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THAILAND 1973: "WE CERTAINLY HAVE BEEN RAVAGED BY SOMETHING . . ."

/ Jeffrey Race

In the Philippines 50.5 per cent of the rice acreage is planted with high yielding varieties; in Pakistan the figure is 41.7 per cent; in South Vietnam, a country ravaged for the last 25 years by a most terrible war, the figure is 19.3 per cent, and even in India, a nation beset with more than its usual share of problems, the acreage represents 14.7 per cent. In Thailand, and according to the World Bank this is a particularly rough estimate, the comparable figure is 2.1 per cent. We may have missed the war and avoided the problems of a nation with 600 million people but we certainly have been ravaged by something; could it be misgovernment?

The collapse of a government is usually preceded by reliable signs. Men of ideas, men outside the circles of power, announce through their criticism that something is wrong. Yet this is not enough: they criticize not always, but often, and their warnings must go unheeded, and finally be ratified by the pillars of the regime itself before collapse is imminent. The above quotation, appearing not in some radical student journal but in the September 6 issue of the respected *Financial Post*, served notice that, if Thailand's political elites had once succeeded in justifying their personal rapaciousness by their wise rule, that defense was no longer valid. Nor was this a solitary warning. Boonchu Rojanasathien, impregnable in his position as executive vice-president of the nation's largest bank, spoke with forthrightness uncharacteristic of a Thai in an address to officials of the Ministry of Finance in July: "We all know what the results of [Thailand's] developmental efforts have been: the wealthy have been developed to greater wealth, while the poor are as poor as ever—and not a few of them are worse off than before. . . . Ironically, now that the greater part of national income is flowing into the hands of the affluent few, these magnates are squandering it as it was feared the poor masses might." And to drive home the point that this was not all a well-intentioned mistake, he concluded his address by observing: "It is well known that many of those who are responsible for the administration of the nation's business are lacking in personal rectitude. It is a cause of considerable concern."¹

So in October 1973 the curves finally intersected between the decreasing popular tolerance of autocracy and the increasing incompetence of the

¹The full text of the address may be found in the *Bangkok Bank Monthly Review*, 14:9 (September 1973), pp. 544-548.

regime, ending one of the political mysteries of modern Asia. Though the actual revolution appeared at the moment to follow from some most fortuitous events, it was still within the context of important secular changes in Thai society. The upshot of Thailand's "October Revolution" is that many long-delayed and long-overdue institutional changes are now taking place, ratifying these inevitable secular trends; there is a new spirit of optimism about the country's political future; and King Bhumiphol has enjoyed a boost in political influence and, if possible, an increase in prestige as well. The sudden departure of Thanom, Prapat and Narong has also unleashed a spate of inquiries into the cost to Thailand of the dictatorship. There was never any doubt that the alliance between the Thai generals and the American Embassy was extremely lucrative for the generals; the new atmosphere of openness, both to inquiry and to publishing the results, is now permitting a reckoning of both the profits to the now-departed generals and the damages to their victims.

EVENTS UNDER THE OLD REGIME: EROSION OF CONFIDENCE FROM JANUARY 1

A chronicle of Thailand in 1973 is in fact a chronicle of loss of confidence in the regime's ability to govern among broad sectors of the population. Despite pretenses to normalcy, it was early apparent that events were out of control, and such successes as the regime had came mostly in the field of foreign policy. The policy pursued—reconciliation with neighboring countries and especially with China—was in fact precisely the one for advocacy of which Thanat Khoman was forced out in the November 1971 coup. By early 1973 it had become apparent, however, that the U.S. was serious about reducing its profile in the region; thus, the settlement in Vietnam far short of victory for the Americans, and the peace agreement in Laos, made an immediate necessity what Thanat had urged as a matter of foresight in 1970.

Discretion marked the generals' opening to the North. Prasit Kanchanawat, the former Minister of Commerce, accompanied a Thai table tennis team to China in 1972, and seems to have gained a reduction in Chinese radio attacks against Thai leaders. Early in June 1973 another Thai table tennis team visited China, and later the same month a Chinese team visited Bangkok, bringing Chinese Foreign Ministry officials in tow. Two Thai Foreign Ministry officials in turn accompanied a Thai badminton team to Peking in August. The subjects discussed and the results achieved were not officially announced, but it was generally assumed that priority was given to asserted Chinese support for hilltribe rebels in Thailand's North and to the opening of trade relations. According to the Deputy Foreign Minister, Major General Chatichai Choonhavan, "substantial progress" was being made in unofficial talks. Although no final decision was reached under the Thanom-Prapat regime, there was considerable internal discussion, and many calls from the business sector, for abrogation of the long-standing decree prohibiting trade with the People's Republic.

Thai overtures were not limited to China. Feelers put out to Hanoi early in the year, however, failed to evoke any response according to a statement by the new Foreign Minister, Charoonphand Issarangkun na Ayuthaya, published in Bangkok papers on October 26. Lieutenant General Vithoon Yasawasdi also revealed, in an interview in *Siam Rath* on November 11, that he had for many years led a Thai task force in Laos consisting at times of up to 30 battalions, but that even under the old regime this was being phased out in accord with the Lao peace agreement. On October 2 former Prime Minister Thanom had also made a conciliatory statement toward Prince Sihanouk, and on the same day Chatchai addressed the UN General Assembly and called for a new order in Southeast Asia "free from all forms of interference from outside." He reemphasized the 1971 ASEAN declaration calling for a zone of "peace, freedom and neutrality."

Concurrently with this modest diplomatic offensive and call for a new order in Southeast Asia, the old order was collapsing at home. Such a collapse of course required the coalescence of opposition among many sectors. The remarkable feature of Thai politics in 1973 was the degree to which the economy mobilized groups against the regime. Politics has never been of much concern to Thai wage earners, but the price of rice always has been. After a long period of remarkable price stability, inflation hit in mid-1972 at a rate unprecedented in Thailand since the post-World War II period. Prices began increasing at a rate of almost one per cent a month, with a cumulative increase of 11.8% through September over the previous year, according to the *Nation* on December 3. Three factors were blamed by economists for the domestic inflation: first, the worldwide inflation raised prices of imported goods; second, a balance of payments surplus and deficit financing from central bank credit increased the money supply at an annual rate of more than 10%; and third, a 12% drop in 1972 rice production reduced supplies of the staple crop and inspired considerable hoarding.²

In response the government in July announced that it would revalue the currency and, after a sufficient length of time to allow currency speculators to establish short positions in dollars, the baht was revalued by 3.3%. The move was widely criticized in the business community as too little, too late. Then the government established price controls on retail rice sales, leading predictably to a disappearance of rice from the market and in turn the theretofore unprecedented scene of urban Thai standing in long queues to purchase rice from the government, and rural Thai storming rice mills to avert starvation.³ A series of strikes also broke out in Bangkok, not just among private businesses but in government enterprises such as the State Railways as well.

²The analysis of the inflation is from the July 20, 1973 *Financial Post*; the figure on the 1972 decline in rice production is from the business section of the *Nation*, November 20, 1973.

³*Bangkok Post*, July 29, and *Bangkok World*, August 3, 1973.

The rice crisis precipitated a remarkable spate of public brawling within the regime, another reliable sign that the long-coherent elite was losing its grip. Power to control rice prices had originally been in the hands of the Commerce Ministry, but on August 2 the Board of Inspection and Follow-up of Government Operations (BIFGO), submitted a plan to transfer rice control authority to itself and to use absolute power under Article 17 of the interim constitution to seize hoarded rice stocks. Nominally under General Thongcherm Sangkhavanich, BIFGO in fact was the power base of Lieutenant Colonel Narong Kittikachorn who until three years ago had been leading his men on raids to tip police boxes into Bangkok klongs. Prior to the official proposal Narong had been publicly critical of the Commerce Ministry's handling of the rice crisis; predictably, the Cabinet at a session on August 3, chaired by Narong's father, approved the transfer of authority to BIFGO and the use of Article 17.

Just a month later, as the strikes continued, Narong angered many high government officials by asserting to the newspapers that the Labor Department itself, because of its corrupt inspectors, was responsible for the worker unrest. Narong's father-in-law, Marshal Prapat, responded in a quote printed in the *Bangkok Post* on September 6, "It is possible that the colonel said it. A person who is ignorant may say 'bla bla.' He who is irresponsible may say whatever he likes."

The rice crisis itself, and the coincident inflation, thus precipitated a whole series of events which brought the competence of the regime into question. Shortages and high prices politicized large numbers of people, and the mutual accusations of incompetence and irresponsibility between the country's leaders only confirmed what most had suspected all along.

It was in this atmosphere of unrest and suspicion that the incredible series of calamities occurred which finally brought down the regime, largely through the activities of a newly assertive student movement. The events of 1973 will certainly result in a revision of the customary appraisal of Thai students as interested only in cars, *thiew*, and high-status jobs in the civil service. The rise of this student movement is a subject worthy of research, and although this is not the place for a prolonged discussion, it is worth noting here two factors which helped to bring it about. First was the increasing influence of Western ideals of freedom (including academic freedom) which filtered in both from university lecturers trained abroad and from Western-language publications. Second was the decline in pressure from the regime against "deviant" students, possible in earlier years when ranking generals served as rectors of the country's universities. Prapat resigned as rector of Chulalongkorn in 1969 after embarrassment arising from the Siam Square land scandal, and the others then followed suit.

In 1968 the National Student Center of Thailand (NSCT) was formed, but the regime found no reason to "nip it in the bud" as it began with a non-

political orientation.⁴ The beginning of the movement's political orientation may be dated back to late 1972, with the student participation in the struggles against Decree 299, which would have compromised the integrity of the Thai judiciary even more than is presently the case, and against Japanese economic power. (In the latter the students were covertly encouraged by the regime itself, as a way of signalling the Japanese government that more favorable aid and trade agreements were required.)

The first major disaster of the year which the student movement seized upon was the so-called "Thung Yai Affair," resulting from the crash of a Thai army helicopter about fifty miles west of Bangkok on April 29. Investigation by a team of students and newspaper reporters revealed that the helicopter, filled with carcasses of protected animals, was returning from an illegal hunting expedition in the Thung Yai game preserve. Six high-ranking military and police officers were killed and five injured in the crash. Marshal Thanom immediately announced that the helicopter and party had been on a "secret mission," and Narong added that a calling card from one of the officers with a note to a village headman asking that he help the hunters, was probably in code and had a different meaning. A campaign of intimidation, telephone threats and violence failed to stem newspaper reports and student denunciations, and "secret mission" became a humorous public codeword for cynical abuse of power.⁵ M. R. Kukrit Pramoj openly accused the generals of lying in the pages of *Siam Rath*.

Following on this catastrophe came an enormous student demonstration in June, the largest in the history of the country up until that time, over the expulsion from Ramkhamhaeng University of nine students for publishing a magazine satirical of the government (in fact, deriding its handling of the Thung Yai Affair). Thugs again failed to stop the protest, and the government brought further derision on itself by assailing an alleged "third hand" behind the demonstrations. Like "secret mission" before it, the "third hand" was overnight on everyone's lips and in every newspaper, in ironical reference to the "hand's" alleged complicity in everything from water pollution to bad weather: the public's way of signalling their awareness of the generals' contempt for their intelligence. The government was forced to back down, with enormous loss of face, by reinstating the expelled students, accepting the resignation of the rector who had expelled them, and instituting an investigation to determine who had hired the thugs to beat up the students. (There was never any question: witnesses said the attackers drove off in a university vehicle after finishing their job.)⁶

⁴Those pursuing this subject may find useful a recently published book *Dap Thewada* (Bangkok: Phikanet Press, 1973).

⁵The Thung Yai Affair filled the papers for months, and occasional articles still appear as the investigation and trials proceed. A summary of the first months is contained in the June 7, 1973 issue of the *Post*.

⁶For coverage of the Ramkhamhaeng demonstration see any of the Bangkok papers for the period June 20-24, 1973. The report of the attack on student demonstrators received front-page coverage in the June 21, 1973 issue of the *Nation*.

Following the resolution of this issue in late June, another student demonstration broke out a month later protesting the government's alleged mishandling of the rice crisis then at its peak, and in early September yet another over a new "gag rule" partially banning outside speakers from university events.⁷

In retrospect historians may conclude that King Bhumiphol himself gave the final crucial blessing to the forces of change in a talk in late September to the students of Chulalongkorn University. During the talks the king denied reports that he had disagreed with the forbidden recent student demonstrations, asserting instead, according to newspaper reports, that "the public is ready to support the students any time they see that student activities are beneficial to society."⁸ Two weeks later began the final wave of demonstrations.

OCTOBER: THAILAND'S 1848

The collapse of the military oligarchy was appropriately Thai: years upon years of peaceful, if cynical, toleration abruptly terminated by a few days of stunning violence. Nevertheless it had become increasingly apparent over the preceding year that Thai military leaders were walking anachronisms, men with guns, money, and foreign backing, but not the fund of prestige and respect necessary to pull through a serious crisis with their own people. It was plain in the insulting terms used toward them in private conversation, even in the treatment in the public media: unflattering low-angle closeups of Prapat's enormous paunch, or of him sleeping, jaws agape, at public ceremonies. The ultimate outcome appears to have been a result of the newly assertive role of King Bhumiphol, the intransigent refusal of the crowds to accept the continuance of Thanom as supreme commander despite his resignation on the 14th as prime minister, and splits within the military and the police at the last moment.

The final round of struggle began on October 6 with the arrest of 12 (later 13) students, politicians and intellectuals for passing out pamphlets at the Pramaine Ground urging the speedy adoption of a constitution. The constitutional activists were initially charged with violating a decree forbidding the assembly of five or more persons for political purposes, but this was later changed to treason as the police discovered alleged documentary evidence of a communist plot to overthrow the government. Initial limited student protests were met by equivocations and contradictory claims on the part of officials, indicating that the latter were still attempting to frame a case. As the number of protestors increased to more than 50,000 at Thammasat University, there were official hints that some of the activists were "dupes" who

⁷See the issues of the *World* of July 23 and the *Post* of September 6, 1973.

⁸*World*, September 21, 1973.

would be released after minor fines while the real plotters (presumably non-students) would suffer full penalties under the martial law absolute powers.⁹

The continued vacillations of the official story, and the resort, for the hundredth time by the generals, to the cry of "communist wolf," spurred public cynicism and crowds continued to grow at Thammasat. Public support for the protest grew and Major General Sanga Kittikachorn, brother of the prime minister, publicly criticized the government for making a big issue out of nothing. Talks on Thursday, October 11, between student leaders and Marshal Prapat broke down over the government's refusal of an unconditional release for the constitutional activists, and Friday arrived as a day of confrontation. Crowds, including many non-students, swelled to 200,000 at Thammasat, and the government was given an ultimatum to release the detainees. The government in turn prepared for a massive crackdown by ordering military units from outlying areas into Bangkok and warning hospitals to be ready for casualties.¹⁰

As the Saturday noon deadline arrived without word of the release of the arrested, the largest demonstration in Thai history began, as a crowd of 400,000 students and members of the public began a meticulously organized and marshalled march from Thammasat University to Chitrlada Palace. In fact the arrested were being physically ejected from their cells at almost that moment (they refused to leave on bail as they claimed that would have admitted guilt), but word of their release was not broadcast in time to avert the march. At four in the afternoon nine student leaders were granted an audience with the king, who asked them to call off the march since the arrested constitutional activists had been released. Three of the nine then proceeded to meet with Marshal Prapat to agree on truce terms; the latter assented to a constitution within one year. The first compromise was thus struck, but it failed.

Communication difficulties held up the announcement of the truce agreement for several hours. But when the terms were announced most of the crowd dispersed, leaving nevertheless some 80,000 demonstrators around the palace who were dissatisfied with the one-year delay in granting the constitution. It was at this point that a serious split took place between the rest of the NSCT leadership and Saeksan Prasertkul, an NSCT member associated with an independent student group at Thammasat, who remained with the demonstrators. Saeksan claims that he remained to help control the crowd,

⁹Extensive coverage of the confrontation began with the Bangkok papers of October 7, 1973. The hints that the government was willing to compromise by releasing the students alone were published in the *World* of October 12, 1973.

¹⁰Sanga's statement appeared in the *World*, October 9, 1973. He went on to say: "If the demand for a permanent constitution is considered treason, then the whole 38 million Thai population is committing treason." The hospital alert was announced in the *Post*, October 12. According to the *Nation*, October 24, records of a special meeting chaired by Marshal Prapat on October 8 reveal that Prapat said compromises with the "law-breakers" could not continue and that he was willing to "sacrifice" 2 per cent of the estimated 100,000 demonstrators at that time in order to "save" the country.

others claim he remained to incite. Versions differ, and no one, king, officials or students, had slept for days, but the split from that moment left hard feelings which have continued and further split the student movement since.¹¹

As the City of the Angels went to sleep Saturday night, many believed that the latest political crisis had been defused at the last moment by the same technique as in previous crises: yielding at the brink to concrete demands (in this case for the release of the constitutional activists) plus vague promises for a constitution at a safely remote date in the future. In fact the remaining demonstrators had finally agreed at 6 a.m. to leave, after Saeksan arranged for a representative of the king to issue a special message asking the demonstrators to disperse. But instead of a settlement, the city awoke to news of a massacre at the palace grounds, apparently a case of bungling by riot police. Tempers rose rapidly as word of the massacre spread, and crowds began again to increase in size. Within hours battles were raging at several points in the city, with army and police units loyal to Thanom and Prapat using machine guns, tanks and helicopter gunships to fire on the demonstrators. By late Sunday afternoon casualties were near a thousand, and the Rajdamnoen area resembled a war zone: corpses, gutted buildings, still smoldering vehicles, and barricades manned by demonstrators. It was the worst political violence in modern Thai history and it stunned the nation.

At 7:15 p.m. King Bhumiphol appeared on television to announce to the country that he had appointed Professor Sanya Thammasak, Rector of Thammasat University, to be prime minister to replace Marshal Thanom who had resigned. The king also appealed to all parties to cease the violence. However, Marshal Thanom remained as supreme commander, that is, the real power in the country; the crowds refused to disperse; and the fighting continued into the night. Thus the second compromise also failed.

Sunday night the army seized control of the country's radio stations and issued orders to broadcast no news except that provided by the Public Relations Department, then under the control of the Supreme Command. During Monday morning a series of patently phony broadcasts was made: that the army was no longer fighting student demonstrators but "communist terrorists" who had infiltrated Bangkok; that the stories going around (in fact newspaper and radio reports) of the army and police firing on students were false and not to be believed, etc. Significantly, all the announcements were made in the name of the Supreme Command, not the new civilian prime minister. Inexplicably the military had failed to close the newspapers or cut telephonic communications, so the truth of the continuing military plot, in defiance of the king and the prime minister, was freely communicated.

The turning point came during a Monday afternoon meeting of Thanom, Prapat, Narong and General Kris Sivara, just appointed army commander-in-chief on October 1 to replace the retiring Prapat. The three demanded

¹¹A conciliatory account of these events, written by former NSCT president Thirayuth Boonmee, appeared in the *Post*, November 4, 1973.

that Kris call in more army units from outside Bangkok to use "absolute measures" (Thanom's words) against the demonstrators. Air Force, Navy and Border Patrol Police leaders, however, indicated that they were unwilling to see further violence. Kris's consequent refusal to order the new units into action doomed the trio of Thanom, Prapat and Narong to exile.

At 6:30 p.m. a radio announcement, this time over the name of the prime minister, stated that Marshals Thanom and Prapat had resigned all their government positions and left the country along with Colonel Narong. Violence subsided with astonishing rapidity, and within less than two hours the 10:00 p.m. curfew, imposed the previous night, was lifted. In fact the exiled leaders and some 20 members of their families, with ten busloads of luggage, were still waiting under heavy guard at the Bangkok airport. Prapat and Narong, and their families, left at 9:47 p.m. for Taiwan aboard a Thai International plane called back in mid-flight from its scheduled trip to Malaysia. Thanom and his family unaccountably remained on Thai soil for one more day before flying to exile in the United States, where his family had already purchased a home.

AFTER THE REVOLUTION

Though the events of mid-October were clearly a struggle for power between urban groups, this does not mean that the result has no implications for the ongoing revolution in Thailand's rural areas. During 1973 the revolutionary movement largely consolidated its position, though there was some expansion of areas in Phetchabun in the North, Sakol Nakhon and Kalasin in the Northeast, and in the Phattalung-Trang area in the South. During 1973 also the weaponry of the revolutionary forces was upgraded to include 60 mm mortars, M-79 grenade launchers, B-40 rocket launchers, and AK-47 automatic rifles, and targets shifted from Village Defense Corps posts to units of the regular army forces. Revolutionary armed forces also increased over the previous year as shown in the following table:¹²

Region	1971-72	1973
North	1500	1528
Northeast	1700	2123
Central	110	146
South	400	1282

Newspaper reports also indicated that revolutionary forces had succeeded in halting work on the Maesot-Umphang road, dynamited a bridge in Nan

¹²This information was provided by the Counterinsurgency Information Center, Communist Suppression Operations Command, Bangkok.

province, and had 230 of 280 villages under their control in Nakae district of Nakhon Phanom province and 32 of 37 villages in Umphang district of Tak province.

Whether the new civilian political elites will prove more flexible and understanding than their military predecessors remains to be seen. As of now there are contradictory indications. One announcement states that the army will cease taking part in military operations against the revolutionary forces and adopt a defensive posture; another states that the Communist Suppression Operations Command is planning an amnesty and is proposing a plan for hilltribe citizenship. On the other hand, the *Bangkok Post* of November 8 reported that "large numbers of Meo terrorists were killed by bombs dropped from Royal Thai Air Force planes." The negative consequences of such tactics are clear from the government's own documents.¹³ After a brief lull in mid-October, rural violence picked up markedly at the end of the month, ironically in coordination with a propaganda campaign emphasizing the now-deposed generals' own nationwide radio broadcasts that the communists were responsible for the uprising in the capital. The new campaign asserted that the corrupt American-supported dictatorship had been successfully overthrown, and now it remained only for the rural people to follow their city brothers by wiping out the last vestiges of the dictatorship in the countryside.

Space is inadequate for an analysis of other changes since the revolution, but a listing of important decisions as reported in the press since the new regime came to power will give a feel for the current atmosphere in Thailand:

—The Supreme Command is to be dissolved and replaced by a chief-of-staff system.

—An 18-member Constitution Drafting Committee was appointed on October 24, including two of the most outspoken Thai journalists, Mrs. Sumalee Viravaidhya and M. R. Kukrit Pramoj.

—King Bhumiphol, in an unprecedented speech, urged students to remain united in fighting dishonest practices: "If you remain united in your good intentions, all corrupt men will one day disappear from Thailand."

—Three hundred special committees established under the old regime were dissolved.

—Using Article 17 absolute power, the new government froze the assets of the three exiled leaders and their families and appointed an eleven-member investigating committee. Assets uncovered through the end of the year were as follows (in millions of baht):¹⁴

¹³See Jeffrey Race, "The War in Northern Thailand," *Modern Asian Studies*, 8:1 (January 1974); and in Thai in *Social Science Review* 8:11 (August 1973).

¹⁴Cash figures are from the *Bangkok Post*, November 11, 1973. Shares are at market value where available, otherwise at par; see the inventory given in the *Financial Post*, December 7, 1973. Real estate assets have not yet been publicized.

Family	Cash and deposits	Shares	Total
Thanom	9.02	9.2	18.22
Prapat	133.26	244.8	367.06
Narong	8.67	22.8	31.47

It was also revealed that Prapat and Narong had arranged for royalties on a government forest concession to be paid to themselves; proceeds are estimated to be 750 million baht over the next 30 years.

—Narcotics prices doubled in Bangkok after the departure of the trio while the bribes necessary for shipment of beef animals from the provinces have decreased by 80%.

—In a television address to the nation on November 14, army commander-in-chief General Kris vowed that the military would stay out of politics and that officers accepting political office would have to resign from the service.

—The cabinet decided on a modest overhaul of the taxation system, reducing taxes on necessities and increasing luxury taxes.

—The cabinet abolished Revolutionary Decree No. 4 banning political meetings of five or more persons.

—The embargo on the import of nitrogen fertilizer in support of the fertilizer monopoly was lifted, and the government rescinded an agreement made by the generals to establish a total fertilizer monopoly in collaboration with a Japanese company.

—Plans are being made to amend the Labor Law to permit the formation of labor unions.

—The Constitution Drafting Committee has included a clause in the draft that future ministers may not be permanent civil servants or managers, directors, advisors or members of any business firm.

—The former National Assembly chosen by the generals was dissolved and replaced by a new 299-member assembly chosen by majority vote from a 2,300-member National Convention. The latter was appointed by King Bhumiphol from among prominent, and principally non-military, citizens from all walks of life. (Local papers of December 21 carried the list of those elected.)

The major question now is how far the new civilian leadership will be permitted to progress toward the kind of democratization which is long overdue for a country of Thailand's wealth, literacy and sophistication. Constitutional rule is anathema to powerful institutional forces in Thailand, centered in the military, because it would place limits on the self-aggrandizement which many have come to expect as part of a career of "public service." A key figure to watch will be General Kris, who saved the country from certain civil war by his refusal to go along with the now-exiled leaders in their plans for more military force in October.

How Thai politicians will behave in the invigorating atmosphere of true political competition of the type being talked of now is another factor that remains uncertain. The spirit of concord and reconciliation which presently prevails in Bangkok gives considerable hope, however. Moreover, one thing does seem certain: after the incredible bloodshed in 1973, even though the military may retain a considerable role in national affairs, there can be no going back to the naked army rule of past decades. And if Thailand is fortunate, the melancholy events of October may propel the nation out of a 40 year interregnum and toward fulfillment of the ideals of the 1932 revolution.