of the government, and a more stringent press law promulgated.⁸⁷ Finally, in all serious cases, punishments were to be extreme – death or life imprisonment. With minor revisions, the committee's recommendations were adopted by the court and passed into law in

⁸⁵ See the cabinet minute of 17 May 1927 published in Suwadi: 1976, 330-332.

⁸⁶ The committee's report has been reprinted in full in Suwadi: 1976, 333-345.

⁸⁷ In October, graduating military and naval cadets were also required to swear a new oath of loyalty to the throne in which they promised to defend the nation from its enemies, external and internal. Among the latter were any who "sought to change the traditional form of government." See *Sayam riwiv*, 16 October 1927, 'wan thi kao tunlakhom pen wan phithi samkhan khong chat thai' (An Important National Ceremony on 9 October).

early September.⁸⁸ At the same time, a new immigration law was enacted in order to protect the kingdom from the threat of foreign agitation and the police were ordered to step up their activities against radical elements in the kingdom's Chinese community, with the result that literally hundreds of individuals were deported over the next several years.⁸⁹ In addition, the court also began drawing up plans for a clandestine intelligence service (*tamruat phuban*), dispatching a small group of police officers to Europe in late 1927 to learn the arts of building networks of informants, compiling dossiers, infiltration, and surveillance.⁹⁰

Ironically, press commentary of the period suggests that these attempts to buttress the authority of the dynasty had the opposite of their intended effect, exacerbating political tensions of the period and further eroding the popular standing of the court. A number of writers expressed amazement that "a simple request to have a voice in the affairs of one's own country" could be construed as a "sign of rebellion and an indication of Bolshevik leanings."⁹¹ Meanwhile, many others openly ridiculed the court for "treating the symptoms and not the disease" – for foolishly trying to "close the mouths of the nation's owners" and "snatch the newspapers from their hands" while doing nothing to end corruption, inequitable taxation, unemployment, and lower-class poverty.⁹² As noted by one writer of the period, the risk of class hatred could easily have been ended by taking steps to assure that members of the upper class

⁸⁸ *Ratchakitchanubeksa*, 44, 3 September 1927, 168-172.

⁸⁹ The new law was designed to stop the immigration of radicals and individuals carrying communicable diseases. See *Sayam riwiv*, 13 November 1927, 'phrakrasae rap sang' (A Royal Clarification); and Great Britain, PRO, FO 7775/7775/40, Waterlow to Chamberlain, 12 August 1927. Regarding the number of Chinese exiled during the period, *Num sayam*, 29 October 1931, reported that 214 individuals were exiled in 1929, 1000 in 1930, and well over 1000 in 1931. Ironically, there was a steady decline in the number of suspected communists apprehended during the period: 123 in 1929, 51 in 1930, 32 in 1931. See *phraya Athikon Prakat*, 'komunit khoe arai?' (What is Communism?), in *Tamruat*, 1:5, June 1932, 472.

⁹⁰ NA, R7, *mahathai*, 11/7, *kromtamruat phuthon nakhonban lae phuban tang kromtamruat phuban*. Plans for the organization were apparently begun in late 1927 at the behest of the king, and in early 1928, a previous official from the Ministry of Defense, *mom jao* Wong Niratchon, was dispatched to Paris with a small group of police officers to study under Sir Basil Thompson, previously of Scotland Yard.

⁹¹ *Si krung*, 22 April 1927, 'khokhwam wijan ruang palimen' (A Critical Essay on the Parliament); 8 July 1927, 'rathaban kap kotmai' (The Government and the Law); 19 July 1927, 'kamarok' (Social Diseases); 23 July 1927, 'kanprap bonchewik' (Suppressing Bolshevism); *Thai num*, 12 July 1927, 'bonchewik' (Bolsheviks); and *Sayam riwiv*, 13 November 1927, 'sapha ratsadon khwan ja mi hai prathet sayam ru mai' (Should Siam Have a People's Assembly or Not?).

⁹² *Si krung*, 29 August 1927, 'sahai phu ruam chat thi rak' (Beloved Fellow Nationals); and 6 September 1927, 'rok huajai khong pracharatsadon khoe ruang kotmai nangsu'phim' (The New Press Law: A Cause of Mental Illness within the Ranks of the Public); *Kro lek*, 29 August 1927, 'lak thamma haeng nangsu khao kap khwam chalat khong phufang' (The Press, Morality, and Audience Intelligence); *Pakka thai*, 28 September 1927, 'nangsu'phim muang rao' (The Newspapers of Our Land); *Thai num*, 29 September 1927, 'borisat kanyu jamkat haeng prathet Thai' (The Siamese Limited Complaints Company); and *Sayam riwiv*, 5 December 1927, *phraratchabanyat samut ekkasan lae nangsu'phim kap bannathikan* (The Press Law and Editors).

were no longer free to act in a hateful manner.⁹³ Instead, however, the kingdom's rulers were accused of once again acting to protect the interests of "the privileged few", thereby deepening the rift between the government and the people.⁹⁴

The notion that it was somehow possible to legislate away the threat of radical political change was a frequent topic of graphic satire during the period as well. In the cartoon of one individual, for example, the state was depicted as a policeman carrying the recommendations of the anti-Bolshevik committee in one hand and a nightstick in the other, and in a second drawing, it was shown as a "limited-complaints company", its doors boarded shut by the new immigration law and its smoke stacks billowing out clouds of new security-related measures (Figures 6.10 & 6.11). One of the more caustic graphic editorials in the vein, however, was a sketch of a diminutive Prajadhipok precariously balanced on his throne while attempting to prohibit a giant Bolshevik from entering the kingdom – a subtle commentary on the relative potency of royalism and communism in the latter months of 1927 (Figure 6.12).

Throughout the period, the merits of democratic rule also continued to be extolled in the popular press (Figure 6.13). In June, for example, a number of writers were openly critical of Prajadhipok's assertion that parliamentary politics was a 'game' which had little immediate utility for Siam. In the essay of one, it was held to be far more dangerous to the national interests, and ultimately to the position of the monarchy, to grant political rights to one group in society while denying them to another.⁹⁵ And in a more sarcastic vein, a second agreed that party politics *was* indeed a game – a fair one which contrasted sharply with the prevailing political order in that it afforded "fellow members of the nation an equal opportunity to express their viewpoints" while making it impossible for "one side to beat the other while their hands are tied and their mouths are closed."⁹⁶

In response to the idea that democracy was a 'foreign' ideology unsuited to the temperament of the Siamese people, another essayist also noted that there was nothing particularly 'Thai' about the absolute monarchy either.⁹⁷ Among other things, he argued that it was ludicrous for the kingdom's rulers to claim that they were somehow protecting the nation from radicals who sought to imitate the Europeans when they were "hurriedly following in the paths of the foreigners" themselves. Citing the

⁹³ *Thai num*, 13 September 1928, 'khwan ok kotmai pongkan wai' (It Ought to Be Prohibited).

⁹⁴ *Pakka thai*, 23 September 1927, 'kiatiyok khong chaona' (The Honor of Farmers).

⁹⁵ *Thai num*, 11 June 1927, "phutao", 'khwamhen ruang pratchathipatai' (An Opinion on Democracy). The essay was subsequently republished in *Sayam riwiv* on 26 June 1927 along with a commentary from the editor, who argued that the behind-the-scenes factions of absolute monarchies were far more dangerous than the public 'game' of party politics. See *Sayam riwiv*, 26 June 1927, 'riwiv thai num' (A Review of *Thai num*).

⁹⁶ *Thai num*, 13 June 1927, 'khwamhen ekaratsadon thai' (The Opinion of a Private Citizen). In the same essay, the writer asserted that most people were no longer willing to live under a "dictatorship" or an "oligarchy", both words being rendered in English.

⁹⁷ *Sayam riwiv*, 11 September 1927, 'banmuang khong rao' (Our Homeland).



Figure 6.9: *Kammanto*, 18 August 1927, the debate over the assembly represented as a tug-of-war between the nobility and the people.



Figure 6.10: *Sayam riwiw*, 26 June 1927, the state as policeman. An editorial commentary on the government's effort to strengthen the kingdom's anti-Bolshevik laws.

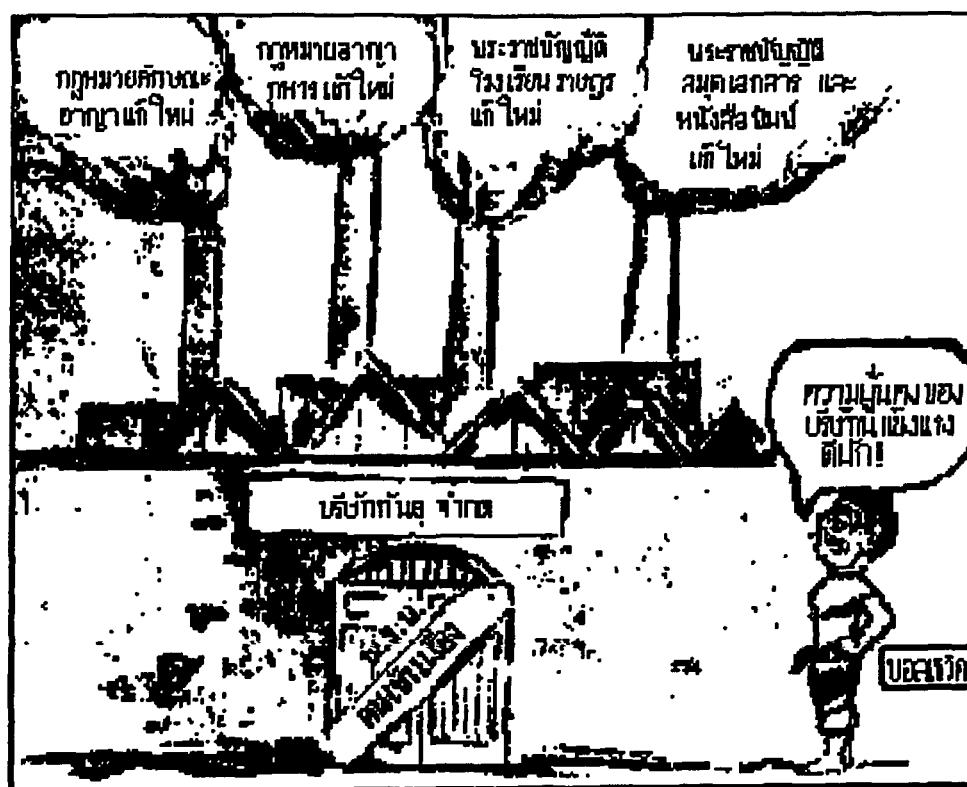


Figure 6.11: *Sayam riwi*, 16 October 1927, Siam represented as an 'anti-complaints' company. The clouds of smoke billowing from the chimneys are labelled 'revised criminal code', 'revised military code', revised education laws', and 'revised press code'. The factory door is boarded shut with an 'immigration law'. The 'Bolshevik' in the lower-right hand corner is noting that the company appears to be exceedingly stable.



Figure 6.12: *Sayam riwiw*, 2 October 1927, on the absurdity of the government's effort to legislate away the threat of Bolshevism. His throne precariously balanced on top of Siam, a diminutive Prajadhipok informs the giant Bolshevik on the left: "You can't come around here any more. I really despise you!"



Figure 6.13: *Sayam riwiw*, 4 July 1927. 'Mr. Citizen' explains to 'Miss People's Assembly' that when he asked for her hand in marriage, her father merely shook his head. In reply, she asks whether he has given up hope of marrying her.

court's continued reliance upon foreign advisors, its policy of sending upper-class children abroad for their education, its ongoing efforts to model the kingdom's political administration along European lines, and its failure to protect the economic interests of the Thai, he noted that the government could hardly be said to have championed the nation's independence. Conversely, he claimed that proponents of democratic reform were merely trying to make Siam more like Japan – a country which had already escaped from its unequal treaties with the West, successfully developed an industrial base, and provided its citizens with a quality education. And in another essay of the period, the idea that most people were "perfectly content" under the absolute monarchy was openly ridiculed as well by an individual who noted that the British were saying exactly the same thing to the peoples of India in order to keep them from seeking *their* political independence.⁹⁸

6.4 Conclusion. In the foregoing discussion, I have been attempting to trace the history of an evolving nationalist critique of the Jakkri dynastic state in the early years of the Seventh Reign. Towards that end, I have once again drawn upon the essays and editorials of the popular press in an effort to show that many nationalist commentators of the period remained openly critical of Prajadhipok and his ministers in the aftermath of Vajiravudh's death. At the same time, I have also been arguing that continued disaffection for Jakkri rule contributed to the development of a movement for popular sovereignty in early 1927. Admittedly, this 'movement' was limited in scope, being largely confined to the members of a disenfranchised urban intelligentsia. Nonetheless, it exerted a powerful influence over the court. In an effort to control the spread of 'radicalism' and preserve the political authority of dynastic state, the kingdom's rulers not only adopted a number of new legislative measures but also came to justify their authority in new ways, by arguing that the subjects of the realm were immediately incapable of managing their own political affairs and by questioning whether the Siamese were even 'racially suited' for self-rule.

⁹⁸ *Thai num*, 26 July 1927, 'mai khit mai plaek' (It Only Seems Odd When You Think About It). For similar commentary and criticism, see *Kammanto*, 3 August 1927, 'khonsathithuchan' (Constitution). In addition, see *Thai num*, 26 July 1927, 'nonlap thap sit' (Sleeping on Top of Our Rights); 30 July 1927, 'kio dwei ruang sapha ratsadon' (Concerning the People's Assembly); and 4, 17 November 1927, 'saphap pen thai nai khwamkhithen' (The Condition of Thai/Free Thought); *Si krung*, 28 July 1927, 'khrui pen jaokhong muang thai' (Who Owns Siam Anyhow?); and 30 July 1927, 'ruang rathasapha' (The Assembly); *Pakka thai*, 28 July 1927, 'khrui pen phu chai amnat aebolut kac phonlamuang' (Who's Using Absolute Power with the Citizenry); and 10 August 1927, 'khwamhen rao mairai phon' (Our Views Are Not Without Value).

VII

Thai Anti-Colonialism: 1927-1932

Are we really independent? ... Aren't the country's biggest commercial concerns all in white hands? And don't white hands possess boundless tracts of timber in the North, as well as the mines and rubber plantations of the South? And aren't white hands running all of the government's important departments, managing its revenue, and overseeing its expenditures? As far as rights are concerned, white hands clearly hold more than the country's owners. ... A European acquaintance of mine ... used to think that Siam was one of his colonies. Now, however, he considers it to be an indirect colony (*kholoni khong khao doy thang om*) – one which they are able to maintain without bringing in foreign administrators and spending large sums of money ...¹

7.1 Introduction. The above passage, an excerpt from an essay which was published in the popular literary journal *Suphap burut* in 1930, is presented here in support of the seemingly unwarranted appellation 'Thai anti-colonialism'.² As has already been noted, insomuch as Siam's rulers successfully maintained the sovereignty of the dynastic state, it has long been assumed that the independence of the Thai nation was preserved as well, making it unnecessary for the people of the kingdom to 'liberate' themselves from the yoke of colonial rule at some later stage. In the foregoing pages, however, I have been attempting to trace the outlines of an alternate perspective on the Thai nation, a nationalism in which the dynasty figured as a national oppressor in its own right. In the above essay, for example, the writer drew a sharp distinction between the domestic political standing of the Jakkri court and the independence of the nation. Indeed, he was arguing the former had been maintained at the latter's expense, that the kingdom's rulers had preserved their authority by allowing the colonial powers of Europe to exploit the nation and its resources. Within the confines of his

¹ *Suphap burut*, 1 April 1930, 'than fang pen rot mai?' (How Do You Like the Sound of This?).

² *Suphap burut* was the collective enterprise of a number of young authors – Kulap Saipradit, Malai Chuphinit, Op Chayawat, Choti Phraephon, Sanit Jaroenrat, Jaran Wuthathit being some of the better-known. Published from mid-1929 through to 1931, the magazine was an immediate commercial success, some one thousand nine hundred of its first two thousand copies being sold. By its third issue, it had a print run of four thousand copies, a figure which was subsequently raised again to five thousand copies a few months thereafter. See *Suphap burut*, 1:3, 1 July 1929 and Withayakon Chiangkun, *Suksa botbat lae khwamkhut si burapha* (Si Burapha: A Study of His Life and Thought), Bangkok: Sainam, 1989: 15.

discussion, then, Thai independence was shown to have been doubly compromised – once by the West and once by the members of an indigenous ruling elite.

In an effort to demonstrate the pervasiveness of such sentiments in the period just prior to the absolute monarchy's overthrow, I intend to use this chapter to examine the anti-colonial themes which nationalist commentators of the 1927-1932 period incorporated into their respective works. As in preceding chapters, much of my discussion will focus upon the popular press, with particular attention being given to a selection of essays on the economy and public education – two issues which were subsequently taken up by the People's Party and used as a part of a broader justification for the 1932 overthrow of the Jakkri dynastic state. In addition, I will also examine a collection of political graphics which were published during the period as well. Thereafter, brief consideration will be given to two additional mediums in which the interests of the dynasty and nation were shown to be in conflict: language and popular fiction.

7.2 *The Economy.*

A hundred years ago, the wealthy and the powerful bought their slaves directly. Now that we have entered the 'civilized' age, however, the powerful countries of the world simply force the weaker into indirect slavery, a type no less complete than the previous form. We must awaken! It's far too late already ... the country is falling under the permanent oppression of outsiders.³

For much of the Seventh Reign, the economy remained the primary focal point of Thai nationalist concern. It was a topic which overshadowed all others, an issue perceived to have a bearing on each and every facet of national life. As wealth was the "blood of the nation", its production and smooth circulation were commonly believed to be essential for the nation's development. Its dissipation, meanwhile, was held to be a principal cause of national collapse. The inequitable distribution of income could "retard" and possibly even "halt" the nation's growth while parasites, whether foreign-born or domestic, were capable of "bleeding the nation dry", tapping its resources until nothing was left "but the skin and bones."⁴ Throughout the period, wealth was

³ *Sayam riwiv*, 29 August 1926, 'kanoprom phonlamuang nai ratchakan thahan' (Teaching Soldiers to be Citizens).

⁴ *Pakka thai*, 17 February 1926, 'kan hai ku ngoen' (Lending Money), 27 July 1927, 'hai profitthi'ring' (High Profiteering), and 12 September 1927, 'kitjakan khong prathet' (The Country's Affairs); *Thai num*, 7 January 1929, 'dotlong nam plam jarakhe' (Leaping into the Water to Wrestle with the Crocodile); *Ratsadon*, 9 January 1929, 'hen wa jao pen luktumthuang khwamjaroen', (The View That Princes are an Impediment to Prosperity); *Lak muang*, 13 May 1929, 'phrakhlangkhangthi phloi sanuk' (The Privy Purse is Having Fun, Too); *Si krung*, 8 May 1930, 'rathaban mai khrai bamrung khwamsuk khong pratchachon' (The Government has No Desire to Look After the Happiness of the People) and 8 November 1931, 'muang thai kamlang tok yu nai yuk sethakit toktam ngoen lae sombat jao nai na ja

often asserted to be a critical component of "Thai-ness" (*khwampenthai*) as well. Just as "the power of money" (*amnat ngoen*) was said to have left the world's wealthier nations and the nation's wealthier members at liberty to do as they pleased, so the impoverished were thought to be leading contingent existences.⁵ "Money alone guarantees *khwampenthai* (Thai-ness/freedom)", observed one essayist of the period:

... and as for those who barely scrape by, saving nothing, ... mired in poverty, they live poised on the brink of disaster ... without strength, without power, and at the mercy of events ... Poverty not only denies them the respect of others, it deprives them of self-respect as well. They cannot rely upon themselves, they are not free within themselves, and so they must turn instead to others.⁶

Precisely because of such sentiments, the idea of 'prosperity' (*khwamjaroen*) was imbued with increasing significance during the period. As most of the nation's citizens were believed to be "Thai (free) in name alone", prosperity was seen as being the key to their independence – the means of 'liberating' the poor from the exploitation of foreign and domestic oppressors alike.⁷ For this reason as well the government was increasingly held to account for the nation's myriad economic problems. In the broadest of terms, the kingdom's rulers were considered to be "more responsible than anyone else for the country's lack of development" in that they retained full authority to negotiate treaties, formulate policies, and allocate resources.⁸ At the same time, they were acknowledged to possess a disproportionate share of the nation's accumulated capital in an age when most of their compatriots continued to live in poverty.⁹ As a result, those at the upper reaches of the social hierarchy were not only

thuk samruat sak khrang' (As the Siamese Economy is in Decline, Why Not Survey Royal Wealth?).

⁵ *Thai num*, 18 January 1929, 'othonomi khoe arai?' (What is Autonomy?); *Lak muang*, 26 and 27 April 1929, 'thai khwampenyu khong thai samai ni' (The Thai: Our Daily Existence at Present), and 28 April 1929, 'itsaraphap khong thai thi na khit itsaraphap' (Thai Freedom: Our Freedom is Worth Thinking About). In this latter essay the writer asserted that 'Thai-ness' (*khwampenthai*) should mean 'freedom' (*itsaraphap*) while arguing that most Thai people continued to live under the oppression of "others with bigger fists."

⁶ *Pakka thai*, 27 December 1927, 'itsaraphap nua khwamjampen' (Freedom Beyond Need).

⁷ *Pakka thai*, 10 May 1927, 'kha khong rathaban sayam' (Slaves of the Siamese Government); 30 March 1928, 'sit lae phonlaprayot khong chat Thai' (The Rights and Benefits of the Thai Nation); *Thai num*, 17 November 1928, 'khawmjaroen khong prathet sayam' (The Prosperity of Siam); and *Lak muang*, 12 December 1929, 'arai pen khawmjaroen khong chat' (What is National Prosperity?); and *Suriya*, 8 August 1931, 'khawm khoeichin' (Getting Used to Something) and 29 August 1931, 'chalong kanku itsaraphap khong chat tong samoe na kan' (We Must All Be Equal Before We Can Celebrate the Recovery of National Independence).

⁸ *Pakka thai*, 15 October 1926, 'saphap khong bonchewik' (The Condition of the Bolsheviks) and *Si krung*, 12 November 1931, 'phramahakasat khong rao' (Our King).

⁹ *Sayam riwiw*, 7 November 1926, 'kammakon rampung rao yakjon phro arai' (A Labourer Reflecting on the Causes of Our Poverty); *Ruam khao*, 3 February 1927, 'saphap khawmjon nai sayam' (The Nature of Poverty In Siam); *Pakka thai*, 26 July 1927, 'prathet sayam pen talat khakhai khong khon tang chat' (Siam is a Market for Foreign Nationals); *Si krung*, 9 August 1928, 'saphap khong khon thai nai patjaban' (The Condition of the Thai at Present); *Thai thae*, 12 August 1931, 'khrjai ja chuai khon thai' (Who Will Help the Thai?).

thought to enjoy a freedom which the lower classes still lacked but they were perceived to be the only ones capable of placing all of the nation's various classes and groupings on equal footing.¹⁰

The desire for 'economic liberation' was given an additional urgency during the period by a widespread perception that foreigners had all but taken over the national economy.¹¹ Not only was Siamese commerce thought to have fallen "completely into their hands" but they were also believed to have monopolized the nation's banking and money supply, its domestic market for raw materials, and its overseas shipping.¹² Meanwhile, foreign workers were held to be flooding into the country, making it "impossible for Thai laborers to find employment in their own home" at a time when foreign merchants were "sucking Thai blood to the marrow through the importation of high-priced merchandise."¹³ And after foreign nationals were granted the right to own property in Siam in early 1927, concern was increasingly voiced that overseas banking interests would take advantage of the new law to gather up huge tracts of Thai

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- ¹⁰ *Si krung*, 4 June 1928, 'prarap thung sethakit khong prathet', (Speaking of the Country's Economy), 1 September 1928, 'withi kae khwamyakjon khong chao rao' (A Method for Ameliorating Our Poverty), and 3 December 1931, 'khwamkaonao pen thura khong rathaban' (Progress is the Business of Government); *Pakka thai*, 25 May 1926, 'pluk phuan thai' (Awakening My Fellow Thai) and 21 October 1927, 'lak haeng khwampenthai' (The Principles of Being Thai); *Thai num*, 17 November 1928, 'khwamjaroen khong prathet sayam' (The Prosperity of Siam); *Lak muang*, 4 November 1929, 'thammai rathaban joeng mai chuai ratsadon nai mua ratsadon ja chuai rathaban' (Why Is the Government Unwilling to Help the People When the People Are Helping the Government?); *Thai thai*, 15 August 1931, 'pho kha thai khwan rian sethawithi ru yang' (Hasn't the Time Come for Thai Merchants to Study Economics?); and 26 August 1931, 'sayam pen khong khrai' (Who Does Siam Belong To?).
- ¹¹ *Thong thai*, 20 July 1926, 'khon thai ja kin tae khao yang diao ru?' (Do Thai Only Eat Rice?); *Pakka thai*, 15 June 1927, 'plukjai muang' (Awakening the Country); 25 October 1927, 'kanlock that' (Ending Slavery); *Si krung*, 24 April 1928, 'amnat haeng kankhakhai tok yu nai mu khon tangchat' (The Power of Commerce has Fallen into Foreign Hands); 14 May 1928, 'prarap thung sethakit khong prathet' (A Consideration of the Country's Economy); *Bangkok kanmuang*, 28 April 1928, 'uttasahakam lae kankhakhai' (Industry and Commerce); *Ratsadon*, 23 January 1929, 'chuai kankae khwamkhatkhong khong prathet' (Helping to Correct the Country's Needs); *Thai thae*, 12 August 1931, 'phokha thai somkhuan ja rian sethawithaya ru yang' (Isn't It Time for Thai Merchants to Study Economics?).
- ¹² *Kro lek*, 8 April 1927, 'yang mai sai koen khwan dok khon thai oi' (It Isn't Too Late to Act, Thai Friends!); *Sayam riwiv*, 22 and 29 May 1927, 'riwiv pakka thai' (A Review of *Pakka thai*); *Pakka thai*, 1, 3, 7, 14 June 1927, 'plukjai muang' (Awakening the Country); and *Si krung*, 25 August 1927, 'kam khong muang thai' (Siamese Karma); 30 May and 3 June 1930, 'sinkha ok khong prathet sayam toktam phro amnat kanlack ngoen (Siam's Falling Exports Due to the Power of Exchange Rates).
- ¹³ *Pakka thai*, 27 July 1927, 'hai profitthi'ring' (High Profiteering); *Bangkok kanmuang*, 28 April 1928, 'uttasahakam lae kankhakhai' (Trade and Industry); *Si krung*, 5 July 1928, 'kammakon thai pluk thai hai tun laeo' (The Thai Have Been Awakened by Thai Labor); 11 July 1928, 'khwamhen achip kammakon thai ja khong yu dai doi withi dai' (An Opinion on How The Occupations of Thai Laborers Can Be Made Secure); 9 and 20 August 1928, 'saphap khong khon thai nai patjuban' (The Condition of the Thai at Present); 4 September 1928, 'kwa thua ja suk nga ko mai' (The Pods Will Spoil Before the Beans are Ripe); *Lak muang*, 20 October 1928, 'khon thai nai muang thai mai mi ngan tham pen rok rairacng' (The Spreading Contagion: Thais Without Work in Siam); *Suriya*, 12 August 1931, 'rao khuikan len tae sing thi rao hen' (We Only Scratch at the Things Which We See); and *Num sayam*, 2 November 1931, 'kammakon thai khat upatham' (Thai Labor Lacks a Patron).

farmland as well.¹⁴ Not surprisingly, it appeared to many commentators of the period as if the nation was on the brink of becoming 'an indirect slave' (*khikha thang om*) of outsiders.¹⁵

Within this context, one can better appreciate the hostility engendered by the court's continued fiscal conservatism. At best, *laissez faire* economics was viewed as a poor 'solution' for the country's economic problems in that it left the rich and powerful "completely at liberty to prey upon the foolish and the weak."¹⁶ At worst, the court was seen to be openly collaborating with the foreign business community in order to "drink the blood of the poor."¹⁷ Some essayists of the period asserted that the kingdom's rulers had been "tricked" by their European advisors into leaving the nation at the mercy of foreign exploiters.¹⁸ Others argued that they were acting from greed alone with scant regard for the economic future of the nation as a whole.¹⁹ On

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- ¹⁴ The right was extended to all of Siam's principal treaty partners in early 1927. On the matter of treaty revision with the West, see Batson: 1984: 94. Regarding the press commentary of the period, see *Pakka thai*, 26 May 1927, 'plukjai muang farang ja ao phaendin thai doy mai tong chai thahan (Awakening the Country: Foreigners Will Take the Land of the Thai Without Using Soldiers); 18 June 1927, 'thidin khong khon thai' (The Land of the Thai); 2 July 1927, 'du angkrit kap farangset' (Watching England and France); *Thai num*, 23 June 1928, 'ngao hacng khwam hayana khong sayam' (The Shadow of Calamity Hangs Over Siam); *Si krung*, 14 January 1928, 'ja riak wa khai ban khai muang dai mai' (Shouldn't It be Called Selling/Betraying the Homeland?); *Lak muang*, 21 February 1929, 'rathaban kap ratsadon tong rakkan phiang nai?' (How Much Should the Government and the People Love Each Other?); *Thai kasem ruam khao*, 26 and 27 May 1929, 'phaendin thai' (The Land of the Thai).
- ¹⁵ *Si krung*, 7 September 1929, 'muang thai kap phokhasap' (The Thai Homeland and Its Resources); 8 October 1931, 'kho thi wa khon chalat pokkhong yak nan, pen khwamjing chapho phupokkhong thi ngo' (Stupid Rulers are the Only Ones Who Find Educated People Difficult to Govern); *Pakka thai*, 9 May 1927, 'thai jong rak thai' (Thais Should Love the Thai); 15 June 1927, 'plukjai muang' (Awakening the Country); and *Lak muang*, 10-12 October 1928, 'tongkan sontana kap khon thai' (Talking With the Thai).
- ¹⁶ *Sayam riwiv*, 22 May 1927, 'riwiv pakka thai' (A Review of *Pakka Thai*); *Si krung*, 2 May 1927, 'phonlamuang kap saphap', (The Citizens and their Condition); 23 February 1928, 'pai yu pa kan ru' (Shall We Return to the Forests?); 1 May 1930, 'thamyangrai chaona khong rao joeng ja ramruai khoen' (How the Economic Condition of Our Farmers Can Be Improved); 8 May 1930, 'rathaban mai khrai bamrung khwamsuk khong pratchachon' (The Government Has No Desire to Look After the Happiness of the People); 21 October 1931, 'pok pluak' (Removing the Peel); *Thai thae*, 10 June 1931, 'saphap manut' (The Human Condition); 29 August 1931, 'bun pen khong khao bab pen khong khrai' (While They Gain the Merit, Who's Blamed for the Sin?).
- ¹⁷ *Lak muang*, 13 February 1930, 'phrakhleng khang thi phloy sanuk' (The Privy Purse is Having Fun, too); *Pakka thai*, 20 May 1927, 'khrai pen phu rakchat jing' (Who Are the Real Patriots?); 26 May 1927, 'plukjai muang tham yang rai thai rao ja jaroen?' (Awakening the Country: What Do We Have to Do to Prosper?); 13 August 1927, 'tua pen thai jai pen thai ya hai jai pen jiw' (As Our Bodies and Minds Are Thai, We Should Not Have the Hearts of Jews).
- ¹⁸ *Thai thae*, 5 August 1931, 'bannathikan kanbantuk' (The Editor's Record); 12 August 1931, 'pho kha thai somkuan ja rian sethawithaya ru yang' (Isn't It Time for Thai Merchants to Study Economics); *Pakka thai*, 16 June 1927, 'chat satsana phramahakasat ja sathitsathap yu dwey akan chen rai' (On What Do the Nation, Religion and King Stand); 20 June 1927, 'plukjai muang' (Awakening the Country).
- ¹⁹ *Sayam riwiv*, 1 April 1927, 'jotmai jak minburi' (A Letter from Minburi); *Lak muang*, 13 February 1930, 'phrakhleng khang thi phloy sanuk' (The Privy Purse is Having Fun, too); *Pakka thai*, 3 December 1926, 'khwamhenkaetua' (Selfishness); 8 September 1927, 'rao thuk kong chanit nai' (The Manner in Which We Have Been Cheated); *Lak muang*, 20 May 1929, 'lathi kot hua manut rit luat' (The Principles of Oppressing People in Order to Extract Their Blood); *Si krung*, 25 August 1927, 'kam khong muang thai' (Siamese Karma).

occasion, they were even held to be motivated by a belief that foreigners were somehow superior to their own countrymen.²⁰ The conclusions drawn were generally the same, however, for most commentators of the period were in agreement that further efforts to protect the national economy were urgently needed in order to save the Thai from being transformed into "scrap-eating dogs ... like the American Indians, the Malays, the Burmese, the Khmer, the Vietnamese, and the peoples of India ... whose mouths no longer have voices, whose guns no longer carry bullets."²¹

As a result of the global economic downturn of 1930-31, concern over the court's economic policies was increasingly voiced in the latter years of the reign. Rather than attempting to survey the voluminous press criticism of the period, however, I will use the remainder of this section in order to briefly consider how 'the economic issue' was discussed in several broader nationalist critiques of the Jakkri dynastic state which were drafted in the period just prior to its overthrow. The first of these, an eight-part essay entitled "An Appraisal of the Nation" (*ramphung thung chatprathet*), was published in the popular daily 'Freedom' (*Itsara*) in September of 1931.²² Its author, an individual who chose to write under the penname "A Volunteer Soldier" (*thahan asa*), has remained anonymous.

7.2.1 *Itsara* – "A Volunteer Soldier" (*thahan asa*).

How shall we judge those individuals who revere foreigners while belittling their fellow nationals? After living here but a short while, foreign nationals are held to have a good understanding of our affairs. Why are our own people not acknowledged to have a better understanding? ... Governments must rely upon their citizens to defend the country ... granting people a political voice so that they can protect their own interests. In Siam, however, we do just the opposite, ignoring the voices of the country's citizens while giving rights and benefits to foreigners. It is because of the support which foreigners receive from our government that they now possess what is rightfully ours.²³

²⁰ *Pakka thai*, 8-9 June 1927, 'plukjai muang rathaban ya hen khon phai nok di kwa khon phunmuang' (The Government Should Not See Outsiders as Better than Its Own Citizens); 25 August 1927, 'thai ja pen thai phro wa thai samakkhikan' (Thai Freedom Depends On Unity).

²¹ *Pakka thai*, 30 March 1928, 'sit lae phonlaprayot khong chat thai' (The Rights and Benefits of the Thai Nation). In addition, see *Si krung*, 16 September 1931, 'sayam yu bon bandai chan nai' (How Far Up the Ladder is Siam?) and *Pakka thai*, 30 May, 15 and 18 June 1927, 'plukjai muang' (Awakening the Country).

²² *Itsara* was owned by To Buntian and published from mid-1930 through to early 1933. The essay 'ramphung thung chatprathet' (An Appraisal of the Nation) was published on 16, 17, 19, 21, 22, 23, 25, and 26 September 1931.

²³ *Itsara*, 21 September 1931, "thahan asa" (A Volunteer Soldier), 'ramphung thung chatprathet' (An Appraisal of the Nation).

Like a number of his contemporaries, "Volunteer Soldier" was of the opinion that the ruling elite in Siam had maintained its authority at the nation's expense – by letting the colonial powers of Europe take possession of territories previously under Siamese control, by granting extraterritorial status to European nationals, and by allowing foreigners to take advantage of the kingdom's people and resources while denying the subjects of the realm the right to defend their political and economic interests. As a result, during the course of his essay, he repeatedly entreated the kingdom's rulers to break with their policies of the past and take steps to protect the nation from foreign exploitation.

He began by arguing that the nation was threatened from within by the divisive behavior of the Siamese upper class.²⁴ After emphasizing that unity (*sammakhitham*) was "the principal source of love within groups" and asserting that those encharged with the task of government were ultimately responsible for fostering a sense of oneness in society at large, he noted with concern that there was "a total lack of unity" between the Siamese government and people. Instead, "each turned its back on the other in the manner of masters and slaves, growing further apart by the minute" as a result of the misguided policies of the ruling elite. Having "failed to examine the true nature of Siam", they had undertaken to model the country's development after the West, "adopting the outward trappings of Western society without adopting any of its substance." Rather than directly addressing such "blatantly obvious" problems as farm debt, for example, they had simply dispatched an endless stream of government officials overseas to study the conditions prevailing in foreign lands. Meanwhile, the wealthy few continued to "farm on the farmers' backs", squeezing them with taxes and usurious rates of interest. As a result of this "shadow-puppet development", the kingdom's rulers had come to believe that the country was "already civilized" while a growing number of others had "lost all hope" that the nation would ever prosper and concluded that the poor were likely to remain so all of their lives.

According to the writer, the nation's survival was contingent upon ending the growing division between the rich and the poor. As the matter of Siam's economic development had long been left to the foreigners, commerce – "the most important aspect of national life" – had fallen completely in their hands.²⁵ And this, in turn, had undermined the kingdom's administration and defense, as evidenced by the government's ongoing efforts to balance the budget through retrenchments and salary reductions. Thus, he asserted that it was essential for the court to take a more active role in developing the nation's industry, commerce, and agriculture. Moreover, he

²⁴ *Itsara*, 16 September 1931, "thahan asa" (A Volunteer Soldier), 'rampung thung chatprathet' (An Appraisal of the Nation).

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 17 and 19 September 1931.

argued that it was equally important for the people to be given a voice in their own affairs, for only thereby would they come to understand that they were the owners of the kingdom and begin working together like the other peoples of Asia to assure that foreigners were unable to become their permanent overlords.²⁶ Conversely, if things remained unchanged and no additional steps were taken to "protect the kingdom's Thainess", the writer warned that foreigners would continue to act as "the lords of Thai trade and finance" while the Thai remained "Thai in name alone ... in no better shape than if we had come to Siam from China ourselves."²⁷ Rather than working to develop the kingdom, members of the upper class were held to be far more interested in the accumulation of private wealth and the promotion of their own careers. At the same time, many were said to have retained the habit of "revering foreigners and belittling their fellow nationals." Finally, not only were those at a lower level in society left to fend for themselves but whenever anyone complained of such matters, they were accused of "arrogantly rising above their station in life" by individuals who clearly had no better understanding of the nation's problems. If they had, the writer argued, the kingdom would "long ago have attained a level of development similar to the countries of Europe" and foreigners would never have been permitted to "mingle among us while stuffing their pockets with our goods."²⁸ Instead, however, the government had largely ignored the needs of the country's citizens while "allowing foreigners to completely seize our rights, leaving the Thai to eat the crusts that remain."

In order to rectify matters, he called upon the kingdom's rulers to stop "trying to create a civilized veneer for the country which belied the condition of its people" and start devising real solutions for the nation's problems instead. Among other things, he proposed that they begin by placing quotas on foreign imports, limiting immigration, providing capital to local industries, giving tax relief to the country's farmers, and finding work for the capital's unemployed.²⁹ At the same time, he warned that action of one type or another was urgently needed to save the nation from total collapse.³⁰

7.2.2 *Rak Sayam* – "A Wise Elephant" (*chanyakhacha*).

One could forgive the loss of Siam's wealth if it were the result of governmental backwardness. After all, 'the backward' are not omniscient and when they interact with intelligent people who have their hearts set on taking advantage of the dull-witted, they generally suffer losses. It is far more vexing, however, when our resources are given away by

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 19 September 1931.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 21 September 1931.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 22 September 1931.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 23 and 25 September 1931.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 26 September 1931.

self-serving individuals who are determined to look after their own interests at the expense of their fellow nationals.³¹

The economic difficulties confronting the nation were similarly discussed in yet another serialized editorial which was published in January of 1932 under the title "What Does Siam Need?" (*krung sayam tongkan arai*).³² According to the writer, the essay was meant to provide a "comprehensive diagnosis" of Siam's "economic affliction" at a time when the kingdom was widely recognized to be "one step away from death", a condition which he claimed had recently been noted by no less a personage than the king.³³

He began by recounting the history of Siam's 'illness' in order to emphasize that the various 'cures' promoted by the court had actually contributed to the kingdom's malaise. During the course of the Fifth Reign, for example, members of the ruling elite were said to have spent a considerable amount of time and money in an effort to treat the kingdom with "special medicines" found in foreign lands. As an immediate consequence of their efforts, however, Siam was transformed into a "peculiar country where East actually met West", an unhealthy state of affairs which he claimed had ultimately hastened the kingdom's economic demise. In addition, he noted how other 'powerful individuals', presumably Vajiravudh and the members of his court, had engaged in an effort to "save their seats" by treating Siam's illness with "propaganda" (*propakanda*), a pointless effort in that the kingdom was not "pretending" to be sick at all but rather was suffering from a "severe squeeze."³⁴ As a result, he concluded that Siam's rulers had little understanding of how to restore the kingdom to economic health.

In a subsequent instalment, he also suggested that they were a principal cause of Siam's deteriorating condition. Having come to the realization that their kingdom lagged far behind the West, the powerful men of the realm were held to have launched a program of 'self-strengthening' (*kansang tua eng*), in the sense of "strengthening themselves at the expense of their fellows."³⁵ Thus, instead of seeking to create "a field in which all of the sheep could freely graze", they had produced "a country with too many lions" – arrogant beasts with "overdeveloped senses of superiority." And this, in turn, had weakened Siam and left it susceptible to three additional ailments –

31 *Rak sayam*, 12 January 1932, "Chanyakhacha" (A Wise Elephant), 'krung sayam tongkan arai?' (What Does Siam Need?).

32 The first instalment of the essay was featured in the premier issue (9 January 1932) of *Rak sayam* (The Siamese Guardian), a daily publication which was owned by nang Noen Chunsawan and edited by Kulap Nopharat. Subsequent instalments were published in the paper's issues of 10, 11, 12, 13, 14 January 1932.

33 *Rak sayam*, 9 January 1932, "Chanyakhacha" (A Wise Elephant), 'krung sayam tongkan arai?' (What Does Siam Need?).

34 *Ibid.*, 10 January 1932.

35 *Ibid.*, 11 January 1932.

'political oppression' (*ponlitikon oppretchan*), 'economic domination' (*ekhanomik dominechan*), and the 'immigration system' (*immikreting sittem*), all of which had devastating consequences for the kingdom's economic condition.³⁶ Before the symptoms of these latter diseases had begun to appear, the court had given the people of the kingdom several doses of "all-purpose medicine" by promoting public education and health care.³⁷ Thereafter, however, he asserted that they had done nothing to keep the kingdom from "wasting away."

At the end of his essay, the writer discarded the metaphor of illness in order to directly address his readers on the importance of working together to "throw off the foreign economic yoke."³⁸ Among other things, he called upon the public to consider

our forests, our mines, and our electricity supply, all of which have fallen completely under the control of foreign countries. Foreign domination of these activities has drained off large amounts of Thai money ... and laid waste to our national resources in a way which no other enemy ever could. Think for a moment! The Siam Electric Company alone has recently announced a capital holding of twenty million baht, money which the company has snatched from all of us. And consider as well all of the timber and mining companies which are working to profit at our expense ... in any given year, tens of millions of baht flow out of our country ... if we allow the flow to continue, we'll be left with little more than our flesh and bones, if we don't die altogether.

On the matter of Siam's 'needs', then, the writer was clearly arguing that it was necessary to save the nation from the exploitation of a self-serving upper class and foreign economic interests alike.³⁹

7.2.3 *Si Krung* – Kulap Saipradit, "Humanism" (*manutsayaphap*).

The powerful, those well-born individuals with money and titles, take pleasure in having everyone adopt their polite modes of speech. I won't venture to say who benefits from this but the nation definitely doesn't ... Can we honestly say that we have taken stock of our true situation in Siam? I only hear them uttering falsehoods about how this fellow really doesn't need to eat for a few days, or how that one is capable of enduring suffering, or how there isn't any pressing need to make changes, leaving us free to do as we've done in the past.⁴⁰

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 12 January 1932.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 13 January 1932.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 13 and 14 January 1932.

³⁹ Although the author promised to continue his discussion in a subsequent instalment, his essay was abruptly discontinued.

⁴⁰ *Si krung*, 21 January 1932, *nai* Kulap Saipradit, 'manutsayaphap khwamsangop' (Humanism: Tranquility).

The above passage is an excerpt from another critique of Jakkri rule which was written in January of 1932 – Kulap Saipradit's "Humanism" (*manutsayaphap*).⁴¹ At the time of the essay's publication in the popular daily *Si krung*, Kulap had already established a literary reputation under the penname 'Si Burapha'.⁴² Angered that many of his contemporaries were inclined to attribute the critical commentary of the press to influential members of the nobility "as if commoners were incapable of doing anything on their own", however, he arranged for "Humanism" to be published under his own name.⁴³

The essay began with an explanation of how the Thai, ostensibly a free race whose members had "as much right to think their own thoughts as the other peoples of the world", had allowed themselves to be "enslaved" by the opinions and beliefs of others.⁴⁴ Noting that most people had given far too little thought to such fundamental questions as "who we are, what role each of us has in the development of the country and the nation, what rights we have, and how we should exercise them under the framework of the law", Kulap argued that most remained oblivious to the true nature of their own society. As a result, they continued to "act in inhuman ways" and believe in "unreasonably and evil things." In a second instalment which appeared under the heading "The Misleading Human Belief that the Powerful Are Always Correct", he subsequently explained how the "lies and falsehoods" of Siamese society were perpetuated.⁴⁵ Popular taste was held to have been dictated by authority, and this at a time when power resided with the members of a self-serving upper class. As a result, people throughout the country continued to believe that the ruling elite could do no wrong and willingly "turned black into white" on their behalf. Thus, in an age when "most people remained uneducated and many of the educated remained uninterested in looking after the affairs of their compatriots", authority continued to provide its own

⁴¹ Details of the commoner-writer Kulap Saipradit's ('Si Burapha' 1906-1974) life and work are generally well known. See Wibha Senanan, *The Genesis of the Novel in Thailand*, Bangkok: Thai Wattanaphanit, 1975: 150-154; and Rungwit Suwannaphichon, *Si Burapha: si haeng wannakam thai* (Si Burapha: Excellence in Thai Literature), Bangkok: Saengdao, 1979. In addition, see the discussion of Kulap's 1932 novel *Songkhram chiwit* (The War of Life) below.

⁴² *Si krung* began publication in 1913 as monthly literary journal. In 1926, however, the owner of *Sayam ratsadon*, Manit Wasuwat, began issuing the paper as a political daily. Initially, it was edited by Bunjoet Kritayanin, a previous member of the police force who was released from service for alleged misconduct [see NA, R6, *nakhonban* 20.1/7, 'sayam ratsadon lae si krung' (*Sayam ratsadon* and *Si krung*)]. The essay 'manutsayaphap' was published on 10, 16, and 21 January 1932, giving rise to an extensive debate in the period press and ultimately resulting in *Si krung*'s brief closure on rebellion charges. See *Si krung*, 11 February 1932, 'khamthalaeng khong bannathikan' (An Announcement from the Editor).

⁴³ *Si krung*, 21 January 1932, Kulap Saipradit, 'manutsayaphap' (Humanism).

⁴⁴ *Si krung*, 10 January 1932, Kulap Saipradit, 'manutsayaphap khwamsoetrong khoe khwamjing khwamjing khoe khwamsoetrong' (Humanism: Honesty is Truth and Truth is Honesty).

⁴⁵ *Si krung*, 16 January 1932, Kulap Saipradit, 'manutsayaphap khwamlong khong manut thoe wa amnat tham arai thuk mot' (Humanism: the Misleading Human Belief that the Powerful Are Always Correct).

justification with "pretty language", and the powerful remained at liberty to "spread falsehoods throughout the land."

The likely consequences of this state of affairs were addressed in a final instalment entitled "Tranquility".⁴⁶ Peaceful change was said to be one possibility for, although authority "invariably had an impact on popular perceptions", the "source of authority" could shift over time, passing from kings to orators, and from members of the upper class to the poor, before ultimately coming to be shared by all of the members of a given society. When those in power "continually turned truth into lies", however, "oppression and mutual dishonesty" could easily lead to violent change as well. If, for example, the head of a household no longer had enough money to buy food for his family, he could still assure their happiness by setting aside consideration of his own stomach and sacrificing a few of his delicacies so that everyone had enough to eat. If, as in Siam, however, he sought to convince his family that they were capable of enduring suffering and had no real need to eat for a few days, there was little hope of things remaining peaceful. Instead, Kulap concluded that relations between employer and employee, between one class and another, were likely to become increasingly strained. Moreover, he added that it might even be necessary for the people to band together in order to "force those in power to stop lying to themselves" and start looking after "the interests of the majority."

7.3 Education.

The more they learn, the worse it gets. The more they think like buffaloes, the easier they are to rule (*ying ru ying rai ying ngo pen khwai ying sabai kae kanpokkhong*).⁴⁷

Education was another area in which the interests of the dynastic state and nation were perceived to be in conflict during the period. From the latter years of the Sixth Reign, nationalist writers of the popular press had undertaken to promote the view that public schooling was the key to national development, the means by which to foster a strong and unified national polity.⁴⁸ Among other things, the dissemination of scientific and commercial knowledge was asserted to be an integral part of national defense.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ *Si krung*, 21 January 1932, *nai* Kulap Saipradit, 'manutsayaphap khwamsangop' (Humanism: Tranquility).

⁴⁷ The poem was used as the headline of an editorial on the government's education policies which appeared in *Thai num*, 25 May 1928.

⁴⁸ *Tu thong*, 11-18 November 1924, 'nathi phonlamuang' (The Duties of the Citizenry); *Kro lek*, 1 March 1925, 'phu mi bandasak ja' (Dear Nobility); *Phim thai*, 17 April 1925, 'sonthana kap chainum' (Chatting with Young Men); and *Sayam ratsadon*, 17-18 September 1925, 'phongsawadan sangkhep prathet yipun' (A Brief History of Japan).

⁴⁹ *Pakka thai*, 22 March 1927, 'kansuksa pen upakon khong chat' (Education is a Tool of the Nation) and 26 April 1927, 'yuthasat kap kansuksa kicokhong yang rai' (The Relationship Between Military Strategy and Education); *Si krung*, 18 April 1927, 'kansuksa khong chat watha khong asvabahu' (National Education: the Discourse of Asvabahu), 12 July 1927, 'khwamhen ruang kansuksa' (An Opinion on Education), 22 July 1927, 'phai nai anakhot'

Moreover, instruction in the arts and humanities was similarly discussed as being a requisite step in the creation of 'good citizens' – "true patriots" who had an "understanding of their rights and duties" and "the courage to speak out" about the shortcomings of the existing political order.⁵⁰

Not surprisingly, the court was frequently called upon to adopt a more progressive education policy as well. In the early years of the Seventh Reign, for example, the capital press was filled with the arguments of individuals who believed that the government should increase public spending on education and raise teachers' salaries.⁵¹ At the same time, planners at the Ministry of Public Instruction were openly criticised for allocating a disproportionate share of the ministry's revenue to schools in the capital, for the poor quality of their syllabus and texts, for failing to emphasize vocational training, for doing little to promote public morality, and for making no attempt to encourage the education of women and the rural poor.⁵² In seeking to make education pay for itself with a local education cess and school fees, for example, the ministry was held to have caused "serious hardship" for the poor in every province of the kingdom.⁵³ According to one writer of the period, the extra two or three baht in taxes was far too much for most of the nation's farmers, many of

(Future Danger), and 29 September 1927, 'sapha ratsadon ja thoeng wela jattang dai ru yang' (Has the Time Come for Establishing a People's Assembly or Not?); *Thong thai*, 5 October 1926, 'rok ruarang khong khon thai' (The Lingering Illness of the Thai); *Sayam riwiv*, 1 April 1927; and *Bangkok daily mail*, 29 May 1929, 'kansuksa khong rao' (Our Education).

50 *Pakka thai*, 21 March 1927, 'kansuksa nai rongrian prathom' (Elementary Education); *Thai num*, 27 August 1927, 'chiwit khong ratsadon', (The Lives of the People); *Thong thai*, 14 September 1926, 'thana khong ying thai nung dwey kansuksa' (The Educational Status of Thai Women); *Si krung*, 22 July 1927, 'phai nai anakhot' (Future Danger) and 10 January 1929, 'kansuksa pen khruang pho phonlamuang di' (Education is a Device for Producing Good Citizens); and *Thai thae*, 15, 19 August 1931, 'phun kansuksa khong thai' (The Fundamentals of Thai Education).

51 *Pakka thai*, 8, 9, 11 and 12 January 1926, "Sotthi" 'kansuksa khong chat' (National Education). The writer noted that a majority of the kingdom's twenty thousand teachers were still being paid between three and five baht a month, an amount unchanged from the end of the nineteenth century. In addition, see *Si krung*, 15 July 1927, 'ngoenduan khong khrua ajan' (The Salaries of Teachers); 27 October 1927, 'sapha ratsadon kap sapha ongkhamontri' (The People's Assembly and the Privy Council); and *Thai thae*, 5 August 1931, 'thamakan kap omsin' (Public Instruction and Public Savings). In this latter essay, the writer reported that there were some 32,522 children who were not receiving education in the capital alone – a sizeable number in a population of roughly 600,000 people.

52 *Pakka thai*, 22 June 1926, 'wicha achip' (Vocational Training); 29 October 1926, 'saphap khong satri thai' (The Condition of Thai Women); and 21 March 1927, 'kansuksa nai rongrian prathom' (Elementary Education); *Si krung*, 28 December 1926, 'baeprian thi bankhap lae mai bankhap' (Required and Optional Texts); 1 June 1929, 'khomanakhom pen yot kanpokkhong' (Transportation is an Essential Part of Administration); 2 August 1927, 'kansuksa' (Education), and 20 September 1929, 'prathet sayam kap kasikamsuksa' (Siam and Agricultural Studies); *Thong thai*, 14 September 1926, 'thana khong ying thai nung dwey kansuksa' (The Educational Status of Thai Women); *Thai thae*, 17 June 1931; *Suriya*, 2 September 1931, 'khongkan sam pi' (A Three-Year Plan) and *Rak sayam*, 17 February 1932.

53 See *Si krung*, 22 July 1927, 'phai nai anakhot' (Future Danger); *Lak muang*, 13 February 1930; *Thai thae*, 13 June 1931, and *Suriya*, 11 July 1931.

whom had little recourse but to let regional education officials confiscate their land.⁵⁴ Similarly, another observed that those who paid the tax received very little in return, either because their money was promptly misappropriated or because the quality of instruction received by their children was "simply not be worth the two baht."⁵⁵ Perhaps the most damaging criticism of all, however, pertained to the court's ongoing policy of sending upper-class children abroad for an education for throughout the period, the policy was widely decried as being "unfair" to the lower classes and "dangerous for the nation as a whole" in that it caused the children of the ruling elite to "lose the habits of the Thai and take up the customs of the foreigners instead."⁵⁶

For a variety of reasons, such criticisms were increasingly voiced in the latter years of the Seventh Reign. Instead of providing additional funding for public schooling, Prajadhipok and his ministers immediately reduced the Ministry of Public Instruction's budget by some 90,000 baht, giving rise to complaints that the monarch shared his predecessor's belief that education was a cause of social unrest.⁵⁷ Moreover, the court's decision to replace the standing Minister of Public Instruction *jao phraya* Thammasak Montri with *phra ong jao* Thani Niwat proved controversial as well – initially, because the prince was considered to be "a poor choice" for the position and thereafter, because he appeared to be spending most of his time on dubious 'study missions' overseas.⁵⁸ In addition, during the debate over the assembly in 1927, the court was repeatedly criticised for using education as an "excuse" to delay the implementation of democratic reforms, and poverty as an excuse to slow the development of education.⁵⁹ In one essay of the period, for example, the writer

⁵⁴ *Thai num*, 25 August 1927, 'khwamthukyak khong chaona' (The Suffering of the Farmers). The Education Cess Act empowered officials to confiscate the land of individuals unable to pay the tax.

⁵⁵ *Sayam riwiv*, 25 July 1926, 'ngoen suksaphli kap phonlamuang' (The Education Cess and the Citizens).

⁵⁶ For example, see *Pakka thai*, 5 May 1926, 'tunlayaphap kap nakrian nok' (Retrenchment and Foreign Students); 22 March 1927, 'kansuksa pen upakon khong chat' (Education is a Tool of the Nation); and *Thai thae*, 10 June 1931.

⁵⁷ See *Si krung*, 18 April 1927, 'kansuksa khong chat watha khong asvabahu' (National Education: the Discourse of Asvabahu). After attributing the previous administration's lack of progress in developing the kingdom's school system to Vajiravudh's belief that "education causes unrest", the writer criticised the budget cut, remarked that the Primary Education act was being intentionally underfunded, and added that teachers were were paid less money than he spent on cigarettes each month. Regarding the Ministry's budget, the 1925-26 allocation of 2,800,630 baht was reduced by some 90,000 baht for the 1926-27 fiscal year. Thereafter, it was gradually increased to a high of 3,000,000 baht, before being reduced again to 2,000,000 baht in the period just prior to the absolute monarchy's overthrow. In addition see *Sayam riwiv*, 25 September 1927, 'jotmai' (A Letter) and *Rak sayam*, 5 February 1932.

⁵⁸ See *Pakka thai*, 10 July 1926, 'jao haeng krung sayam' (The Princes of Siam); *Sayam riwiv*, 29 August 1926, 'riwiv pakka thai' (A Review of *Pakka Thai*) and 2 January 1927, 'phra ong jao thani kap krasuang thammakan' (Prince Thani and the Ministry of Public Instruction); and *Si krung*, 18 April 1927, 'kansuksa khong chat watha khong asvabahu' (National Education: the Discourse of Asvabahu).

⁵⁹ *Sayam riwiv*, 25 July 1926, 'ngoen suksaphli kap phonlamuang' (The Education Cess and the the Citizenry), 29 August 1926, 'riwiv pakka thai' (A Review of *Pakka Thai*), and 4 September 1927, 'banmuang khong rao' (Our Homeland); *Si krung*, 2 August 1927, 'kansuksa'

openly accused the kingdom's rulers of being "all talk and no action; aware that most people remain uneducated, that half the nation is illiterate, and yet unwilling to do anything about it" out of concern that a well-educated populace would demand its freedom.⁶⁰ Similarly, another sarcastically noted that the court was only really interested in teaching the people a single lesson – that they should love their king and refrain from asking for democratic reforms.⁶¹

Following an announcement in early 1929 that plans were being made to close a number of secondary schools and raise the cost of higher instruction, however, public criticism of the court's education policies reached an unprecedented level.⁶² In paper after paper, the kingdom's rulers were held to be "intentionally impeding the development of national education", "oppressing the many for the sake of the few", and leaving the kingdom's lower classes "at the mercy of foreign exploiters."⁶³ In an essay of 1930, for example, the Thai were said to have been denied an education in order to protect the economic advantages of the ruling 'elite and the foreign business community – the "less than half a percent of the population" who were actually profiting from the kingdom's development.⁶⁴ As an immediate consequence of this policy, the writer argued that the kingdom already had far more in common with neighboring 'slave states' (*prathet chan bao*) like Burma and Cambodia than it did with 'master states' (*prathet chan nai*) like Japan, a point which he emphasized in the following chart.

(Education); and *Thai num*, 25 September 1928, 'ying ru ying rai ying ngo pen khwai ying sabai kae kan pokkhong' (The more they know, the worse it gets; the more they have the brains of buffaloes, the easier they are to rule).

⁶⁰ *Sayam riw*, 4 September 1927, 'banmuang khong rao' (Our Homeland).

⁶¹ *Kro lek*, 23 February 1928, 'khwamkhaorop' (Respect). In addition, see *Suriya*, 1 August 1931, 'kho khwan khit' (A Matter Worth Thinking About).

⁶² The plan, which was discussed over the next three years, was proposed in order to alleviate court concerns over the possibility of political unrest arising from growing number of educated unemployed in the capital. See Batson: 1984: 78.

⁶³ *Si krung*, 10 January 1929, 'kansuksa pen khruang pho phonlamuang di' (Education is a Device for Producing Good Citizens), and 4 October 1929, 'phonlamuang ngo pen phai to kanpokkhong' (Stupid Citizens are Dangerous for the Political Administration); *Ratsadon*, 30 January 1929, 'phra ong jao thani niwat kap kansuksa' (Prince Thani and Education), 1 February 1929, 'choen du namphrathai phra ong jao thani' (Take a Look at Prince Thani's Generosity), 8 February 1929, 'choen phikhro kansuksa khong chat' (Analyze the Nation's Education System) and 13 February 1929, 'pokkhong kap kansuksa kieokan yangrai' (The Relationship Between Administration and Education); *Thai num*, 5 February 1929, 'kansuksa khong thai' (Thai Education); 9 February 1929, 'kansuksa khong chat' (National Education); and 20 February 1929, 'sukhanikatham'; *Lak muang*, 15, 16 April 1929, 'kansuksa khong chat rao' (Our National Education); *Daily mail*, 29 May 1929, 'kansuksa khong rao' (Our Education).

⁶⁴ *Suphap burut*, 1 April 1930, 'than fang pen rot mai?' (How Do You Like the Sound of This?). In addition, see *Si krung*, 21 January 1930, 'sayam jat kansuksa dwey ngoen pi la sams satang' (Siamese Education: 30 Satang a Year), *Thai thae*, 13 June 1931, 'phanaek wijan' (Critic's Corner).

	ญี่ปุ่น	สยาม	พม่า	เขมร
พลเรือน	อยู่ในมือ ของตนเอง	อยู่ในมือ ต่างชาติ	อยู่ในมือ ต่างชาติ	อยู่ในมือ ต่างชาติ
อุตสาหกรรม	อยู่ในมือ ของตนเอง	อยู่ในมือ ต่างชาติ	อยู่ในมือ ต่างชาติ	อยู่ในมือ ต่างชาติ
ที่ปรึกษาราชการ	อยู่ในมือ ของตนเอง	อยู่ในมือ ต่างชาติ	อยู่ในมือ ต่างชาติ	อยู่ในมือ ต่างชาติ
ปกครอง	อยู่ในมือ ของตนเอง	อยู่ในมือ ของตนเอง	อยู่ในมือ ต่างชาติ	อยู่ในมือ ต่างชาติ

Figure 7.1: *Suphaphurut*, 1 April 1930, the political and economic sovereignty of Japan, Siam, British Burma, and French Cambodia compared. Japan alone is shown to have retained full control of its trade, industry, policy formation, and political administration. Meanwhile, Burma and Cambodia are represented as having allowed all four to pass into "foreign hands". Siam is depicted as a land which has retained control of its political administration alone, making its condition appear much like that of neighboring colonial states.

Similar sentiments were also expressed in an essay which was published in late 1931 under the title "Stupid Rulers Are the Only Ones Who Find the Educated Difficult to Govern."⁶⁵ After asserting that education alone would save the nation from becoming "an indirect slave" (*khikha thang om*) of the West, the writer argued that governmental neglect of public schooling had already resulted in the kingdom being transformed into "a field where foreigners were free to play at farming on the backs of others."

7.4 Political Graphics. In the latter years of the reign, the anti-colonial themes of the popular press were increasingly reflected in the cartoons of the kingdom's graphic satirists as well. During the course of 1930-31, for example, the popular daily *Si krung* featured an ongoing series of graphic editorials on the topic of foreign economic exploitation – drawings in which the court was invariably shown to have allowed the nation's trade and industry to fall completely into foreign hands. In one cartoon of the period, the nation was depicted as a home being overrun by Chinese, Indian, and European creditors while the master of the house lounged in bed and in another, a drawing entitled "if we don't fix it, it really won't get any better", bags of Thai money

⁶⁵ *Si krung*, 8 October 1931, "kho thi wa khon chalat pokkhong yak nan pen khwamjing chapho phupokkhong thi ngo' (Stupid Rulers Are the Only Ones Who Find the Educated Difficult to Rule).

were shown being hurriedly carted overseas (Figures 7.2 and 7.3). Some cartoonists of the period acknowledged that the kingdom's rulers were attempting to correct the nation's economic problems, albeit at "a turtle's pace" (Figure 7.4). In the drawings of others, however, the kingdom's monied classes were shown to have completely foresaken the nation at a time when it nearing total collapse (Figures 7.5, and 7.6).

Frequently, the kingdom's upper classes were portrayed as 'national oppressors' in their own right. In mid-1931, for example, members of the ruling elite were variously depicted as "cruel-faced giants" which "farmed on the backs" of the people, as a press for extracting their 'revenue blood', as lifeguards who sought to 'rescue' the kingdom's sinking agricultural classes with an anchor of taxes and high interest rates, and even as a bird of prey luring unsuspecting farmers to their deaths (Figures 7.7, 7.8, 7.9, and 7.10). Elsewhere, the kingdom's rulers were also represented as arrogant individuals who lorded it over their fellow nationals: clutching the means of agricultural production in their hands in front of prostrate farmers; touring the countryside in their motorcars on roads built by slave labor; returning from 'official inspections' with booty collected in the provinces; and looking on with delight as their shoes were licked clean by sycophant servants (Figures 7.11, 7.12, 7.13, and 7.14).

The graphic artists of a number of other newspapers besides *Si krung* made use of anti-colonial themes into their respective works as well. Indeed, the very masthead of *Thai thae* (True Thai) was an editorial in its own right, as was the heading of *Suriya*'s 'Funny Page' (Figures 7.15 and 7.16).⁶⁶ And one of the more caustic commentaries on Jakkri 'collaboration' to appear during the period was published in the Privy Purse-owned *Phim thai*. Entitled "In Step", this latter cartoon was a drawing of King Prajadhipok and the Governor General of Singapore, Sir Hugh Clifford, engaged in a two-step on a chessboard in front of the Royal Palace (Figure 7.17). Although ostensibly adversaries, Prajadhipok on white and Sir Clifford on black, the king was shown contentedly following his opponent's lead.

⁶⁶ A bi-weekly publication, *Thai thae* was issued by Somjit Nuwonlana from June to July of 1931. *Suriya*, a daily, was published from July to September 1931 by *Thai mai* Press.

ใคร เป็น เจ้า ของ บ้าน !



เจ็ก คุณหญิง อ้าวมาเอาค่าตัดเสื้อสิ ค่ะ!

แขก คุณหญิง จั๊มาเอาค่าเช่าเดือน!

ฝรั่ง ไอ้มาเอาค่ารถมอเตอร์คาร์!



คุณหญิง เจ็ก, แขก, ฝรั่ง,—
มา เป็น เจ้าของ บ้าน กันเต็ม แต่เช่าแม่ ชะ!

Figure 7.2: *Si Krung*, 12 August 1931, a commentary on the court's failure to protect the nation from the exploitation of foreign economic interests. Under the heading "Who Owns the Place?", a hoard of Chinese, Indian and European creditors are shown demanding payment for various goods and services. On the right, the master of the house lounges in bed while being told that foreigners have taken over the family home.



ไม่ แก้ว ไม่ หาย จริง ๆ !

Figure 7.3: *Si Krung*, 31 December 1931, "If We Don't Fix It, It Really Won't Get Any Better." In the above drawing, Siam loses another bag of Thai money to the foreign capitals of the world.

ภาวะที่รัฐบาลกำลังแก้ไขกันอย่างแข็งแรง



Figure 7.4: *Si Krung*, 10 August 1931, a sarcastic commentary on the court's economic policies. Entitled "Our Economy at Present – The Conditions which the Government is Taking Strong Measures to Correct", a turtle is shown pulling an impoverished Thai farmer to market with his rice, tin, and teak – Siam's principal export products.



Figure 7.5: *Thai Thae*, 1 August 1931, "When Will Siam Be Like This?" The figure carrying the flag is labelled 'economically-powerful groups'.



Figure 7.6, *Si Krung*, 26 August 1931, an elephant, here symbolizing the Thai nation, on the brink of death.

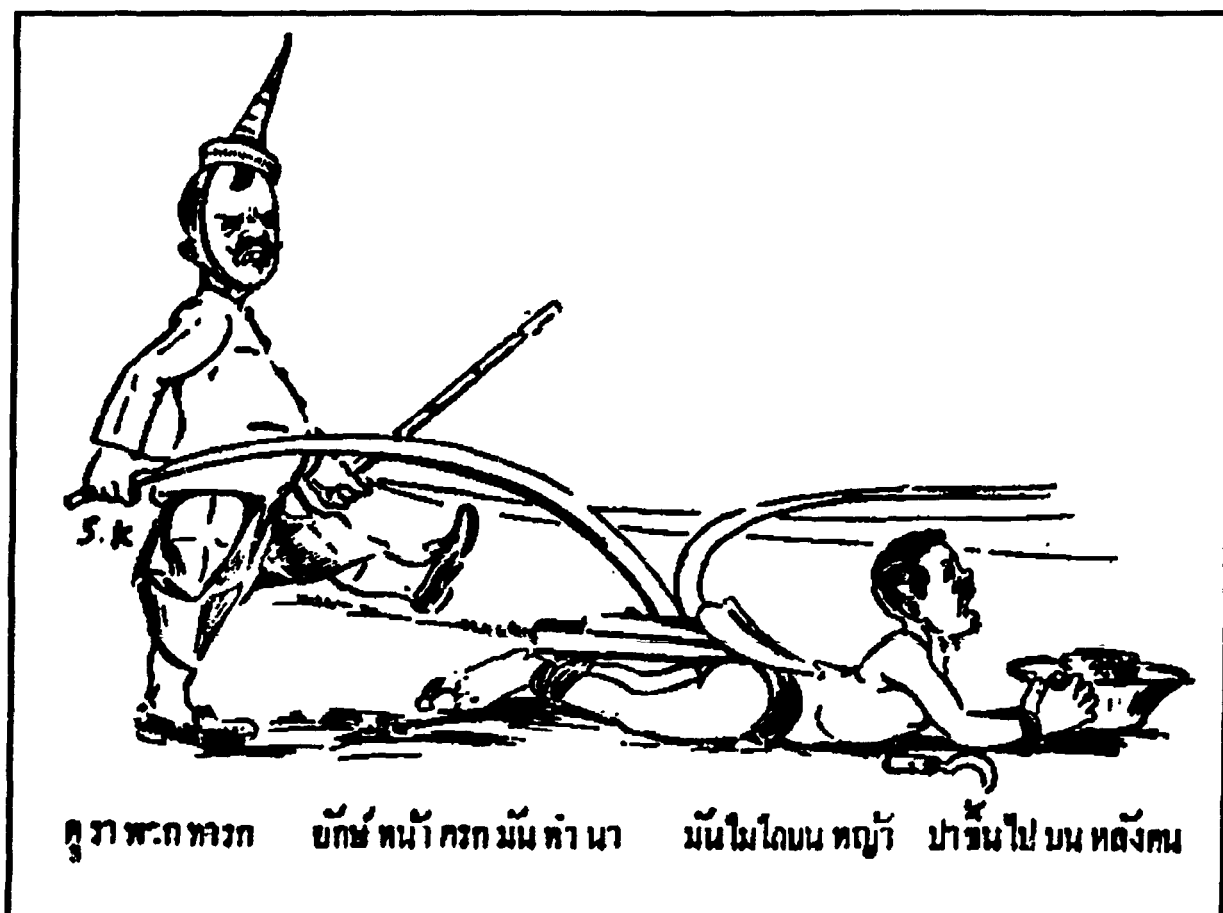


Figure 7.7, *Si Krung*, 4 August 1931, a graphic commentary on upper-class exploitation of the Thai farmer. At the bottom of the drawing, the artist has written that "cruel-faced giants don't plow on the grass. Instead, they lift the plow up for use on human backs."

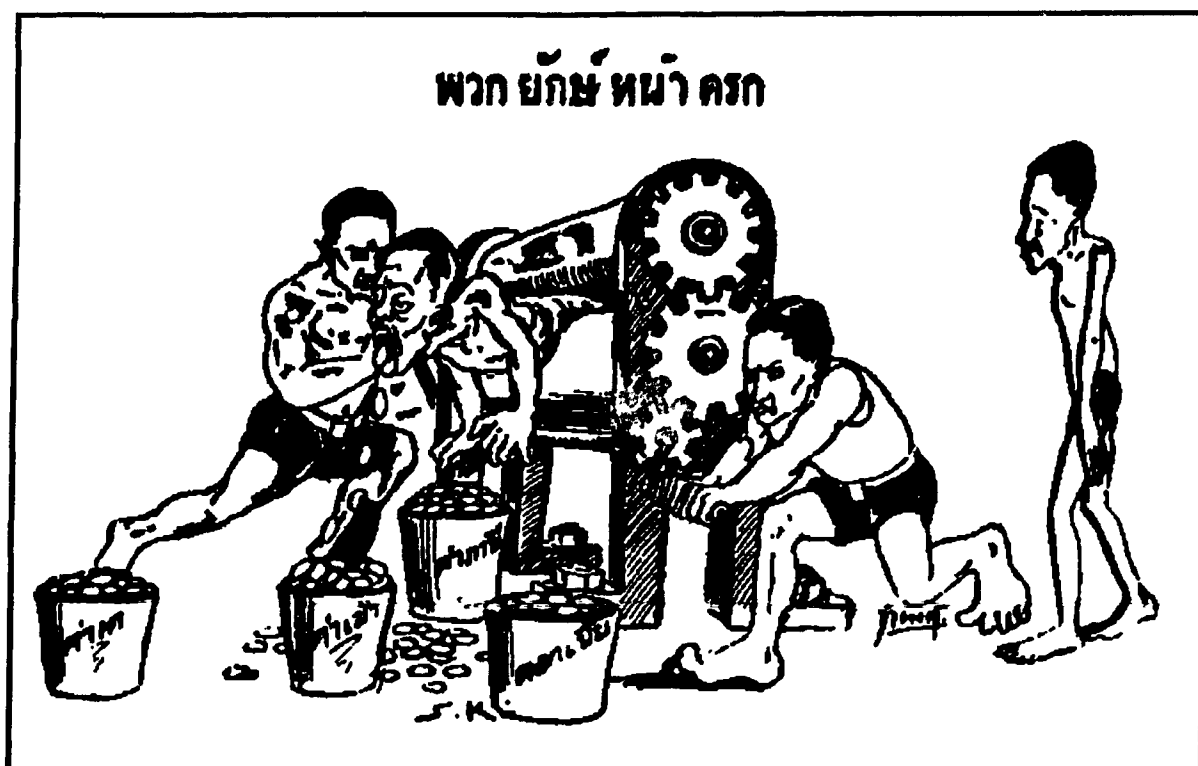


Figure 7.8: *Si Krung*, 5 August 1931, an additional commentary on upper-class exploitation of the Thai farmer. In this instance, "the cruel-faced giants" of the realm are shown putting the financial squeeze on the farmer with interest rates, rents, and asundried taxes.



Figure 7.9: *Si Krung*, 3 September 1931. On the left, members of the press are encouraging the government to take swift action to save the sinking farmer. In response, the government is poised to throw out a float tied to an anchor of low rice prices and high interest rates.



Figure 7.10: Si Krung, 23 October 1931, a humorous commentary on upper-class exploitation of the nation's farmers. A lordly stork lures a group of farmer-frogs out of the water by offering them a handful of flies while boasting that he has many more to give away. In response, one of the frogs is explaining that it loves flies while expressing concern that the stork may have an ulterior motive for making the kind offer.



Figure 7.11: *Si krung*, 27 July 1931, "Life in Siam", farmers fearfully paying their respects to a self-satisfied official who possesses their means of livelihood – the plow and the buffalo.

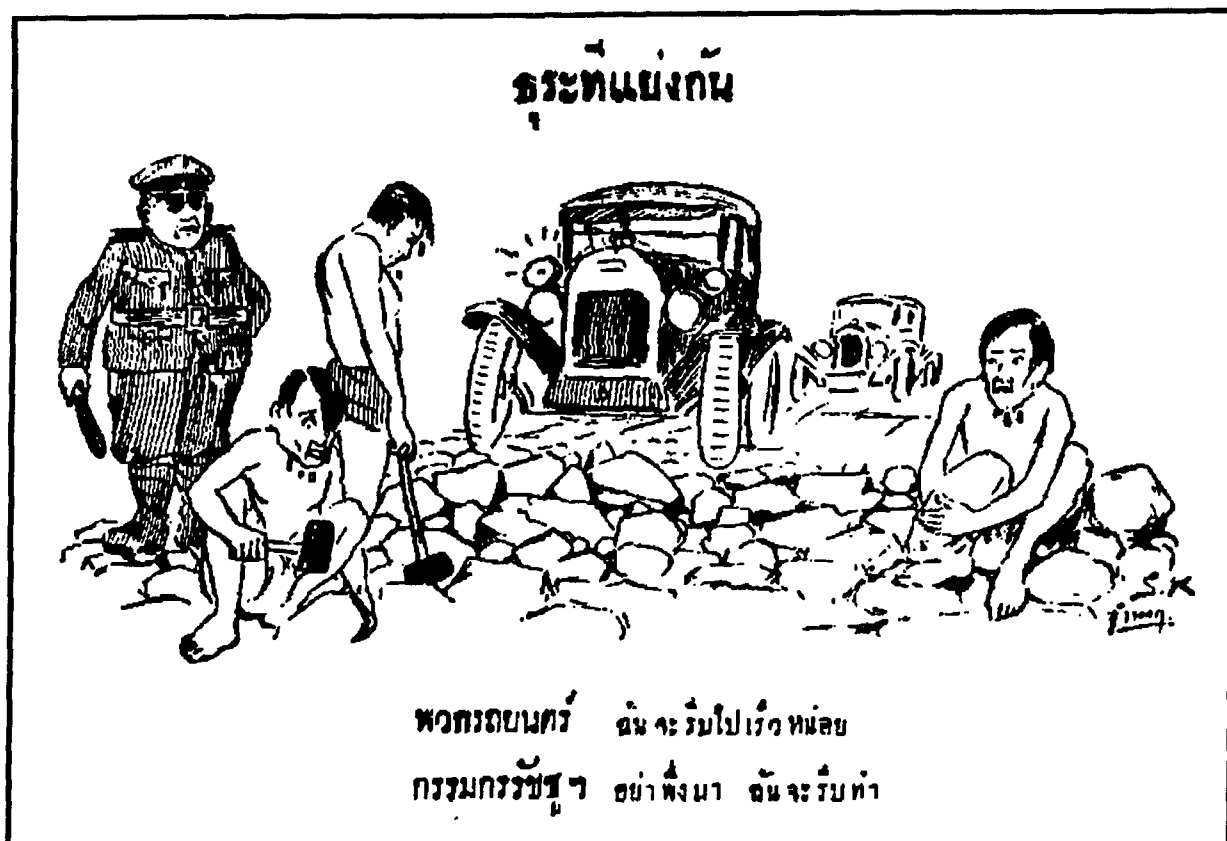


Figure 7.12: *Si Krung*, 31 August 1931, "Business At Cross Purposes". Under the gaze of a club-carrying policeman, corvée laborers are told to quickly finish their work so that "the people in the cars" can hurry on their way. In an age when there were something in the order of two thousand automobiles in Siam and most of these belonged to members of the upper class, the image was a forceful assertion that the kingdom was being developed for the benefit of the ruling elite alone.

กลั่นจากธรรมชาติ...งานยิ่งเต็ม!



หัวใจ — เจอ นะ! จากนั้นเพิ่ม ๒-๓ เดือน เท่านี้ ดิ้นเบ้อเรอ เบ้อว่า ไปตามๆกันหมด!! อากะพิ้งเหมือนนิคค์จ๊ะ!!

Figure 7.13: *Si Krung*, 16 July 1930, a critical commentary on government inspection trips to the provinces. Entitled "After returning from an inspection they are even bigger!", the drawing shows a government official and his family members carting home the booty which they have collected in the countryside. The caption at the bottom of the cartoon reads: "Yes, it looks as if we've all put on a tremendous amount of weight, and all of it within the space of six or seven months. The air in the provinces certainly is good for you!"

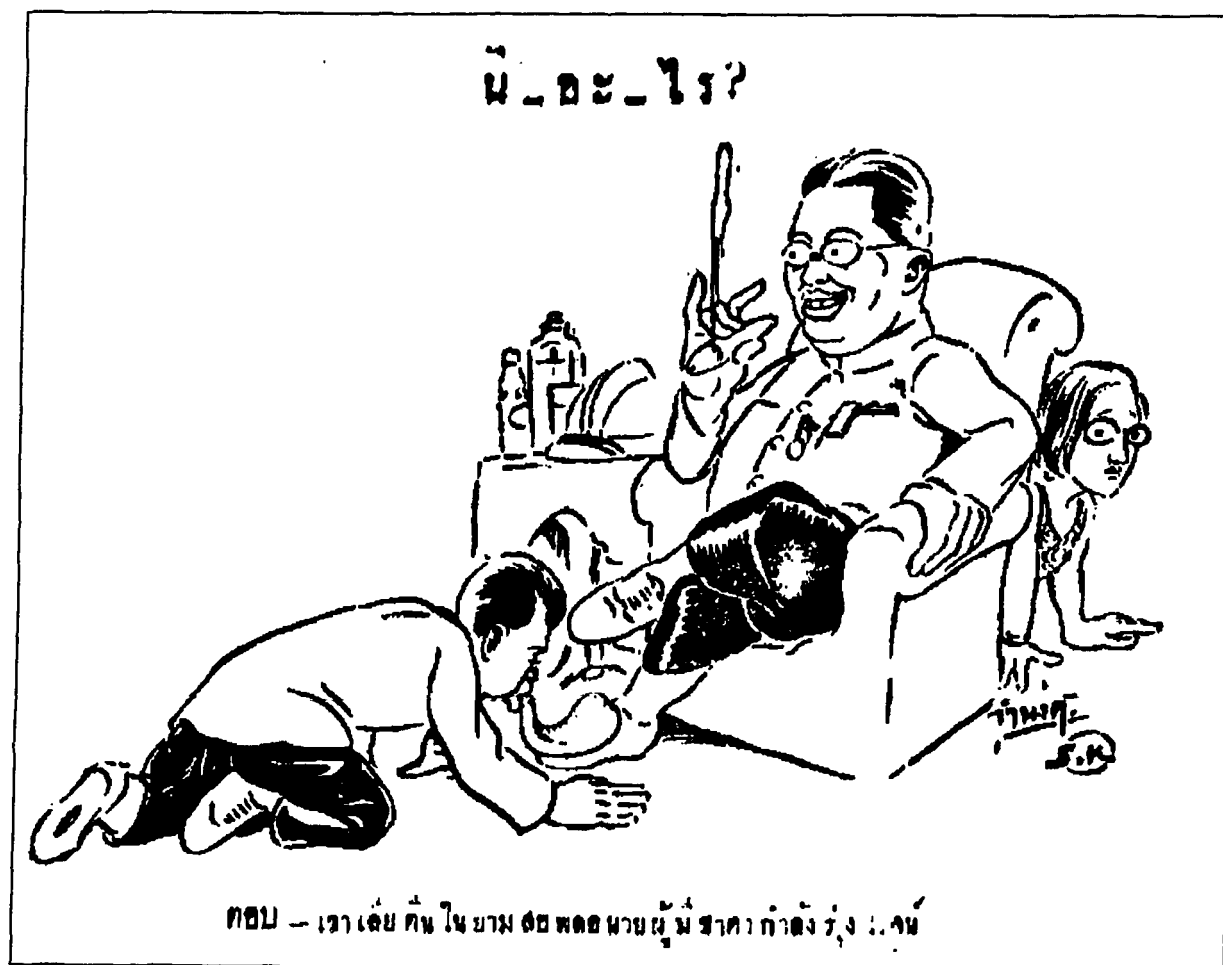


Figure 7.14: *Si Krung*, 18 July 1931, a commentary on sycophancy entitled "what's this?" At the bottom of the drawing, one finds the answer: "When their patron's star is rising, they flatter him by licking his feet."

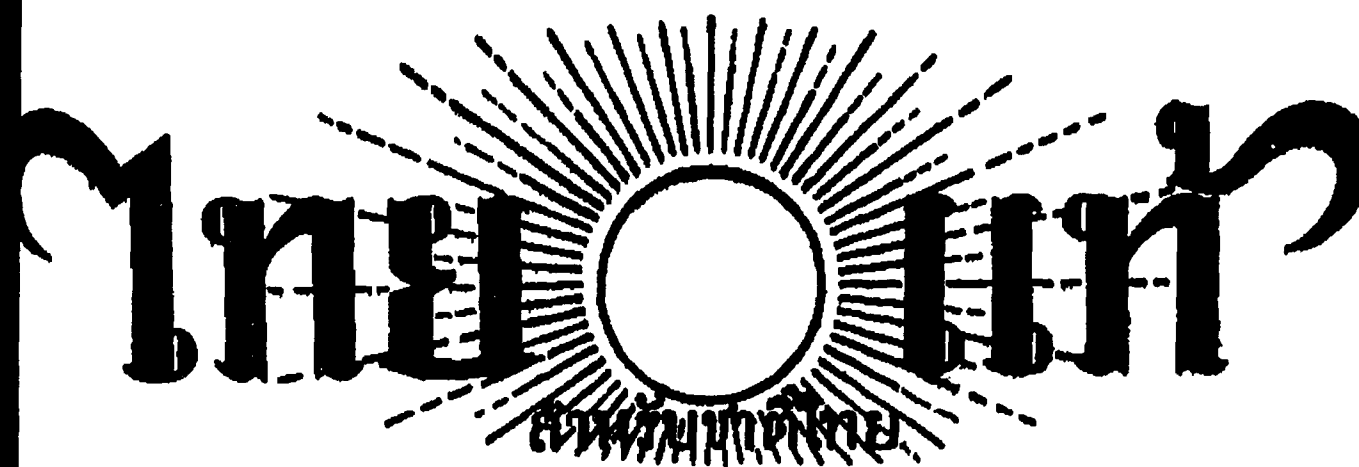


Figure 7.15: *Thai Thae*, 1931. An editorial in its own right, the newspaper's name, "Real Thai" and the sub-heading "For the Thai Nation" are arranged around a rising sun, a common symbol of Imperial Japan.



Figure 7.16: The header of *Suriya*'s 'Funny Page', bordered on both sides by club-wielding policemen. Included under this heading on 2 September 1931 was the tale of a noble whose arrogance caused him to believe that he was better than the commoner who supported him, a joke concerning a group of policemen involved in a street fight, and a second joke about a member of the nobility who, upon inquiring of a butcher whether he had meat for dogs, was asked whether he planned to eat it in the shop or take it home.

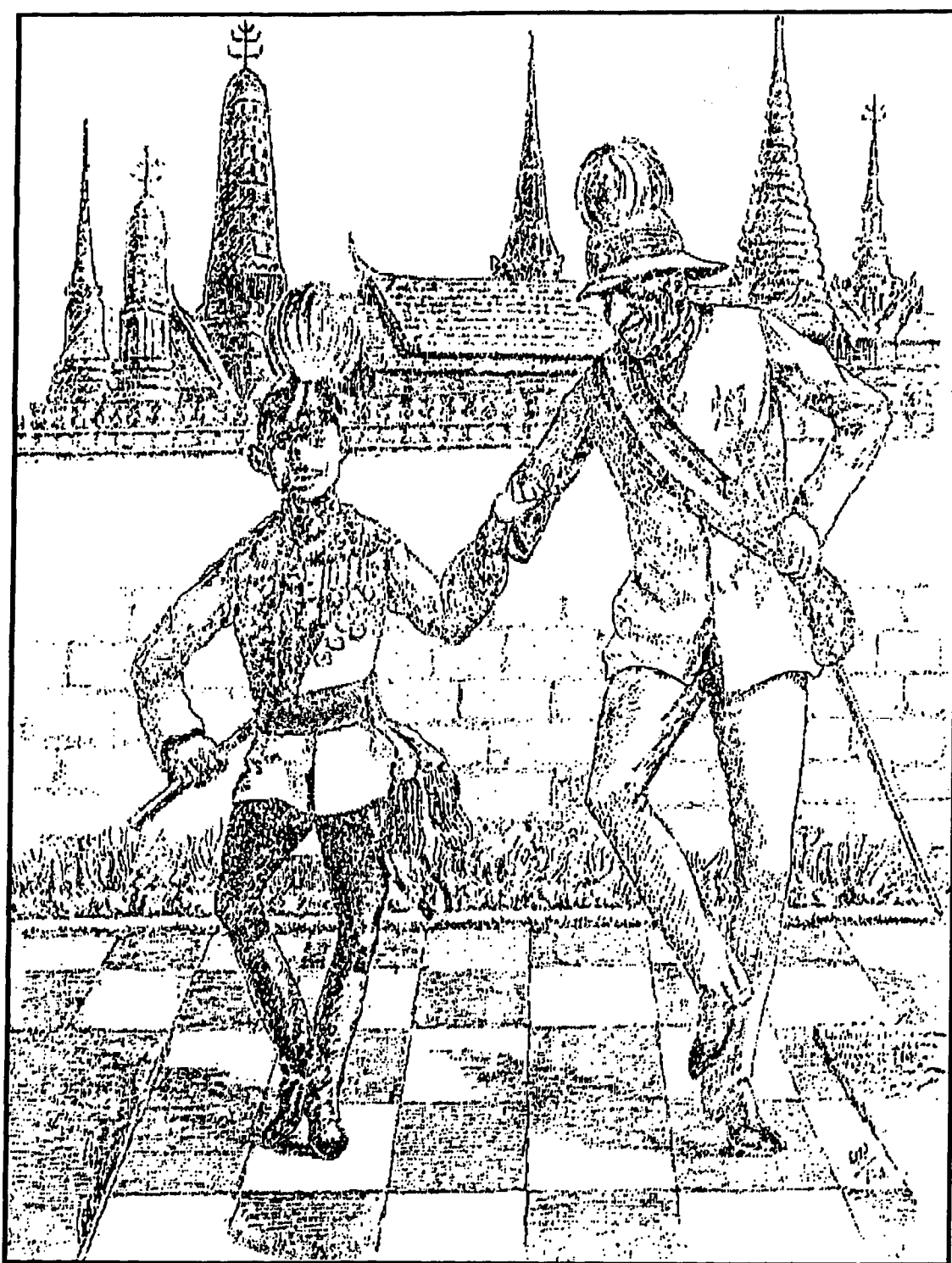


Figure 7.17: *Phim Thai*, 28 April 1928. Entitled "In Step", the above drawing was intended as a humorous commentary on Singapore Governor Sir Hugh Clifford's successful visit to Siam several months before. Originally published in *Straits Produce* of 15 April 1928, the drawing was subsequently carried in the Privy Purse-owned *Phim Thai*.

7.5 Language.

Any nation which hopes to obtain freedom in the present age must first strive to free its language.⁶⁷

In the latter years of the reign, concern for the nation's independence were also made manifest in an extended press debate over language. A "fundamental ingredient of Thai-ness", the "source of national life and tradition", central Thai was increasingly depicted as a vernacular on the brink of extinction – threatened from without by the intrusion of foreign words and corrupted from within by the self-serving policies of a ruling elite who were believed to be tailoring the language of a people, a nation, to suit their own narrow purposes.

From the mid-1920's, the government was frequently called upon to 'develop' the national language – a task which was almost invariably said to entail the 'preservation' and dissemination of central Thai.⁶⁸ Among other things, there were demands that Ministry of Public Instruction take a more active role in the promotion of standardized spelling, usage, and grammar.⁶⁹ Moreover, concern was increasingly voiced over the widespread use of English within the government bureaucracy. In the Ministry of Commerce and Communications, for example, English was said to have emerged as the language of preference, further buttressing the claims of economic nationalists that ministry personnel were far more interested in assisting foreigners than they were in helping their fellow Thais.⁷⁰ At the same time, the government was criticised for "baffling the nation's farmers" with English-language forms and explanations, and accused of indirectly encouraging the nation's youth to spend more time studying English than they did their own native tongue by hiring English speakers at better rates of pay.⁷¹

⁶⁷ *Si krung*, 13 November 1929, 'chiwit khong chat thai yu thi phasa thai doi trong 8' (The Existence of the Thai Nation Depends Upon the Thai Language, Part Eight).

⁶⁸ A notable exception was an essay published in 1928 in which the writer asserted that nationality had "nothing whatsoever to do with language." Citing the Swiss and the United States as examples, he argued that a united polity could be forged in Siam without forcing the kingdom's minorities to speak Thai. Similarly, the following year, another essayist asserted that language had very little to do with the development of the nation and stressed that it made little difference what people spoke or even how they spoke it, provided they all understood each other. See *Lak muang*, 14 November 1928, 'khwamhen ekkachon chat mai tong mi phasa' (A Private Opinion: Nations Don't Need Their Own Language) and *Phim thai*, 5 September 1929, 'kammakon', 'nangsu thai lae phasa thai' (Thai Writing and Language) respectively.

⁶⁹ For example, see *Phim thai*, 28 December 1926; *Pakka thai*, 27 January 1927, 'o wa phasa thai' (For the Thai Language); and *Thai num*, 3 August 1927, 'phasa lae nangsu thai' (Thai Language and Books).

⁷⁰ *Pakka thai*, 27 January 1927, 'o wa phasa thai' (For the Thai Language); and *Sayam riwiv*, 24 April 1927.

⁷¹ *Si krung*, 9 April 1927, 'ko khwan wijan ruang phasa tang prathet nai muang thai' (A Matter of Concern: Foreign Languages in Siam); 16 June 1927, 'nangsu lae lek thai' (Thai Writing and Numerals); 4 September 1929, 'phasa thai khong rao' (Our Thai Language); 1 November 1929, 'chiwit khong chat thai yu thi phasa thai doi trong 2' (The Existence of the Thai Nation Depends Upon the Thai Language, Part Two); and *Thai num*, 28 April 1929, 'khwan rawang kanchai phasa' (We Should be Careful About Using Language). In this latter essay, the writer

A number of writers also called upon the government to simplify the nation's language, particularly the official discourse of the ruling elite. Some openly ridiculed the court for issuing proclamations on the appropriate use of such English expressions as "His Excellency" at a time when many Siamese found the Thai-language pronouncements of their local officials virtually incomprehensible.⁷² Meanwhile, others argued that the profusion of pronouns and honorifics available to Thai speakers was "a source of national division", an anachronistic facet of the language which created problems for people of all classes by making it impossible for fellow nationals, individuals who were "all basically the same anyhow", to address each other as peers. Thus, it was proposed that an effort be made promote the use of *khapjao* (I, me) and *than* (you) to the exclusion of all other forms of first and second-person address.⁷³

In response to such criticism, the court took a number of steps to 'improve' the nation's language during the period. With the change of reigns, the Department of Texts (*krom tamra*) at the Ministry of Public Instruction was granted the authority to standardize spellings and where necessary, create Pali-Sanskrit neologisms to replace some of the more commonly-used English loan words – changes which were subsequently introduced into the language through the publication of an expanded edition of the ministry's dictionary in 1928 and the revision of school texts.⁷⁴ In addition, over the next several years, officials at the Department of Texts not only continued to 'build the nation's vocabulary' but also took steps to standardize Thai abbreviations and even developed a set of official guidelines for Thai-English transcription.⁷⁵

Here, again, however, the measures adopted by the government failed to alleviate concern that the national language was somehow deteriorating during the period. Indeed, from 1927 onward, the Department of Texts was widely criticised for hastening the process of linguistic decline. In one essay of the period, for example,

noted with concern that many students felt compelled to demonstrate their knowledge of English by incorporating unnecessary English words and expressions into passages of Thai prose – a stylistic habit which continues to be employed by many contemporary Thai scholars and academics.

72 *Si krung*, 9 April 1927, 'ko khwan wijan ruang phasa tang prathet nai muang thai' (A Matter of Concern: Foreign Languages in Siam).

73 *Pakka thai*, 4 June 1927, "mo ha", 'khaphacao lae than' (Me and You).

74 See the discussions in *Thai num*, 3 August 1927, 'phasa lae nangsua thai' (Thai Language and Writing); *Si krung*, 4 May 1928, 'pathanukrom khrang thi nung kap khrang thi song tang kan yang rai' (The Difference Between the First and Second Editions of the Dictionary); *Krungthep daily mail*, 5 September 1928, 'pathanukrom mi khun arai' (What's the Use of a Dictionary?); and 21 November 1929, 'phasa thai' (The Thai Language). Published in February 1928, the Textbook Division's new dictionary was reported to contain some 26,230 entries, almost double the number contained in the previous edition of 1918.

75 See *Si krung*, 12 August 1931, 'sapha senabodi long damri kham ni bang' (The Council of Ministers Ought to Give Some Consideration to These Words as Well) and 1 September 1931, 'khamyo nai phasa thai khwanja banyat chai khoen bang' (They Should Make Up Their Minds About Thai Abbreviations). In addition, see NA, R7, *betthalet*, 4/27, *withi khian phasa thai dwey akson roman* (A Method for Writing Thai with the Roman Alphabet).

the department's new standardized spellings were held to have rendered the Thai writing system "even more complicated and chaotic" than before, causing "confusion" among those who had already mastered the language and "difficulties" for those who were still in the process of learning it.⁷⁶ At the same time, a number of other writers expressed concern that the department was actually "undermining the history of the language" by giving "real" Thai words "foreign roots", thereby creating the erroneous impression the Thai spoke an amalgam of Pali, Sanskrit, Khmer, Chinese, Lao, Mon, Kha, Mao and Chawa.⁷⁷

For similar reasons, many writers were equally disturbed by the department's "strange new words" – polysyllabic compounds of a length which threatened to "slow the development of the nation", wasting a speaker's time and throwing his or her listeners into a state of confusion.⁷⁸ As noted by one essayist of the period, insomuch as the public was already obliged to "dawdle" over such words as *phrabatsomdetphrajaoyuhua* (His Royal Majesty the King), *phradechaphrakhun* (Your Great and Powerful Majesty) and *taithaokaruna* (Your Highness), it was counter-productive to further "clutter up" the national language with the "insincere patois of court sycophants", particularly when most people had "a far greater need for short, colorful obscenities."⁷⁹ In similar fashion, a number of others pointed out that the neologism *somburanayasitthirat* (absolute monarchy) was a modest improvement on the expression *kanpokkhong yang phrajaao phaendin yu nua kotmai* (a political administration in which the lord of the land is above the law) which nonetheless lacked the punch of the shorter and far more convenient English "equivalent" – despot.⁸⁰ How was it, asked one, that no attempt was made to create a shorter, more convenient word by simply assigning the meaning to an unused Thai phoneme?⁸¹

And wasn't it ultimately better to make do with a number of Western words than to set about devising awkward equivalents with "the languages of Indians, and dead

⁷⁶ *Thai num*, 3 August 1927, 'phasa lae nangsua thai' (Thai Language and Writing).

⁷⁷ *Ibid*; and *Krungthep daily mail*, 15 August 1929, "555" (*phra* Sarasat), 'phasa thai ja mai pen phasa thai bot thi nung' (The Language of the Thai Will No Longer be the Thai Language, Part One) and 21 November 1929, 'phasa thai' (The Thai Language).

⁷⁸ *Thai num*, 3 August 1927; *Krungthep daily mail*, 21 August 1929, "555" (*phra* Sarasat), 'phasa thai ja mai pen phasa thai bot song' (The Language of the Thai Will No Longer be the Thai Language, Part Two); and 4 September 1929, "555" (*phra* Sarasat), 'phasa thai ja mai pen phasa thai bot ha' (The Language of the Thai will No Longer Be the Thai Language, Part Five).

⁷⁹ *Krungthep daily mail*, 4 September 1929, "555" (*phra* Sarasat), 'phasa thai ja mai pen phasa thai bot ha' (The Language of the Thai will No Longer Be the Thai Language, Part Five).

⁸⁰ This particular example was raised no less than three times during the period. See *Krungthep daily mail*, 21 August 1929; *Si krung*, 28 August 1929, 'phasa thai' (The Thai Language) and 11 October 1929, 'chiwit khong chat thai yu thi phasa thai doi trong 1' (The Continued Existence of the Thai Nation Depends Upon the Thai Language, Part One).

⁸¹ *Si krung*, 28 August 1929, 'phasa thai' (The Thai Language).

Indians at that?"⁸² In the opinion of one writer, there was simply no point in replacing terms which had already attained a degree of common usage in Siam with yet another set of 'foreign' expressions which nobody understood, particularly when it resulted in the nation losing the advantage of sharing a political and technical lexicon with the peoples of the West.⁸³ Thus, he proposed that the Department of Texts leave off trying to develop an insular national vernacular devoid of links to the living languages of the world and promote the "internationalization" of the Thai language instead by encouraging the retention of foreign technical terms, the adoption of Arabic numerals, and the use of short place names as opposed to the aristocratic-sounding Sanskrit names which were usually chosen by the court.⁸⁴

While the idea of "internationalizing" the Thai language stuck many writers of the period as ludicrous, most were equally critical of the court's "addiction to Sanskrit."⁸⁵ In an essay entitled "Thai is Not an Indian Tongue", for example, one individual lashed out at "the Sanskrit contagion" by arguing that the ancient ancestors of the Thai race had *not* migrated from West to East but rather from North to South – from north of Assam into the Ahom region of India, and from southern China into the area comprising present day Siam.⁸⁶ In the process, the Thai language was said to have been mixed with the languages of the Khmer, the Burmese, the Mon, and the Vietnamese, "as normally occurred whenever people discussed the new things which developed in each age." According to the writer, however, it was exceedingly inappropriate for the Department of Texts to replace "common Thai words" with others "used by nations which had already lost their independence." Although Pali was the language of the Buddhist canon and the means by which to learn of the Buddha's life and teachings, the Buddha was unable to speak it and the important points of Buddhism had nothing to do with it either. So, too, Sanskrit – a language

⁸² *Krungthep daily mail*, 15 August 1929, "555" (*phra* Sarasat), 'phasa thai ja mai pen phasa thai bot nung' (The Language of the Thai will No Longer Be the Thai Language, Part One); and 21 November 1929, 'phasa thai' (The Thai Language).

⁸³ *Krungthep daily mail*, 21 August 1929, "555" (*phra* Sarasat), 'phasa thai ja mai pen phasa thai bot song' (The Language of the Thai will No Longer Be the Thai Language, Part Two).

⁸⁴ *Krungthep daily mail*, 23 August 1929, "555" (*phra* Sarasat), 'phasa thai ja mai pen phasa thai bot sam' (The Language of the Thai Will No Longer be the Thai Language, Part Three). *Phra* Sarasat's contention that there was nothing wrong with the "internationalization" of Thai received some support during the period. In an essay of 1931, for example, one writer argued that the adoption of romanized script would make the Thai language more accessible to foreign readers, help Thai authors to get rich overseas, reduce the size of Thai dictionaries, and facilitate the process of looking up words. *Si krung*, 14 and 15 September 1931, 'akson thai khwan plian rup phua fang prawat wai nai ngan 150 pi bang (We Should Make History by Changing the Thai Alphabet in Honor of the 150th Anniversary of the Jakkri Dynasty).

⁸⁵ For example, see *Si krung*, 27 and 28 August 1929, 'phasa thai' (The Thai Language); and 1 December 1931, 'akson thai khwan plian rup ru mai' (Should We Change the Thai Alphabet or Not?); *Krungthep daily mail*, 30 August 1929, 'khatkhan 555' (Disagreeing With "555"); and *Lak muang*, 10 September 1929, 'yaeng khwamhen ruang phasa thai khong 555' (A Criticism of 555's Views on the Thai Language).

⁸⁶ *Krungthep daily mail*, 22 November 1929, 'phasa thai mai chai khack' (Thai is Not an Indian Tongue).

which spread with Indian religion before being "forced into the mouths of the Thai" along with Khmer (*khom*) when Siam was a vassal of the Cambodian court. As a result, he concluded that it was a matter of deep concern that officials at the Department of Texts were seemingly determined to reinvigorate these dead Indian languages while making "no attempt to restore any of the words which truly belong to the Thai" to common usage.

He continued his critique the following day in a lengthy essay on *rachasap*, the language employed when speaking of the royal family's activities and possessions.⁸⁷ After remarking that *khaek* (a derogatory reference to things Indian) was "not the only language trying to gobble up Thai in its own home", the author asserted that Khmer was "just as bad." The language of "a tiny race which lost its freedom", it was said to have been "incredibly lucky" in that it had been afforded the status of a high language in Siam, "supplanting a number of true Thai words" in the process. When the Khmer still ruled Siam, the Thai were said to have

misconstrued that they were gods and taken their language to be the language of gods in consequence. Thus, they began using Khmer when speaking of their own leaders as well, and from that time forward it was treated as a sacred language.

Recently, however, this perception was held to have been undermined by several factors. Cambodian religious texts had been translated into Thai, causing the Khmer script to lose its sacral value. Moreover, a growing number of people had also realized that it was ridiculous "for the free peoples of Siam, an independent country which has received recognition from all of the countries of the West, to employ the language of a historical adversary which has lost its independence" when speaking about their rulers, particularly when the language continued to be used in French Cambodia to describe the activities of lower-class commoners. Finally, "real Thai leaders" were asserted to have "no great love of the Khmer words which commoners use to flatter them" either. In consequence, the writer argued that the time had come for the Department of Texts to quit trying to convince people that Khmer was "a marvellous language which deserved to be passed on to the young" and work instead to "restore Thai to the condition it was in when it was invented some 2,000 years before."

Alarmed that the 'independence' of the nation's language was being compromised, a growing number of writers clamored for the formation of a "language assembly" (*nirutti sapha; sapha banyat sap*) – a body of elected officials who would have the task of working together to "give Siam a common language with common principles."⁸⁸ As Thai was the "shared treasure of some ten million people", it was held to be "much

⁸⁷ *Krungthep daily mail*, 23 November 1929, 'phasa thai mai chai khamen' (Thai is not Khmer).

⁸⁸ *Krungthep daily mail*, 21 November 1929, 'phasa thai' (The Thai Language).

too dangerous" to leave its development to the five-man council at the Department of Texts.⁸⁹ Moreover, it was said to be "inappropriate" for questions of spelling and pronunciation, matters best left to "tradition or the majority view", to be decided by a single individual or group.⁹⁰ Quoting Voltaire to the effect that people were "the lords of their own language", one author even went so far as to argue that linguistic change was an inherently democratic process anyhow:

for when someone feels that a word should be written or pronounced in a certain way, they have the right to request that others do so but no authority to order such changes. Even if they are the rulers of a country, their wishes will be unrealized if others are unwilling to agree and in the end, they will be forced to follow the usage of the majority.⁹¹

As a result, the court's "interference" in language matters was said to constitute an unwarranted "breach of democratic principles", an unpopular effort to "return to linguistic axioms which had been passed over" and "could never be restored again."⁹²

One of the more forceful arguments in this vein was presented in a nine-part essay entitled "The Existence of the Thai Nation Depends Upon the Thai Language."⁹³ Citing Cardinal Richelieu's work with the Academie Francais, the role of language reform in ending Japanese 'feudalism', the more recent efforts of Hu Shih and the Assembly of Scholars to preserve Chinese independence by 'purifying' the Chinese language, and the activities of various language councils in Eastern Europe, the author asserted that people everywhere were engaged in a life-or-death struggle to maintain their independence through the promotion of "well-defined and secure national languages." Moreover, he argued that it was just a matter of time before those nations which failed to do so "disappeared from the face of the earth", their languages being "consumed by the languages of others." In consequence, he called for the immediate formation of a language assembly and proposed that it quickly adopt an aggressive policy of 'linguistic irredentism', restoring words which had been "lost to the race" and taking steps to promote the use of the Thai language among the peoples of neighboring states.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ *Krungthep daily mail*, 15 August 1929, "555" (*phra Sarasat*), 'phasa thai ja mai pen phasa thai' (The Language of the Thai Will No Longer Be the Thai Language); and 25 September 1929, 'thuang khwamhen dao nua ruang phasa thai' (Contesting "North Star's View of the Thai Language).

⁹¹ *Krungthep daily mail*, 15 August 1929, "555" (*phra Sarasat*), 'phasa thai ja mai pen phasa thai' (The Language of the Thai Will No Longer Be the Thai Language).

⁹² *Krungthep daily mail*, 25 September 1929, 'thuang khwamhen dao nua ruang phasa thai' (Contesting "North Star's View of the Thai Language).

⁹³ *Si krung*, 11 October, 1, 2, 3, 6, 9, 11, 13 and 14 November 1929, 'chiwit khong chat thai yu thi phasa thai doi trong' (The Existence of the Thai Nation Depends Upon the Thai Language).

7.6 Allegorical Fiction

The world is feverish and books alone will provide the cure. There is no other hope or recourse; only in books can we take comfort and refuge.⁹⁴

Given the number of well-known Thai novelists who began their literary careers in the latter years of the Seventh Reign, it is surprising to note that popular literature was also perceived to be coming undone during the period. As increased competition drove down the price of new manuscripts, many of the kingdom's more established authors were reportedly compelled to leave off writing and turn to other occupations.⁹⁵ Meanwhile, capital publishers were criticised for pandering to the market with an ever-increasing number of "indecent" romances and crude political satires.⁹⁶ Finally, in this instance again, the court's efforts to improve matters through the imposition of sanctions and the setting of standards were seen as largely ineffectual.⁹⁷

⁹⁴ Song Thephasit, *pralom lok* (Consoling the World), 1926, cited in Wat Wanlayangkun, 'Orawan: oksamsok', *Thanon nangsu*, 4:10, April 1987: 27.

⁹⁵ *Ratsadon*, 30 December 1928, 'nakpraphan muang thai' (Siamese Authors). Manuscripts which had previously commanded as much as two to three hundred baht were reportedly being sold for as little as three baht in 1928. For those with the wherewithal to publish their own novels, pocket books retailed at twice the cost of printing, making it essential for an author to sell at least five hundred copies of a standard thousand-copy print run in order to break even. On this latter point, and for a general history of the book trade in Siam, see So Bunsanu, *Tam roi lai su thai* (Following the Tracks of Thai Writing), Bangkok: Phi Wathin, 1987: 36.

⁹⁶ During the course of the 1920's, there appears to have a growing demand in Siam for what were characterized as 'indecent books' (*nangsu lamok*). When *Bangkok kanmuang* ran afoul of the authorities for publishing a drawing of a couple poised on the brink of making love in mid-1923, for example, the editor observed that the market was already filled with postcards (*rup potkat*; *rup po*) of bare-breasted women and spicy novellas capable of "shaking the heavens more than our little drawing ever could." From 1923 onward, an increasing number of political satires were reportedly published as well: Sunchai Manmat's *Tok krabong* (Fallen From Favor) which featured a picture of Vajiravudh on its cover 'in honor' of the king's birthday; *Tok tiang* (Falling from Bed); *Kin mia* (Eating A Wife), and *Hualan jaochu* (The Balding Playboy) being just a few of the works which contained "characters modelled after real individuals." See *Bangkok kanmuang*, 17 July 1923, 'hen sawan wai' (Watching the Heavens Tremble); *Sayam ratsadon*, 9 January 1925, 'sonthana kap nakpraphan samai ni' (Speaking with the Writers of the Age) and 5 June 1927, 'ruang na ru samrap chao rao' (Matters of Interest to Us All).

⁹⁷ By all accounts, the authorities had difficulty in policing the booktrade during the period. By 1927, for example, there were reports of a flourishing subscription business in pornographic novels, a ruse apparently initiated by a young woman of the upper class who had previously been prosecuted on obscenity charges for her early novels – *The Mermaid*, *Opening Heaven*, and *A Man with Lovers*. Moreover, a dramatic increase in "political novels" was also reported the following year. In addition, the court's efforts to set standards of excellence were openly ridiculed during the period as well. From the end of the Sixth Reign, an annual competition for excellence in literature was staged under the auspices of the Royal Council of Sages (*ratchabanthitaya sapha*). As prizes were frequently awarded to Vajiravudh and the members of his court, however, the competition was quickly transformed into a topic of public satire. Thus, in the early Seventh Reign, one writer lampooned the affair by sarcastically musing that he was bound to win the two thousand baht prize with his upcoming study on the factors which had driven Taksin, prior to the Jakri dynasty, insane. See *Krungthep daily mail*, 24 June 1927, 'nangsu lamok' (Indecent Books); *Ratsadon*, 30 December 1928, 'nakpraphan

Similar concerns were also addressed in period fiction. One of the more powerful pieces of social criticism to ^{be} published during the period, Kulap Saipradit's *Songkhram chiwit* (*War of Life*), was a forceful assertion of authorial impotence in the face of social injustice.⁹⁸ Structured as an epistolary exchange, the novel charts the course of an unsuccessful romance between Raphin Yuthasin and the object of his desire, the seemingly virtuous Phloen or "Pleasure". As the tale progresses, Raphin uses his correspondence with Phloen in order to vent his frustration over the inequities of the Seventh Reign social order – the sharp disparities of wealth and privilege which afford comforts to some while leaving others in suffering. In the process, he maintains the belief that his correspondence is a form of self-improvement, a means by which to establish himself as a writer and win 'pleasure' for a bride. He is ultimately proven wrong on both counts, however, for as the story concludes he remains an impoverished clerk and Phloen leaves him to marry for money.

An equally frustrated view of the author's role in Siamese society was presented in *mom jao Akat Damkoeng's* popular novel of 1929, *Lakhon haeng chiwit* (*The Circus of Life*).⁹⁹ The story's protagonist and narrator, Wisut Suphalak na Ayuthaya, is yet another aspiring writer, an individual who is only able to make headway in life after quitting Siam for Europe. Deprived of an opportunity for advancement in his homeland, he leaves for England where he quickly establishes himself as an author and social critic. Significantly, he does so by becoming a journalist – an occupation which is depicted in the novel in exceedingly flattering terms. Among other things, those who work for the press are described as heartfelt patriots, "the better among them either loving or hating their nations with a passion."¹⁰⁰ Moreover, they are also held to be people of honesty and integrity who "see the truth of life" and seek to impart

muang thai' (Siamese Authors); and *Bangkok kanmuang*, 30 November 1926, 'jao taksin ba jing ru?' (Was Taksin really Crazy?) respectively.

⁹⁸ Published in 1932, *Songkhram chiwit* was modeled upon Dostoyevski's *Poor People*, a fact which Kulap acknowledged by including a brief biography of the Russian writer in the text of his story.

⁹⁹ The son of *kromluang* Ratburi Direkrit, Akat Damkoeng Raphiphat (1905-1932) became interested in writing while studying at Bangkok's Thepsirin School, where he issued a broadsheet with his classmate, Kulap Saipradit, and produced several short stories for publication. In 1924, he left Siam for a brief period of study in England, ultimately returning to Siam via the United States and Japan some four years later. His first novel, *Lakhon*, was published shortly after his return. It proved to be exceedingly popular, some four thousand copies of the work being sold within the space of a single year. In the subsequent period, Akat published a second novel and two collections of short stories. In early 1932, however, he abruptly fled the country for Hong Kong, dying there under suspicious circumstances. See NA, R7, *mahathai*, 2.1/60 – *mom jao Akat Damkoeng*; Chali lamkrasin, *Mom jao akat damkoeng kap nganpraphan* (*mom jao Akat Damkoeng and Writing*). Bangkok: Bannakit, 1976: 30; and Orasom Sutthisak, *Jaochai nakpraphan boenglangchak chiwit khong mom jao akat damkoeng raphiphat* (Prince and Writer: The Behind the Scenes Life of *Mom Jao Akat Damkoeng Raphiphat*), Bangkok: Dokya, 1987.

¹⁰⁰ Akat Damkoeng Raphiphat, *Lakhon haeng chiwit* (*the Circus of Life*), Bangkok: phraephitaya, 1972: 105.

it to their fellows.¹⁰¹ Precisely because the journalist is an individual with well-developed sense of responsibility to his countrymen, however, Wisut the reporter is ultimately compelled to return to an uncertain future in Siam, a country where "the press is held in such low esteem that journalism isn't even considered to be an occupation."¹⁰²

Apart from representing the political journalist as a 'national hero', Akat subsequently made use of his second novel *Phiw luang phiw khao* (Yellow Skin, White Skin) in order to present a scathing indictment of Jakkri rule.¹⁰³ The novel appeared to be an uninspired sequel to *Lakhon haeng chiwit*, a supplemental account of Wisut's inter-racial love affair with a fellow reporter named Maria Grey.¹⁰⁴ During the course of his tale, however, Akat intentionally used Wisut's ambivalent relationship with Maria as a foil for the love affair of two new characters in the story: *phra ong jao* Worapraphan, a Thai prince who is studying at Oxford and Irene Stills, the daughter of a wealthy British businessman. In contrast to Wisut, who repeatedly refuses Maria's requests for a permanent union, Prince Worapraphan plans to marry Irene over the objections of several characters in the story. Wisut, for one, attempts to convince the prince that Asians and Europeans make poor marriage partners, only to be accused by Worapraphan of "thinking with the old-fashioned ideas of the men who used to stand in the way of change and global civilization."¹⁰⁵ Further along in the text, a more determined effort to dissuade the prince is then made by yet another character in the tale, an exiled Indian princess named Aruya. She, too, has had a relationship with an Englishman, one which ended in betrayal, and this, in conjunction with her memories of the colonial legacy in her homeland, have caused her to openly depise the British. When Wisut at one stage admits that his knowledge of India is limited to what he has read of English history, for example, she angrily tells him:

there is absolutely no truth in their historical records. The British wrote those in order to convince people that they are gods and were little concerned about the factual basis of what they had written ... the British wouldn't dare write a [true] history of India because of the ruthless behavior which they have displayed in the past. They stole a country, stole the wealth of a kingdom, and killed millions of people in the process ... anyone who knows even

¹⁰¹ *ibid*: 105, 151.

¹⁰² *ibid*: 104.

¹⁰³ Originally published in 1930, *Phiw luang phiw khao* (Yellow Skin White Skin) has recently been reprinted. See Akat Damkoeng Raphiphat, *Phiw luang phiw khao* (Yellow Skin White Skin), Bangkok: Phraepitthaya, 1973.

¹⁰⁴ This appraisal was not only put forward by Prince Chula Chakrabong in a 1931 review (see Chali: 1976: 195) but more recently, the Thai scholar Mattani Rutnin has described the novel as little more than 'a study of racial and social conflicts ... [full of] overly romantic clichés and awkward English-Thai syntax' (see Mattani Mojdara Rutnin, *Modern Thai Literature: The Process of Modernization and the Transformation of Values*, Bangkok: Thammasat University Press, 1988: 33). Both reviewers failed to take note of the work's allegorical value, however.

¹⁰⁵ Akat: 1973: 68.

a little Indian history and is honest will admit straight-away that the British are animals, the most brutal of bandits. They are forever moralizing about right and wrong, while locking up petty thieves in pursuit of justice ... But as for travelling around stealing big things, countries and kingdoms, they seem to have no understanding that these are crimes at all. In fact, they see such theft as being praiseworthy! ... They see all other human races as animals ... perhaps you don't understand what they have already done to your country. All of us in Asia and Indochina have been cheated together.¹⁰⁶

Unsurprisingly, Aruya is convinced that Worapraphan's love for Irene is tantamount to a betrayal of his race, a 'collaboration' which will ultimately bring him little but British scorn. Thus, at one stage, she explains to him

you and I are very similar. You have been studying in England since you were a child, while I've been here since I was born ... They've raised us as British children, forcing us to adopt their habits. We've forgotten ... forgotten what the hearts of the Thai or the Hindu, what our own hearts, are really like ... how can you be happy when they've taught you to be something which you shouldn't be, taught you to want things which you can never hope to get? If I'd lived in India all of my life, if the British hadn't come and stolen my birthright, my life, and my mind, I would never have even dreamed of loving a European male, or a white-skinned male from any other country for that matter. In all likelihood, I would have had the same feelings for the whites which they now have for us ...¹⁰⁷

And when Worapraphan still fails to recognize that his love for Irene is misplaced, Aruya proves that her perceptions are correct by arranging for him to overhear the Englishwoman and her latest paramour discussing the prince as "a vile species of insect."¹⁰⁸

This latter incident leads to one of the more ambiguous parts of the novel. Having destroyed the prince's illusions, Aruya tries to comfort him by noting that he should be happy to have escaped from becoming another object of British ridicule, "as we yellow and brown-skinned peoples of the East have displayed our stupidity to them in sufficient numbers already."¹⁰⁹ Worapraphan is furious, however, and blames everyone *but* the British, expressing his anger at those who sent him to England, at himself, and finally at Aruya. Announcing that he is "not one of her kind", he breaks off their relationship and quits the scene. In fact, he goes to a brothel, explaining to Wisut the next day that for years he had been "trying to construct a paradise by which he might escape from the color of his skin" only to discover that he could 'enter

¹⁰⁶ *ibid.* 85.

¹⁰⁷ *ibid.* 120-121.

¹⁰⁸ *ibid.* 130.

¹⁰⁹ *ibid.* 136.

paradise' whenever he wished.¹¹⁰ In response, Wisut observes that "it is just this sort of ruler who has made the Jakkri clan so progressive, so capable of leading the nation to good things."¹¹¹ The intended sarcasm of the remark is readily apparent within the confines of the text. In a lengthy passage at the opening of the novel, the reader has already be asked to consider:

How is it that our country has come no further than this at present? When will we ever awaken from the stupor which has caused us to believe that we are already happy? We are not at war and the foreigners are no longer likely to bother us. It is time that we cease worrying about them. There is nothing strange about our poverty. When we leave our schools, we seek only to become civil servants, as if there were no other occupations in Siam. Engaging in business is considered a dangerous test of luck in which we feel we have neither the capital nor the skill to better our Chinese competitors. Nor, for that matter, do we try to accumulate capital, even though we are all well aware that our Chinese immigrants arrive here with next to nothing, unable to speak Thai, and yet within a five or six years, have amassed fortunes ... we allow foreigners to come and have the pleasure of mining our ore at Phuket, planting our rubber plantations, growing our coconuts. We Thais let the foreigners suck the blood from our bodies, we allow them to come and develop our commerce, to reap as full a harvest as they please ...¹¹²

Moreover, at the conclusion of the story, when Maria asks Wisut if he truly loves his king, he replies that he has already answered the question with the tale of Worapraphan. Perhaps the most telling indication that *Phiw luang phiw khao* was meant to be taken as an allegorical critique of Jakkri rule, however, is provided by Akat's curious play upon the novel of a contemporary, Sir Hugh Clifford's *Saleh: A Prince of Malaya*.¹¹³ Midway through the text, Akat breaks his narrative in order to acknowledge that he has drawn upon Clifford's work in writing chapters twelve through twenty-one.¹¹⁴ In contrast to Clifford's sympathetic portrait of a Malay *raja* who has lost his identity after years of study in London, however, Akat intentionally crafted a picture of an arrogant Siamese prince, an individual so thoroughly enamored with things British that he is no longer willing to heed the advice of his fellow nationals or his more experienced royal peers from neighboring Asian lands. This shift in meanings is nowhere more evident than in the conclusions of both tales, for

¹¹⁰ *ibid.*: 145.

¹¹¹ *ibid.*: 155.

¹¹² *ibid.*: 11-12.

¹¹³ Clifford's novel was first published in two instalments: *Sally: A Study* (1904), and *Saleh: A Sequel* (1908). In 1926, both pieces were combined and published under the title, *Saleh: A Prince of Malaya*. The work has recently been reprinted; see Hugh Clifford, *Saleh: A Prince of Malaya*, Singapore: Oxford, 1989.

¹¹⁴ See Akat: 1973: 77. While Akat modified and rewrote much of the borrowed material, the speeches of his Indian princess Aruya were directly translated from Clifford's novel, which also contained an embittered and nationalistic 'little Princess'.

whereas Clifford's Saleh returns to his homeland to die in an unsuccessful uprising against the colonial authorities, Akat's Worapraphan regains his self-esteem in the warehouses of London.

Akat was not the only popular author of the period to employ romance for allegorical purposes. A number of similar tales were also crafted by *mom luang* Buppha Nimmanhemmin, or 'Dokmai Sot'.¹¹⁵ Her first novel *Satru khong jao lon* (Her Enemy), for example, was at once a light-hearted love story and a metaphoric affirmation of the need for national unity in the face of the 'foreign threat'.¹¹⁶ The tale centers upon the problematic relationship of two upperclass youth, Prasong Wibunsak and his betrothed Mayuri. Prasong, whose very name conveys the idea of desirability, is an idyllic fusion of the traditional and modern Thai leader, an individual whose virtue and Western training have earned him the right to run the family business, which clearly prospers under his guidance. In contrast, Mayuri has seemingly been marred by her exposure to things Western. Despite her foreign education, she is incapable of contributing to her father's business and appears content to pass her days in pursuit of idle pleasures. Moreover, she has also become headstrong, stubbornly refusing to follow her father's wish that she marry her childhood sweetheart, Prasong.

The conflict between these rival aristocrats is ultimately played out in the home of Mayuri's father 'Chatra' – a name denoting the multi-tiered umbrella which serves as a prominent symbol of Jakkri kingship. At the opening of the tale, Chatra informs Prasong that Mayuri is no longer willing to marry him, thus "freeing" him from his long-standing obligation. Determined to win Mayuri back as a marriage partner, however, Prasong poses as an educated commoner and travels to the Chatra household to serve as the secretary of his would-be father-in-law. Initially, his relationship with Mayuri is severely strained, for although secretly in love with her, he treats her with open disdain and flatly refuses to acknowledge her 'superior' social

¹¹⁵ Like Akat, *mom luang* Buppha Nimmanhemmin ('Dokmai Sot' 1905-1963) spent her early years on the periphery of the extended royal clan. Her mother was an actress, one of the forty-odd wives of *jao phraya* Thewetwongwiwat (*mom ratchawong* Lan Kunchon), and while still quite young, Buppha was sent to live in the women's quarters of Royal Palace. She remained there until she was thirteen, at which time she was enrolled at St. Joseph's Convent for her formal schooling. It was while studying at St. Joseph's that she was exposed to Western fictional forms and developed an interest in writing. Her earliest published work was a short play which appeared in *Thai kasem* in 1927. It was not until 1929 that she produced her first novel, *Satru khong jao lon* (Her Enemy) which was serialized in *Thai kasem* from June to September of 1929. Apart from her final piece of writing, an unfinished satire of the Phibun administration, *mom luang* Buppha's works have not been interpreted as political allegories. For brief biographies of *mom luang* Buppha, see Wibha, 1975: 151; Samnakphim Praphansan, *Nakkhian ruang san diden* (Excellent Authors, Excellent Short Stories), Bangkok: Praphansan, 1989: 7-8; and T. Strehlow's *A Secret Past*, Melbourne, 1986. In addition, see B. Batson, 'Kulab Saipradit: The War of Life', *Journal of the Siam Society*, 69:3, 1981, 61.

¹¹⁶ The discussion which follows is based upon *mom luang* Buppha Nimmanhemmin, (Dokmai Sot), *Satru khong jao lon* (Her Enemy), Bangkok: Bannakhan, 1963.

standing. She, in turn, responds by repeatedly reminding him of the distinction between "people of breeding and commoners – masters and slaves."¹¹⁷ Nonetheless, Mayuri is eventually compelled to recognize that her real 'enemy' is not the 'educated commoner' Prasong but rather her Chinese suitor, an individual who schemes to rape her while she is unconscious. Just as his plan is about to be realized, however, Prasong arrives to save her, 'awakening' Mayuri and revealing his true identity. Thus, as the story concludes, she willingly agrees to marry Prasong and the unity of the Chatra household is restored.

Like Akat, *mom luang* Buppha subsequently drew upon the themes of her first novel in order to craft an allegorical critique of the kingdom's European-oriented elite in the period just prior to the overthrow of the absolute monarchy. In her 1932 novel *Kam kao* (Past Karma), the reader is again presented with yet another upper-class heroine who has lost touch with her identity as a result of her exposure to the West – Nut.¹¹⁸ In this instance, however, the characterization is sufficiently pronounced as to make Nut appear more European than Thai. She dislikes Thai food, can barely speak her own language, and seems utterly incapable of fitting into her own society.¹¹⁹ Moreover, like the heroine of *Her Enemy*, she is also "much too fond" of idle pleasures.¹²⁰ In contrast to Mayuri, however, Nut is immediately unable to find a marriage partner. Her uncle Phong, a European-educated barrister, appears to be the ideal candidate, although this possibility is seemingly precluded by the familial nature of their relationship. Moreover, her other suitors have inexplicably broken off their courtships. For that matter, even her family relations are problematic: her 'father' is absent from the story, her 'mother' has little patience for her, and her elder sister seems distant and withdrawn. Thus, early on in the tale, she comes to suspect that 'there must be some reason' for her inability to find love.¹²¹

The 'reason' pertains to the identity of Nut's father. He is not the influential *phraya* Ratthanathewi in whose home she has grown to adulthood but rather *nai* At, an ex-army officer whose health has been broken by a twenty-year imprisonment. This fact is revealed to Nut at a time when she has travelled to visit some mysterious 'relatives' in the countryside. Initially, her impressions of their village are much like those of a tourist: the landscape seems wild and dangerous, the manner of dress and betel nut-stained teeth of the locals fascinating, and even such simple tasks as washing her face require the help and instruction of others.¹²² Not surprisingly, when she

¹¹⁷ *ibid*: 60.

¹¹⁸ The following discussion is based upon the 1973 reprint. See *mom luang* Buppha Nimmanhemmin, *Kam kao* (Past Karma), Bangkok: Khlang Witthaya, 1973.

¹¹⁹ *ibid*: 22.

¹²⁰ *ibid*: 32.

¹²¹ *ibid*: 43.

¹²² *ibid*: 64-70.

discovers that it is also *her* village and its occupants her true family, she becomes physically ill. Ultimately, she is compelled to accept her changed circumstances when she hears the story of her parents' tragic romance.¹²³ Having been denied permission to marry, they eloped while At was still a military cadet, living happily together over the next several years. A day came when At returned home to find his wife struggling with an intruder, however. Without thinking, he shot the man only to learn that he had killed his father-in-law. Nut's mother, meanwhile, was shattered by the incident and died as well, leaving At without witness to his innocence. Thus, he was wrongly sent to prison for murder, giving his daughters and family inheritance over to a friend's care.

This tale within a tale, the 'past karma' which not only reunites the aristocratic Nut with her true family in rural Siam but allows her to eventually marry the barrister *nai* Phong, has an allegorical function in the narrative as well. As the novel was published in early 1932, At's twenty-year prison sentence would necessarily have begun in 1912, the year of the abortive military uprising against the Sixth Reign court. Through this correspondence of dates, then, it was possible to read At's story as a metaphor for rebellion – a cause which divided Nut's family but one which eventually captured her sympathies.

7.7 Conclusion. In the preceding pages, I have drawn upon the published works of a number of different national commentators – essayists, graphic artists, and popular novelists – in an effort to show how Thai independence was problematized in the latter years of the Seventh Reign. In some cases, the nation was asserted to have fallen completely under the sway of an 'un-national' authority: foreign exploiters who lived off of Thai blood; cruel-faced giants who farmed on the nation's back; and self-serving rulers who used 'pretty language' to enslave the thought of a people. In others, the 'national oppressor' was held to be little more than poverty, lack of education, and a tradition of reticence in the face of authority. In each instance, however, this oppressor was said to have attained a position of dominance in Siam with the collusion of the Jakkri court, whose members had either failed to come to the aid of a beleaguered Thai nation or openly collaborated with its enemies in order to preserve their own narrow interests. Dangerously 'infatuated' with the West, unwilling to enter into a political 'marriage' with the educated commoners of the realm, and increasingly isolated from their own 'true family', they were accused of forcing the Thai to speak with the language of a conquered people.

¹²³ *ibid.* 113-130.

VIII

Conclusion

Were it not for an unquestioned assumption the Jakkri royal clan should be given star billing in the early history of the Thai nation, I suspect that the central argument of this study would be self-evident. Herein, I have chosen to focus upon the written records of a Bangkok-based literati, making no mention of how the nation-building efforts of the Siamese 'center' were perceived, reworked, and resisted by the millions of individuals, some ethnic Thai and others not, who lived in the kingdom's 'peripheries'. Moreover, I have utilized but a fraction of the critical commentary contained within the archival record. Indeed, for purposes of this study, I have been compelled to exclude a number of the period's more pressing 'national' debates: the extended literary discussions of consumption habits, family life, gender relations, sexual mores, physical fitness, fashion, manners, entertainment, and vice which in one way or another contributed to the development of a Thai national culture. Nonetheless, from my abbreviated examination of the popular press, it is manifestly evident that the Thai nation was not 'set in place' by the members of a ruling elite at all but rather was constituted through an ongoing process of discursive struggle.

Without a doubt, Jakkri dynasts were deeply involved in this 'battle of words' and continually sought to influence its outcome, for what was ultimately at stake was the meaning of legitimate political authority. To preserve the dynastic state, it was essential that the nation be conceived in terms of the empire, and crucial that the throne be envisioned as its unifying center. Conversely, it required little more than that a distinction be made between the particular interests of the dynasty and the aspirations of the nation as a whole in order to challenge the Jakkris' right to rule. Thus it was that from the late nineteenth century onward, the kingdom's rulers flatly denied that such a distinction *could* be made and actively promoted the view that the monarch was nothing less than the nation embodied – the quintessential 'true patriot' who invariably spoke and acted on behalf of the broader political community, thus precluding the need for any form of political/national dissent.

Despite the sizeable collection of official texts now maintained at the Thai National Archives – and the numerous studies which have drawn upon these materials in order to present a coherent picture of the Jakkris' 'official' nationalist vision – there is little to indicate that the court succeeded in dominating the course of the nation's intellectual development, however. To the contrary, in the late nineteenth century at a time when the monarchy was assuming its most absolute form, the idea that Siam's survival was somehow contingent upon a shared deference to wishes of the king was openly contested by a growing number of rival national authorities – courtiers and other members of the urban literati who continued to disseminate their own interpretations of what the political community was and ought to be. And in the early decades of the twentieth century, after Vajiravudh had exhausted every means at his disposal in an effort to affirm that the king was the symbolic center of the Thai world, the monarchy's claim to national legitimacy was increasingly called into doubt by the members of a disenfranchised commoner class, individuals who publicly promoted the view that *their* nation had yet to escape from the subjugation of an oppressive political authority. It was in the Seventh Reign that the tenuous links between dynasty and nation ultimately came undone, however, for while Prajadhipok and his ministers had very little to say on the subject, the popular press was filled with the commentary of nationalists who championed the cause of popular sovereignty while depicting the monarchy as an impediment to the national advance.

Against the backdrop of this evolving debate, the underlying significance of the 1932 overthrow of the absolute monarchy becomes clear. The culminating moment in an extended struggle to liberate a particular 'Thai nation' from the rule of its principal national 'enemy', the event marked the emergence of a new national authority and the establishment of a new national agenda. The change was immediately embodied in the rhetoric and institutions of the post-1932 political order – the constitution, the representative assembly, the publicly-contested election, and the ongoing effort to rationalize state authority in terms of the popular will. Moreover, it was reflected in the policies of the new government as well – in its efforts to revise the kingdom's tax code, expand the public school system, hasten the process of treaty revision, and promote a number of measures designed to develop and protect the national economy from the exploitation of 'outsiders'.¹

¹ See the discussions in W. Reeve, *Public Administration in Thailand*, London: The Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1951, 28-29; V. Thompson and Richard Adloff, *Cultural Institutions and Educational Policy in Southeast Asia*, New York: The Institute of Pacific Relations, 1948; Chanthalak na Phomphet and Pranom Khwinwiphat, 'Phumilang rathawisahakit thai' (The Orgins of Thai State Enterprises), *Warasan thammawat*, 10:4, December 1981, 12-20; and Jongjairak Pokphathanakun, *Nayobai khong rathaban thai kiao kap kammakon rawang 2475-2499* (Labor Policies of the Thai Government, 1932-56), Sinakharinwirot Masters Thesis, 1986.

It must be emphasized, however, that the People's Party coup of 24 June was in no sense an endpoint in the process of Thai national self-definition. Indeed, the event merely opened a particularly violent phase in the nation's political history.² The growth of the People's Association in the latter months of 1932 was mirrored by emergence of a pro-royalist underground, an organization known as the 'Save the Nation Party' (*khana ku chat*) which had as its principal aim the restoration of Jakkri rule.³ Bankrolled from within the royal family and led by prominent members of the Old Regime, the group engaged in a behind-the-scenes effort to destabilize the new government over the next sixteen months.⁴ In an attempt to foster unrest within the

² On this point, it is sufficient to note the number of prominent individuals who undertook to arm themselves during the period. On 30 June, a mere three days after the People's Assembly held its first session, some twenty-three members of the new government including a number of new assemblymen sought permission to carry handguns from the Bangkok police. The following day, an additional seven applications were received, including requests from the principal civilian leader of the People's Party, Pridi Phanomyong, and two other members of the People's Committee. By 21 July, another twenty-six requests had been filed, seven from assemblymen, and in early August, King Prajadhipok himself ordered four revolvers and five thousand rounds of ammunition for his own personal use. Meanwhile, the Throne Hall, which served as the headquarters of the People's Party, maintained "a fortress-like appearance, with machine-gun barrels pointing out from windows and armored cars ... parked on the esplanade" that served as an approach to the building. See NA, *sammak lekthathikan khana rathamontri* (Office of the Cabinet), (2)0201.99/2-6, *awut tangtang* (Sundry Weapons) and *Bangkok Daily Mail*, 6 July 1932, respectively.

³ See the scores of surveillance reports on file in NA, *kong klang, sammak lekthathikan khana rathamontri* (Office of the Cabinet), *plianplaeng kanpokkhong 2475* (The 1932 Change of Government), 0201.16/30 'raigan sup ratchakan lap' (Government Surveillance Reports). These and all subsequent reports cited in this section were the result of a military order issued by the coup's chief strategist, *phraya* Song Suradet, which detailed a number of methods for handling party security, including the establishment of an intelligence network. On 24 June, a number of individuals were selected from among the hundreds of people who came to apply for party membership, given identity badges, and assigned to different locations around Bangkok, where they were expected to explain the aims of People's Party to the public at large and note any rumors of 'dangerous activities' being planned by those opposed to the coup. The following week, this growing network of informants was organized into a 'Department of Information' and placed under control of *luang* Narubet Manit, a member of the People's Party and the National Assembly. The military order and an account of the department's recruitment activities can be found in NA, *kong klang, sammak lekthathikan khana rathamontri* (Office of the Cabinet), *plianplaeng kanpokkhong 2475* (The 1932 Change of Government), 0201.16/21 and /35 'raigan sup ratchakan lap' (Government Surveillance Reports).

⁴ The principal backers of the organization were the previous Minister of Commerce and Communications, Prince Purachat, and the ex-Minister of Interior, Prince Boriphat – the former donating 100,000 baht to the venture and the latter 700,000. The money was given to ex-Police Commissioner *phraya* Athikon Prakat, one of the party's chief organizers. Apart from Athikon and his previous lieutenants in the police Special Branch (*kong phiset*), a number of other prominent individuals were reportedly active in the organization as well, including: the king's father-in-law Prince Sawat, the previous Minister of Foreign Affairs Prince Thewawong, the ex-Minister of Education Prince Thani, *phra ong jao* Boworadet, *mom jao* Alongkot, *mom jao* Setsiri, *mom jao* Amoradet, *mom jao* Nakhachat Mongkhon, *mom jao* Thongthikayu, *mom jao* Wongsanirat, *phraya* Pathibat Phuban, *phraya* Borihan, *phraya* Sena Songkhram, *phraya* Suriyanuwong, *phraya* Chaipratcha, *phraya* Siratchadechochai, *phraya* Udomphong Pensawat, *phraya* Chalocm Akat, *phraya* Phisansaen, *phraya* Thephastin, *phraya* Phichai Songkhram, *phraya* Saraphai Phiphat and Lui Krirwat of the *Bangkok Daily Mail*, Hom Nilarat of *Sayam num*, *luang* Wichit Wathakan at *Thai mai*, *luang* Maitri Wani, *luang* Saranuphraphan, *luang* Phani Suntharasan; and the abbot of a temple in Thonburi *phra* Chalam. Rank-and-file members of the party were recruited from among those who had been removed from their posts in the aftermath of 24 June, as well as the military and police,

kingdom's Chinese community, for example, a campaign was launched to create the impression that the new government was stridently anti-Chinese, thugs posing as People's Party loyalists were dispatched to harass influential business leaders, and coolie laborers were encouraged to strike and riot.⁵ At same time, a parallel effort was begun to convince the foreign community that members of the People's Party were communist-inspired by distributing leaflets, planting editorials in the English-language press, and approaching the heads of various foreign legations.⁶ Finally, a number of additional steps were taken to foster discontent within the military, isolate various members of the People's Party from their more conservative peers, and promote the view that party leaders were little more than bandits who had acted for the benefit of themselves alone and not on behalf of the nation as they claimed."⁷

Throughout the period, the capital was filled with rumors that People's Party loyalists were likely to meet with a violent end as well. From July onward, party

officials at the Whiskey and Opium Departments, the Royal Guards, and the Chinese triads, some eight of which were reportedly 'hired' to support the organization. See NA, *kong klang, sammak lekhatikan khana rathamontri* (Office of the Cabinet), *plianplaeng kanpokkhong* 2475 (The 1932 Change of Government), 0201.16/7-35 'raingan sup rachakan lap' (Government Surveillance Reports).

⁵ When thousands of rickshaw drivers launched a week-long strike in early August of 1932, for example, members of the police reported to the press that they suspected communist agitation (see *Bangkok Times Weekly Mail*, 8 and 15 August 1932). Party informants predicted the incident in advance, however, and noted that strikers were being paid forty satang a day to stop work by *phraya* Athikon, who planned to use the incident to create disturbances around the city. On the strike and other efforts to foster unrest within the Chinese community, see NA, *kong klang, sammak lekhatikan khana rathamontri* (Office of the Cabinet), *plianplaeng kanpokkhong* 2475 (The 1932 Change of Government), 0201.16/22 Reports of 21 September 1932 and 1 February 1933; /23 Report of 6 February 1933; /28 Report of 19 August 1932; /30 Reports of 5 July, 10 August, 7 October 1932, 2, 6 January, and 14 February 1933; /35 Reports of 30 June and 9 August 1932.

⁶ In September of 1932, for example, the head of the British legation was informed by Prince Thewawong that several of the principal figures in the People's Party were "thorough-going communists ... in the pay of Russia". Shortly thereafter, the legation was also approached by Prince Purachat, who asserted that "it was only a matter of time before ... communism became completely rampant" in Siam (see Great Britain, PRO, FO 7455/4260/40, Dormer to Simon, 13 September 1932 and FO 7455/7455/40, Dormer to Simon, 16 September 1932). Several weeks later, there was indeed a dramatic increase in communist agitation and leaflet distribution in the capital, and the English-language press was filled with speculation that Pridi Phanomyong was 'the organizer behind the scenes' (see Virginia Thompson and Richard Adloff, *The Left Wing in Southeast Asia*, New York: William Sloane, 1950, 54). However, the leaflets were reportedly being printed at Prince Thewawong's palace and distributed by a number Athikon's lieutenants who borrowed automobiles from various members of the royal family or used taxis owned by *phraya* Thephastin. On this and other efforts to create the impression that the new government was communist inspired, see NA, *kong klang, sammak lekhatikan khana rathamontri* (Office of the Cabinet), *plianplaeng kanpokkhong* 2475 (The 1932 Change of Government), 0201.16/26 Report of 31 July 1932; /30 Reports of 30 September, 1, 7, and 13 October 1932, 2, 22 January, 1, 4 February, and 18 March 1933.

⁷ See NA, *kong klang, sammak lekhatikan khana rathamontri* (Office of the Cabinet), *plianplaeng kanpokkhong* 2475 (The 1932 Change of Government), 0201.16/22 Report of 18 January 1933; /23 Reports of 23 December 1932 and 18 January 1933; /25 Reports of 12, 21, 23 November 1932; /26 Report of 28 July 1932; /28 Report of 24 July and 24 August 1932; /30 Reports of 16 July, 3, 7, 11, 28 October 1932, 3, 4, 25 January, and 11 February 1933; /31 Report of 1 March 1933; /35 Reports of 10, 30 August, 1 September, 18 October, 9 November, 1, 15, 20 December 1932, 25 March 1933.

leaders were repeatedly warned of the hired assassins in their midst, individuals who were said to be waiting for the opportunity to strike, and there were frequent reports that a "bloody" counter-coup was in the offing – first in August, then in September, and yet again in October.⁸ At the same time, word spread through the capital that Britain and France were poised to intervene on the monarchy's behalf – a rumor which appears to have been kept alive by prominent members of the royal family.⁹ In mid-September, for example, the king's father-in-law announced to the press that Prajadhipok had only agreed to cooperate with the new government in order to forestall the otherwise "certain intervention" of England and France, whose leaders were unlikely to tolerate any attempt to form a republic.¹⁰ Moreover, on at least one occasion, Prajadhipok personally called upon the kingdom's British financial advisor to influence the policies of the new government by "dangling the bogey of foreign intervention in their faces."¹¹

With the signing of a permanent constitution in December, it briefly appeared as if the struggle between supporters of the Old Regime and the new might be institutionalized through the emergence of a multi-party political system. Towards the end of the month, various members of the 'Save the Nation Party' gathered at the palace of Prince Sawat to discuss the possibility of creating a formal political association, an organization which was subsequently established in early January as

⁸ NA, *kong klang, samnak lekhatthikan khana rathamontri* (Office of the Cabinet), *plianplaeng kanpokkhong* 2475 (The 1932 Change of Government), 0201.16/24 Report of 2 December 1932; /26 Reports of 11, 13, 20, 31 July 1932; /28 Reports of 12, 30 July, 11, 18, 24 August 1932; /30 Reports of 14 August, 7, 19 October 1932, 17 February 1933; /35 Reports of 28 July, 11 August, 18 October 1932, and 25 March 1933. Throughout the period, rumors of an impending counter-coup were also reported by members of the foreign legations. In early August, for example, the British, American, and French legations received letters signed 'Anarchist Siamoise' which warned that rioting was to occur the following week in an effort to overthrow the People's Party. See United States, Department of State, Siam, US Dispatch 185, Chargé d'Affaires Potter to Secretary of State, 3 August 1932.

⁹ British troops were said to be concentrating in Singapore and on the Burmese frontier while French troops mobilized in Indochina and an international fleet converged in the Gulf of Siam. Reporting on the matter in late 1932, the British Minister openly speculated that "the supporters of the old regime were spreading [the stories] for their own purposes, as if the wish had been the father of the thought" (Great Britain, PRO, FO 1558/1558/40, Dormer to Simon, Annual Report for 1932). Members of the new government appear to have taken the rumors seriously, however, for the possibility was not only discussed on the floor of the assembly but the government also conducted a number of hurried investigations of British troop concentrations during the period. *Raingan prachum sapha phuthaen ratsadon* (Minutes of the Meetings of the National Assembly), 5 September 1932: 208-209; and NA, *samnak lekhatthikan khanarathamontri* (Office of the Cabinet), 0201.37.1/1, *betthalet, tang prathet* (Misc., Foreign Countries).

¹⁰ Cited in Frazier Hunt, Interview with Prince Sawat, *Washington Herald*, 8 September 1932; *Time*, 19 September 1932. The official who brought the articles to the attention of party leaders interpreted the remarks as an indication that Sawat was intentionally encouraging foreign intervention while noting that it would not be the first time that a king or prince had "turned to foreign nations for help in bringing back their power." NA, *samnak lekhatthikan khanarathamontri* (Office of the Cabinet), 0201.8/8 *bukkhon* (People), *luang Mitratham*.

¹¹ Prajadhipok to Baxter, 4 August 1933, included in Great Britain, PRO, FO 7281/42/40, Bailey to Simon, 10 October 1933.

'the Nationalist Party' (*khana chat*).¹² At the same time, plans for a Labor Party were also drawn up by Pridi Phanomyong, the principal civilian leader of the People's Party. In late January, however, Prajadhipok abruptly announced that he was opposed to the formation of discrete political parties and desirous that all existing associations be abolished.¹³ Using an argument employed by Chulalongkorn some thirty years before, he asserted that most people still lacked an understanding of parliamentary politics, making it likely that political parties would do little more than 'create divisions' in the kingdom. Thus, rather than permitting the Nationalist Party to form, he proposed instead that the People's Association be immediately disbanded.¹⁴

Ironically, this royal effort to restore an outward semblance of 'unity' in Siam set the stage for one of the period's more divisive interludes – an eight-month interval of time in which a conservative coalition prorogued the assembly, suspended the constitution, and sent members of the previous administration into exile, before being ousted in turn by another military coup which reinstated the old government.¹⁵

¹² NA, *kong klang, samnak lekhatikan khana rathamontri* (Office of the Cabinet), *plianplaeng kanpokkhong* 2475 (The 1932 Change of Government), 0201.16/23 Report of 23 December 1932. A request to form the association was lodged with the Ministry of the Interior on 7 January 1933. See the discussion in Phuton Phumaton, *Kansuksa ruang san phiset* (A Study of the Special Courts) Chulalongkorn University Masters Thesis, 1977, 60-68.

¹³ NA, *ratchalekhanukan* (Royal Secretariat) 2/128, Prajadhipok to *phraya* Mano, 31 January 1933. Cited in Direk Uthaiphon, *Khwamlomlao khong rabop phak kanmuang nai prathet thai* (The Shortcomings of Thailand's Political Party System), Thammasat University PhD Thesis, nd, 36-37; and Wina Manophimok, *Khwamkhatyaeng phai nai khana ratsadon* (Conflict Within the People's Party), Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University MA Thesis, 1977, 40.

¹⁴ The king's pronouncement resulted in the issuance of a controversial prime ministerial decree in mid-February of 1933, an order which banned all civil servants, active members of the military, and elected members of the assembly from participation in the People's Association. As noted by Virginia Thompson, 'it was generally recognized that such an eclipse of the People's Party was precisely what the sponsors of the Nationalist Party were aiming at' (Thompson: 1941, 71). From September onward, the growth of the People's Association was a matter of increasing concern to the court and in December, Prajadhipok specifically raised the issue with *phraya* Mano, the compromise candidate who had been chosen to serve as the kingdom's first Prime Minister. It was only after the king's father-in-law undertook to organize the Nationalist Party and Prajadhipok spoke out against all political associations, however, that *phraya* Mano was afforded with an opportunity for action. See Wina: 1977, 85 and Great Britain, PRO, FO 2387/42/40, Dormer to Simon, 15 March 1933.

¹⁵ The decision to prorogue the assembly has frequently been explained in terms of a controversial economic plan put forward by Pridi Phanomyong – a proposal which, while generally supported on the floor of the assembly, met with the stiff opposition of the court, moderate elements in the People's Party, and many of the more conservative members of the new government. A number of other factors contributed to the decision as well, however. In the period just prior to the assembly's closure, assembly members declared the prime minister's decree on political parties unconstitutional, produced a draft estate duty act over the strenuous objections of the king, and approved a liberal election law, a piece of legislation which was perceived to work to the disadvantage of People's Party opponents. In addition, throughout the period *phraya* Mano was under considerable pressure from the court to close the assembly as well. See NA, *bukkhon* (Individuals), 3.10/1, *phraya nitisit phaisan samakhom ratsadon* 2475 (*phraya* Nitisat Phaisan – The People's Association 1932); NA, Office of the Financial Adviser, 0301.1.1/20, *raidai tua pai lae phasi* 2474-78 (General Revenue and Taxation 1931-35), Baxter Memorandum of 3 January 1933; Great Britain, PRO, FO 2068/42/40, Dormer to Simon, 29 March 1933; and FO 3109/42/40, Dormer to Simon, 3 April 1933; Suphot

Shortly thereafter, the newly-reconstituted administration was then thrown into political turmoil when supporters of the 'Save the Nation Party' launched their own military *putsch* from the provinces, an uprising which was eventually put down through force of arms.¹⁶ It was only with the resolution of this latter crisis that the political struggle set in train by the 24 June coup was effectively brought to an end, leaving the People's Party in full control of the state.¹⁷ Nonetheless, over the course of the next decade party-backed governments continued to be plagued by an ongoing series of assassination plots, coup attempts, and minor military rebellions.¹⁸

Unsurprisingly, the character of the new national government was ultimately shaped by the particular historical context in which it was formed. As a result of the political turmoil of the 1932-33 period, the democratic ideal of a heterogenous political community, a 'nation' which was allowed to speak with not one but rather a number of different voices, was increasingly perceived to be antithetical to the Thai nationalist project. In this regard, it is sufficient to note the shift which occurred in the thinking of Siamese military leaders during the period. When the national assembly first met on 27 June 1932, a brief ceremony was staged by *phraya* Phahon Phonphayuhasena in order to divest the military of the absolute political authority which had been seized from the monarchy a few days before. By the end of 1933, however, the kingdom's military leaders were no longer willing to defer to the authority of a civilian administration. In a radio broadcast of late October, the new Minister of Defense *luang* Ronsitphichai asserted that the military could hardly be expected to remain apart from politics at a time when "keeping the peace" had emerged as the nation's "single

Dantrakun, *Phrapokklao kap khanaratsadon* (Prajadhipok and the People's Party), Bangkok: Jirawannuson, 1983: 14; and Wina: 1977, 244.

¹⁶ Like the People's Party coup of 24 June 1932, the October rebellion has remained a matter of historical controversy. However, many of its principal leaders were individuals who had previously been associated with the 'Save the Nation Party' (*khana ku chat*) and rebel proclamations of the period were issued under a variation of the party's name – the 'Save the Homeland Group' (*khana ku ban ku muang*). Finally, the rebels were led by a cousin of the king and made use of a tactical plan which had first been contemplated by the court on the evening of 24 June 1932, at a time when Prajadhipok and his ministers were still considering the possibility of resisting the People's Party coup in Bangkok. For accounts of the uprising, see Hom Ronran, *Mua khapjao ko kankabot* (When I Instigated a Rebellion), Bangkok: Nakhonchai, 1949; Nikhom Charumani, *Kabot boworadet 2476* (The Boworadet Rebellion of 1933), Chulalongkorn University MA Thesis, 1976 and Chaiwat Yonbiam, *Fanrai khong muang thai* (Thailand's Nightmare), Bangkok: Sinlapa wathanatham, 1985. Regarding the court's plans for encircling the capital on 24 June, see Anuphap Thayaphap, *Anuson nai ngan phraratchathan phloeng sop pho.to.phraya anuphap thayaphap* (Cremation Volume of *phraya* Anuphap Thayaphap), 1961.

¹⁷ As an immediate consequence of the uprising, many of the Old Regime's principal supporters were jailed on charges of rebellion. In addition, some forty members of the royal family including the king elected to leave Siam for overseas. Prajadhipok travelled to England, where he remained at the time of his abdication in 1935.

¹⁸ Charnvit: 1974, 30-31.

most important problem."¹⁹ At the same time, he drew a sharp distinction between politicians who espoused a number of diverging ideological positions and soldiers "who existed for the nation alone", blaming the former for the conflicts of the preceding sixteen months while arguing that the latter were ideally suited to act as the final arbiters in national affairs, both by lending their support to "good governments" and by removing "bad" ones.

The military's entry into national politics was also facilitated by a widespread concern that England and France might intervene on the monarchy's behalf. Given the frequently-voiced criticism that both countries had long been allowed to exploit the Thai nation, it is not surprising that members of the new government immediately sought to distance themselves from the European-oriented foreign policy of the Jakkri dynastic state.²⁰ The decision to forge an alliance with Japan, however, had its roots in the early months of 1933 at a time when military supporters of the People's Party were drawing up plans for a second coup to regain control of the country's political administration.²¹ Disturbed by the possibility that foreign troops might be called in to defend the existing government, Lt. Colonel Phibun Songkhram and several other military officers approached the Japanese legation in May with a request for military support.²² Although the Japanese minister was immediately unwilling to commit himself, he expressed sympathy for the conspirators' aims and asked that they contact him again in the event that their plan succeeded. As a result, on 20 June 1933 the minister was called to a second meeting with the principal leaders of the coup, *phraya* Phahon and *luang* Phibun, opening a period of increasing cooperation between the two governments which ultimately led to Siam's alliance with Japan during the Second World War.

It was this 'collaboration' with Japan which eventually proved to be the undoing of the People's Party – politically *and* historiographically. From the outset, the then Prime Minister Phibun Songkhram's decision to support the Japanese war effort deeply divided the party's leadership and as the tide of battle turned against Japan, not only was Phibun removed from office but an attempt was made to diminish the threat of future reprisals from England and France by providing covert assistance to the Allied

¹⁹ NA, *kong klang, samnak lekhatikan khana rathamontri* (Office of the Cabinet), *plianplaeng kanpokkhong* 2475 (The 1932 Change of Government), 0201.1.1/6, *suntharaphot naiphantri luang ronsitphichai* 28 tula 2476 (Major *luang* Ronsitphichai's Speech of 28 October 1933).

²⁰ See Great Britain, PRO, FO 1919/1919/40, Dormer to Simon, 5 February 1934, Siam: Annual Report for 1933.

²¹ See the discussions in E. Flood, *Japanese Relations with Thailand 1928-1941*, University of Washington PhD Thesis, 1967; and W. Swan, *Japanese Economic Relations with Siam: Aspects of Their Historical Development*, Australian National University PhD Thesis, 1986.

²² Flood: 1967, 58-65; and Tojiharu Yojikawa, *Rathaban jomphon plaek phibun songkhram lae songkhram pasifik* (Field Marshal Plaek Phibun Songkhram and the Pacific War) Bangkok: Munithi khongkan tamra sangkhomsat lae manutiyasat, 1985, 4.

Powers.²³ At the war's end, however, a lengthy diplomatic effort was required before the two countries agreed to settle their outstanding claims against the kingdom through the return of disputed territories and the payment of modest reparations. The settlement was arranged under the auspices of yet another party-backed government and would ultimately have been to its credit were it not for the mysterious death of Prajadhipok's successor Anan.²⁴ The post-war years were a time of increasingly polarized politics in Siam, and when the young king was found dead from a gunshot wound in mid-1946, the incident seriously undermined the prestige of the government and was ultimately used as a pretext for another military coup which effectively ended the party's political influence.²⁵ While the coup was ostensibly launched on behalf of Phibun, its principal backers had few real ties to the political leadership of the post-1932 period and subsequently set about restoring the monarchy to a position of prominence in national affairs.²⁶

The monarchy's reemergence on the political scene brought with it a corresponding resurgence of critical nationalist writing the likes of which had not been seen since the early 1930s. In Udom Sisuwan's 1950 study *Thailand, A Semicolony* (*Thai kungmuangkhum*) and in Jit Poumisak's 1957 *The Real Face of Thai Feudalism* (*Chomna sakdina thai*), for example, the monarchy's place in the nation's pre-1932 past was once again called into serious question.²⁷ By the end of the decade, however, such works had largely been banned by the military dictatorship of Sarit Thanarat, leaving their rediscovery to the subsequent generation of student activists who arose to challenge the authority of Sarit's lieutenants and champion an alternate vision of Thai nationhood in the early 1970s.

23 See the discussions in Direk Chai'anam, *Thai kap songkhram lok khrangthisong* (Thailand and the Second World War) Thonburi: Phraphitthaya, 1963; Natthawut Sutthisongkhram, *Nai kuang aphaiwong kap phak pratchathipat* (Nai Kuang Aphaiwong and the Democratic Party), Bangkok: Ruangsini, 1979; and Pridi Phanomyong, *The Political and Military Tasks of the Free Thai Movement to Regain National Sovereignty and Independence*, Bangkok: Amarin, 1979.

24 For an account of the particulars surrounding this latter incident, see R. Kruger, *The Devil's Discus*, London: Cassell and Company, 1964.

25 As a result of the scores of exiles who returned to the kingdom in the immediate aftermath of the war and the repeal of Siam's 1933 Anti-Bolshevik Act, the period marked the emergence of a distinct political 'right' and 'left'. See Nakharin: 1982, 13-17; and C. Reynolds and Hong Lysa, 'Marxism in Thai Historical Studies', *Journal of Asian Studies*, 43:1, November 1983, 81-86 respectively.

26 Thak Chalocmtiarana, *Kanmuang rabop pokhum upatam baep padetkan* (The Politics of Despotism Paternalism). Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University, 1978.

27 See C. Reynolds, 'Feudalism as a Trope or Discourse for the Asian Past with Special Reference to Thailand', in E. Leach, S. Mukherjee, J. Ward (eds), *Feudalism: Comparative Studies*, Sydney: Association for Studies in Society and Culture, 1985, 136-154; and *Thai Radical Discourse: The Real Face of Thai Feudalism Today*, Ithaca: SEAP, 1987, 149-168.

Appendix A: Supplemental Graphics



Figure 1: *Bangkok kanmuang*, 12 July 1923, the first drawing
to generate obscenity charges in Siam

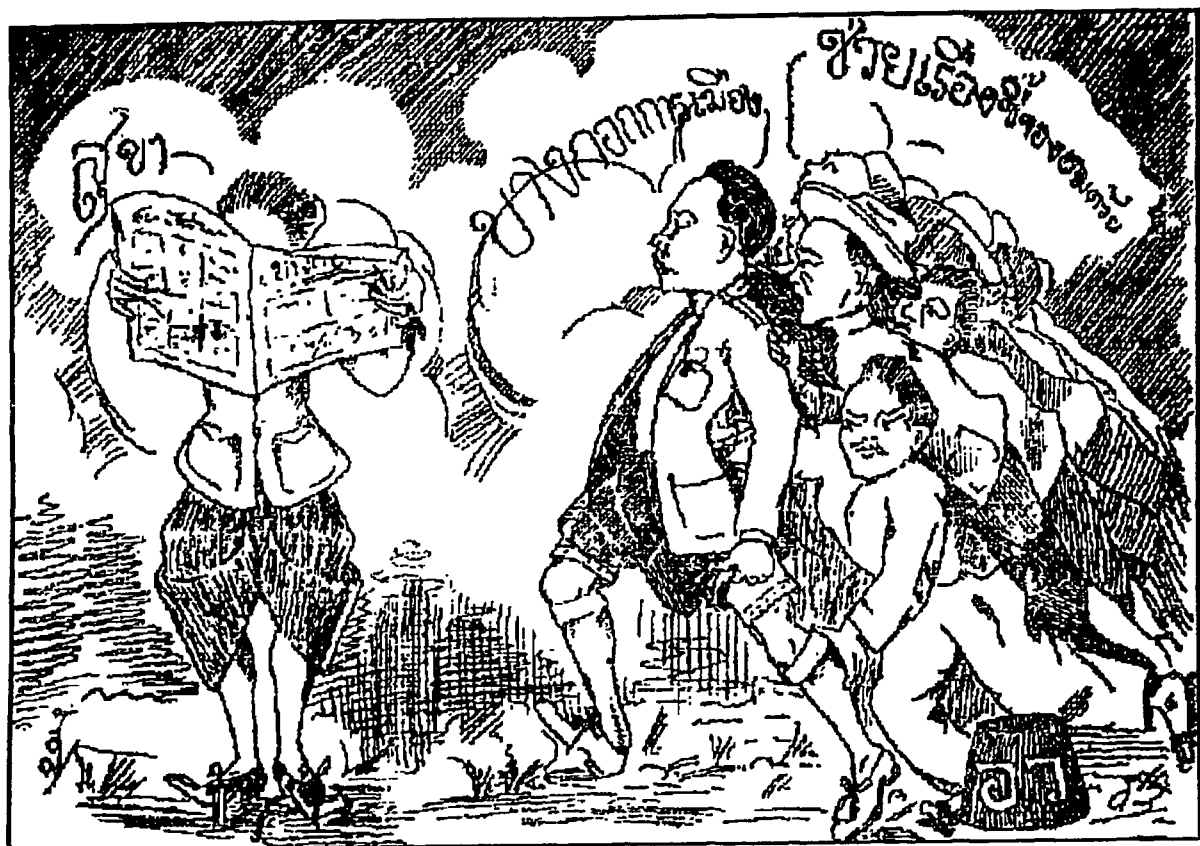


Figure 2: *Bangkok kanmuang*, 2 February 1925, "Bangkok kanmuang! Please help us with this shitty matter, too!" A commentary on the public outcry over the Bangkok Sanitation Board's decision to grant the Om Weng Company a monopoly concession on the capital's night soil trade.





Figure 4: *Kro lek*, 18 October 1925, "I guess this means that even thoroughbred dogs eat shit!" A commentary on the noble stockholders of the On Weng Company.



figure 5: *Bangkok kanmuang*, 11 November 1924, a fight to control the night soil business.



Figure 6: *Bangkok kanmueang*, 31 December 1924, criticism through juxtaposition. On the right, a portrait of King Vajiravudh published in honor of his birthday; on the left, an essay entitled "The Suffering of the Rich" which begins with the passage: "Who would have thought that the rich could suffer? Since they usually obtain everything they desire, what could possibly upset them?"

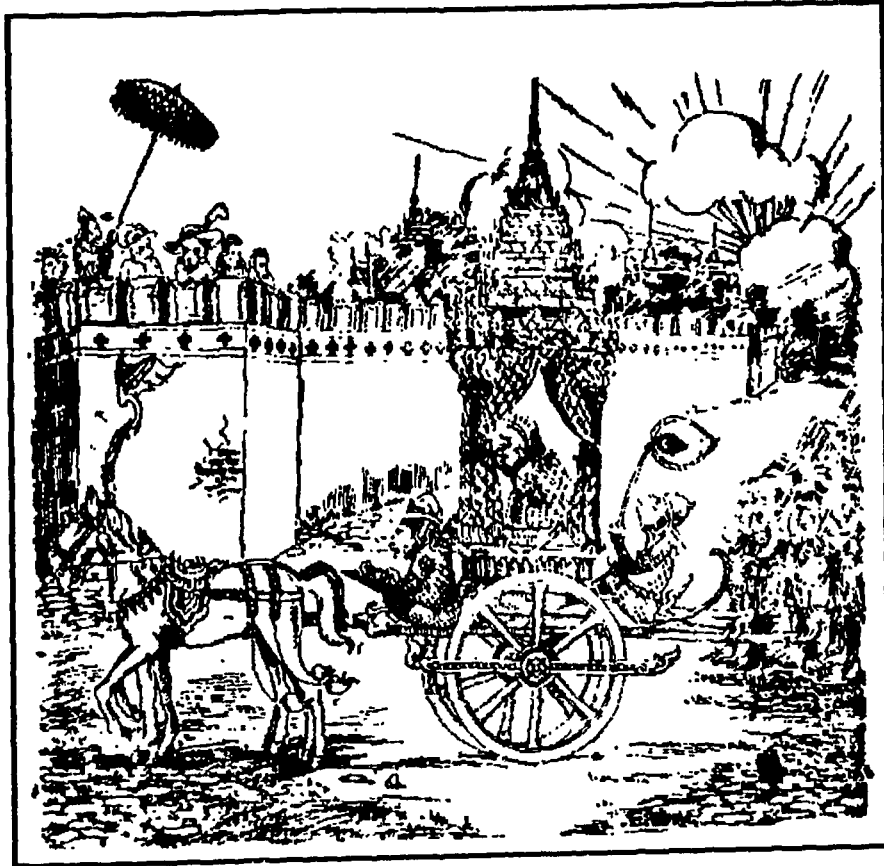


Figure 7: *Kro Lek*, 10 May 1925, the Grand Palace
filled with dog-kings and monkey-princes



Figure 8: *Kro lek*, 17 May 1925, Kaen Phet keeping the immoral forces of the kingdom at bay with justice.



Figure 9: *Kro lek*, 7 June 1925. The expression 'riding an elephant to catch grasshoppers' conveys the idea of employing excessive measures to accomplish a given task. In the above drawing, however, the beasts of the court are shown riding a weeping elephant – the Thai nation – in pursuit of their own trivial ends.

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13/1-7; 20.1/1-41; 20.3/63; 20.6/104;
20.11/4; 20.18/111
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| <i>Darunowat</i> , 1874-75 | <i>Satja</i> 1932-33 |
| <i>Dusit samit</i> , 1918-23 | <i>Sayam num</i> , 1932 |
| <i>Itsara</i> , 1931-32 | <i>Sayam ratsadon</i> , 1923-25 |
| <i>Kammakon</i> , 1923-24 | <i>Sayam riwiw</i> , 1926-27 |
| <i>Kammanto</i> , 1926-27 | <i>Sayam sakkhi</i> , 1923-24 |
| <i>Kasem rat</i> , 1925-26 | <i>Sayam samai</i> , 1917 |
| <i>Khai phet</i> , 1926 | <i>Si krung</i> , 1926-32 |
| <i>Khao sot</i> , 1923 | <i>Siam Observer</i> , 1913-1925 |
| <i>Kro lek</i> , 1924-28 | <i>Suphap burut</i> , 1929-31 |
| <i>Kro phet</i> , 1926 | <i>Suriya</i> , 1931 |
| <i>Krungthep daily mail</i> , 1914-29 | <i>Tamruat</i> , 1932 |
| <i>Lak muang</i> 1927-30 | <i>Thai mai</i> , 1932 |
| <i>Lua sayam</i> , 1925 | <i>Thai num</i> , 1926-1929 |

Mangkhn daeng, 1923
Morning post, 1924
Nakkanmuang, 1922-24
Num sayam, 1931
Pakka thai, 1926-28
Phim thai, 1913-1929
Rak sayam, 1932
Ratsadon, 1928-29

Thai thae, 1931
Thammajaksu, 1898
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