

Summary of letter and note from the King of Siam to Mr. James Baxter
dated 4th August, 1933.

(คัดจาก : สถาบันไทยคดีศึกษา มหาวิทยาลัยธรรมศาสตร์ F.O.371/17176)

Covering letter

Sorry to have asked you to come down to Hua Hin and not to be able to see you. Have lately discovered that the Government does not like me to see foreigners without being watched by one of themselves. They think the foreigners are on the side of the Princes and prefer Absolute Monarchy. They are still suspicious that the Princes will call on England or France to help them to get back to power.

The tone of my note may seem defeatist. I confess I do not see much hope. I wish people would not expect too much and would think out some way of defending themselves. There are plenty of signs that the People's Party are not going to take the least notice of my opinions or wishes.

The chief fight is against Communism. Perhaps you and other foreign advisers can still help by threatening to resign en bloc. They are still afraid of the bogey of foreign intervention. One must use that bogey to the last even if there is no chance of foreign intervention taking place. Hope you can do something to dangle that bogey in their faces. Sorry to be so melodramatic.

Note

Political Parties. None. Different opinions, different aims in various groupings, mostly un-organised. The People's Party has some sort of organisation but no cohesion, no semblance of party discipline. Its object is to hold on to power through fear. It cannot tolerate the idea of any other party coming into power. They are afraid of their lives and certainly of their jobs. It is possible that they may resort to terrorism. They are showing signs of nervousness and may shortly arrest arbitrarily. They control armaments and there is no possibility of a successful rising unless they quarrel among themselves.

The section of the People's Party which stands by Luang Pradit is the only section which has a policy and leadership. Pradit has some idea of political manoeuvring and party organisation. His followers worship him and follow blindly. His aim is a Socialist republic. He realises that a Republic is not possible at the moment but wants it as soon as possible. His policy is highly to the taste of the lazy Siamese Intelligenzia which wants to break the monopoly of the Chinese and other foreign commercial enterprises. They are too lazy and incapable of doing it themselves and appeal to the State to do for them what they ought to do by their own efforts. It is likely that Republicanism will gain ground as Siamese are naturally envious and vain. Siamese are not social climbers like the English but social levellers through envy and laziness.

The Pradit faction has a well organised propaganda. They spread scabrous and scandalous stories about the Royal Family on sexual matters and hope by these means to bring the Royal Family into disrepute. Unless there is some organised counter-action they will succeed.

This aim of the military and naval section of the People's Party is self-preservation. There are no strong leaders and they often quarrel among themselves. They are a band of brigands with good weapons. Conflict is likely. There are factions within the units themselves. There may be elements here which could save the situation. Bahol (the P.M.) is a sincere well-meaning man not blessed with brains and apt to support his friends right or wrong. Luang Sudhu (army leader) is a sincere patriot and strong personality with a large following of officers. Both Bahol and he are convinced monarchists.

The loyalty of the army and navy means no more than that they will not do anything to harm the King. They will not tolerate the King taking active command of the Army and will not obey any command detrimental to their personal interests. Those who are sincerely loyal do nothing. They will not risk losing their jobs. They show a singular lack of initiative and many are rank cowards. If the officers had possessed the virtues of European officers the coup d'etat of June 24th 1932 could not have taken place. There were only 33 officers in the plot and the troops were not affected by the propagands. Yet the few were able to control all the forces

in Bangkok with the help of a few tanks containing neither machine guns nor ammunition.

It is believed that the Army could never be fooled into supporting another coup, yet on 20 th June last the same leaders again seized the Government without noise. The Army and Navy as such do not exist. There is a band of armed men. The troops in the provinces have practically been disarmed. The Palace Guard is the only body with a semblance of organised force, and it is doubtful how they would behave.

The Opportunists joined in after the coup of June 24th 1932. They have no principles of any kind. They may throw in their lot with Luang Pradit for pickings if his plan succeeds. Communism is welcomed by the educated Siamese who stand to gain good jobs at the expense of the rich and the enslavement of the only politically conscious class is inclined to Communism.

The People's Party has for its object the monopoly of Government jobs for themselves. They are united in their hatred of the Princes because they regard them as possible rivals for the same monopoly.

It must be said in justice that the Princes had too long a spell and that the others were left too long out in the cold.

They are in general loyal to the Throne but are suspicious that the King, persuaded by his relatives, will seize power. Consequently they keep strict watch on him.

There is an extremist section who find the King very much in their way. They would like to put a weak puppet in his place if they dared. They have plans and hopes. They hope to manoeuvre in such a way that the King will abdicate of his own free will.

The Monarchists. The over-whelming majority of the Siamese people are loyal to the King and are firm Monarchists. They regard a Republic with horror. They are quite unorganised so that it may be said that a Royalist party does not exist. There are various shades of opinion:-

1. Hardened Conservatives

Their ideas are antiquated and superstitious. They cannot understand any limitation of the King's power. Such an idea is sacrilege. They live in hopes that the magical and supernatural powers inherent in the person of the King will one day confound all his enemies. They believe that the present trouble is a temporary visitation caused by some past sin of the King and that in good time his "merits" will cause the old sacred power to return to him. They do nothing at all but grouse a little. The hurricane which destroyed the Cavalry Barracks and the sudden death of one of the cavalry officers are cited as a hopeful sign that the "Phra Barania" is beginning to work or that the Emerald Buddha is waking up and taking notice of things once again.

These people are perfectly hopeless as a political force.

But the vast majority of the people are in this state of mind and the mentality of most royalists is tainted by this kind of belief which acts as a deterrent to action. Most Monarchies are so easy to destroy just because of the blind faith in the object of their worship - the King. They do not mean to rescue him or help him through his troubles. On the contrary, it is his job to help them by the exercise of his magical powers. If the king does not seem to be able to use these supernatural powers it must be because of mere obstinancy or that he has lost his "merits" and virtues. In the end they turn against him and curse him in the same way that an idol-worshipper would overturn and kick his idol when it fails to procure him what he desires. There is an old saying of the Thai. "We have swords always over our necks and whichever sword is nearest that sword is our master." This accounts for the submissive manner in which the Siamese have accepted all the changes of Government we have been having these days.

2. Constitutional Monarchists

Most of the Siamese who are not taken by the more extreme ideas belong to this category. Yet they do not form themselves into a party because their thoughts are still tinged by the superstitions outlined above. They are used to a particular form of Government. They are lost without the leadership of the Princes. They are not desperate enough to face death for a cause. They realise that one must evolve with the time, that Absolute Monarchy

is dead. They support the Constitution on the whole but they would like to see more conservative people at the helm. They think vaguely of making a coup and hope to goodness that someone would get up and do it. They think that the King ought to do something about it and are rather fed up because he does not. They vaguely hope that foreign intervention will save the country from Communism. They hopefully remark that "surely the English or the French will never allow Siam to become Communist." It is unfortunate that in the circumstances, the Princes cannot lead them. If the Princes were to attempt to lead the Royalists, it would be the end of the Monarchy. If the Royalists are to do anything they must find a leader from their own ranks. A real menace of Communism may perhaps drive them to action-possibly too late.

3. Die hard Absolut Monarchists

There are a few. Their idea is to make a coup and wipe out the whole lot of the Revolutionaries. They hope that the King will call upon his loyal troops, make war on Bangkok, execute the Revolutionaries and re-assert his personal rule. All this is sheer madness. It is said that many of the foreigners are of this opinion.

There is no turning back. All efforts must be concentrated on making the Constitution work.

The greatest weakness of the Royalists is their lack of leadership. Their natural leaders are the Princes and they cannot lead.

The King had some influence on the Mano Government and exerted it as fully as possible. He was not always listened to. With the change of Government his influence can only be a negative one. The present Government does not seek and does not mean to take his advice. If the King is to be able to use his negative influence he must have a certain liberty of action. He must not put himself into a position where he could readily be coerced. His strongest weapon is the threat to abdicate-effectively used several times already. To be really effective there must be some chance that he could put the threat into execution, that is, to be able to go away or to retire to some safe place and await events. To make the same threat while he is in Bangkok is not half so effective since he lacks liberty of action. The revolution-aries have only to get hold of his person effectively to stop any kind of movement on the part of the Royalists. With the King in their hands they can take measures to suppress any attempted revolt. With the King at large and free to lead a revolt they have to be more cautious.

The King's presence in the Capital cheers the people. But it gives false hopes to the Royalists and makes them more content than ever to leave things to the gods. It is really a misfortune that the people place too much hope in the King. He cannot help them much. The sooner they realise that they must help themselves, the better.

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MEMORANDUM

1. In compliance with the Royal Command, a plan for the institution of government by Prime Minister and for the establishment of a Legislative Council has been drawn up.

Owing to the limited time at our disposal, this plan has been worked out with a certain element of haste and there is no pretension that it is perfect or final.

2. In practice it will be found that the success of the plan would entirely depend upon the question of personnel. This is all the more so in the case of the Prime Minister and the Cabinet. The choice of the Prime Minister is of extreme importance.

3. The establishment of a Legislative Council, however, implies a very fundamental change in the present constitution. It constitutes a first step towards parliamentary government, and when once it is set up, the tendency will naturally be to extend its activities and increase its power.

4. Is the present an opportune time to effect a fundamental change in the constitution?

There is at present, a feeling of dissatisfaction prevailing amongst a certain class of people, brought about primarily by the world economic depression. In order to meet the financial situation the government has been reluctantly compelled to make drastic cut in government expenditure and to impose new emergency taxes. These

measures will to a certain extent increase the feeling of discontent with the government. In these circumstances there are rumours current that there will be an attempt to overthrow the government at some future occasion. Although some of the rumours appear to be wild and unreliable, yet it would be wise for the government to be prepared for all eventualities. In time like this, it is imperative that there should be a feeling of confidence and unity amongst all the members of the government. There should be no change which would weaken the power of the government.

The answer to the question raised at the beginning of this paragraph is that much depends upon the effect of the change that is proposed. Until the present financial crisis is over, no change in the constitution should be adopted which would have the effect of weakening the power of the government.

5. In order to ensure the satisfactory working of a Legislative Council, it is essential that the members of the Council should possess a certain amount of training in the work which is to be entrusted to them. In this respect the experience of our neighbours may be of interest to us. Both in India and Burma, no Legislative Council was set up until the inhabitants have had some local training in self government. The best training for local self government would seem to be the establishment of municipalities in the more advanced parts of the country. In the case of Burma municipalities

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were set up as early as 1884, but the present Burma Legislative Council was not set up till 1923.

In the case of Siam, a law for the setting up of municipalities has now been drafted. It is respectfully submitted that the draft law should be examined and, if found agreeable, should be adopted and put into force. This will enable the local communities to gain some experience in self government. When sufficient experience has been gained in this way, a Legislative Council could be set up with a certain measure of confidence that it will function well and wisely.

Saranromya Palace

Bangkok 9th March, 1932.

(Signed) Phya Srivisar.

สำนักหอสมุด