

Notes on Sir. R. Holland's Audience with H.M. the King of Siam
(Enclosure 1 of Mr. Dormer to Sir. Jone Simon Letter, D. March 3,
1934 Received March 3)

(คัดจาก : สถาบันไทยคดีศึกษา มหาวิทยาลัยธรรมศาสตร์ F.O. 371/18206)

I saw that the first revolution was inevitable. I knew it was coming. The people who were sent home for education were not the same class as in former days. There were not sufficient posts for them to fill. For this reason the body of discontent grew. The bubble was inflated to the bursting-point. Then came the economic depression. The clique that was in possession of remunerative offices was discredited and had to be ousted after the change was made, Phya Mano failed as a statesman. He consulted me, but he didn't take my advice. He was singularly ignorant of popular feeling. He removed from office individuals who had taken part in the revolution, not for that reason, but because he wanted to replace them by others more efficient. He refused to employ propaganda to explain his aims and policy, and he disregarded warning as to the dangers which threatened his Administration. His coup d'Etat in dissolving the Assembly was effected in spite of my remonstrance as to the probable effects. So he was outwitted by Phya Bahol, whose government was of course, purely militarist. Then came the recent upheaval. You may not know that there were two movements in progress at the same moment; one within Bangkok, the other outside. The first, which represented genuine discontent with the method of

Phya Bahol's party, would have won if it had not been forestalled and humpered by the effort of Prince Bavoradej. No movement which had for its apparent object the restoration of the old regime could possibly succeed. It was foredoomed to failure, and for that reason I was strongly opposed to Prince Bavoradej or any member of the Princely order heading such a movement. If prince Bavoradej had abstained, the force of the moderate party would certainly have gained the upper hand in Bangkok, and recent history would have been different. My own part was one of great difficulty. I was bitterly reproached for not having come to Bangkok and placed myself at the head of the so-called Royalist party. What good would that have done? I should have been a pawn in the hands of any party that could control my movements. I should have descended into the areana of politics. I might have imperilled the existence of the monarchy. My decision to go to Singgora was taken at a moment's notice. I think event have proved it right, but it has been a most trying and wearing time. I have been reproached on all sides, both for what I have done and for what I have not done. In England they say the King can do no wrong. In Siam it appears he can do nothing right. The government suspected my every action and discourteously disregarded my offers of mediation. They would have accepted them if things had seem to be going against them. But as soon as they felt they had the upper hand, they wanted no intervention from me. But I think that what has happened has cleared the air. The general position has improved. Phya Bahol is loyal and sensible, but he is

surrounded by fanatical young men. Even they, however, perceive that at the moment the King is a necessary future in the Constitution, and I think the belief is gaining ground that I am absolutely opposed to any attempt to reinstate the absolute monarchy. That is quite impossible. There are elements of hope in the present situation. The elections were fairly conducted and the persons chosen, I believe, represent the people's choice. They have already shown that they are not animated by extreme democratic views, and even an adherent of Luang Pradit, who was elected for Bangkok, has declared that he means to represent the view of the people who chose him and is not going to follow slavishly Luang Pradit's behests. There is a considerable body of feeling against Luang Pradit in the new Assembly; among the soldiers, of course, because they fear that Luang Pradit may oppose budget demands for the army, and among others because they suspect Luang Pradit's communistic views. Hence Luang Pradit, finding that his following is in a minority, has asked for a formal enquiry to decide whether he is a communist or not. One elected member of the Assembly, Phya Devahastin, had already shown a capacity for independent thought, and has attracted to himself a following not merely from among the elected members, but from among the nominated members also. That is why I think that the outlook has improved since the new Assembly came into being.

Now I feel that the situation will be eased if I absent myself for a time from Siam. If I remain in the country, but am

away from Bangkok, I can exercise hardly any control or influence, and my name may be taken in vain by conspirators against the present government. If I stay in Bangkok, I am a target of complaints, and discontented persons will try to focus their intrigues upon me. If I go away for a time, there may be a chance for things to settle down. I should leave a Regency, composed of Prince Narisr and Prince Jainad, and I can always be communicated with, wherever I am in Europe, by telegram or even by telephone. And, as a matter of fact, I feel that I cannot stand much more of it. The strain of the past two years has been terrible. My eye must be operated upon shortly for cataract, and Dr. Noble has told me that a period of two months rest and recuperation is essential before this is done.

I feel that the future will depend very largely on the fate of the persons condemned as a result of the recent rebellion. I have pressed urgently that the death sentences should be commuted. Phya Bahol has agreed to this, but there are many hot-heads who are determined that the executions shall take place. This would be a fatal move. Vengeance would be exacted in the long run from those responsible, and one can only envisage, as a result, a vista of revolutions, each more sanguinary than the last. Foreign opinion would strongly condemn the infliction of the death penalty, especially now that so long a period has elapsed since the sentences were pronounced. The persons who are responsible for the present government are not uninfluenced by the thought that their actions may be regarded unfavourably by foreign Powers. I insisted that I

should grant an audience to you two to-day without any representative of the government being present, and my demand was accorded to because government realise at last that I am not working against them, and that by talking freely and frankly to you, as I have done, I am not likely to prejudice the safety of the Constitution in any way. For some time past the Government have refused to permit me to have any private interview with a European.

The governing idea of the party in power at present is to continue their dominance. All their efforts and measures are directed to that end. Unless they are turned out by force through some counter movement within the army, they will continue in power until the Assembly representing public opinion is capable of indicating its will in a manner which must command abedience.

December 26, 1933

R.E.H.

Notes on Mr. Baxter's Audience with H.M. the F.O. 371/18206 King of Siam. (Enclose 2 of Mr. Domer to Sir. John Simon Letter, D.R. March 3, 1934)

Pradit

The King opened the conversation with a reference to Sir. Robert Holland's appointment as advisor to the committee set up to report on whether Luang Pradit was or was not a Communist. The

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King clearly regretted the move, and seemed apprehensive that it was intended to prepare the way for the resuscitation of the Pradit Economic Programme. When I mentioned that I had asked Phya Mano whether publication would not be the best refutation, the King stated that he had advised publication.

Later on in the conversation the King said that Pradit had been suggested as Min of Interior in the Government just formed; that he thought such an appointment would be a shock to public confidence; that Pradit was without experience, & C.

Student sent Abroad

The King said that the revolution of the 24th June, 1932, was inevitable, that it would have come whether or not he had given the Constitution earlier. As one of the causes he appeared to lay great weight on the quality of the students sent abroad towards the end of the last reign. This he said, was bad. They were ill - chosen; many failed to pass their examinations and were returned. He pointed out that the Siamese fell into one or other of two classes peasants or officials; that the public service could not absorb the supply; that the curtailment of public expenditure necessitated by the economic crisis aggravated the difficulty of providing openings, in fact, meant reduction in personnel.

The student sent out in the past few years were, he said, a better lot.

Mano.

The King, while appreciating Mano's services, blames him for his refusal to be warned of the dangers to which his Government after the coup d' Etat at the end of March was exposed, and for not taking the necessary measures to safeguard his position. The King considers that Mano made a mistake in dissolving the Assembly on the 1st April last; that the elements which Mano wanted to clear out could have been got rid of without dissolving, that he, the King was against dissolution. Incidentally, he mentioned that Stevens urged dissolution on Mano.

The King appeared to agree with my analysis of Mano, namely, that Mano, who is accused of having worked to betray the revolution and re-establish the old regime, was not, in fact, doing anything of the kind; that he was ousting bit by bit the revolutionaries, not qua revolutionaries, but because he, almost without being aware of it, was seeking to put men in jobs because he thought they were the best men for the jobs. The natural and inevitable, though false, interpretation was that Mano was a traitor to the revolution. Moreover, Mano was temperamentally incapable of using—they were antipathetic to him the necessary instruments of democracy - publicity, playing to the gallery, appeal to popular feeling. Things which Bahol understands and exploits.

msc

The Revolt in October.

The King explained that there were two movements, one within and one without Bangkok. I am uncertain whether the King meant, or to what extent he meant, that there were distinct and separate movements. I am also uncertain whether he believes that the one outside Bangkok was organized by Prince Boveradej.

One thing, however, emerged clearly, namely, that the King considers the choice of a leader was fatal of success. Leadership by any prince, and most of all by Boveradej, was necessarily, if wrongly, interpreted to mean the re-establishment of the old regime. Had the movement been led by other than a prince, the chances are that the Bahol Government would have been overthrown.

During the first few days of the out break the King offered five times to mediate. No notice was taken. The King's opinion is that, as soon as there seemed reason to believe that the Gov't would win, the Gov't was anxious to keep him out of the business. Had it looked as if the revolt would succeed, the Gov't would have accepted his offer to mediation.

The King explained the difficulty and delicacy of his position in the October affair. Had he return to Bangkok, as the Gov't desired and as he is reproached by the Royolists for not doing, he would have become a pawn in the Gov't game. Shut up in the Grand Palace, with no means to ensure his voice being heard outside its walls, with, as he said, the radio in the hands of the Gov't, he would have been

impotent; at Hua-Hin he was free to act.

The King admitted that his going to Singgora was a flight. Having already had a gunboat sent to Hua-Hin to bring him to Bangkok, he got the wind up at some movement in the troop at Petchaburi and fled.

He considered that events have proved he was right in not returning to Bangkok, and would, I think, also claim that the flight to Singgora, though not resulting from a deliberate act of policy, was, in fact, good policy.

In England it is said that the King can do no wrong. In Siam, said the King, it seems the King can do no right. He said that he is always blamed by everybody and for everything. The Gov't is suspicious of him. Incidentally, he remarked that it was a great concession to be allowed to see Holland and me alone. The Royalists are critical and disappointed. They expected him somehow, magically almost, to bring off a coup d' Etat. All the disgruntled and discontented turn to him and attempt to weave a web of plots and intrigues around him. It is for this reason that he thinks it advisable for him to go away for a lengthy spell abroad. With him away, he thinks that the plotting and intriguing of those opposed to the Government will stop. So long as he is in the country, whether in Bangkok or Hua Hin, efforts will continue to be made to involve him in schemes for the overthrow of the Government. Also health.

Although it can not be said the King eulogised the present Gov't, it is certainly true to say that he did not appear in the least hostile. He has some respect for Bahol, though under no illusions that he is the real and effective head of the Gov't.

(I hear that he has quoted with approval and amusement my comment that during the past six months I had no notion who, what or where was the Gov't.)

The Election

The King said that the elections had not been cooked; was pleased that in the majority of cases the candidates from Bangkok for the provincial constituencies were not elected; that instead, local men, well known, were chosen; that they mean to be independent. Phya Devahastin has, the King stated, collected a group around him. When I mentioned that I had heard Devahastin to play a part. He said that Devahastin isn't very clever, but that he is sensible, shrewd and courageous.

He seemed to think that there was a considerable body of opinion in the new Assembly, critical and apprehensive of Pradit some of the soldiers because they fear that Pradit will oppose expenditure on armaments; another section because of Pradit's communist tendencies.

It was evident that the King has hopes that the Assembly will behave sensible and moderately, and will restrain the military.

Punishment of those implicated in the Revolt

The King stated that he understood foreign opinion was hostile to the Gov't, whereupon I made a statement somewhat on the following lines. This seemed, so far as I could judge, to be accepted.

The foreign communities resented Mano's overthrow on the 20th June last because they considered that he was running a very decent Gov't under difficult conditions, because they had great confidence in and liking for the man himself. The bussiness communities, ever since the 20th June, have been nervous because they didn't believe that Bahol was really the head of the Gov't, and because, more especially, they feared that the Gov't from one day to the next might devalue the tical and throw the market into a state of disorder. The Recall of Pradit and his appointment to the State Council was a shock to them, a shock aggravated by the fact that the Gov't, on its advent to power, had declared its intention not to recall Pradit.

The foreign communities were, however, open to conviction, and their attitude of distrust would certainly change as and when the Gov't showed that it intended to pursue a moderate, non-revolutionary policy. So far the Gov't had not done anything specific to justify the prevailing distrust, which was based on vague fears and on the lack of any sentiment that the Gov't had a mind of its own.

Mano's Pension

The King was given to understand that it had been decided to pay it.

December 26, 1933.